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# Demandingness, Self-Interest and Benevolence in Śāntideva's Introduction to the Practice of Awakening (Bodhicaryāvatāra)

Stephen E. Harris

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**DEMANDINGNESS, SELF-INTEREST AND BENEVOLENCE  
IN ŚĀNTIDEVA'S *INTRODUCTION TO THE PRACTICE OF  
AWAKENING (BODHICARYĀVATĀRA)***

**by**

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B.A., Philosophy, University of Oklahoma, 1999  
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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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**May, 2014**

# **DEDICATION**

For Anita

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# **Demandingness, Self-Interest and Benevolence in Śāntideva's *Introduction to the Practice of Awakening (Bodhicaryāvatāra)***

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores how benevolence and self-interest converge, thereby lessening moral demandingness, in the writing of the eighth century Indian Buddhist monk, Śāntideva. In the opening chapter, I argue that Śāntideva appears vulnerable to the overdemandingness objection, the claim that a moral system asks too much of its followers. This is because he endorses an extremely demanding process of virtue development during which an individual commits to becoming a bodhisattva, the Buddhist saint who voluntarily takes countless rebirths, often in painful situations, in order to attain full Buddhahood and liberate all beings from suffering. In the dissertation, I show that Śāntideva can make a powerful response to the overdemandingness objection, largely because the psychological transformation bodhisattvas undergo, as they perfect the virtues of buddhahood, also greatly lessens the severity of the sacrifices they make.

I begin to reconstruct this response in the second chapter, by showing how the Buddhist analysis of suffering implies that a bodhisattva gives up less than it appears when they commit to advanced Buddhist training. The final three chapters each explore an aspect of how demandingness lessens and self-interest and benevolence converge as the bodhisattva progresses along the path. The third chapter explores how perfecting Buddhist virtues allows the bodhisattva to overcome a particularly pernicious form of weakness of will that prevents doing what is in one's best interest. The fourth chapter

explains how developing key Buddhist virtues like patience, mindfulness and introspection lessens the amount of suffering experienced by the bodhisattva when they make sacrifices for others. The final chapter explores several demand-lessening benefits that result from perfecting wisdom and realizing the truth of no-self (*anātman*). The dissertation illustrates the philosophical value of Śāntideva's writing, by showing that even though he does not explicitly raise and respond to the overdemandingness objection, he is aware of the need to lessen the demandingness of his ethical requirements and incorporates philosophically interesting demand-lessening strategies in order to do so.

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## Introduction

A striking feature of certain Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist ethical texts is their integration of what appears to be an enormously demanding conception of moral perfection with the claim that progressing towards this achievement benefits the aspirant. The one who adopts this aim is the bodhisattva, the being (*sattva*) who strives for full Buddhist awakening (*bodhi*), a process which takes countless rebirths and requires undergoing an extraordinarily difficult process of virtue development, in order to work tirelessly to benefit all sentient beings. Few verses in the Mahāyāna canon illustrate this theme as forcefully as the one by the eighth century Buddhist monk, Śāntideva, in the eighth chapter of his *Introduction to the Practice of Awakening*, or *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (hereafter BCA).

Thus those whose mind-streams are cultivated in meditation and who equally accept the suffering of others dive into the Avīci hell like swans into a pool of lotuses. (BCA 8:107)

They become oceans of joy when sentient beings are liberated. Have they not found fulfillment? What is the use of sterile liberation? (BCA 8:108)<sup>1</sup>

The image of the bodhisattva joyfully diving into the hell realms shatters any conception of moral excess developed in the West. While contemporary ethicists like Peter Singer and Peter Unger insist that morality tells us we should donate surplus income saved from forgoing afternoon matinees and ski vacations, the bodhisattva prays to be reborn in Avīci, the unrelenting hell where fires from all directions slowly burn away the skin and bones of beings that dwell there for billions of years (Tsong-Kha-Pa

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<sup>1</sup> Citations are from the Wallace and Wallace translation of the BCA unless otherwise noted. I cite using the chapter and verse number corresponding to this translation.

2000, 164).<sup>2</sup> Bodhisattvas undergo this and many other torments as they voluntarily delay final liberation from suffering for countless lives in order to develop the full virtues of Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings.

Based on passages such as this, as well as his argument that beings should commit to impartial benevolence and work tirelessly for the benefit of all, in the first chapter of this dissertation I argue that Śāntideva appears to be vulnerable to what has been called in contemporary ethical theory the overdemandingness objection, the claim that a moral theory makes unreasonably severe demands on its adherents.<sup>3</sup> Although Śāntideva does not explicitly frame and respond to the problem, in the remainder of the dissertation I argue that his BCA contains numerous demand-lessening techniques that provide a powerful defense against it. The overall strategy Śāntideva employs to lessen demandingness is psychological transformation by means of which the interests of self and others become closely entwined. Several chapters of this dissertation show how demandingness is lessened by this psychological transformation as one progresses along the Bodhisattva path.

For reasons I explain at the end of this introduction, I state my thesis in both a stronger and a weaker form. The stronger version is that, if we grant the Buddhist certain key presuppositions, in particular the efficacy of certain Buddhist virtues, the psychological effects of realizing no-self (*anātman*), and the saturation of ordinary experience by subtle forms of suffering, then Śāntideva's moral requirements are not

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<sup>2</sup> See Singer 1972 and Unger 1996. Perhaps the most powerful Western resonance is the stoic happy on the rack. For descriptions of the Buddhist hell realms, see also the discussion in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*. See Vasubandhu 1988, 456-460.

<sup>3</sup> It is often referred to as the demandingness objection, but since the real problem being levied against the theory is that it is overdemanding, I refer to it as the overdemandingness objection or problem. Thanks to Anne Baril for this suggestion.

overly demanding. In other words, he can provide a satisfactory response to the overdemandingness objection. The weaker version is that, assuming these same presuppositions, the demandingness of the bodhisattva path is significantly less than it appears, although it may still be overly demanding. I wait till the end of this introduction to explain why it is helpful to provide a stronger and weaker form of my thesis, since discussing the actual demands of the bodhisattva path first will help me to do so.

Śāntideva, in fact, makes a claim more forceful than even the stronger version of my thesis. This is hinted at in the second verse quoted above, where the bodhisattva is said to achieve fulfillment as a result of his apparent sacrifice, and Śāntideva makes his position explicit in the first chapter of his BCA.

*Bodhicitta* should never be released  
by those wanting to escape from the many sufferings of existence,  
by those wanting to eliminate the evil predicament of sentient beings,  
and by those wanting to experience many kinds of enjoyments. (BCA 1:8, my translation)<sup>4</sup>

*Bodhicitta* is the root virtue of the bodhisattva.<sup>5</sup> It can be translated as the thought or aspiration (*citta*) for awakening (*bodhi*). It is the aspiration to attain the full awakening of a Buddha in order to rescue all sentient beings from suffering and the perils of cyclic existence. The bodhisattva nurtures this compassionate intention, voluntarily delaying liberation from *saṃsāra* and taking countless rebirths while developing the virtues of full Buddhahood.

The quoted passage explains three benefits of developing *bodhicitta*. The third line refers to the fact that the bodhisattva, who is motivated by *bodhicitta* to fully develop

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<sup>4</sup> bhavaduḥkhaśatāni tartukāmairapi sattvavyasanāni hartukāmaiḥ| bahusaukhyāśatāni bhoktukāmai ma vimocyam hi sadaiva bodhicittam (Śāstrī 2001, 9).

<sup>5</sup> See Brassard 2000 for an in-depth study of *bodhicitta*.

the virtues of Buddhahood like compassion, patience, generosity and skillful means will be able to work most effectively to remove (*hartum*) the evil predicament (*vyasana*) of sentient beings (*sattva*), that is to liberate them from *saṃsāra*. The other two benefits are initially rather puzzling. In the first line, Śāntideva claims that those wanting to escape (*artum*) from the suffering (*duḥkha*) of existence (*bhava*) should develop the virtue of *bodhicitta*. This is surprising, since it is the bodhisattva, motivated by *bodhicitta*, who *delays* liberation from suffering in order to take additional rebirths and develop the virtues that allow her to liberate sentient beings. It would seem that the early Buddhist goal of individual liberation would be the natural endpoint for one whose deepest motivation is to escape from *saṃsāra*. The final line refers to enjoying (*bhoktum*) many pleasures (*saukhya*). The reference here is to the ordinary happiness experienced by persons in *saṃsāra*, such as pleasant rebirths and material prosperity. In this verse, Śāntideva is claiming that adopting the bodhisattva path, and committing to work tirelessly for the welfare of others, results in deep benefits for oneself.

In this dissertation, I want to make sense of Śāntideva's claim that adopting the bodhisattva path is in one's interest. An obvious explanation that is discussed by Śāntideva shortly after the quoted verses is the accrual of vast amounts of positive karmic benefit (*puṇya*) that results in good material conditions, fortunate rebirth in future lives, and creates the conditions for progress on the bodhisattva path.<sup>6</sup> I discuss this benefit in more detail later in this introduction. Since this dissertation is a work in comparative philosophy, however, I am primarily interested in exploring the ways that self-interest and benevolence come together in Śāntideva's text that will be acceptable to, or at least have a good deal of plausibility for, persons outside the Buddhist tradition. Since this is

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<sup>6</sup>See BCA 1:13-1:22.

not the case regarding the specific causal functions of karmically fruitful action, I simply note the importance of this element in Śāntideva's thought, but do not incorporate it into my argument. Instead, I focus on strategies developed in Śāntideva's BCA, and other related Buddhist works, which narrow the gap between self-interest and benevolence and lessen demandingness by using premises that are not at least wholly alien to one outside the Buddhist tradition. For instance, chapter four of the dissertation examines positive psychological effects of Buddhist virtues. Most of us will, I think, agree with the Buddhist that the virtue of patience can dissolve some forms of anger, and that this sometimes benefits the individual by decreasing her mental suffering. At the end of this dissertation, I also consider the reasonableness of the Buddhist presuppositions upon which the various demand-lessening techniques that I will consider depend.

A clarification it is worth making at the outset is that although I am focusing on benefits to an individual from following the bodhisattva path, I am not arguing that Śāntideva is an ethical egoist. Ethical egoism claims that an agent should do whatever is in his or her own benefit. One reason to be cautious in ascribing such a position to Śāntideva is that he offers arguments that we ought to help others escape from suffering that make no obvious appeal to our benefit. In other words, in the BCA we find both self-regarding and other-regarding reasons to become bodhisattvas and dedicate our lives to ending the suffering of all. I will consider the most developed of these other-directed arguments in the first chapter of this work. Second, the project of classifying Śāntideva's ethics according to contemporary Western categories like egoism, consequentialism and virtue ethics faces several difficulties, including underdetermination as to which ethical

theory provides the best fit for Śāntideva's normative views. I also develop this argument in the initial chapter of this work.

In the remainder of this introduction, I provide background information on Mahāyāna and early Buddhism, as well as a brief introduction to Śāntideva. I also offer a survey of the difficulties the bodhisattva undergoes, and summarize several demand-lessening strategies found in the BCA that I will not be focusing on in the body of this work. I also explain why, even given the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*), Buddhists still hold that talking of the moral responsibilities of individuals is unproblematic. Finally, I provide a chapter-by-chapter summary of my argument to follow.

## **Early Buddhism and the Mahāyāna**

Although we are not clear about what his exact dates were, the historical Buddha probably founded the religion of Buddhism somewhere in the fifth century BCE. The goal of Buddhist practice, as illustrated in the earliest texts that are available to us, is to liberate oneself from the round of rebirth that is *saṃsāra*, and the various kinds of suffering experienced within. The Buddhist path is represented in these texts, as well as throughout its tradition, by the Four Noble Truths. The first truth, that of suffering (Pali: *dukkha*/ Sanskrit: *duḥkha*), is the claim that the experience of non-liberated humans is pervaded by both obvious and subtle forms of suffering.<sup>7</sup> The second truth claims that the cause of our suffering, and our continual rebirth in *saṃsāra*, is craving (*taṇhā/trṣṇā*). This craving itself arises because of ignorance (*avijjā/avidyā*), referring to both a

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<sup>7</sup> Since the BCA, which is the main focus of this study, is written in Sanskrit, generally I will only provide the Sanskrit of the translated term. Sometimes, when dealing with texts from the early Buddhist tradition, I provide the Pali term followed by the Sanskrit, as I have done here.

mistaken intellectual belief that phenomena are permanent, independent and able to provide lasting satisfaction, as well as the cognitive process by which these non-existent attributes are superimposed upon transitory and dependent entities. The third noble truth, *nirvāṇa* (Pali: *nibbāna*), represents the cessation of craving and ignorance which cause suffering and rebirth. The final noble truth of path (*magga/mārga*) is comprised of the Buddhist teachings by which liberation is attained.<sup>8</sup> All of these teachings are adopted by Mahāyāna Buddhists like Śāntideva, and as we will see the early Buddhist understanding of suffering in particular plays an important role in the defense he can give in response to the overdemandingness objection.

Already in the early Buddhist canon, there are references to the historical Buddha being, in his past lives, a bodhisattva, that is a being (*sattva*) aiming towards enlightenment (*bodhi*). The contrast here is to the *arhat*, or noble one, the spiritual ideal emphasized in early Buddhist texts, who eliminates his or her own suffering and escapes rebirth. The bodhisattva, by contrast, aims at a higher state of awakening whereby he is able to teach beings effectively and lead them to liberation. Although the historical Buddha was said to be a bodhisattva in his past lives, early Buddhist texts provide little if any encouragement for ordinary persons to aspire to this goal.

The days when scholars believed early Buddhism and the Mahāyāna Buddhist movement to be discrete schools coexisting independently are gone. Recent scholarship has shown that for much of its history in India, the Mahāyāna was a doctrinal development existing within early Buddhism.<sup>9</sup> A key piece of evidence for this is the

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<sup>8</sup> A number of excellent introductions to Indian Buddhism have been published, including Williams 2000 and Gethin 1998.

<sup>9</sup> See Nattier 2003, especially pps. 172-176. Also relevant are Harrison 1987, Samuels 1997, and Silk 2002.



fact that the Mahāyāna schools have no ordination lineages of their own. Mahāyāna monks like Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga and Śāntideva, then, must have been ordained in the lineages of the early Buddhist schools. What this strongly suggests is that Mahāyāna monks lived and practiced alongside their mainstream Buddhist counterparts. What distinguishes monks who come to identify with the Mahāyāna movement is the gradual acceptance of a new group of Mahāyāna scriptures (*sūtras*) and certain key doctrines emphasized within them. One such tenet is the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), an expansion of the early Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*), in which the lack of the independent existence of all phenomena is emphasized.

The doctrinal development in the Mahāyāna that is central to my study is the greater emphasis placed on the role of the bodhisattva, the saint who develops *bodhicitta*, the aspiration to attain full Buddhahood in order to liberate all sentient beings. In non-Mahāyāna early Buddhist texts, there is not yet a clear distinction between the awakening of an *arhat* whose focus is on his own liberation, and that of a fully awakened Buddha who has completed the bodhisattva path.<sup>10</sup> As both Mahāyāna and early Buddhist traditions develop, the awakening of a Buddha is distinguished from that of an *arhat* in that he completely destroys the defilements (*āśravas*) of ignorance (*avidyā*). As a result, the bodhisattva gains supernatural powers, including a limited omniscience that allows him to perceive the karmic propensities of other beings, and thereby work most effectively for their benefit. A second distinction between the two paths, implicit in bodhisattva manuals like the BCA, is a much more radical development by the Mahāyāna of the other-regarding virtues like compassion (*karuṇa*) and generosity (*dāna*). Of

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<sup>10</sup> See Bodhi 2010.

course, it is also only the bodhisattva who develops the root bodhisattva virtue of *bodhicitta*.

As the Mahāyāna movement continues to develop, so too does the emphasis on the importance of the bodhisattva ideal. Texts like *The Lotus Sutra* begin to refer to early Buddhist traditions emphasizing personal liberation as *hīnayāna*, a derogatory term that means inferior.<sup>11</sup> *The Lotus Sutra* also claims that there is only one vehicle, that of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and one possible spiritual attainment, that of full Buddhahood attained after following the Buddhist path. In the BCA, Śāntideva's text that is the focus of this study, individual liberation from suffering is derogatorily referred to as *arasika*, meaning sterile, or literally "without taste."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, he offers arguments that everyone should commit to impartial benevolence that seem to imply that all beings are obligated to take up the bodhisattva path. I consider one such argument in the opening chapter.

### **Demandingness on the Bodhisattva Path**

From the outside, early Buddhist monastics appear to live extraordinarily demanding lives. Monks and nuns forgo sensual pleasure, abandon family and wander homeless possessing almost nothing, wearing robes sewn together from discarded rags, and so on. According to Buddhist texts, however, living these lives is actually in the interest of the practitioner. This is because the pleasures of ordinary life that monks and nuns renounce are pervaded by subtle forms of suffering and are not really worth pursuit. Accepting monastic discipline is in the individual's own benefit, since it is the most

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<sup>11</sup> See Reeves 2008 for a translation of *The Lotus Sutra*.

<sup>12</sup> BCA 8:108, quoted above. *Arasika* can also mean "in bad taste." It is tasteless, or in bad taste, in comparison to the achievement of the Mahāyānist, who takes great joy in liberating others from suffering.

efficacious way of eliminating these forms of suffering, and of ending rebirth. I will discuss Buddhist conceptions of suffering in the second chapter of this dissertation. For now, we can note that if we accept this analysis of suffering, then the particularly demanding nature of the Bodhisattva path has nothing to do with the austere nature of monastic lives.<sup>13</sup>

The particular kinds of demandingness faced by the bodhisattva are several. Most obviously, the bodhisattva voluntarily takes almost limitless additional rebirths after the stage at which she could have attained individual liberation from suffering and rebirth, in order to completely develop the full virtues of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. At the end stages of the Buddhist path, the bodhisattva will have greatly attenuated the mental defilements of ignorance, attachment and craving, and thereby lessened the deeper forms of suffering which they cause. Therefore, these additional rebirths will contain less of the subtler forms of suffering. Nevertheless, in many of these additional lives, the bodhisattva voluntarily undergoes severe physical torments. The *jātaka* or birth stories, which recount the past lives of the historical Buddha while he was a bodhisattva, tell of numerous instances in which the Buddha-to-be, as a result of his great generosity (*dāna*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), offered limbs or even his life to others. One tale has him giving his eyes to a blind man, while in another he offers his body for food to a hungry tigress, and in another he lets demons feast on his flesh (Ohnuma 2000, 43; Ohnuma 1998.)<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> As Goodman points out, many Buddhist texts also allow the majority of Buddhists to practice as lay followers who do not renounce household life. Goodman argues that this may be justified through a consequentialist commitment to maximizing benefit. See Goodman 2009, chapter seven.

<sup>14</sup> Versions of all these tales may be found in the relatively compact Sanskrit *jātaka* collection, *Jātakamālā* of Āryaśūra. See Āryaśūra 2010.

An even more violent trauma experienced by the bodhisattva is his voluntary taking of unfortunate rebirths, particular in the hell realms. I began this introduction by citing a verse by Śāntideva in which he links voluntary rebirth in hell to the flourishing of the bodhisattva. For our purposes, we do not need to go into detail about the various forms of torture the inhabitants of the different hells experience.<sup>15</sup> It is enough to note that the bodhisattva is willing to take rebirth in the most horrible place imaginable because of his vast compassion for sentient beings.

There are two kinds of pain that, according to Buddhists, would be relevant to assessing how demanding these various kinds of austere activities would be. Buddhist psychology distinguishes painful physical sensation (*kāyika-dukkha/kāyika-duḥkha*) from mental pain (*cetasika-dukkha/caitasika-duḥkha*, or *domanassa/daurmanasya*).<sup>16</sup> The first arises when one of the five sense organs connects with certain sense objects. For instance, when I prick my finger with a pin, unpleasant physical sensation arises in dependence on the organ of touch, and when I smell garbage, it arises dependent on the organ of smell. In addition to the five physical sense organs, Buddhists posit a sixth, the *manas*, or mental organ, which takes for its object mental experience like ideas, concepts, physical sensations etc. Mental painful sensation (*domanassa/daurmanasya*) arises based on the contact between the mental sense organ (*manas*) and unpleasant mental objects. For instance, immediately after experiencing the painful physical sensation (*kāyika-dukkhalkāyika-duḥkha*) of the pinprick, the mental organ can take this moment of

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<sup>15</sup> See Vasubandhu 1988, 456-460.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, at Walsh 1995, 345: D ii 306. Both types of pain are kinds of sensation (*vedanā*), which can be either positive, negative, or neutral in affective tone. This distinction between physical and mental pain is distinct from the Buddhist three-fold classification of suffering that I will consider in the second chapter. Physical and mental pain experienced while undergoing physical sacrifices would be kinds of explicit suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*) under the three-fold classification.

physical pain as its object, and mental pain (*domanassa/daurmanasya*) can arise as I psychologically recoil from the experience. Likewise, mental pain can arise when I think of unpleasant ideas, or experiences, like going to the dentist or being betrayed by a friend.

I will say more about these and other Buddhist kinds of pain in chapters two and four. For now, the point to note is that for most of us, both physical and mental pain will be involved when making sacrifices like cutting off a body part that the bodhisattva undergoes. An ordinary person would experience tactile physical pain when a hand is cut off, for instance, but also massive amounts of mental pain, both in anticipation of the amputation, and in recoiling against the physical pain as it occurs, and finally in the form of grief and regret over losing the lost body part. In chapter four, I will examine how certain Buddhist virtues emphasized by Śāntideva radically decrease the amount of mental pain the bodhisattva experiences when undergoing physical austerities. This explains an important aspect of how demandingness lessens as she progresses along the path to Buddhahood.

A final kind of apparent mental pain the bodhisattva undergoes is the pain of compassion when he perceives others suffering. Śāntideva himself describes compassion feeling like one's body is on fire (BCA 6:123).<sup>17</sup> At another place in the BCA, he has an opponent object that compassion should not be nurtured, since it causes its possessor much suffering (BCA 8:104). Interestingly, Śāntideva's response is not to deny that compassion is painful, but to point out that one's own suffering matters little when compared to the suffering of so many (BCA 8:104-105).

The pain a high-level bodhisattva experiences as a result of compassion is almost paradoxical, since by this point he should have eliminated the ignorance and craving that

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<sup>17</sup> See also Lele 2007, 66.

account for the deeper forms of mental pain. In chapter four, I consider this issue and argue that in fact there is nothing mysterious about an enlightened being experiencing mental pain.<sup>18</sup> My own sense of the issue is that the pain of compassion would not necessarily have a negative value on the bodhisattva's well-being; unlike the kinds of suffering (*duḥkha*) explored in my second chapter, it seems to me that the pain of compassion is an essential element of a life worth living. Śāntideva does not consider this response, however, and I have not incorporated it into my argument.

### **Summary of Argument/Chapters**

As stated above, the primary thesis that I will defend in this dissertation is that if we grant certain key Buddhist presuppositions, in particular the efficacy of certain Buddhist virtues, the psychological effects of realizing no-self and the saturation of ordinary experience by subtle forms of suffering, then Śāntideva's moral requirements are not overly demanding. In other words, I will argue that he can make an adequate response to the overdemandingness objection. I begin in the opening chapter by explaining the objection and argue that Śāntideva appears to be vulnerable to it. First, I consider and dismiss the possibility that Śāntideva faces this objection as a result of being a consequentialist. In reply to Charles Goodman, I argue that Śāntideva is not committed to any particular foundational ethical theory, and therefore he will not face the overdemandingness objection as a result of accepting a particularly demanding theory of the right. I then argue that Śāntideva becomes vulnerable to the objection as a result of his argument that we should commit to impartial benevolence, which implies that we should become bodhisattvas.

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<sup>18</sup> See pps. 136-8.

The later chapters of the dissertation each explore an important element in Śāntideva's resolution of the tension between a commitment to impartial benevolence and the pursuit of one's own welfare. Each of these chapters explores in some way how the bodhisattva path is less demanding than it appears. In the second chapter, I examine how the Buddhist analysis of ordinary experience being permeated by subtle forms of suffering implies we give up less than it seems when we commit to the bodhisattva path. I begin by exploring the early Buddhist categorization of the three kinds of unsatisfactory experience (*duḥkha*), paying special attention to the two deeper forms of conditioned suffering (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*) and the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*). Next, I explain how these forms of suffering constrain the kinds of items that the Buddhist can incorporate into a theory of well-being. This allows me to conclude, in support of my overall thesis, that the sacrifices the bodhisattva makes are much less than they initially appear, since items of supposed value like career success and personal prosperity are infected with suffering and are not really worth pursuit.

The final three chapters each explore an aspect of the demand-lessening elements of the psychological transformation the bodhisattva undergoes as he approaches his goal. The third chapter explores Śāntideva's strategy of applying the virtuous mental states (*kuśala dharmas*) as antidotes to the afflictive mental states (*kleśas*). This use of the virtuous qualities, I argue, should be understood as Śāntideva's response to the problem of weakness of will, or *akrasia*, in which an agent freely acts against their better judgment. I argue that, for Buddhists like Śāntideva, weakness of will is a particularly deep problem, due to the series of cognitive mistakes made in perception that lead us to desire items that do not exist in the way they appear to us. I also draw upon work by

Amelie Rorty in broadening the concept of *akrasia* to include psychological responses such as emotional reaction and pernicious perceptual classification. I show that Śāntideva provides antidotes to several of these *akratic* breaks identified by Rorty, and in particular I illustrate how he redirects negative energy from mental defilements to break the hold of habitual pernicious perceptual and emotionally reactive patterns. In keeping with my overall thesis, this chapter illustrates that one of the central benefits an individual receives from traveling the bodhisattva path is breaking these habitual reactive patterns that bind one to *samsāra*.

In the fourth chapter, I examine whether the virtuous mental qualities developed by the bodhisattva contribute to his or her well-being. Certain other-regarding virtues emphasized in the bodhisattva's path, like generosity (*dāna*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), lead the bodhisattva to take additional painful rebirths in *samsāra*, and therefore seem to decrease her well-being. I argue that developing these virtuous mental states (*kuśala dharma*) is less demanding than it initially appears. First, full development of Buddhist virtues like patience (*kṣānti*), mindfulness (*smṛti*) and introspection (*saṃprajanya*) results in a deeply rooted tranquility that is resistant to severe mental suffering, even during temporary experiences of painful sensation. Second, certain passages in the BCA suggest that Śāntideva ascribes a kind of perfectionist value to the development of the bodhisattva's virtues, holding that this represents a praiseworthy achievement far greater than the accomplishments of the seeker after individual liberation.

In the final chapter, I draw upon the writing of Vasubandhu, a Buddhist author who considers how bodhisattvas are psychologically able to perform their deeds of compassion, as well as meditations by Śāntideva on how to develop compassion for



others, to reconstruct several demand-lessening strategies dependent upon the psychological effects of realizing no-self (*anātman*). As a result of realizing the nonexistence of any enduring, unitary identity, the bodhisattva not only eliminates his mental suffering arising from self-cherishing and fear, but he is also able to identify his welfare with the welfare of others and thereby lessen the tension between altruistic action and self-interest. I illustrate Śāntideva's use of this strategy, and argue that if we accept certain Buddhist presuppositions, it results in a great lessening of demandingness as one progresses along the bodhisattva path.

### **Other Demand-lessening Elements of the BCA**

There are several demand-lessening elements present in Śāntideva's text that I will not focus on in this study, the most important of which I mention here.<sup>19</sup> My choice to focus on the demand-lessening elements just summarized was guided mainly by my belief that each of these elements was philosophically interesting, both in its own right, and as a premise in my reconstruction of Śāntideva's response to the overdemandingness objection. "Philosophically interesting," here, indicates that the issue dealt with in each chapter is closely related to a distinct area of philosophical theorizing, such as *akrasia*, virtue theory and moral demandingness. It also indicates that each of these elements does not depend merely upon religious premises, but will be plausible enough to be taken seriously by someone outside the tradition. By contrast, I find the demand-lessening

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<sup>19</sup> See Jenkins (1999) for a detailed consideration of the interrelationship between one's own and other's benefits in Mahāyāna Buddhism. There is some overlap between Jenkins and my own study, particularly in the attention he pays to the functioning of the virtues as antidotes to the mental afflictions. See for instance, p. 40. Jenkins places much more emphasis on the karmic benefits of compassion for the bodhisattva, an aspect of Śāntideva's text that I leave out of my argument. See for instance his claim that the intention to descend to the hell realms may result in rebirth in heaven (p. 111).

elements treated below have less philosophical interest, in one or both of these senses, although this in no way entails they are of less value to our understanding of Śāntideva's text.

First, the very fact that Śāntideva has written a bodhisattva manual is itself indicative of an awareness of the need to lessen demandingness. The function of any instruction manual is to make some task accessible to a wide variety of persons. A manual for operating a complicated copier, for instance, indicates the expectation (generally mistaken) that most people will be able to operate the machine competently without professional assistance. In the early Buddhist tradition, where bodhisattvahood was something accomplished only by extremely rare individuals, a bodhisattva manual was not needed. But as the Mahāyāna develops, and more persons aspire towards bodhisattvahood, a need grows to make the path accessible to a larger audience. The result is the appearance of bodhisattva manuals like Śāntideva's BCA that lay out in detail the various meditations and practices leading to bodhisattvahood. One result of a well written instruction manual is that the task in question, here that of becoming a bodhisattva, will itself become easier to achieve, since the practitioner now knows exactly what must be done to accomplish her goal.

Second, an important benefit of developing *bodhicitta* that is strongly emphasized by Śāntideva is its karmic benefits. Below I quote a group of verses from the first chapter of the BCA in which Śāntideva develops this theme:

Owing to [*bodhicitta's*] protection, as due to the protection of a powerful man, even after committing horrendous vices, one immediately overcomes great fears. Why do ignorant beings not seek refuge in it? (BCA 1:13, translation modified)

Although the result of the aspiring *bodhicitta* is

great within the cycle of existence, it is still not like the continual state of merit of the venturing *bodhicitta*. (BCA 1:17, translation modified)<sup>20</sup>

From the time that one adopts *bodhicitta* with an irreversible attitude for the sake of liberating limitless sentient beings, From that moment on, an uninterrupted stream of merit, equal to the sky, constantly arises even when one is asleep or distracted. (BCA 1:18-- 1:19, translation modified)

Verses seventeen through nineteen point out that great karmic merit (*puṇya*) accrues as a result of generating *bodhicitta*. Verse seventeen distinguishes between two kinds of *bodhicitta*, the desire to enter the bodhisattva path, and the actual setting out on the path, and points out that while both create karmic merit, the latter is vastly more advantageous than the first. Karmic merit results in fortunate rebirths as a human or deity, as well as material prosperity and attaining the conditions to practice Buddhism in the future. Verse thirteen remarks on another benefit of *bodhicitta*, its ability to protect one from past negative karma created by former negative actions (*pāpa*). Significantly, these verses follow shortly after the verse I quoted at the beginning of this introduction, in which Śāntideva promises that developing *bodhicitta* will help one to acquire worldly happiness and also to escape *saṃsāra*. The most obvious answer Śāntideva gives as to why *bodhicitta* benefits oneself, then, is because of the way the universe is karmically wired. Of course, this is not a particularly philosophically satisfying response, and while it is important to acknowledge its significance in Śāntideva's text, I do not focus on it in this study.

Another strategy explicitly employed by Śāntideva that is relevant to this dissertation is his conception of the bodhisattva path as a progressive one in which the

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<sup>20</sup> Wallace and Wallace translate "*bodhicitta*" as "Spirit of Awakening." I do not think any translation adequately captures the sense of the term, and leave it untranslated throughout.

most demanding of the other-regarding virtues are developed gradually, in order to avoid overwhelming the novice bodhisattva. Śāntideva discusses this strategy explicitly in relation to the virtue of generosity (*dāna*), which causes the bodhisattva to give her body to sentient beings.

At the beginning, the Guide prescribes giving vegetables and the like. One does it gradually so that later one can give away even one's own flesh. (BCA 7:25)<sup>21</sup>

When insight arises that one's own flesh is like a vegetable, then what difficulty is there in giving away one's flesh and bone? (BCA 7:26)<sup>22</sup>

In the first verse, Śāntideva offers an easy and undemanding way to develop generosity, by giving away food and other inexpensive possessions. The second verse explains that developing another virtue, the wisdom that realizes the emptiness of all phenomena, makes the sacrifice of body easier, since the bodhisattva realized in wisdom understands that there is neither an enduring person, nor an enduring body to be given away. For such a bodhisattva, giving away flesh is very like giving away possessions, since neither belongs to one in any deep sense. These verses illustrate a general strategy that I will comment on in more detail in the later chapters of this study. By progressing along the bodhisattva path, the bodhisattva undergoes massive psychological changes, here resulting from the realization of emptiness, and as a result what is painful at the beginning of the path may create no great hardship to the late stage bodhisattva.

At another point in his text, Śāntideva is explicit that one should not sacrifice one's life until psychologically prepared to do so:

One should not afflict this body, which serves  
the true dharma for the sake of another.

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<sup>21</sup> “Guide” here refers to the Buddha.

<sup>22</sup> Thanks to Charles Goodman for suggesting the importance of these verses.

In this way, one can quickly cause the wishes of sentient beings to be fulfilled. (BCA 5:86, my translation)

Therefore, when the thought of compassion is impure, one should not sacrifice one's life, but it should be sacrificed when one's thought is equal to this. Thus, life must not be wasted. (BCA 5:87, translation altered)<sup>23</sup>

What this means is that much of the early practice of the bodhisattva will be spent developing virtues that directly benefit both self and other at the same time. The virtue of patience, for instance, not only protects others from one's anger, but also frees a person herself from the suffering of feeling angry. Radically other-regarding virtues like compassion will be developed slowly, so that demanding acts like sacrificing one's body will not be made until one's psychological resources have been developed in ways that meliorate or even outweigh these difficulties.

A final demand-lessening theme that appears in many Mahāyāna works, although not at least obviously in Śāntideva's BCA, is the description of high-level bodhisattvas possessing something akin to immunity to pain. The *Universal Vehicle Discourse*

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<sup>23</sup> saddharmasevakam kāyamitarārtham na pīdayet| evam-eva hi sattvānāmāśāmaśu prapūrayet||86|| tyajenna jīvitam tasmādaśuddhe karuṇāśaye tulyāśaye tu tattyājyamittham na parihīyatet||87|| (Śāstrī 2001, 85-86). In verse 5:87, I use the Wallace and Wallace translation, except that I substitute "equal to this" in place of "unbiased," as a more literal translation of *tulya*. Crosby and Skilton translate the second verse as follows: "Therefore one should not relinquish one's life for someone whose disposition to compassion is not as pure. But for someone whose disposition is comparable, one should relinquish it. That way, there is no overall loss" (Śāntideva 2008, 41-42). Ohnuma's construal is similar. "Therefore, he should not sacrifice his life for someone who lacks the pure intention of compassion, but he should do so for someone whose intentions are equivalent to his own. In this way, nothing will be lost." Ohnuma claims that in this verse Śāntideva seeks to limit the bodhisattva's acts of self-sacrifice to only worthy recipients. See Ohnuma 2000, 60-61. I believe, however, that Wallace and Wallace are right to construe "aśuddhe karuṇāśaye" and "tulyāśaye" as locative absolute clauses, indicating respectively that the bodhisattva should not give up his life when *his* compassion is impure, but may give it up when *his* compassion is sufficiently developed. Śāntideva's intention here is to limit self-sacrifice to those psychologically ready to do so without regret, pride, resentment or any other negative mental state corrupting the act. The alternate reading, while grammatically possible, has Śāntideva implausibly claiming that a bodhisattva should sacrifice his life only for a very advanced spiritual practitioner, who of course would have no need of the gift. As Ohnumo points out, the *jataka* stories themselves emphasize exactly the opposite of this, since they are filled with bodhisattvas sacrificing their bodies for unworthy recipients (Ohnumo 2000, 60-61).

*Literature* (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*), for instance, claims that bodhisattvas dwelling in hell are not harmed by the suffering they experience (Thurman 2004, 170-171). In Śāntideva's other text, the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (hereafter, ŚS), he discusses a concentration called "the production of happiness towards all phenomena" (*Sarvadharmasukhagrānta*) in which the bodhisattva maintains a happy mind even while undergoing hellish tortures.<sup>24</sup>

There are two ways of understanding passages like these. One is to treat this ability as a magical power, on line with reading minds and teleportation, gained by the bodhisattva at the late stages of the path. This, like the link between *bodhicitta* and positive karma (*puṇya*), will not provide a philosophically satisfying defense of Śāntideva's claim that developing the virtues of bodhisattvahood is in one's own interest. A second possible interpretation of these passages is to treat them as the end result of a psychological transformation, some of the major elements of which I will be exploring in this dissertation. In this interpretation, the bodhisattva maintains a happy mind in severely painful experiences, not by magical powers, but through her extreme facility with the demand-lessening strategies I explore below. The production of happiness towards all phenomena, here, is the limit case in which psychological transformation has progressed to the point to where the bodhisattva's mental state cannot be severely disrupted by any amount of pain, and likewise, erupts into joy when offering aid to others.

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<sup>24</sup> I take this translation of *Sarvadharmasukhagrānta* from Lele 2007, 63. See Śāntideva 1971, 177-178, and also Lele 113-115.

## Śāntideva and the BCA

Very little is known about the life of Śāntideva. He is said to have lived at the great monastic university, Nalanda, in the seventh or eighth century CE. It is unknown how influential the text that is the focus of this study, *Introduction to the Practice of Awakening (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, was in India, but it has been regarded as a spiritual masterpiece in Tibet for over a thousand years. Śāntideva describes his purpose in writing the text as presenting a guide to the discipline (*samvara*) of the bodhisattvas (BCA 1:1). As described above, it is a how-to manual on developing the essential attributes of a bodhisattva. Chapters one, three and four of the text focus on the development and protection of *bodhicitta*, the root virtue of the bodhisattva. Chapter two contains offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as confession of past wrongdoings, meant to prepare the mind to take the actual bodhisattva vow, which takes place in the third chapter. Chapters five through nine each focus on the development of one or more of the core virtues that partially constitute bodhisattvahood. The fifth chapter is named after introspection (*samprajanya*), and also focuses heavily on mindfulness (*smṛti*). It acts as Śāntideva's chapter on ethical discipline, since mindfulness and introspection are seen as essential factors in preventing negative mental states from arising, which cause harm in their own right, as well as lead to unskillful verbal and physical action. The sixth chapter is dedicated to the perfection of patience (*kṣānti*). The seventh emphasizes the development of effort (*vīrya*), the enthusiasm to engage in Buddhist practice. The eighth chapter is devoted to meditative concentration (*dyāna*), and the ninth the wisdom (*prajñā*) realizing the emptiness of all phenomena. The tenth chapter contains a series of beautiful dedications in which karmic merit (*puṇya*)

from the bodhisattva's efforts are dedicated to all sentient beings. I will discuss the virtues that Śāntideva emphasizes in more detail in the fourth chapter of this study.

The other extant text usually ascribed to Śāntideva is the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, or *Compendium of Trainings* (ŚS). Unlike the BCA, this is for the most part not written in the author's voice, but is mainly compiled from earlier Buddhist sources. The ŚS is an anthology of Buddhist teachings on how to develop the physical and mental qualities of the bodhisattva.<sup>25</sup> Although the text is of immense value, I have chosen not to draw heavily upon it in this study. One reason for this is that since it is largely an edited work, it is less than clear that Śāntideva would fully endorse everything he has chosen to include in the volume.<sup>26</sup> The second, more important reason is that the BCA possesses a unity and eloquence that is almost unmatched by any other Indian Buddhist text. It leads the reader systematically through acknowledging the benefits of *bodhicitta*, taking the vow to become a bodhisattva, developing the virtues essential to attaining the state of Buddhahood, and finally dedicating the merit from this practice to all sentient beings. Therefore, there is an advantage to focusing my consideration of how Śāntideva wrestles with the issue of the demandingness of the bodhisattva path upon this single text. I will, however, draw upon other Mahāyāna and early Buddhist texts as an aid in making explicit strategies and presuppositions Śāntideva would accept, but does not always clearly articulate in the BCA.

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<sup>25</sup> See Clayton 2006 and Mrozik 2007 for recent studies of the ŚS.

<sup>26</sup> I have argued elsewhere (Harris, forthcoming) that there may be passages in the BCA that are used as skillful means, rather than statements Śāntideva is intellectually committed to. Nevertheless, the BCA has an obvious unity as a text in the voice of a single author that provides an advantage for taking it as the primary object of my study.



## No-self and Moral Attribution

One concern that can be profitably addressed in this introduction is the question of how, given the Buddhist acceptance of no-self (*anātman*), it makes sense to talk of unfair levels of demandingness, or indeed to ascribe any kind of moral properties to persons. Below, I briefly explain the early Buddhist doctrine of no-self, before passing onto Śāntideva's understanding of the doctrine, and finally explain why both early and later Buddhists believe one can deny any enduring self but still talk about the moral responsibilities of persons.

Early Buddhism denies convention-independent existence to any entity composed of parts. The classic example comes from the early Buddhist text, *The Questions of King Milinda* in which the monk Nāgasena debates with the Greek king Milinda about the existence of persons and chariots. Defending himself from charges of nihilism, Nāgasena argues that the names “chariot” and “Nāgasena” are conventional designations (*prajñapti*) useful to refer to a group of parts in close causal association, but not referring to any single independent entity. Persons and chariots, the monk teaches the king, exist, but only as conventions useful for transacting our daily affairs in life (Rhys Davids 1890, 40-46: *Miln* II 1:25—29).

The systematic philosophical texts arising out of the early Buddhist tradition called “abhidharma” develop the doctrine of no-self (*anātman*) by claiming that whatever can be analyzed, either physically or conceptually, is only conventionally real (*saṃvṛtisat*), but has no ultimate existence (*paramarthatat*), that is existence independent of human needs and practices. What is ultimately real, for the Ābhidharmika, are the *dharma*s, partless radically impermanent moments of matter and consciousness, like

color, shape, and mental events like hatred and compassion, whose causal relationships account for all ordinary experience.<sup>27</sup> Śāntideva is a member of the Mahāyāna Madhyamaka school, whose defining feature is the rejection of the possibility of any element of experience being unanalyzable. In contrast to abhidharma, even the *dharmas*, claims the Madhyamaka, can be analyzed into their causal conditions, and therefore lack essence (*svabhāva*). This is the famous Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and it implies the corresponding claim that whatever exists does so in dependence on causal conditions (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Like Nāgasena, however, the Madhyamaka does not deny that partite objects, including persons, exist as conventional designations (*prajñapti*), useful fictions that help us conduct business in the world. Although no enduring self (*ātman*) exists, Madhyamakas, as well as Ābhidharmikas accept the existence of conventional persons as useful ways of treating together discrete moments of mind and body in close causal relationship.

Both early Buddhists and later Mahāyāna thinkers also agree that these conventional selves are both the bearers of moral responsibility and the agents who progress along the Buddhist path. This issue is addressed perhaps most famously in *The Questions of King Milinda*. In the text, Nāgasena tells the king Milinda that there is no enduring being who transmigrates from one life to the next. In reply, the king asks whether the transmigrating being will escape its “evil deeds” (Rhys Davids 1890, 112: *Miln* III 5:7). Although the question is couched in terms of transmigration, the application to a single life is obvious. Since there is no enduring self, the king could as well have asked whether the man would escape the deeds performed earlier in the same life. Nāgasena’s reply is to offer the example of a thief stealing mangos that grew from

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<sup>27</sup> See the summary in Vasubandhu 1988, 910.

seeds a neighbor planted. The mangoes are not identical to the planted seeds, but they grow as a result of them. Because of this close causal connection, the king agrees that the man who takes the mango is guilty of theft. Likewise, the body and mind in a future life carry with it the negative actions performed by the body and mind in the current life (Rhys Davids 1890, 112; *Mil* III 5:7). Obviously, the same answer can be given in regard to actions performed within one lifetime. Because of the close causal connection between my present self and my self of five years ago, I bear responsibility for his harmful acts, even though there is no enduring entity to act as the bearer of this moral responsibility.

What this means is that the Buddhist view of no-self still allows for the existence of a conventional self that can be the bearer of moral attributes. For all Buddhists, the fact that selves are conventional designations does not entail that they do not deserve moral consideration. Different schools of Buddhism will justify the ascription of moral properties to the conventional self in different ways. For instance, Ābhīdharmikas will point out that the designation refers to actually existing mental and physical moments, including pain and happiness, which it is possible to prevent or increase. Madhyamakas reject any such ultimately existing *dharma*s, but claim that conventionally labeled selves are not wholly nonexistent. When designated upon a valid (although itself empty) basis of mental and physical moments, a conventional self has a robust enough existence to deserve moral consideration. It is not my purpose here to consider whether these positions are plausible. All I want to emphasize is that for these Buddhist, it is no contradiction to talk about moral responsibilities, virtuous characters, ethical goals and so on, even though no enduring unitary agents possess these moral attributes. Likewise,

there should be no objection to my consideration of the demandingness of the bodhisattva path for the conventionally existing individual.

Finally, one interesting feature of moral demandingness in Mahāyāna Buddhism that deserves note is that it ranges over multiple lifetimes. The sacrifice that a bodhisattva makes when she willingly takes rebirth is one that her conventional self in a future lifetime will experience. The question of continuity of personal identity over future rebirths is a difficult one that I cannot here consider in any detail. I can note, however, that not just Śāntideva and the Mahāyāna tradition, but all Indian Buddhists link the well-being of the present conventional self with that of future rebirths. In early Buddhism, where the goal of personal liberation is emphasized, much of the motivation to deeply engage in Buddhist practice is to bring one's future rebirths closer to the complete cessation from suffering that is *nirvāṇa*. Although Buddhist schools explain rebirth in different ways, what is common to each treatment is that the mental continuum is said to continue, connecting with a new physical body, while the physical continuum perishes. Śāntideva's own concern for the well-being of future transmigrations in one's own mental continuum is evidenced in his frequent encouragement to consider the karmic consequences of present actions upon future rebirths. This emphasis on continuity of well-being over lifetimes allows us to consider whether the multi-lifetime project of the bodhisattva asks too much of the transmigrating being (or series of closely related beings) undertaking it.

## Translation and Referencing of Terms in the Source Language

With occasional exceptions, in this dissertation I limit my consideration of Buddhist texts to those written in Sanskrit and Pali. Since the BCA is written in Sanskrit, I primarily use this language when providing the original term along with the translation. When drawing upon sources in Pali, I generally provide both the Pali and the Sanskrit of the translated term. In such cases, the Pali term precedes the Sanskrit. If only one term from a source language is provided, it is in Sanskrit.

There are a number of valuable translations of the BCA into English.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, I did not feel it necessary to provide my own translations of the text. I have used as a primary translation that of Alan and Vesna Wallace, both because of its accuracy and its readability. These authors base their translation mainly upon the Sanskrit version of the text, using the edition edited by Louis de la Vallee Poussin, and the one edited by P.L. Vaidya. They also consult the Tibetan Derge version (Wallace and Wallace 1997, 6-7). Where I have felt some feature of their translation is not adequate to my purposes, I have altered it and indicated this in the citation. I believe that no English translation adequately captures the sense of “*bodhicitta*,” and have left it untranslated throughout, removing the Wallace and Wallace translation of “spirit of awakening” when necessary. If I provide my own translation I note this in the citation. I have used the Sanskrit edition of the text edited by Dwārikādās Śāstrī (2001) when I do so. I have also frequently consulted the excellent translation, also from the Sanskrit, by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (2008). These authors have chosen to emphasize literalness and accuracy of

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<sup>28</sup> Translations from the Sanskrit include Crosby and Skilton 2008, Wallace and Wallace 1997 and Matics 1972. Translations from Tibetan include Padmakara Translation Group 2006 and Stephen Batchelor 1999.

translation over readability, and it is for this reason that I do not use it as my primary source in this study. This is not, of course, meant as a critique of the quality of their translation.

### **Concluding Introductory Remarks**

In the opening of this introduction, I claimed that my main purpose will be to explain how demandingness is lessened as one progresses along the bodhisattva path. I then gave a stronger and a weaker form of the thesis I will defend. The stronger version was that, if we grant the Buddhist certain key presuppositions, like the efficacy of certain virtues, the psychological effects of realizing no-self, and the saturation of ordinary experience by subtle forms of suffering, then a requirement to adopt the bodhisattva path will not be overly demanding. The difficulty with this thesis is not so much that it is too ambitious but rather that it will be difficult to evaluate its success. The overdemandingness objection arises when a theory makes unfair demands on its adherents. Moreover, the usual way to determine when a theory makes excessive demands is by appeal to our intuitive judgments. It simply seems unreasonable, for instance, for a consequentialism to demand that we never spend money on a movie when these resources could do more good elsewhere.

The bodhisattva, however, undergoes radical torments well beyond anything condoned in contemporary ethics. Bodhisattvas gouge out their eyes and present them to beggars, give their bodies for food to hungry animals, take rebirth in hell realms and so on. Moreover, Mahāyāna Buddhism has a radical conception of the psychological potential of the human mind. Parts of this dissertation will explore how a bodhisattva

who has perfected patience, for instance, can undergo great physical pain without mental distress, while taking great joy in making sacrifices for another's benefit. My argument will be that the radical psychological transformation of the bodhisattva both ameliorates the distress she feels, and compensates her for any distress she may experience while undertaking these apparently demanding activities.

The concern with the stronger phrasing of my thesis is that the radical nature of Buddhist ethics is liable to disrupt our intuitive judgments about what is overly demanding. Is it too much to ask that the bodhisattva experience the physical pain of sacrificing a limb repeatedly in thousands of rebirths if we also accept that her development of the virtue of patience means little to no mental pain is experienced while she does so? Does the bodhisattva come out on top when she takes rebirth in a hell realm but experiences unimaginable amounts of refined mental pleasure as a result of liberating sentient beings there? Although there is no reason to doubt that Śāntideva and other Mahāyāna authors were sincere in holding that bodhisattvas do actually undertake these difficulties, it is not realistic to try to stipulate the hedonic value of various bodhisattva activities and weigh the sacrifices against the gains. For instance, we are unlikely to have reliable intuitions about the negative value of severe physical pain unaccompanied by mental torment because these sufferings always accompany each other in our experience. Likewise, we will have no way to assess the welfare of an individual who wholly identifies her well-being with the flourishing of others, since this is a condition we are unlikely to have experienced.

It is for these reasons that I also offer a weaker version of my thesis, which is that, granting the Buddhist presuppositions listed above, the demandingness of the bodhisattva

path is much less than it appears. The weaker thesis differs from the stronger in being agnostic about whether the demand-lessening elements of the BCA provide a successful response to the overdemandingness objection. Defending this thesis would, however, successfully accomplish my goal of showing how altruism and self-interest converge and how demandingness lessens as one progresses along the bodhisattva path. I will hereafter phrase my project in defense of the stronger thesis, but to the extent that my arguments are unconvincing, it should be kept in mind that my project will remain largely successful so long as I successfully illustrate how the demand-lessening aspects of the text function, even if it is uncertain if they would provide an adequate response to the overdemandingness objection facing Śāntideva.



## Chapter 1: Śāntideva and the Overdemandingness Objection<sup>29</sup>

In the introduction, I surveyed some of the major demands the bodhisattva path makes on the individual. Just because a moral system is demanding, however, does not mean it is overly demanding, since any plausible moral system will sometimes be demanding (Chappell 2007, 255). It will probably, for instance, tell us we ought to sacrifice our lives if it is the only way to save the entire world from nuclear disaster.

The overdemandingness objection only applies when a theory asks too much of its followers. We could also phrase this by saying that it makes unreasonably high demands on its adherents. Of course, there will be differences of opinion over what constitutes unreasonable demands. Usually, the overdemandingness objection is supported based upon an appeal to our intuitions.<sup>30</sup> Intuitively, it seems too much to ask a person to give up all her free time and money to help others. Act consequentialism, however, demands that she do so, since this will maximize good consequences overall. For this reason, act consequentialism is usually held to be vulnerable to the overdemandingness objection.

There have been a number of different formulations of the overdemandingness objection. The version I am concerned with arises when a moral system asks the agent to make what appears to be an unreasonable sacrifice of her well-being. This is, I believe, the version of the objection to which Mahāyāna Buddhist authors like Śāntideva are most

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<sup>29</sup> The first half of this article (up to p. 48) is based upon Harris (forthcoming), used by permission of *Philosophy East and West*.

<sup>30</sup> Hooker (2009, 149) formalizes this by claiming that the overdemandingness objection depends upon accepting a metaethical principle that says a satisfactory moral theory should correspond with at least most of our considered intuitions. Considered intuition, here, refers to intuitive ethical judgment that upon reasonable reflection one still believes to be correct.

vulnerable.<sup>31</sup> This is because on the face of it Mahāyāna authors seem to be asking the bodhisattva to make massive sacrifices to their well-being, by remaining in *samsāra*, sacrificing limbs or even their lives, taking voluntary rebirth in painful realms and so on. Moreover, it is demandingness in the well-being reducing sense that the various forms of psychological transformation the bodhisattva achieves will reduce.

For a moral theory to be vulnerable to the overdemandingness objection, it must do more than accept a particularly demanding moral ideal. A theory praising self-sacrificing sainthood as the highest ethical achievement, but permitting adherents to commit to a much less demanding moral code does not face the objection. The objection only has force when a theory *requires* adherents to make what appears to be overly demanding sacrifices of their well-being. For this reason, as we have seen in the introduction, most forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism do not face the objection. Although they praise the bodhisattva ideal as the exemplar of spiritual life, they permit the less demanding path of aiming at liberation for one's own benefit.

There is a feature of the well-being sacrificing version of the overdemandingness objection that is particularly important to my argument in the chapters to come. This is

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<sup>31</sup> The overdemandingness objection is often linked to Bernard Williams' claim that Utilitarianism alienates us from our life projects by requiring us to abandon them whenever doing so would promote the good (Williams 1973). Moral theories are also sometimes said to be overly demanding if they severely narrow the range of options open to the agent (Murphy 2000, 26), or require an agent to make sacrifices, even when all things considered they have most reason not to do so (Portmore 2011, 26). To the extent that these formulations do not depend on a loss of agent well-being, I think it better to treat them as distinct problems, rather than group them under the overdemandingness objection, but I will not argue for that here. The alienation and option-narrowing versions of the objection do seem to face a Mahāyānist like Śāntideva if, as I will argue, he obligates individuals to become bodhisattvas. This is because the bodhisattva's training will radically limit the type of projects he can pursue. But these objections will have little force against Buddhists, since they will claim these options are pervaded by subtle forms of suffering, and are therefore not worth pursuit. I will develop the connection between the Buddhist analysis of suffering and the welfare-reducing version of the overdemandingness objection in the second chapter, and so we will also get a sense of how Buddhists would respond to these other forms of the overdemandingness objection. See also Harris 2010 regarding how the Buddhist analysis of suffering narrows the goals that are worth pursuit. As for Portmore's all-things-considered version of the objection, the Buddhist would claim that all-things-considered what we have most reason to do is aim at individual liberation, or turn to the bodhisattva path.

that demandingness in the well-being decreasing sense will increase or decrease depending upon the resources possessed by an individual. Consider the classic example of giving surplus income to charity. A moral theory that only required a donation manageable relative to my level of income is unlikely to be unreasonably demanding. Moreover, as overall income increases, the amount that can be asked increases as well. Similar claims could be made about other demanding situations, such as whether a person is obligated to rescue a child in a burning house. If it is likely that I will be badly hurt in the attempted rescue, it may be too demanding to claim that I am required to attempt the rescue. A former firefighter in great physical shape, however, might have only a small chance of being injured if she attempted the rescue. Intuitively, we would probably not think it too demanding if a moral theory required her to do so.<sup>32</sup>

What this shows is that as resources increase, which in these examples include material goods and physical abilities, the amount of well-being that is lost as a result of aiding others may decrease. Since the version of the overdemandingness objection that I am considering depends on an overly demanding loss of well-being, this means that individuals with greater resources are less likely to experience overly demanding losses of well-being as a result of moral demands of the relevant kind. The relevant Buddhist point, to be developed in particular in the third through fifth chapters of this dissertation, is that the resources in question can also be psychological. The bodhisattva undertakes a number of trainings as she progresses through the bodhisattva path that lessen the mental

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<sup>32</sup> Relevant here also is Moss 2011, 85, who emphasizes the importance of taking into account the position of the individual facing the apparently demanding tasks.

pain she experiences when enduring physical hardships.<sup>33</sup> These include the development of virtues like patience that lessen frustration and anger, and the ability to radically identify one's well-being with the well-being of others. I explore these demand-lesser strategies in detail in the chapters to come. What is important to note for now is that the demandingness of the bodhisattva path should be assessed not from the standpoint of one outside the discipline, but for a bodhisattva advancing in these mental trainings.

In the remainder of this chapter I argue that the Mahāyāna Buddhist monk Śāntideva does face the well-being-reducing version of the overdemandingness objection. In the first part of the chapter I consider and reject the possibility that he might face the objection as a result of consequentialist commitments. In response to Charles Goodman, I argue that we do not have sufficient evidence to identify Śāntideva as a consequentialist. In the second part, I consider Śāntideva's extended argument in the eighth chapter of the BCA that we should accept a commitment to impartial benevolence. I suggest the implied conclusion is that we are ethically obligated to become bodhisattvas, and claim that as a result Śāntideva is vulnerable to being charged with the overdemandingness objection. The final section of the chapter sets up my discussion of demand-lesser techniques found in the BCA to follow by surveying possible responses to the overdemandingness objection as a way of situating Śāntideva's contribution within the terrain traveled in contemporary discussions of the issue.

### **Consequentialism and Demandingness**

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<sup>33</sup> In other words, when undergoing physical hardships, the bodhisattva experiences physical painful sensation (*kāyika-duḥkha*) but lessened mental painful sensation (*caitasika-duḥkha*) like irritation or mental suffering arising as a result of the physical pain. See the introduction to this dissertation, pps. 11-12.

Perhaps the most influential way the overdemandingness objection has arisen in the Western tradition is as a result of committing to a particularly demanding theory of the right. In principle, the objection can apply to versions of any moral theory; for instance, a virtue ethics or a deontology that accepts a particularly demanding set of virtues or rules may face the objection.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the objection has been associated most strongly with consequentialism, since an act consequentialist claims that the right action is the one that maximizes impersonal value, and therefore she is required to sacrifice her well-being whenever doing so would maximize welfare overall.

In this section, I consider Charles Goodman's argument that Buddhist authors, including Śāntideva, are consequentialist. If this were correct, Śāntideva would face the overdemandingness objection as a result of his consequentialist commitments. Indeed, as I consider below, Goodman claims that its severe nature provides one piece of evidence that Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics is consequentialist. I argue in reply that although Goodman is right to emphasize the severity of Mahāyāna ethics, this does not arise as a result of committing to any particular theory of the right.

### **Classifying Śāntideva's Ethics**

One of the chief tasks of many normative theories is to provide a theory of the right, which unifies moral judgments by explaining why certain actions are right or wrong at the deepest level. Ethical theories are usually classified depending on their

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<sup>34</sup> Regarding the possibility of a virtue ethics being demanding, see Swanton 2009.

answer to this question.<sup>35</sup> Consequentialism, for instance, holds that consequences are, ultimately, the sole factor that determines the rightness or wrongness of action.

Generally, consequentialist theories claim that the right act is the one that maximizes good consequences, and a universal consequentialist theory holds that the right action is the one that impartially maximizes good consequences for all concerned.<sup>36</sup> Egoism claims the right action is the one that most benefits the agent. A deontological normative theory, in the sense I will be using the term, claims that the right action is the one that fulfills the appropriate duty or obeys the relevant rule. Virtue ethics has been understood a variety of ways, but a prominent form claims that the right action is the one a person of virtuous character would characteristically perform in the relevant situation (Hursthouse 1999, 28).<sup>37</sup>

Writers of Buddhist moral texts do not themselves develop taxonomies of ethical theories, such as the four I have just mentioned, and so do not provide criteria for distinguishing one from another. Śāntideva, therefore, will not directly tell us whether he ascribes to a particular normative theory. Instead, an author who wants to classify the ethics of a writer like Śāntideva must engage in rational reconstruction, and infer which normative theory, if any, provides the best fit for those passages that state his ethical

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<sup>35</sup> Of course, normative ethical theories also provide guidance over how we ought to act, and may consider questions such as what a good life consists in. My interest here, however, is limited to the possibility of whether the demanding nature of Śāntideva's ethics arises from his commitment to a given theory of right.

<sup>36</sup> Forms of egoism that claim the right action is the one that maximizes good consequences for the agent are also consequentialist. Nevertheless, I follow the standard practice of restricting the term "consequentialism" to refer to universal consequentialist theories.

<sup>37</sup> These terms are used in various ways in contemporary ethical writing. For instance, 'deontology' is sometimes used to refer to Kant's moral theory. My arguments are intended to highlight the difficulty of ascribing any underlying normative theory to Śāntideva, and so do not hinge on a particular specification of the underlying right-making criteria of action.

views.<sup>38</sup> There are various ways this project might be developed. Charles Goodman talks of determining which ethical theory a Buddhist author would ascribe to, should he learn of the available contemporary options (Goodman 2009, 4).<sup>39</sup> A stronger characterization claims a Buddhist writer *should* commit to a given normative theory, or even that they are implicitly committed to it, based upon their stated ethical views. My argument will apply to all of these ways of characterizing the project of rational reconstruction; I will be claiming that Śāntideva's BCA does not provide sufficient evidence to allow us to conclude that Śāntideva *would*, or *should* commit, or had already implicitly committed to consequentialism. For brevity's sake, however, I will usually phrase this project as determining whether Śāntideva is committed to consequentialism,.

Goodman's general strategy is to point to features Buddhist authors like Śāntideva share with consequentialism, and take this as evidence that Buddhism is consequentialist. Below I consider several of the most promising of these similarities, and argue they do not provide significant evidence that Śāntideva is a consequentialist.

### **Consequences and Consequentialism**

In defense of his claim that Buddhism is consequentialist, Goodman cites numerous passages from both early Buddhist and Mahāyāna texts emphasizing features that are strongly associated with consequentialist theories. Below, I cite three such passages, along with Goodman's analysis of the first and last, as representative of his

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<sup>38</sup> I take the phrase from Siderits 2003, pp. xiii-xiv, where he characterizes rational reconstruction as determining what contemporary position a traditional author *should* accept.

<sup>39</sup> At times, Goodman's phrasing suggests Buddhist writers have already committed to consequentialism, although of course they would not use that term. See for instance his comments about Śāntideva in Goodman 2009, 89-91.

method. The first is from an early Buddhist text, but I quote it because Goodman analyzes it in detail, and it illustrates how he treats similar passages by Śāntideva.

When you reflect, if you know: “This action that I wish to do with my body would lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results,” then you definitely should not do such an action with the body. But when you reflect, if you know: “This action that I wish to do with the body would not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results,” then you may do such an action with the body.<sup>40</sup>

Goodman takes the passage as *prima facie* evidence that early Buddhist ethics is consequentialist.

This passage says that actions are to be evaluated in terms of their consequences for both self and others, just as in universalist versions of consequentialism. It refers only to happiness and suffering, suggesting a hedonistic consequentialism such as classical utilitarianism . . . This statement purports to state a criterion that distinguishes right action from wrong actions. (Goodman 2009, 48)

Goodman also cites passages from the Mahāyāna writers, Śāntideva and Asaṅga, that state rules may be set aside and small harms committed when outweighed by large gains. The following passage comes from Śāntideva’s BCA:

Even what is proscribed is permitted for a compassionate person who sees it will be of benefit. (Goodman 2009, 98)<sup>41</sup>

The third passage, taken from Śāntideva’s *Compendium of Trainings* (*Śīkṣāsamuccaya*), is cited by Goodman as illustrating a number of pieces of evidence of Śāntideva’s consequentialism.

Through actions of body, speech, and mind, the Bodhisattva sincerely makes a continuous effort to stop all present and future suffering and depression, and to produce present and future happiness and gladness, for all beings. But if he does not seek the collection of the conditions for this, and does not strive for what will prevent the obstacles to this, or he does not cause small suffering and depression to arise as a way of preventing great suffering and depression, or does not

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<sup>40</sup>Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 524-5: M i 415. Cited in Goodman 2009, 48.

<sup>41</sup> BCA 5:84, translation by Goodman.



abandon a small benefit in order to achieve a greater benefit, if he neglects to do these things even for a moment, he is at fault.<sup>42</sup> (Goodman 2008, 21; Goodman 2009, 89-90)

This passage requires a commitment to the welfare of all beings, and endorses causing some suffering when greater positive consequences arise as a result. Goodman analyzes the passage as follows:

None of the distinctive characteristics of classical act-utilitarianism are missing from this passage. The focus on actions; the central moral importance of happy and unhappy states of mind; the extension of scope to all beings; the extreme demands; the absence of any room for personal moral space; the balancing of costs and benefits; the pursuit of maximization—every one of these crucial features of utilitarianism is present. (Goodman 2008, 21; Goodman 2009, 89-90)

Goodman's treatment of these passages illustrates his general strategy of pointing out commonalities between Buddhist texts and consequentialism as evidence that Buddhist authors like Śāntideva would identify as consequentialist, should they have known of the theory. Taken together, these passages suggest four such commonalities. The first passage shows that Buddhist authors are concerned with the consequences of actions on the welfare of themselves and others. The second passage shows Śāntideva holds that rules may sometimes be violated when they lead to good consequences. The last passage shows both that the bodhisattva has a universalistic concern that puts the welfare of others on par with his own, and at least some commitment to balancing, the view that we can inflict small amounts of harm when much greater benefits will result.

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<sup>42</sup> Goodman also cites similar passages from the Mahāyāna author, Asaṅga. For instance: "If the bodhisattva sees that some caustic means, some use of severity would be of benefit to sentient beings, and does not employ it in order to guard against unhappiness, he is possessed of fault, possessed of contradiction; there is fault that is not defiled. If little benefit would result for the present, and great unhappiness on that basis, there is no fault" (Goodman 2009, 79).

The last passage also mentions the extreme demands required of the bodhisattva, a factor I delay for treatment until the next section.<sup>43</sup>

Goodman is correct that all four of these features often appear in consequentialist theories. What distinguishes consequentialism from other ethical theories, however, is the claim that *consequences alone* determine the rightness of an action.<sup>44</sup> None of the features cited by Goodman provide strong support that Śāntideva would accept this claim. Regarding the early Buddhist passage emphasizing concern for the consequences of our actions on others, almost any moral theory, as well as common sense, insists we should care about the effects of our actions. To provide support for a consequentialist interpretation, the passage would have to be coupled with ones indicating there are absolutely no constraints in play that may limit our pursuit of good consequences. It is not clear to me that Goodman cites any passage supporting this much stronger conclusion. The final passage cited by Goodman indicates that the bodhisattva should inflict small amounts of harm for great gain, but this does not mean there might not be a constraint against preventing massive harm, even when greater good is at stake. A traditional consequentialist, for instance, would claim that if a bodhisattva could spur countless sentient beings towards buddhahood by drastically impeding the spiritual progress of a single sentient being, he should do so. But I know of no Buddhist text that

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<sup>43</sup> Goodman also draws attention to the passage's hedonic emphasis, but since my purpose here is on whether Buddhist thought can be classified, I set aside for the moment concerns as to its theory of the good.

<sup>44</sup> Of course various definitions of consequentialism are possible, but this is certainly the basic understanding of consequentialism that has been adapted by ethical theorists. Goodman characterizes consequentialism as the view that "of all the actions available to an agent in any given situation, the right action is the one that produces the best consequences" (Goodman, 2009, 24).

rules out the possibility that constraints, such as not doing great spiritual harm to an individual, might be relevant in determining the correct action for a bodhisattva.<sup>45</sup>

As to the passages emphasizing the possibility of violating rules, and inflicting small amounts of harm for great benefits, again most normative theories, and simply common sense morality, will hold that some rules may be broken on occasion, and that sometimes we need to hurt people a little to help them a lot.<sup>46</sup> A mother taking away her son's video games as punishment does not provide evidence that she is a consequentialist, nor does the actions of a father who relaxes curfew to let a child attend a late movie with friends.

The last common factor identified by Goodman, universal impartial concern for all beings, is the most convincing, since this feature is strongly identified with many varieties of consequentialism, and absent from many other normative theories.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, one might have an impartial concern for all beings, and still accept constraints that limit how one might promote their welfare. A father might, for instance, have an impartial concern for the welfare of all his children, but still be obligated to fulfill his promise to their grandfather to disperse an inheritance only to the grandfather's favored grandchild.

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<sup>45</sup> See also, on this point, Barnhart 2012, 20-21, and 25. See Barnhart 2012, 20-26 for his full critique of Goodman's position.

<sup>46</sup> A virtue ethics might hold that a generous person occasionally violates rules to benefit others, while a deontology need not claim every rule is inviolable. Even rule consequentialism can posit a rule requiring occasional violations of ethical rules if this would raise good outcomes overall. I will not consider here whether this blurs the distinction between rule and act consequentialism.

<sup>47</sup> As Michael Barnhart has recently pointed out, one concern here is that the passage contains advice for bodhisattvas, those who have taken a vow to become Buddhas and work for the sake of all sentient beings (Barnhart 2012, 22). It does not, directly at least, claim that all beings should manifest this level of benevolence. To strengthen his position, Goodman also owes us textual support for the position that Mahāyāna texts claim all beings should become bodhisattvas See Nattier 2003, 174-176, for doubts as to whether this was the dominant position in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

We should conclude, then, that the evidence Goodman cites illustrates impartiality and a universal commitment to all sentient beings as important features of Śāntideva's thought. This is a conclusion well worth noting. They do not, however, provide strong support that Śāntideva would accept that *only* consequences are relevant in determining the rightness of action. Therefore, they do not allow us to conclude that Śāntideva would endorse consequentialism.

Another way of making this point is to note that all the features cited so far are compatible with versions of non-consequentialist normative theories that a Buddhist would be able to accept. As Goodman points out, a universal concern for others' well-being is incompatible with a virtue ethics like Aristotle's in which other regarding virtues like generosity are exercised in moderation (Goodman 2009, 90). A Mahāyāna Buddhist virtue ethics, however, would place far greater stress on other-regarding virtues, including a radical form of generosity (*dāna*) that leads the bodhisattva to sacrifice his or her body when needed by other beings, and compassion (*karuṇā*) so strong that the bodhisattva is willing to undertake painful rebirths in hell realms for the sake of sentient beings suffering there. It would also stress the virtue of impartiality (*upekṣā*), resulting in an unbiased mind caring for all sentient beings equally.

Acceptance of these virtues would lead to the endorsement of the four features identified by Goodman considered above. Since the compassionate bodhisattva wants to eliminate the pain of others, he will carefully consider the results of his actions, and he will be willing to violate an ordinary rule of morality, or inflict a small amount of pain when a great benefit will result. Finally, development of the virtues of impartiality (*upekṣā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) results in a mind imbued with an impartial universal

concern for the welfare of all sentient beings. Therefore, these four features would appear in a Buddhist virtue ethics that claimed that the right action was the one that would be performed by the virtuous person acting characteristically.

The most likely form of deontology acceptable to Mahāyāna Buddhists would be one emphasizing the vow the bodhisattva takes to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. The claim here would be that the radically other-regarding actions of the bodhisattva derive, at the deepest level, not from the value of perfecting virtuous mental states, nor from an obligation to maximize good consequences, but from the commitment he or she has made to liberate all sentient beings. Moreover, this commitment would also lead the bodhisattva to exhibit the four features identified by Goodman. Since her vow is to liberate all beings from suffering, she would pay careful attention to the consequences of her actions on others. On occasion, she might commit a small harm, or even violate a less important rule or commitment in order to greatly improve the well-being of others. Finally, the vow requires committing to removing the suffering of all, entailing that the bodhisattva must develop an impartial concern for everyone's well-being.

One might think that a radically other-regarding ethics like Śāntideva's would be diametrically opposed to egoist theories, but surprisingly, given background Buddhist assumptions of how karma functions, even an indirect egoism is compatible with the bodhisattva's commitments. Buddhists hold that performing actions for another's welfare creates karmic merit (*puṇya*) that results in benefits in this and future lives, and ultimately creates some of the conditions for obtaining *nirvāṇa*. Furthermore, merit is created in dependence on the intention (*cetanā*) one has when one performs an act, so that if I perform a generous act motivated by the selfish desire to gain future karmic benefits,

the merit will be less beneficial than if I perform an act motivated to help another person.<sup>48</sup> We have also already seen in the introduction that Śāntideva suggests that one reason to develop *bodhicitta* is the vast amounts of positive merit (*puṇya*) that a commitment to eliminating the suffering of all living beings results in (BCA 1:21-22). It is consistent with these passages, therefore, to claim that an author like Śāntideva endorses other-regarding commitments and mental attitudes, but justifies this at the deepest level by reference to one's own benefit.<sup>49</sup>

I am not suggesting that Śāntideva is really an egoist, or a virtue ethicist, or a deontologist, but rather am arguing that all of these normative theories are, like consequentialism, compatible with the four features identified by Goodman and considered above.<sup>50</sup> Although Goodman has accurately identified features important to Buddhist ethics, simply citing these features does not tell us what at the deepest normative level entails their acceptance. On the basis of the evidence so far considered, Śāntideva's deepest ethical commitments are underdetermined, and additional evidence

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<sup>48</sup> As I will explain in chapter three, "*cetanā*" has a wider semantic range than "intention." The slightly inexact way I have expressed this point will serve for present purposes, however.

<sup>49</sup> A possible response is suggested by Goodman, who argues that the dedication of merit (*puṇya-pariṇāmanā*) endorsed in Mahāyāna texts, in which the bodhisattva transfers his good karmic merit (*puṇya*) to others, shows that bodhisattvas place others' welfare above their own. See Goodman 2009, 75-77. Such a dedication of merit, however, would be an act of generosity, which would itself help the practitioner accumulate meritorious karma; therefore, it remains possible that the ultimate normative justification for the dedication of merit itself is egoistic.

<sup>50</sup> Another way of putting the difficulty is to use Shelly Kagan's distinction between normative factors and normative foundations. Normative factors are those considerations that need to be taken into account in determining whether an action is right or wrong (Kagan 1998, 17-18). In contrast, normative foundations explain *why* these given factors determine whether an act is wrong or right (Kagan 1998, 190). The passages cited by Goodman strongly suggest that consequences are at least an important factor in determining rightness of actions. They do not, however, show that Buddhism is foundationally consequentialist, since they do not show what justifies, at the deepest level, the acceptance of these consequences.

would need to be introduced to show that he was committed to, or at least would be more likely to endorse one or another of these theories.<sup>51</sup>

### **Demandingness and Consequentialism**

In the last section, I argued that the presence of the consideration of consequences and similar factors in texts like Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* does not provide sufficient evidence that the author is a universal consequentialist, since such consideration is consistent with multiple normative theories. Goodman's argument continues by identifying several other factors that Buddhism and Consequentialism share. Elsewhere I argue that like the appeal to consequences considered above, these additional factors underdetermine which theory Śāntideva would endorse (Harris forthcoming). Here, I will only consider one of these additional factors that is particularly relevant to this study, the demanding nature of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics.

Consequentialist theories, in general, tend to be demanding because they require the adherent to choose the act or follow the rule that would maximize good consequences. For instance, since donating all my income above that needed to pay basic living expenses could alleviate great amounts of suffering, and since this would far outweigh the relatively modest pleasure I would gain from spending it on myself, I ought to donate it. Goodman contrasts this to certain forms of virtue ethics, such as Aristotle's, that emphasize personal flourishing and leave room for the agent to develop their own

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<sup>51</sup> The list of ethical theories I have suggested are compatible with Śāntideva's ethical commitments is not meant to be exhaustive. One might, of course, claim Śāntideva is an ethical pluralist, and other possibilities might be argued for as well. To such possibilities my response would remain the same: we would need textual evidence that supports the claim that Śāntideva is a pluralist, rather than a consequentialist or virtue ethicist etc. For a recent study suggesting similarities between Śāntideva and particularism, see Barnhart 2012.

interests (Goodman 2009, 90). He claims that “if we find a thinker presenting an ethical position that is extremely demanding, that is evidence that we are dealing with a form of consequentialism” (Goodman 2009, 44).

Goodman then points out that the conception of the bodhisattva developed by Śāntideva is extraordinarily demanding.

Whatever suffering is in store for the world, may it all ripen in me. May the world find happiness through the pure deeds of the Bodhisattvas (Goodman 2009, 92).<sup>52</sup>

We can also remember here the various apparent sacrifices that the bodhisattva makes that I considered in the introduction to this dissertation. Goodman holds that the shared demanding nature of Śāntideva’s ethics and universal consequentialism supports his thesis that Buddhist authors like Śāntideva would endorse consequentialism (Goodman 2009, 90-92).

As this dissertation progresses, I will argue that the apparent sacrifices the bodhisattva makes are much less demanding than they appear. Nevertheless, it at least initially appears that Mahāyāna Buddhism is extremely demanding, and so it is worthwhile to consider whether demandingness would provide evidence that Buddhism is consequentialist. The difficulty with Goodman’s argument, as before, is that the property of being demanding is compatible with multiple ethical theories. Consider, again, the possibility of interpreting the commitments of the bodhisattva as deriving their normative force from the vow she takes to liberate all sentient beings. If this were the case, at its deepest level Mahāyāna Buddhism would be a deontology whose demanding nature results from the specific form of the rules accepted. Since the bodhisattva’s vow requires her to liberate all sentient beings, great demands are placed upon her; however, in this

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<sup>52</sup> BCA 10:56, Goodman’s translation.



interpretation, the normative force of the demands stems from the nature of her vow, rather than a commitment to consequentialism.

Goodman is right to claim that many forms of virtue ethics, including Aristotle's, are much less demanding than consequentialist theories, and appear to ask less of their adherents than the bodhisattva path. Nevertheless, how demanding a virtue ethics is depends upon which virtues it endorses, and how strongly these virtues must be developed. As we have already seen, Mahāyāna ethics stresses radically strong versions of other-regarding virtues like compassion and generosity, and therefore a Mahāyāna virtue ethics would be as demanding as many kinds of consequentialism.<sup>53</sup>

In fact, given Buddhist presuppositions about the functioning of karma, as mentioned above, even an indirect ethical egoism is compatible with the demanding nature of Śāntideva's ethics. This is because both the karmic and the psychological benefits of being a bodhisattva committed to helping others are positive. Therefore, even apparent self-sacrifice might be seen, at the deepest level, as entailed by a commitment to help oneself as much as possible. As above, I am not arguing that Śāntideva would endorse a foundational virtue ethics, a deontology or an ethical egoism, but only that his moral commitments are compatible with all these theories. For this reason, simply noting the demanding nature of his ethics does not provide evidence for any particular interpretation of its underlying normative structure.

Since Śāntideva does not explicitly ascribe to a theory of right, Goodman is correct to believe that if we are to categorize his normative thought, we will need to infer which theory is the best match for his stated commitments. In this section, I have argued

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<sup>53</sup> See also Clayton 2009, 17-18, regarding the bodhisattva's development of virtues for the welfare of other beings. Clayton, however, seems to side with Goodman in holding this endorsement of other-regarding virtues is a consequentialist element in Śāntideva's moral theory.

that this task is much more difficult than it at first appears. Although Goodman draws attention to a number of features Buddhist authors share with consequentialists, this does not provide significant evidence that Buddhism is consequentialist, since given Buddhist presuppositions all of these feature are compatible with multiple foundational normative theories including kinds of virtue ethics, deontology and egoism.

Elsewhere, I argue that similar concerns face authors claiming that Śāntideva should be classified as a virtue ethicist (Harris, forthcoming). Of course future attempts to classify his thought might be made, but for our purposes, it is enough to note that it does not appear that we have sufficient evidence to identify him as a consequentialist. Therefore, we have no reason to believe that the demandingness of his moral thought arises out of any foundational consequentialist commitments. In the following section, I examine an extended argument by Śāntideva that concludes we should commit to impartial benevolence and remove the suffering of all without partiality. I argue that Śāntideva faces the overdemandingness objection as a result of this claim that we should commit to impartial benevolence.

### **Śāntideva, Impartial Benevolence and Demandingness**

Although we do not have adequate evidence to infer that Śāntideva is a consequentialist, the overdemandingness objection can arise for an author regardless of whether they ascribe to any particular theory of the right. This is the case in what is probably the most influential normative argument of the last century, Peter Singer's argument that we ought to provide greater assistance to impoverished nations. The version quoted below, taken from Singer's *Practical Ethics*, argues that we ought to

prevent extreme poverty, meaning poverty which results in a lack of basic necessities, like food and essential medical care.

- 1) “If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable [moral] significance, we ought to do it.
- 2) Extreme poverty is bad.
- 3) There is some extreme poverty we can prevent without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance.

Conclusion: We ought to prevent some extreme poverty” (Singer 2011, 200).<sup>54</sup>

We need not evaluate the argument’s success here. Rather, I cite it to show that demandingness can arise from normative arguments that do not commit their authors to any particular theory of the right that specifies at the deepest level what makes an action right or wrong. Although Singer is generally considered a consequentialist, his first premise is compatible with deontology and virtue ethics, since these theorists can claim that one need not “prevent something bad” when doing so would require violating a relevant rule or acting unvirtuously, since this may be of “comparative moral significance.”<sup>55</sup> Further, Singer’s employment of this argument makes him vulnerable to the overdemandingness objection, since many of us will think it requires too severe sacrifices of personal time and income.

In the eighth chapter of his *BCA Śāntideva* makes an argument that we should commit to impartial benevolence that, like Singer’s argument, does not commit him to any particular theory of the right. Like Singer, we will see that *Śāntideva* is content to

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<sup>54</sup> It is clear from the context, as well as Singer’s third premise, that he intends the reference to “comparable significance” in the first premise to refer to moral significance. I add the term “moral” to make this explicit.

<sup>55</sup> Singer points out that his principle is compatible with multiple forms of moral theory at Singer 2011, 199-200.

rely on our intuitive judgment that certain premises are correct instead of specifying a theory of the right and illustrating how the premise follows from its acceptance. Also like Singer, I will argue that Śāntideva's argument makes him vulnerable to the overdemandingness objection.

Śāntideva's argument takes place over sixteen verses in the eight chapter of the BCA. The initial portion of the argument establishes a prima facie reason to remove suffering, no matter to whom it belongs. I cite the essential four verses.

One should first earnestly meditate on the equality of oneself and others in this way: "All equally experience suffering and happiness, and I must protect them as I do myself." (BCA 8:90)

I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering, just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings, just as I am a sentient being. (BCA 8: 94)<sup>56</sup>

When happiness is equally dear to others and myself, then what is so special (*viśeṣa*) about me that I strive after happiness for myself alone? (BCA 8:95)

When fear and suffering are equally abhorrent to others and myself, then what is so special (*viśeṣa*) about me that I protect myself but not others? (BCA 8:96)

Śāntideva begins the argument by asking us to contemplate the way suffering feels. Our immediate reaction, when we experience pain, is to want to remove it. These four verses then remind us that the suffering of others feels just as bad to them as ours does to us. Since the badness of the suffering we and others feel is alike, Śāntideva concludes that we have a prima facie reason to remove any suffering, no matter to whom it belongs.

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<sup>56</sup> "Sentient being" here translates "*sattva*," which in Buddhist thought refers to anything possessing consciousness.

An opponent might not be willing to give Śāntideva even this much. They might, for instance, claim that although suffering motivates its own removal, it provides no reason to remove it apart from this basic motivation.<sup>57</sup> Further, we are only automatically motivated to remove our own suffering, not the suffering of other persons. Therefore, the suffering of other persons, of itself, provides us no reason to remove it. There might be other reasons, such as our relationship with particular persons, that give us reasons to care about their suffering, but the mere fact that they are suffering does not do so. Śāntideva does not consider objections like this, but is simply content to rely on the likelihood that most persons will be willing to accept that we have some reason to remove suffering, regardless of to whom it belongs (BCA 8:103).<sup>58</sup>

In verses 90 and 94, then, Śāntideva establishes both that others abhor suffering and desire happiness as much as we do, and claims that this provides at least some reason to remove their suffering. The argument continues in verses 95 and 96 by asking what distinction (*viśeṣa*) justifies my prioritizing my own welfare above others. If two persons were in agony and we could rescue only one of them, we should be able to provide some justification for our choice as to which one to help, such as the fact that one caused his own suffering through unethical behavior. Śāntideva, likewise, is asking whether we can provide some kind of rational justification for prioritizing our own well-being over the well-being of others.

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<sup>57</sup> There are actually a couple of forms this objection might take. One might agree that being motivated to do something provides a reason to do so, and then claim that since one is not automatically motivated by the suffering of another, we do not necessarily have a reason to remove it. Alternately, one could claim that being motivated to do something does not, of itself, provide a reason to do it. Therefore, I may not even have a reason to remove my own suffering.

<sup>58</sup> See Nagel 1986, 159-162 for an argument that we have reason to remove the pain of others. Interestingly, Nagel also claims that he finds the position “self-evident,” and expresses doubt about whether his argument provides any additional evidence for it (Nagel, 162).

These verses, then, provide Śāntideva's initial argument that we ought to commit to impartially removing everyone's suffering. First, we have a reason to remove suffering, no matter to whom it belongs, because of the badness of that suffering. Second, if we are going to prioritize removing our own suffering, we should be able to provide some kind of relevant distinction about ourselves that justifies this prioritization. For the remainder of the argument, Śāntideva considers and dismisses as irrelevant several potential distinctions that might justify prioritizing my well-being over that of others. Verses 95 and 96 go on to rule out one possible justification. Since suffering and happiness are equally dear to myself and others, it isn't the case that there is anything particularly repugnant about my own suffering that warrants its prioritization.

In verses 101-103, Śāntideva considers what is probably the most powerful distinction the opponent can appeal to as rationally justifying his prioritization of his own well-being. The opponent can claim that he is justified in giving his own suffering greater consideration because it belongs to him. In reply, Śāntideva invokes the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*).

The continuum of consciousness, like a series, and the aggregation of constituents, like an army and such, are unreal. Since one who experiences suffering does not exist, to whom will that suffering belong? (BCA 8:101)

All sufferings are without an owner without exception.  
They should be warded off simply because they are suffering.  
Why is any restriction made in this case? (BCA 8: 102, translation modified)<sup>59</sup>

Why should suffering be prevented? Because everyone agrees. If it must be warded off, then all of it must be warded off; and if not, then this goes for oneself as it does for

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<sup>59</sup> *asvāmikāni duḥkhāni sarvāṅyevāviśeṣataḥ duḥkhatvādeva vāryāṇi niyamastatra kimkṛtaḥ. Śāntideva 2001, 190. Wallace and Wallace translate "aviśeṣataḥ" as an ablative of reason, "because they are not different." It is unclear, however, why Śāntideva would be claiming that suffering is ownerless because it is not different. Instead, I translate "aviśeṣataḥ" adverbially, as "without exception."*

everyone else. (BCA 8: 103)

Śāntideva's opponent, in these verses, appears to be a Buddhist who accepts the nonexistence of any enduring unitary self, but rejects any suggestion that we have an obligation to care for others as much as ourselves. In the first verse, Śāntideva reminds his opponent that the Buddhist commitment to the unreality of partite objects entails that the self, which is composed of causally connected mental and physical moments, is unreal. As a result, suffering is not owned by anyone. The second verse goes on to claim that since all moments of suffering are ownerless, it is their intrinsically negative feel alone that should motivate us to remove them. In the last verse he considers the possible objection that if there are no selves, we have no reason to remove anyone's pain. He replies that since no one claims pain should not be removed, we need not consider this objection. Arguments must end somewhere, and the premise that we ought to remove suffering because it is bad is as deep as we can or need to go. He concludes that since there is no good reason to prioritize our own welfare, if we are to be rationally consistent we must commit to removing everyone's pain, or care about none of it, our own included. This last option has already been dismissed by his claim that everyone agrees pain should be removed. Thereby a commitment to impartial benevolence, which for Śāntideva would mean committing to the bodhisattva path as the way of most quickly liberating sentient beings, seems to follow.

The force of the central point of the argument can be appreciated by considering a distinction Derek Parfit makes between apparent and real reasons. An apparent reason is a belief "whose truth would give us a reason to act in some way." If these beliefs are true, then this apparent reason is also a real reason (Parfit 2011, 35). For instance, if I

love chocolate, seeing what I take to be a chocolate candy bar gives me an apparent reason to eat it. If it turns out to be unsweetened bakers chocolate, then this apparent reason will not be a real reason, since it is founded upon a false belief.

Śāntideva can be understood as making a similar claim about the self. Ordinarily, most people will consider the fact that I am numerically identical to my future self as providing a good reason to prioritize my own welfare. This provides only an apparent reason, however, since it is grounded on the mistaken supposition that my future self exists. By contrast, suffering provides a good reason to remove it, since at least in this argument Śāntideva seems to accept that suffering does exist.

There are a number of responses the opponent can make to Śāntideva's argument. One difficulty is what I have elsewhere called "Śāntideva's dilemma" (Harris, 2011). Ordinarily, we accept a prima facie obligation to remove suffering, regardless of to whom it belongs, but we also believe it is justifiable to give more priority to removing our own suffering. Śāntideva emphasizes the nonexistence of the self to undercut the second of these attitudes. In doing so, however, he may also undercut our natural acceptance of the first attitude. In verse 103, he suggests that we need not debate about whether suffering need be removed because everyone agrees that it should be. Yet perhaps this agreement is itself dependent upon the mistaken belief that we are actually enduring independent entities. Once we accept the ultimate nonexistence of the self, it is open to the opponent to claim that we need not be concerned about anyone's pain, including our own. In this response, the opponent agrees with Śāntideva that there is no distinction justifying prioritizing one's own suffering, but claims this provides a justification for total apathy as much as impartial benevolence (Harris 2011).



Another strategy the opponent might use is to focus on the fact that even Śāntideva accepts that selves conventionally exist as superimpositions upon causally connected mental and physical events. He might then focus on facts about these momentary events and their connections that might provide the needed distinction to justify prioritizing the well-being of one's own set of closely related mental and physical moments. Here is one way the opponent might develop this strategy. Let us accept with Śāntideva that my current self is obligated to remove suffering, no matter to whom it belongs. Yet I have a special connection to my own future conventional self. Because of our close causal connection, there are facts that are true about my understanding of the experience of my future self that are not true about my understanding of any other conventional self. Śāntideva claimed in verse 8:102 that the quality of the pain everyone experiences is the same. Even if this is true, each person may experience their pain differently. My dread of going to the dentist is not the same as yours, and the way I mentally recoil from an insult will differ from your own reaction. Because of the close causal connections between my current and future self, I know that his reaction to his pain will be extremely similar to my own. I have a window into the subjective feel of the experiences of that future self. Therefore, I relate to his experiences in a way that I cannot relate to the suffering of any other being. Śāntideva's opponent might argue that this distinction can rationally ground special concern for my own welfare.

What I have done by raising these two objections is to show that Śāntideva's argument is far from uncontroversial. My primary purpose here is not to evaluate the argument, however, and so I will not consider potential responses that might be made. For our purposes, we can conclude that Śāntideva argues for the conclusion that we are

obligated to accept impartial benevolence and strive to remove the suffering of all persons. Since this project appears to be extremely demanding, he is therefore vulnerable to having the overdemandingness objection raised against him.

There is another possible interpretation of these verses that deserves brief mention. The passages are placed not in the Wisdom chapter of the BCA, where Śāntideva argues against opponents' views, but in a chapter detailing various meditations designed to reduce attachment and generate compassion. Especially since the argument is not obviously convincing, we might wonder whether it is correct to interpret these verses as an analytic argument trying to derive the conclusion that we are obligated to become bodhisattvas. Perhaps Śāntideva's main purpose in these sets of verses is to encourage us to think closely on the suffering others experience, as well as to meditate deeply on the fact that we have no self as a way of removing egoistic attachment. If this were the case, it might be that Śāntideva is not necessarily claiming that all humans capable of understanding his argument are obligated to become bodhisattvas, but rather only to present a set of tools to help those who have already made this commitment to develop further.<sup>60</sup> One of the reasons it is worth considering this hypothesis is because, as I explained in the introduction, most Mahāyāna texts hold the bodhisattva path to be optional, and this interpretation would bring Śāntideva back into line with the predominant Mahāyāna position.

Although I think this is a possible reading of the text, I will not here consider its merits in detail. These verses are at least presented as an extended argument in which Śāntideva argues we are obligated to commit to impartial benevolence, and by implication that we should adopt the apparently very demanding bodhisattva path. If we

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<sup>60</sup> I develop this possibility in Harris 2011.

take the verses at face value, then, Śāntideva faces the overdemandingness objection. The remaining chapters of this dissertation will reconstruct important aspects of the response he can make.

Nevertheless, even if this is an incorrect understanding of Śāntideva's text, my thesis has been framed in a way that its defense will remain unaffected. I will be arguing that if we accept certain Buddhist presuppositions like the psychological effects of realizing no-self and the Buddhist analysis of suffering, an obligation to commit to the bodhisattva path is not overly demanding in the welfare decreasing sense. Even if Śāntideva does not think we are obligated to become bodhisattvas, it is still an important finding that the bodhisattva path is far less demanding than it appears, and that therefore Mahāyāna ethics would be resistant to the overdemandingness objection if a Mahāyāna author claimed we were obligated to undertake it. Moreover, all Mahāyāna authors, because of the emphasis they place on ordinary beings committing to become bodhisattvas, should be concerned about lessening the demandingness of the bodhisattva path. Therefore, this study should be of considerable interest regardless of whether my interpretation of Śāntideva's argument above is correct.

### **Possible Responses to the Overdemandingness Objection**

Thus far, I have argued that Śāntideva appears vulnerable to the overdemandingness objection, as a result of his claim that we are obligated to act with impartial benevolence, and by implication to adopt the bodhisattva path. In the remainder of this chapter, I survey potential responses to the overdemandingness objection as a way of situating Śāntideva's contribution to this discussion alongside

contemporary responses to the issue. The following chapters will develop different ways that demandingness is actually addressed by Śāntideva and other Buddhist authors.

The most straightforward response to the objection is to simply claim that the correct moral theory is extremely demanding. Versions of this ‘bite-the-bullet’ response have been adopted by prominent ethicists including Shelly Kagan, Peter Singer and Peter Unger.<sup>61</sup> Generally, this approach is matched with a campaign against the intuitions that lead us to believe the demands of the theory in question are unfair. This approach is not really available to the Mahāyānist, however. The difficulty is that endorsing an extremely demanding theory generally requires accepting that most persons will not do what is morally required. Singer, for instance, argues that although we are morally required to give up all our free time and income to help relieve poverty, it is only realistic to expect most persons to make a far smaller contribution (Singer 2011, 211-215). The goal of a Mahāyānist like Śāntideva, however, is to help all beings achieve full Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. This suggests Śāntideva will need to offer some response to the overdemandingness objection that actually lessens demandingness, rather than merely endorse a standard of rightness that most persons will be unable to follow.

A second kind of response to the objection, which has received considerable attention from authors writing from a consequentialist perspective, is to restructure a moral theory to lessen the amount owed to others. Although theoretically this restructuring might take place on either the criteria of right action, or the theory of well-being endorsed by the system, in fact most contemporary approaches have focused on the first of these options. Michael Slote’s satisficing consequentialism, for instance,

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<sup>61</sup> See Kagan 1989, 13-14; Singer 1972 & 2011; Unger 1996.

decouples consequentialism from maximization, and claims that although consequences alone determine the rightness of an act, an act may still be right if it does not have the best consequences (Slote 1985, 36). An agent in Slote's view fulfills his ethical obligations if his action is good enough, even if it is not as good as it could be. Likewise, Samuel Scheffler abandons the consequentialist commitment to impartiality and allows agents to give their own interests greater weight than that of other persons (Scheffler 1982). Adherents of rule consequentialism, similarly, lessen the demands placed on adherents by determining individual obligation by the set of rules that would be most beneficial if followed by everyone.<sup>62</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhism cannot adopt this kind of demand-lessening restructuring of the criteria of right action, however, because to do so would require giving up its primary commitment, the achievement of full Buddhahood in order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. The bodhisattva vow requires the bodhisattva to devote all his resources and energy towards awakening as a means of liberating all sentient beings, and any diminution of this goal would mean abandoning this supreme intention.

Although it has been a less popular option, it is also possible to alter a theory of well-being to reduce the tension between moral demands and an individual's welfare. Three theories about the basic units of welfare value have been particularly prominent in recent contemporary ethical theory. Mental state theories, like hedonism, claim that welfare consists solely in experiencing certain psychological states. A desire-satisfaction theory, by contrast, claims that our life goes best when we satisfy our desires. An

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<sup>62</sup> Hooker (2000) provides a carefully constructed defense of rule consequentialism. Another version of a collective consequentialism that serves as a response to the overdemandingness objection is developed in Murphy (2000). See Mulgan (2001) chapters three, five and six for an accessible summary of rule, satisficing and hybrid consequentialism.

objective list theory claims that certain items enhance our welfare, regardless of whether they bring us pleasure or satisfy our desires. This list might include such items as friendships, appreciation of beauty, character development, and might also include items focused on by the other theories, such as pleasure and desire satisfaction.<sup>63</sup> Other theories of well-being have also been defended, but considering these three influential views will be sufficient for my purpose.<sup>64</sup>

In this welfare restructuring response, the strategy will be to endorse an alternative theory of welfare that will define the foundational units of well-being in terms that lessen apparent demandingness. A Christian objective list theory, for instance, might claim that closeness to God is the most significant element in individual well-being, and devalue items such as pleasure or satisfaction of worldly aims. This is largely the strategy we find in early Buddhist texts that devalue worldly pursuits and claim most forms of sensual pleasure are pervaded by subtle dissatisfaction. As a result, the life of the monk who has forgone family and material comforts is held to be the best available for the monk himself. Moreover, Śāntideva presupposes this early Buddhist analysis of suffering, and will therefore claim that the bodhisattva gives up much less than it initially appears, thereby lessening our overall evaluation of the difficulty of his path. The second chapter of this study will be devoted to an explanation of Buddhist conceptions of suffering, and their relevance to the demandingness of the bodhisattva path.

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<sup>63</sup> Parfit (1984, 403-407) offers an influential discussion of these three theories which is often taken as a starting point for considering what theory of welfare is correct. See also Heathwood (2010) for a good introductory discussion. I discuss the relationship between theories of well-being and Buddhist accounts of suffering in chapter two.

<sup>64</sup> Other influential views about well-being are developed in Sumner 1996 and Darwell 2002. Almost any plausible theory of well-being will give importance to either desire-satisfaction or experiencing certain mental states, and since the Buddhist demand-lessening strategy developed below depends upon these, it will be compatible with any of these theories.

This strategy, alone, cannot provide an adequate response to the overdemandingness objection facing a Mahāyānist like Śāntideva, however. As we have just seen, the bodhisattva undergoes severe torments in numerous rebirths as part of his training and the activities he undergoes to aid sentient beings. Further, all Buddhists accept that suffering is bad. Although the Mahāyānist can claim the bodhisattva suffers no deprivation from renouncing *samsāric* pursuits, she still seems to face the overdemandingness objection if she claims an individual is obligated to undergo these difficulties, rather than aiming for personal liberation from suffering.

The previous two kinds of responses to the overdemandingness objection are alike in altering the deep structure of an ethical theory to lessen the demands on its adherents. There are, however, a number of what we can call demand-lessening strategies, that leave the structure of a theory unmodified, and instead focus on psychological transformation to lessen the demandingness the adherent experiences.<sup>65</sup> One version of this approach emphasizes the development of mental fortitude and flexibility, likely resulting from virtuous qualities like patience and endurance, as a way of lessening the suffering experienced when fulfilling demanding moral requirements. Another version reduces the tension between altruism and self-interest by closely linking the well-being of self and others through psychological transformation to bring an individual's interests into line with what the theory demands. This approach could be adapted to various theories of well-being. For instance a sense of joy at giving might be nurtured which, under hedonic theories of well-being, will help balance out any loss of well-being from making significant charitable contributions. For a desire-satisfaction theorist, the strategy will be

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<sup>65</sup> The possibility of using psychological transformation as a means of reducing demandingness has been raised by Nagel 1986, 205-207; Scheffler 1994, 128-9; and Hooker 1996, 143-144.

to over time eliminate self-regarding desires, like achieving personal success, and replace them with desires for the well-being of others. Since most plausible objective list theories will include either desire-satisfaction or at least certain kinds of pleasure as elements of what makes a life go well, this same strategy applies to these types of theories as well.

It is these kinds of demand-lessening strategies, focused on gradually shaping psychological response, that I will argue are to be found in Mahāyāna Buddhist texts. Chapters three through five of this study are devoted to reconstructing different aspects of the demand-lessening psychological transformation the bodhisattva undergoes as she travels towards Buddhahood. In chapter three, I argue that developing Buddhist virtues allows the bodhisattva control over her physical and mental reactions, thus benefiting from overcoming a particularly severe form of weakness of will. Chapter four discusses the role of Buddhist virtues in lessening mental suffering. Chapter five explores the strategy used by Śāntideva and other Buddhists of adopting other-regarding desires and mental reactions that, I will argue, increase the bodhisattva's welfare on most plausible theories of well-being.

In chapter two, I will argue that although Buddhist conceptions of suffering undermine many of the items we intuitively take to make a life go better, Buddhists do not commit to any single foundational theory of well-being. Because of this, it's worth noting here an interesting feature of the demand-lessening strategy of psychological transformation found in Buddhist texts. This is that this approach is not tied to any particular theory of well-being. This is because there is relatively broad agreement among theories about the welfare increasing value of certain kinds of psychological



states. Almost any plausible theory of well-being will give importance to at least some pleasurable mental states, as well as the satisfaction of some desires. Theories will differ, of course, about what at the deepest level explains this increase to well-being. Hedonism will claim that the satisfaction of desire is valuable because it creates pleasure, while a desire-satisfaction theory will claim that pleasure is valuable because we desire it. Objective list theories might take one or both of these items as having intrinsic value. Therefore, as long as the psychological transformation strategy focuses on these commonly accepted items of value, it will be compatible with multiple foundational theories of well-being. Of course, there may be some disagreement about which kinds of pleasure or satisfied desires have welfare increasing value, and so adaptations to the strategy might still be necessary.

## Chapter 2: Buddhist Conceptions of Suffering and Well-being

I have two aims in this chapter. First and primarily, I illustrate how the Buddhist analysis of ordinary experience as permeated with suffering reveals that that bodhisattva path is less demanding than it appears. The bodhisattva, in concentrating on her training, forgoes many of the ordinary goods we take to make life worth living, such as family involvements, career achievements, sensual pleasure and so on. This chapter illustrates how Buddhist conceptions of suffering undercut the value of these supposed goods, thereby showing that the bodhisattva gives up much less than is at first apparent. I draw heavily on early Buddhist sources in doing this, since their insights are presupposed by Mahāyāna authors like Śāntideva, and since they often offer a more explicit treatment of the dissatisfactory nature of ordinary experience than we find in Śāntideva's BCA.<sup>66</sup>

The second closely related aim of this chapter is to illustrate one way Buddhist ethicists defend their conception of what a worthwhile life looks like. It's probably fair to say that ancient Indian Buddhist conceptions of how lives ought to be lived cut against the grain. Communities of Buddhist monks limit their possessions to essentials like robes, themselves sewn together from rags, and begging bowls, and wander without reliable food or shelter. Śāntideva praises the life of the renunciant who lives at the foot of a tree or in a deserted temple, isolated from all human contact (BCA 8:27). Even household bodhisattvas are urged to scorn their wives (Nattier 2003) and the status of ordinary lay practitioners is generally seen as inferior to that of monastics.

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<sup>66</sup> Śāntideva refers frequently, sometimes almost to the point of exhaustion, to various dissatisfactory aspects of cyclic existence in the BCA. I will refer to some of these descriptions as this chapter progresses. Unlike some early Buddhist texts, however, he does not explicitly categorize the kinds of suffering sentient beings experience. It is for this reason that I do not take the BCA as my primary source in this chapter.

With occasional exceptions, like Śāntideva's argument for impartial benevolence considered in the first chapter, Buddhist ethicists provide very little in the way of explicitly stated normative argument. This does not, however, mean their conception of the good life is left without philosophical defense. The Buddhist analysis of suffering that shows why the Buddhist path is not as demanding as it appears also provides a defense of these lives. In essence, what the Buddhist claims is that ordinary conceptions of what makes a life go well are massively deluded, so much so that the lives of homeless monastics who have abandoned almost everything ordinarily held to be of value are far better than those of the householder who appears to flourish. In other words, they will challenge what we ordinarily take well-being to consist in. The philosophical task of determining with precision what makes a life go well is that of specifying a theory of welfare, and the fact that Buddhist texts contest much of what we ordinarily take to be in our best interest suggests this may be a fruitful area of comparison.

I proceed as follows. In the first section I explicate the most influential of the Buddhist taxonomies of suffering: the threefold division into explicit suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*), the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*), and conditioned suffering (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*). In the second, I sketch the three theories of welfare that have been most influential in contemporary ethical theory. I then argue that Buddhist commitments underdetermine which of these theories would have been accepted by ancient Indian Buddhists. Moreover a modified form of each theory would be compatible with the Buddhist analysis of suffering detailed in the first section. Nevertheless, the Buddhist analysis of suffering constrains the shape any acceptable theory of welfare may take. In my conclusion, I argue that this narrowing process itself is enough to reconstruct a

philosophical defense of the forms of life endorsed in Buddhist texts. Although Buddhist texts do not offer a theory of welfare, in the sense of explicating at the deepest level the units that make a life go well, their analysis of suffering provides justification for their view that the lives of homeless monastics and renunciants are better than those the rest of us lead. This analysis of suffering also illustrates why giving up *samsāric* items of apparent value is not really detrimental to the well-being of the early Buddhist monk or Mahāyāna bodhisattva.

### **The Three kinds of Suffering**

The most influential of the Buddhist categorizations of suffering divides unsatisfactory experience into three categories: explicit suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*), the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*), and the suffering of being conditioned (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*). *Duḥkha-duḥkhatā*, or explicit suffering, refers to the discomfort caused by pain. These are the sensations we ordinarily identify as being painful, like stubbing my toe and experiencing frustration or embarrassment. Unlike explicit suffering, the second and third forms of suffering arise as a result of ignorance (*avidyā*) and craving (*tṛṣṇā*) infecting the cognitive and perceptual processing systems of sentient beings. Buddhist texts describe these systems in a variety of ways, but for our purposes a simplified general formulation will suffice. In dependence upon an object and sense organ, a particular sense consciousness is said to arise. The meeting of these three is called contact (*sparśa*), the event of sensory awareness. For instance, in dependence upon a properly functioning eye organ and the external object, awareness of the sensory properties of the apple, like color and smell, arise. After this sensory event (*sparśa*),

hedonic feeling tone (*vedanā*) follows of pleasant, painful, or neutral variety. This pleasure gives rise to the impulse (*cetanā*) to reach out and touch and taste the locus of the color. Sensations of pleasure continue as the apple is grasped and tasted.

What is important to note is that according to the Buddhist, there is neither a unified enduring subject that experiences, nor a unified enduring object that is experienced. Although for convenience Buddhists sometimes talk of persons or apples, what is actually experienced is a stream of momentary impressions: multiple seeings, touchings, tastes, smells and physical sensations. For any ordinary sentient being, not far advanced in Buddhist training, these experiences are erroneously reified into a unified object, the apple, possessed by an independent and enduring subject (*ātman*). This is ignorance (*avidyā*), the deeply rooted tendency to superimpose the three marks of permanence, independence and satisfactoriness upon impermanent (*anitya*), selfless (*anātman*) and unsatisfactory (*duḥkha*) phenomena. As a result of these superimpositions, craving (*tṛṣṇā*) for the apple arises, followed by an intensified form of desire called clinging (*upādāna*) in which I actively seek out what is wanted. The other mental defilements (*kleśas*), such as anger and jealousy, arise as a result of these root defilements of ignorance and craving. I become resentful or envious when you claim the apple that I want as your own.

Important for our purposes is to recognize that a fully awakened being, an *arhat*, or a Buddha, who has eliminated ignorance and craving from his mindstream, uses the same cognitive and perceptual system as the rest of us. He can see, hear, smell, touch and taste the apple's sensory properties, and even labels this conglomeration of properties for convenience with the concept "apple." Unlike ordinary beings, the

awakened *arhat* does not erroneously believe sense experience to be caused by a unified enduring independent object. Rather, the name given to the object is used as a convenient designation (*prajñāpti*), much as a group of trees might be called a forest without a corresponding error being made that a unitary object called “forest” existed. Also significantly, the awakened being feels pleasant, painful, and neutral sensations (*vedanā*). Upon seeing and tasting the apple, he experiences enjoyment, but unlike the rest of us, craving (*tṛṣṇā*) towards the apple does not arise as a result. This is because he views the apple as a conceptual imputation upon radically impermanent phenomena, rather than as a self-subsisting enduring object capable of sustaining satisfaction.

This sketch of the Buddhist understanding of how error enters into our perceptual and cognitive system allows us to distinguish between the first, and the deeper second and third forms of suffering. The first of the three forms of suffering, *duḥkha-duḥkhatā*, or explicit suffering, is identified with unpleasant sensation (*vedanā*). This is the kind of sensation we ordinarily call painful: I stub my toe, smell decay or hear a sharp sound. As just explained, sensation (*vedanā*) arises in awakened as well as afflicted cognitive systems, and therefore even an awakened being free from ignorance and craving may experience painful sensation. This is attested to in the early Buddhist scriptures by accounts of the historical Buddha experiencing physical pain, such as sickness or a splinter in the toe (Walshe 2005, 244: D ii 99; Bodhi 2000, 116: S i 27-29).<sup>67</sup> Buddhist sources are divided about whether awakened beings experience mental pain, but the psychological suffering of ordinary persons, such as grief and frustration, should also be

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<sup>67</sup> When citing from the Pali canon, the second reference refers to the Pali Text Society’s edition.

classified as explicit suffering.<sup>68</sup> Although Buddhist texts identify explicit suffering with unpleasant sensation, by extension it also refers to the external objects that bring displeasure, as well as associated moments of consciousness (Vasubandhu 1988, 899). Not only my pain, but the wasp that stings me and my awareness of the sting may all be classified as explicit suffering.

In contrast to explicit suffering, the second and third forms of suffering arise as a result of ignorance and craving and are therefore not experienced by liberated beings. It is not, however, immediately obvious how to meaningfully distinguish these forms of suffering. The suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*) relates to pleasant sensation, and is said to refer to the fact that pain will arise when a pleasant sensation ends. Strictly speaking, the resulting painful sensation should be a form of explicit suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*), but Buddhist texts are not consistent on this, and sometimes the painful sensation is itself referred to as the suffering of change.<sup>69</sup> The root problem behind the suffering of change appears to be the impermanence of pleasure. Meanwhile, the suffering of being conditioned (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*) refers to the unsatisfactoriness belonging to any moment of experience in virtue of its dependence upon causal conditioning for its existence. The commentaries claim conditioned things are suffering because they are “oppressed by rise and fall,” that is subject to creation and then

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<sup>68</sup> Of course, *arhats* and Buddhas who have eliminated craving and ignorance will not experience mental pain like frustration and grief that arises from craving. The *Sallasutta* and *The Questions of King Milinda* claim that *arhats* experience physical, but not mental pain (Bodhi 2000, 1264: S iv, 208; Rhys Davids 1890, 69: Mil 44). On the other hand, a few passages in early Buddhist texts suggest that the Buddha did experience occasional mental frustration. For instance, he cites as one reason for his reluctance to teach that to do so to foolish beings “would be wearying and troublesome for me” (M i 168; trans by Webster, cited in Webster 2005, 17, and see this same article for commentary.) Further, numerous Mahāyāna sources reference the bodhisattva feeling mental pain due to his great compassion for suffering beings, including Śāntideva at BCA 6:123. It seems to me that since mental sensation (*vedanā*) arises in the uncontaminated part of the perceptual system, there should be no objection in principle to a Buddha or *arhat* experiencing mental pain. I return to this question in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>69</sup> For example, Asaṅga 2001, 85.

dissolution (Buddhaghosa 1991, 505). Again, the root difficulty seems to be impermanence. Conditioned suffering has a wider scope, since it afflicts all conditioned entities and experiences, and Buddhists hold everything with the exception of *nirvāṇa* is conditioned.<sup>70</sup> But apart from this, the unsatisfactory aspect of both forms of suffering appears to be impermanence, and it is not immediately apparent why two terms need to be used.

We can begin to disentangle the two by noting that the suffering of change is explicitly identified with and restricted to pleasant sensations, and by extension with the consciousness that experiences pleasant objects as well as the objects of pleasure. Conditioned suffering is identified with neutral sensations, and by extension the relevant objects and conscious experience. The commentaries, however, explain that this identification is made only because conditioned suffering is the only kind of suffering afflicting neutral sensations. Painful and pleasant sensations, as well as associated objects and consciousness, are also dependent on causes and conditions, and therefore are also afflicted by conditioned suffering. This opens up two possible avenues for determining what “conditioned suffering” refers to. We might consider neutral sensations in isolation, and determine in what way they are unsatisfactory (Engle 2009, 123). Likewise, we can ask in what way a pleasant sensation is unsatisfactory, specifically in virtue of being pleasant, and use this to determine the meaning of the suffering of change. Since the commentaries claim that the suffering of change is easier to understand than conditioned suffering (Vasubandhu 1988, 900), I begin with this latter strategy.

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<sup>70</sup> Certain Buddhist schools, like the Vaibhāṣika, hold in addition that space and disjunction are not dependent on causes and conditions. See Vasubandhu 1988, 59.



## The Suffering of Change and Related Forms of Suffering

The suffering of change, in the early *sutras*, is described as afflicting pleasant sensation, and multiple commentaries explain that it refers to the fact that suffering will arise when a pleasant sensation ends. As the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* states, “Agreeable sensation is agreeable when it arises, agreeable when it lasts, but suffering in its change” (Vasubandhu 1988, 899). Early Buddhist texts, however, draw attention to numerous shortcomings of pleasure other than the pain that arises when a pleasant sensation ends. Moreover, the suffering of change is the kind of suffering belonging to sensations (and by extension related objects and consciousness) in virtue of being pleasant, and all of the drawbacks of pleasure alluded to in Buddhist texts fit this description. Therefore, in this section I treat together all of these dangers of pleasant sensation, although we should keep in mind that most Buddhist texts only explicitly use the term *vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā* as marking the fact that pleasure turns into pain.

Buddhist texts hold that there is nothing about pleasant sensation itself that inevitably makes suffering arise. This is shown clearly in *The Shorter Discourse on the Mass of Suffering (Cūladukkhakkandha Sutta)* in which the Buddha claims to be able to experience more pleasure in deep meditation than a king with unlimited access to sense pleasure (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 188-89 :M i 94-95). Likewise, we saw above that sensations of pleasure (*sukha-vedanā*) arise even in an awakened being.<sup>71</sup> Pleasant sensation becomes harmful only when it occurs within a cognitive system infected with craving (*trṣṇā*) caused by ignorance (*avidyā*) superimposing permanence and

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<sup>71</sup> In addition, Buddhist texts refer approvingly to the pleasure that arises from helping others. I return to this in the fourth chapter.

independence upon dependent and transitory phenomena. It is this craving for enduring satisfaction from inherently transitory phenomena which results in the experience of grief when the pleasant experience ends.

Buddhists, therefore, hold that pleasant sensations occurring in the mindstream of a liberated being are not harmful. It is only pleasure arising in a *samsāric* person's cognitive system that is marked as suffering. Here, there are broadly two attitudes.<sup>72</sup> The first, which draws attention to what I will call "the object-related drawbacks of pleasure," accepts that even pleasure arising in a mindstream afflicted by craving is, of itself, not harmful, but should be avoided because it will inevitably lead to pain. This strategy is made particularly explicit in a passage from the second century CE poet, Aśvaghoṣa's *Life of the Buddha (Buddhacarita)*, in which the young prince Gautama, who has recently realized the transience of all phenomena, scorns a roomful of courtesans his father has provided to entice him back to a life of kingship and sensual pleasure.

I do not despise sense objects.  
I know that the world consists of them.  
Having realized the world is impermanent,  
my mind does not delight in it.

If these three did not exist,  
Old age, disease and death,  
Then I would also take delight  
in these objects known by the mind. (Aśvaghoṣa 1995, my translation)<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> It is natural to suppose that these two attitudes towards pleasure found in the early Pali canon developed into the realist and antirealist positions on the existence of pleasure exemplified by the Vaibhāṣika, and the Madhyamaka as well as certain early Buddhist schools, respectively. See Vasubandhu 1988, 903-908 for the Vaibhāṣika response to a series of arguments regarding the nonexistence of pleasure.

<sup>73</sup> *nāvajānāmi viṣayān jāne lokān tadātmakamlanityaṁ tu jagamatvā nātra me ramate manaḥ||85|| jarā vyādhiśca mṛtyuśca yadi na syādidaṁ trayam| mamāpi hi manojñeṣu viṣayeṣu ratirbhavet||86||* Aśvaghoṣa 1995. See also translation by Olivelle in Aśvaghoṣa 2008, 115.

The root problem illustrated in this passage has nothing to do with the nature of pleasure in itself; in fact, the Buddha-to-be claims that he would happily dally with the woman if convinced their beauty would not fade. The difficulty with pleasure is that in ordinary minds it is coupled with craving that desires its continuance. Since pleasure is impermanent, this will lead to pain when it collapses. It is this transformation of pleasure into pain that gives the suffering of change its name. Pleasure, here, is seen as worthy of desire, but dangerous and to be discarded since it is conducive to suffering.

Other Buddhist texts also leave unchallenged the satisfactory nature of pleasure, but draw attention to various difficulties of attaining and protecting it. The *Greater Mass of Craving Sutta*, for instance, emphasizes hardships, like cold, heat and insect bites that one must endure to accumulate riches, as well as the inevitable breaking out of quarrels once wealth is achieved (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 2005, 180-81: M i 86-88). Another frequently emphasized drawback is the anxiety one experiences once the objects that bring pleasure are obtained. This point is made vividly in the story of Bhaddiya Kāḷigodha, a former king who becomes the disciple of the Buddha, and is overheard saying “what bliss, what bliss” repeatedly when meditating. The other monks assume he is fantasizing about his former riches, and take him to the Buddha for admonition. Bhaddiya explains that when he was a king, despite the presence of numerous royal guards, he lived in constant paranoid fear of losing his wealth. It is only now as a monk, having renounced all but essential possessions, that his mind is finally at ease (Thanissaro 2012: Ud 18).

All the passages cited so far do not challenge the assumption that pleasure would be valuable if it lasted, even when it arises within a *samsāric* cognitive and perceptual

system; for all he has said thus far, king Bhaddiya might have slept soundly had he invincible magical golems directly under his control to protect his wealth. The problem, rather, is with the world, in the impermanence and the fragility of its objects, and in the greed and hatred of its inhabitants. There is, however, a deeper critique of pleasure leveled by certain Buddhist texts where the impoverished nature of pleasure arising in a mind infected by craving is itself emphasized. I refer to this as “the subject-related drawbacks of pleasure,” since it locates the suffering pleasure engenders as arising from the mind of *saṃsāric* persons directly, regardless of what the world is like.

As before, I turn to Aśvaghōṣa’s *Life of the Buddha* for an illustration of this kind of suffering. In this passage, the Buddha speaks of the insatiable nature of desire.

For pleasures are fleeting, robbing wealth and virtue,  
They are empty, like phantoms in this world;  
Even when wished for,  
They delude the minds of men;  
How much more when actually possessed?

For men overwhelmed by pleasures find no relief  
In triple heaven, much less in this mortal world;  
For pleasures do not sate a man full of desires,  
As firewood a fire accompanied by the wind. (Aśvaghōṣa 2008, 304-305)<sup>74</sup>

The contrast between this and the first passage by Aśvaghōṣa is striking. Earlier, the Buddha-to-be had claimed that only the impermanence of the women’s beauty restrained him from indulgence. In contrast, now craving is characterized in its nature as incapable of fulfillment, and the pleasures that accompany the pursuit of sense objects are said to merely increase longing without providing satisfaction. Pleasure, arising in the mind of a *saṃsāric* person, is now seen in itself to be a kind of suffering, regardless of the fragility and vulnerability of the objects from which it arises. The logic of this second

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<sup>74</sup> I use Olivelle’s elegant translation of this pair of verses.

passage suggests that a roomful of woman bearing eternal beauty would be the ultimate torment for a person afflicted by ignorance and craving.

This insatiability of desire is illustrated by numerous images in Buddhist texts, with perhaps the most provocative belonging to the *Māgandiya Sutta* from the early Pali canon.

Suppose, Māgandiya, there was a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit; the more he scratches the scabs and cauterises his body, the fouler, more evil smelling and more infected the openings of his wounds would become, yet he would find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in scratching the openings of his wounds. So too, Māgandiya, beings who are not free from lust for sensual pleasures, who are devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, who burn with fever for sensual pleasures, still indulge in sensual pleasures; the more such beings indulge in sensual pleasures, the more their craving for sensual pleasures increases and the more they are burned by their fever for sensual pleasures, yet they find a certain measure of satisfaction and enjoyment in dependence on the five cords of sensual pleasure. (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 611-12: M i 507-508)

The image of the leper scratching and burning his sores illustrates how a sensation can feel pleasant while being so deeply impoverished that it should itself be viewed as a kind of suffering. To interpret the passage as claiming that the pleasure of scratching the sores is intrinsically good, but outweighed by the pain of infection and so on, is to misread the image. Pleasure *itself* here is suffering, regardless of its future results. Similarly, the *Potaliya Sutta* emphasizes the insatiable nature of craving by using the image of a famished dog gnawing at a meatless bone smeared with blood (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 469: M i 364). Likewise, Śāntideva compares the pursuit of sense pleasure to licking honey off the edge of a razor (BCA 7:64). The images suggest the cycle of addiction in which pleasure sought by a mind infected with craving merely increases the force of desire without satisfaction.

There are, then, two distinct strands to the early Buddhist critique of the pursuit of pleasure, an external strategy focusing on the limitations of impermanent objects, and an internal one emphasizing the insidious nature of craving itself. The two strategies, however, may be brought closer together by observing that both depend, in some sense, upon the cognitive mismatch between our desire for permanence, and the impermanence of what is encountered. This is obvious in the object-related drawback strategy: it is because the beauty of the woman is impermanent, while the young prince desires permanent satisfaction, that he turns away from the harem. In apparent contrast, the images given in the subject-related approach seem to treat desire as a brute force that craves insatiably, regardless of the characteristics of the object given to it.

Buddhism, however, does not treat craving as a brute given. Craving is analyzed and given a causal explanation as a grasping that arises when permanence and independence are superimposed upon transient and dependent phenomena. In the *Māgandiya Sutta*, this is indicated by referencing the distorted mental faculty of the leper, meant to be analogous to the ignorance that superimposes permanence and independence upon conditioned momentary events (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 611-12: M i 507). Both subject and object related drawbacks of pleasure, then, arise because of a cognitive mismatch between subject and world, in which desire seeks nonexistent permanence.

Where the two strategies differ is the level at which the collision between our expectations and the way the world is occurs. We can characterize this in abhidharma terminology by saying that what I have called the object-related drawbacks of pleasure occur at the level of conventional reality (*samvṛtisatya*), in which partite objects, with spatial and temporal extension, appear to endure for a period of time before dissolution.

From the standpoint of ordinary life, the beauty of the women seems to last, and I do not recognize dissatisfaction from partaking in this pleasure until their beauty, as well as my own virility, have begun to fade. Passages emphasizing the insatiable nature of craving, in contrast, reveal that during this whole stretch in which I appear (even to myself) to be robustly enjoying sensual pleasures, there is a deeper underlying dissatisfaction, which might even be characterized as subtle pain, arising from all this sensual indulgence. This is because at the level of ultimate reality (*paramārthasatya*), in which experience is analyzed into discrete radically impermanent mental and physical events, each instant of engagement with sense pleasure represents a new affective response to cognitive error. Craving, by its very nature, in its moment-by-moment arising, is never capable of any real satisfaction, since it inevitably seeks nonexistent entities. What this means is that the suffering of change is nested. The sensualist experiences moment-by-moment subtle dissatisfaction while indulging in pleasure, and then the more obvious pain that is ordinarily recognized as explicit suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*) when the temporally extended sequence of pleasure comes to a close.

What I have done in this section is to group together a number of strategies present in early Buddhist texts that emphasize the dissatisfactory nature of pleasant experience. Many Buddhist commentaries identify only the pain that arises when pleasure collapses as the suffering of change. This represents one aspect of what I have classified as object-related drawbacks to pleasure. Since *vipariṇāma-duḥkha* is meant to mark the unsatisfactory nature of sensation insofar as it is pleasant, however, I think it helpful to group together under this heading a wider selection of the drawbacks to the pursuit of pleasure represented in early Buddhist texts. These include other object-related

drawbacks, such as the difficulty of obtaining and defending pleasurable objects, and the subject-related drawback that pleasure cannot satisfy craving even temporarily, and should itself be recognized as a form of subtle pain.

### **Conditioned Suffering (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*)**

Conditioned suffering (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*) is the unsatisfactoriness things possess as a result of arising in dependence on causes and conditions. Above I explained that all conditioned entities possess conditioned suffering, but that neutral sensations are explicitly identified with it because they are not afflicted by any other kind of suffering. This makes conditioned suffering somewhat puzzling, since it is not immediately clear why a neutral sensation, inasmuch as it is simply neutral, should be a kind of suffering at all.<sup>75</sup>

Traditionally, the Buddha is said to have listed eight forms of suffering in his first sermon, the last of which the fourth century CE philosopher Asaṅga identifies as conditioned suffering.

[B]irth 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. (Bodhi 2000,1844: S v 421)<sup>76</sup>

Item one, birth, is held to be unsatisfactory in being a physically painful event and in being the foundation for future sufferings (Buddhaghosa 1991, 506-7). Items 2-7 are most naturally identified as cases of explicit suffering, although Asaṅga considers separation from what one likes and not getting what one wants as suffering of change,

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<sup>75</sup> See Engle 2009, 120-137 for an extremely helpful explanation of *saṃskāra-duḥkha*, which has influenced my account.

<sup>76</sup> Repeated in Walshe 1995, 344: D ii 304



since these sufferings arise as a result of our attachment to pleasure. The eighth item in the list references the five aggregates or *skandhas*: matter (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), recognition (*saṃjñā*), consciousness (*viññāna*), and mental factors such as volitional intent (*saṃskāra*). These five are held by Buddhists to jointly constitute the experience of sentient beings. Indeed, the definitive Buddhist claim is that these five impersonal and impermanent elements alone are sufficient to account for sentient experience, and that we err when we identify any or all of them as being or belonging to an enduring self (*ātman*). In the Buddha's sermon, he identifies as suffering the aggregates that are subject to clinging (*upādāna*), itself a stronger form of craving (*tṛṣṇā*), meaning that any aggregate arising in the cognitive and perceptual system of a being under the influence of craving and ignorance is suffering.

This eighth item in the list of sufferings, then, identified by Asaṅga with conditioned suffering, refers to the entire cognitive and perceptual system of unenlightened beings. It constitutes a value judgment on *saṃsāric* experience as a whole. This suggests a contrast between the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*) and conditioned suffering (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*): the suffering of change is atomic, in referencing the drawbacks of a particular instance of pleasure. By contrast, conditioned suffering is holistic, drawing attention to the situatedness of a particular sensation within an impoverished cognitive and perceptual system that functions under the influence of ignorance and craving.

The term “*saṃskāra*” which I have been translating as conditioned, literally means that which has been caused together, indicating that the thing is dependent on

causes and conditions. Aryadeva (c. 300 CE.) suggests that merely an awareness of this causal relatedness of experience should awaken great terror.

You cannot see the initial cause  
Of even a single effect;  
Seeing how vast the causes of even one effect are,  
Who would not be frightened?<sup>77</sup>

There are two reasons that the causal relatedness of our experience should terrify. First, since states arise in a vast causal network beyond our control or even understanding, our present experience can be replaced by suffering at any moment. This instability is marked as *saṃskāra-duḥkha* because it is itself unsatisfactory, just as working for a company that kept threatening to fire you at any moment would be unsatisfactory. Second, each event is itself a causal condition for many future events. Any present occurrence, therefore, can contribute to the arising of innumerable future sufferings.

The Tibetan commentator Tsong-kha-pa likewise emphasizes that instability, and its role of acting as a causal condition for more obvious forms of suffering, are what most strongly characterize conditioned suffering.

Though you have occasional moments when painful feeling is absent, because the aggregates are firmly embedded in the dysfunctional tendencies of suffering and the afflictions, the suffering of conditionality is still present, and therefore myriad sufferings are just on the verge of arising in countless ways. Therefore, since the suffering of conditionality pervades all suffering and is the root of the other two types of suffering, meditate on it often in order to become disenchanted with it. (Tsong-kha-pa 2000, 291)

In this passage, Tsong-kha-pa characterizes conditioned suffering as the cause of the other kinds of suffering because pleasure and pain are both instances of, and arise in dependence upon causally conditioned phenomena. Like Aryadeva, he also draws our

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<sup>77</sup> Cś 7:10; P 5246: 135.5.3-4. Cited in Tsongkhapa 2000, 285.

attention to the extreme fragility of any moment of respite from the arising of explicit suffering. This is in contrast to the suffering of change, in which pain arises because a specifically pleasant item or experience has been lost. Here, Aryadeva and Tsong-kha-pa draw attention to the fragility that characterizes any conscious event whatsoever.

Asaṅga characterizes the suffering of change as being “accompanied by a state of indisposition” (*dauṣṭhulyam*), referring to the presence of harmful habitual tendencies (*anuśaya*) and seeds (*vāsanā*) that ripen into eruptions of negative mental states (*kleśas*) like anger, craving, and jealousy.<sup>78</sup> The point is that as long as a cognitive system is dominated by craving and ignorance, any mental episode, including apparently harmless neutral sensations, may become a contributing factor to the ripening of negative mental states that condition new forms of explicit suffering. A second characteristic of conditioned suffering emphasized by Asaṅga is that “one’s welfare is not secure” (Engle 2009, 124). Asaṅga connects this remark to subtle impermanence, the doctrine that objects and events are not only perishable, but also disintegrate immediately after coming into existence. Except in advanced meditative states, subtle impermanence cannot be directly observed, and must be inferred as a condition of anything changing at all.<sup>79</sup> Engle explains that reflecting on this radical impermanence “creates a profound sense of helplessness that represents a realization of the suffering of conditioned existence” (Engle 2009, 132).

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<sup>78</sup>These are the Sanskrit equivalents of the Tibetan terms Tsong-kha-pa uses. See Engle 2009, 122-123, and footnote 408, p. 424.

<sup>79</sup>The Sautrantika argument for this position is that any cause must have an effect. Therefore, if the destruction of a *dharma* (impartite object) is caused, then the cause has as its effect the absence of the *dharma*. But an absence is not a real thing, and therefore cannot be an effect. Therefore, destruction cannot be caused, and so things must perish of their own accord. Radical momentariness follows, since we would have no reason to suppose a temporally extended thing would perish at one moment rather than another (since its destruction is uncaused). Therefore, to account for the appearance of change, *dharmas* must perish as soon as they arise. See Siderits 2007, 120-123.

We have already seen that one of the prominent aspects of the Buddhist critique of pleasure is its emphasis on the fear of losing objects of enjoyment. Fear of specific occurrences is also implicit in the analysis of explicit suffering (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*); I can be afraid of the physical pain of an operation, or the mental torment of an upcoming divorce proceeding. The holistic nature of conditioned suffering allows us to mark another distinction between it and these other forms of suffering. The anxiety engendered by conditioned suffering is not a fear directed at the loss of any specific object, nor at encountering something unwanted; this follows from the fact that conditioned suffering ranges over neutral feelings as well as objects to which we are indifferent. Conditioned suffering marks the fact that a moment of experience is embedded in a *samsāric* cognitive system, and is unsatisfactory insofar as it arises from and acts as a causal condition for the furtherance of the entire *samsāric* system of pain. The affective state associated with conditioned suffering, then, is not object-directed fear, but anxiety, in something close to Heidegger's sense, as a background free-floating unease about the very conditions of our existence in the world.<sup>80</sup> Conditioned suffering does not make us fear any particular event, but rather makes us feel anxious about being in *samsāra* at all.

Drawing together these various characterizations of conditioned suffering allows us to summarize it as referring to the fact that any given moment of experience occurs within a cognitive system under the influence of ignorance and craving. All such experiences are unsatisfactory in that they are unstable, due to radical impermanence, are liable to be replaced by events of explicit suffering, and that moreover they act as causal conditions for the arising of future states of suffering. In contrast to the suffering of

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<sup>80</sup> See Heidegger 1962, Section 40.

change, conditioned suffering is holistic, in that it draws attention to the entire system of *saṃsāric* experience in which the indicated moment of awareness is causally situated. It results in an intense feeling of helplessness, an anxiety directed not towards any particular item, but rather the entire *saṃsāric* cognitive system as a whole.

We can illustrate the difference between the three types of suffering (*duḥkha*) by considering various arguments we might use to convince a friend to leave an abusive partner. Our friend might point to periods of relative stability and even enjoyable moments occurring as interludes between emotional and physical abuse as justifying their decision to remain in the relationship. In response, we might remind our friend how awful particular instances of abuse were (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*), and point out that any joyful periods are merely respites between the inevitable reoccurrence of abuse (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*). It is conceivable that the friend could respond that these relatively enjoyable periods, combined with periods of peace, nevertheless outweigh the occurrences of explicit pain and suffering. We could respond by insisting that these supposedly good times cannot really be enjoyed since anxiety as to when violence will reoccur contaminates any satisfaction taken from them. This is the strategy exemplified by Buddhists in their analysis of *saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*: all *saṃsāric* experience is contaminated by anxiety, and is unsatisfactory in being part of an impoverished system of pain.

### **Buddhist Suffering and Theories of Welfare**

In this section, I consider how the accounts of Buddhist suffering just explored constrain the shape an acceptable theory of well-being can take, and thereby provide a

defense of the kinds of lives Buddhist texts endorse. I begin by briefly distinguishing three of the most influential theories of well-being in the Western tradition. I then argue that Buddhist texts are compatible with each of these theories, and therefore are not committed to any single theory of well-being. Nevertheless, the Buddhist analysis of suffering explored in the last section constrains the shape any theory of well-being acceptable to the Buddhist can take. I argue that this narrowing of these accounts of well-being is enough to provide a defense of the kinds of lives Buddhist texts affirm, as well as explicate why the bodhisattva's commitment is less severe than it appears since much of what he gives up is not worth pursuit.

A theory of well-being explains what is in an individual's best interest, in the sense of explicating at the deepest level what makes her life go as well as possible. A mental state theory claims that welfare consists solely in experiencing certain psychological states. The most prominent historical example of a mental state theory is hedonism, the position that welfare consists in pleasure and the absence of pain. One influential critique of hedonism points out that most of us care about more than our own mental experience. Nozick famously makes this point through his experience machine thought experiment. We are asked to imagine a machine that stimulates our neurons to give us experiences qualitatively identical to those had in ordinary life. Nozick claims that most of us would not choose to hook ourselves up permanently to an experience machine, even if we were able to program in as many pleasurable experiences as we desired. This shows that humans care about more than how the world feels to us (Nozick 1974, 42-44).

One solution to the problem raised by the experience machine is to endorse a desire-satisfaction theory that claims that satisfying one's desires is what makes a life go well. The ordinary version of this theory claims satisfying whatever desires we happen to have is what welfare consists in. An obvious problem with this view is that we often desire things that are bad for us, and that some of these desires result from false information. The theory may be nuanced to account for this objection by including rationality and informational clauses, so that a life is said to go well when a rational agent with all the relevant information satisfies his desires. A difficulty facing the informed-desire theory is that it is no longer clear why the satisfaction of desire, rather than objectively good qualities of the object desired, are thought to be welfare promoting. If a fully informed rational agent desires a given item, the objection goes, surely there must be some feature of the object desired that is valuable for its own sake, regardless of whether anyone wants it.

James Griffin suggests that it will help us to maintain a distinct conceptual space for informed-desire theories by distinguishing between higher and lower order desires (Griffin 1986, 13). Different fully informed rational agents might still choose to pursue a variety of higher order ends: for instance, one might aim at a life of maximal excitement, while another pursues fame and another a life devoted to family and raising children. The role of information in this multi-layered account is to facilitate the achievement of the higher goal. A fully informed rational agent would pursue only first order ends that are conducive to achieving the higher order end. Since, however, there is no constraint on the highest order wants accepted, what Griffin refers to as the global desires by which

we organize our lives, the theory of value remains grounded in the satisfaction of the desires of the agent (Griffin 1986, 12-13).

In contrast to desire theories, an objective list theory claims that certain items enhance our welfare, regardless of whether we want them. The list of objective welfare enhancing items might include things like friendship, appreciation of beauty, and character development, but also can include subjective mental states such as pleasure and even desire satisfaction.<sup>81</sup> Objective list theories are distinguished from desire theories in that they hold the items on the list benefit an individual whether or not she desires them. An important characteristic of an objective list theory is its rejection of subjectivism, the view that the agent has the final say as to how well her life is going (Haybron 2008, 22).

Although this taxonomy is not exhaustive, considering whether Buddhists would endorse any of these three theories will be sufficient for my purpose. My argument in what follows is similar to the argument in the first chapter that Śāntideva does not appear to be committed to any particular theory of the right, since his ethical commitments are compatible with multiple foundational normative theories. Here instead I argue that the Buddhist commitment to ending suffering and developing the virtuous qualities (*kuśala dharma*) of Buddhahood is compatible with multiple theories of well-being, and therefore Buddhists are not committed to any particular theory about what makes a life go well.

Given Buddhists' emphasis on the importance of eliminating suffering, it might seem obvious that they would accept some form of mental state theory where welfare consists in mental states that lack suffering. All of the theories listed above, however, can acknowledge the welfare-increasing value of ending suffering. A Buddhist desire

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<sup>81</sup> Parfit (1984, 403-407) offers an influential discussion of these three theories which is often taken as a starting point for considering what theory of welfare is correct. See also Heathwood (2010) for a good introductory discussion.



theory can claim that a particularly important desire possessed by each of us is to remove our suffering, and that our life goes much better if that desire is fulfilled.<sup>82</sup> An objective list theory may accept absence of suffering as one of the items that are a direct source of value to my welfare.<sup>83</sup>

Buddhist texts also devote considerable energy to analyzing and explaining how to develop the various virtuous qualities (*kuśala dharmas*) that are conducive to liberation. One might use Buddhist language praising these virtues as evidence that Buddhism accepts an objective list theory, since these seem to be esteemed even if they do not bring pleasure and are not desired by some individuals. A difficulty with this interpretation is that it does not rule out the possibility that such items have only instrumental value, possessing worth only insofar as they contribute to either obtaining the positive mental state of absence of suffering (mental-state theory), or achieving our desire to be free of suffering (desire-theory). Like the emphasis on suffering, the attention Buddhists give to the virtues is compatible with all three theories of well-being listed above. Pointing out that the Buddhist goal is the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, the state in which ignorance and craving are eradicated forever, is no help, for we can then ask whether this state is valued for its own sake, or because we desire it. We might also claim with Damien Keown that attainment of *nirvāṇa* is constituted by intrinsically valuable virtuous states, thereby pushing us back towards an objective state theory of welfare.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> A Buddhist desire-theory would have to accept that if a person did not have the desire to end suffering, then suffering would not make her life go worse. Buddhists, however, could claim that it is simply a psychological fact that all persons have this desire.

<sup>83</sup> Goodman (2009, 60-72) argues that Buddhists accept an objective list theory in which virtues as well as pleasurable mental states are valued for their own sake. I am not convinced Goodman rules out the possibility that Buddhist virtues have only instrumental value, however. I discuss this point below.

<sup>84</sup> See Keown 2001, esp. chap 8.

Although it is undeniable that Buddhist texts are committed to removing suffering and developing virtue, and that they hold this is vital to the welfare of sentient beings, they do not clearly mark the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. As a result, they do not mark at the deepest level what it is that makes a person's life go best: whether it is to experience a mental state free of pain, or to fulfill one's desire to be free from suffering, or to perfect the human virtues, one result of which is freedom from suffering. It is therefore difficult if not impossible to determine which theory of wellbeing Buddhists would adopt. Nevertheless, the Buddhist analysis of suffering discussed in the first part of this chapter excludes many of the items usually held to have welfare value by contemporary versions of these three theories. It therefore functions to narrow the shape that any theory of wellbeing acceptable to Buddhists can take. Below, I discuss the forms these three theories might take that would be compatible with Buddhist commitments.

A mental state theory acceptable to Buddhists will be quite different from contemporary varieties. Given the drawbacks of the pursuit of pleasure illustrated by the Buddhist analysis of the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*), the prospects of a Buddhist hedonism are grim. It is true that, as remarked above, pleasure in itself is not viewed as harmful when not conjoined with ignorance and craving. Nevertheless, there are only scant references in Buddhist scriptures to *arhats* and the Buddha enjoying a kind of rarified pleasure, usually in deep meditative states, and no indication that this is the underlying aim of Buddhist practice. Still, a mental state theory that emphasized a mind free of craving and suffering might be developed into a plausible Buddhist candidate for a theory of welfare. Such an account would sit well with examples like that of the monk

Bhaddiya who finally experiences relief from anxiety when he gives up his kingly possessions. What this means is that, although Buddhists can accept a mental state theory, the shape it can take is radically constrained by their analysis of suffering. Many of the pleasures endorsed by hedonisms like Bentham and Mill would be banished from the Buddhist version, and instead only mental states conjoined with the virtuous qualities, and lacking the mental afflictions (*kleśas*) and states of pain (*duḥkha*) would have value.<sup>85</sup>

As far as I know, no one has defended a desire-theory account of Buddhist well-being, and at first its prospects might seem particularly dim, especially given the critique of craving emphasizing the subject-related drawbacks to pleasure in which desire is seen as an insatiable force. The English word “desire,” however, is ambiguous, and can refer to a mental state of attached grasping, or to a more neutral state in which one is motivated to act with no additional implication of greedy attachment to the result. The Sanskrit for craving, *trṣṇā*, refers to only the first of these motivational states, but Buddhists accept that even fully liberated beings can have the motivation to act in the second sense. To borrow Paul Williams’s example, even the Buddha can be motivated to go on his daily alms round without implying he has craving for its results (Williams 2000, 44).

Buddhists, therefore, are not barred at the outset from accepting some form of desire theory, so long as desire is understood to be a karmically neutral pro-attitude rather than a negative state of clinging. A basic desire-theory in which satisfying whatever desires one has makes one’s life go better, however, must be rejected by Buddhists. As we have seen in the discussion of the suffering of change, humans are massively deluded

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<sup>85</sup> These positive mental states would also include joy at helping sentient beings that is experienced by one in whom craving had been eliminated. See chapter four of this dissertation.

about what we think will bring us happiness. The entire point of the extensive Buddhist critique of pleasure is to convince us of how wrong we are about what will make our lives go well.

A more sophisticated informed-desire theory, however, is compatible with the Buddhist analysis of suffering. Here, the Buddhist will claim that many of the goals we ordinarily use to structure our lives are accepted on the false supposition that they will bring lasting satisfaction. By invoking the information clause of the theory, Buddhists will claim that only the pro-attitudes of one who deeply understands the various forms of dissatisfaction accompanying *samsāric* pursuits will be incorporated into the theory as well-being conducive. Likewise, a Buddhist desire theorist will exclude desires that arise involuntarily as a result of the series of cognitive mistakes that take place when impermanent and dependent phenomena are incorrectly experienced as if they were lasting.<sup>86</sup> As with mental-state theory, we find the Buddhist analysis of suffering radically limiting the shape an acceptable desire-theory may take. As a result of its strong informational condition, the list of acceptable desires that are well-being conducive will be constrained, likely containing only commitments to the Buddhist goals of pursuing *arhatship* and *bodhisattvahood*.

The content of objective list theories tends to be similar to those of informed desire theories, since it is natural to suppose fully informed rational agents would desire mainly the things that an objective list might posit as possessing objective value. Items

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<sup>86</sup> A Buddhist desire-theory must accept that an individual who had a pro-attitude towards *samsāric* pursuits even after fully understanding the frustration that accompanied their pursuit would have to accept that satisfying these desires would make their life go better, provided the desires did not themselves result from cognitive error. Nevertheless, these Buddhists could also claim that it is simply a psychological fact that all individuals strongly want to end dissatisfaction, and that there would actually never be an individual who remained committed to these pursuits once they realized this.

that frequently appear as candidates for intrinsic value in objective list theories include pursuit of knowledge, friendship, the raising of a family and the achievement of life goals. Some of these items are at least somewhat resistant to the Buddhist critique of pleasure. A career that on the whole promotes the well-being of others, enduring friendships spanning many years, attention paid to one's children, all these apparent goods have resonances with Buddhist virtues, such as compassion (*karuṇā*), and love (*metta*). Moreover, occasional pleasures of Mill's higher variety, like philosophical discussion or an evening at the theater, do not in any obvious way incite the pernicious lust alluded to by Buddhist texts. The Buddhist may respond, of course, that the suffering of change can be subtle, and can infiltrate even ordinarily wholesome relationships. A parent often acts with a virtuous motivation, caring only for his child's benefit, but then might also become angry when the child fails to obey, or become jealous of another parent whose child is more successful in school.

Perhaps an even stronger Buddhist critique of mainstream objective list theories would be to draw upon the analysis of conditioned suffering, in which all such items are seen as unsatisfactory insofar as they are experienced within impoverished perceptual and cognitive systems in which negative mental states arise repeatedly and sufferings constantly reoccur. At this level of analysis, the Buddhist need not convince us that any single item, such as children or an achievement like the publication of a first book, is *of itself* suffering. It is enough that the item links us to a system of suffering which as a whole ought to be rejected. The fact that my high salary at a stress-filled and unpleasant job lets me care for my children and support charity is all the worse for me, since it likely means I will not escape the situation in which I suffer. Likewise, the Buddhist can claim

that the enjoyment of poetry and the raising of children are unfortunate snares that bind us to the cycle of rebirth and death.

This in no way entails Buddhists could not accept an objective list theory; as before, it only restricts the shape such a theory must take. The acceptable contents of such a theory will be largely limited to *kuśala dharma*, the Buddhist virtues that are conducive to liberation of self and others, as well as perhaps mental states that are free from suffering, or the achievement of the desire to be free of suffering itself.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to forge a connection between Western theories of welfare and the Buddhist analysis of suffering which provides the ultimate justification for Buddhist conceptions of valuable lives. The most straightforward defense Buddhists might make would be to defend a certain theory of welfare which endorses Buddhist lives, and then to claim that this theory is superior to the theories with which these Buddhist ideals conflict. I have, however, argued that Buddhist texts do not offer a theory of welfare, at least in the sense of specifying which items have intrinsic value in making a life go well. Nevertheless, although multiple theories of welfare are compatible with early Indian Buddhism, accepting the Buddhist analysis of the three kinds of suffering severely restricts the shape any of these theories can take. Moreover, this is enough for the Buddhist to offer a philosophical defense of her conception of what makes a life go well. The Buddhist can claim that items of supposed value, such as career, family, acquisition of secular knowledge, and sensual pleasure, the lack of which made monastic and renunciant lives seem impoverished, are infected with multiple forms of

suffering and are therefore not themselves worth having. They must be stripped from any adequate theory of welfare. This lets the Buddhist claim that lives devoted to ending craving are themselves the best lives there are. Whether they are good because they lead to mental states free from suffering, the satisfaction of our informed desires or an intrinsically valuable virtuous character can be left aside as one more speculative question that is not worth answering.

The relevance of this application of the Buddhist analysis of suffering to Śāntideva's claim that the bodhisattva path is not overly demanding will hopefully be fairly obvious. It initially seems as though the lives of bodhisattvas are deeply impoverished, as a result of giving up family ties, career aspirations, sensual pleasures and so on. However, these items will fall outside, or at least at the periphery of any theory of well-being acceptable to Buddhists. Therefore, Śāntideva can claim that the bodhisattva gives up very little in abandoning these pursuits. Furthermore, the Buddhist analysis of suffering suggests that it will always be in the individual's interest to commit to either *arhatship* or bodhisattvahood, since both of these paths will reduce and finally eliminate the deeper forms of suffering that arise from the mental afflictions. Therefore, even taking on the apparently very demanding bodhisattva path is better than remaining outside Buddhist practice whatsoever.

### Chap 3: Weakness of Will and the Bodhisattva Path

In the last chapter, I argued that the bodhisattva gives up much less than is initially apparent, since ordinary goals are permeated with subtle forms of suffering and are not worth pursuit. In the next three chapters, I examine various aspects of the psychological transformation the bodhisattva undergoes, which help either to outweigh or to lessen the demandingness of his other-regarding actions. This chapter focuses on the how the development of Buddhist virtues allows the bodhisattva to overcome a severe form of weakness of will that prevents him from doing what is intellectually understood to be in his interest. Both early Buddhist practitioners aiming at individual liberation, and Mahāyānists undertaking the bodhisattva path will overcome this difficulty as part of their training, although we will see that bodhisattvas have additional motivational resources as a result of their aspiration for liberation to benefit sentient beings.

In the first chapter of his text, Śāntideva provides a powerful image to illustrate how hard it is to even undertake the bodhisattva path.

Just as lightning illuminates the darkness of a cloudy night  
for an instant, in the same way, by the power of the Buddha,  
occasionally peoples' minds are momentarily inclined toward  
merit. (BCA 1:5)

The reason entering and remaining upon the path is difficult is not merely the intrinsic hardships of the path itself, but because of deeply engrained habits (*anuśayas*) built up over countless lives to react physically and emotionally under the sway of the mental afflictions (*kleśas*) of ignorance, attachment and aversion. Therefore, ordinary persons will be unable to systematically engage in any kind of constructive action.

Śāntideva suggests in this verse that it practically takes an act of divine intervention, here



represented by the assistance of a Buddha, to move our deluded minds to constructive activity.

I begin this chapter by contrasting the Buddhist problem of weakness of will with the Western problem of *akrasia*, acting intentionally against one's better judgment. I argue that Buddhist weakness of will is particularly pernicious, in that it is both a broader phenomena than *akrasia*, and is particularly severe, since its origins are rooted deeply in our cognitive systems. I next explain the basic Buddhist strategy of applying virtuous antidotes to eliminate the afflictive mental states that cause Buddhist weakness of will. I then discuss Śāntideva's strategy of using afflictive emotional energy as the motivational force to fuel the functioning of these virtuous qualities. I finish by considering how compassion and the aspiration for full awakening to benefit others acts as a motivational resource for bodhisattvas that is not available in the same degree to early Buddhist practitioners.

### **Buddhist Weakness of Will**

In Western thought, the experience of a person freely acting against her better judgment has been referred to as weakness of will, or *akrasia*, the term Aristotle used to characterize the phenomena. The experience in question is familiar to most of us. I intellectually acknowledge the value of reducing my sugar intake just seconds before biting into the caramel brownie, and so on. One of Śāntideva's most explicit acknowledgements of the Buddhist version of this problem occurs in the fourth chapter of the BCA. I leave a key term, *cetanā*, untranslated and will return to it below.

I have somehow obtained the advantageous state that is very difficult to achieve, and though aware of that, I am led back to those same hells. (BCA 4:26)

The *cetanā* in this matter is not mine, as if bewitched by spells. I do not know by whom I am bewitched or who dwells inside me.<sup>87</sup> (BCA 4:27, translation modified)

These passages are followed by a number of verses describing the cognitive and emotional defilements (*kleśas*) of anger, attachment and delusion, the forces that cause Śāntideva to act against his commitment to the bodhisattva path. The key phrase in the second verse is his claim that the *cetanā* does not belong to him. *Cetanā* has been variously translated as will, intention, volition, effort, and choice, but there isn't any single term that adequately captures its meaning.<sup>88</sup> In Buddhist psychology conscious experience is made up of moments of conscious awareness (*citta*) and various mental factors (*caitasika*) that provide the affective and cognitive content of the conscious experience. *Cetanā* is a mental factor held to be present in all conscious experience that moves itself, conscious awareness (*citta*) and the other mental factors (*caitasika*) to the object being experienced. Object, here, refers to anything that can be the content of mental awareness.<sup>89</sup>

For example, when I look at a painting on the wall, the conscious awareness (*citta*) is the visual awareness (*caḥsur-vijñāna*) that apprehends the painting. It is accompanied with an assortment of mental factors that contribute to my experience of the

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<sup>87</sup>See also BCA 1:5-1:6, in which Śāntideva bewails the powerful pull of negative action (*pāpa*). The theme of weakness of will also appears in a number of other verses in the fourth chapter. "If I do not perform virtue even when I am capable of it, what then shall I do when fully dazed by the sufferings of miserable states of existence?" (BCA 4:18) "Upon obtaining such leisure, if I do not practice virtue, then there is no duplicity greater than this, and there is no delusion greater than this"(BCA 4:23). "If I recognize this and still deludedly fall into sloth, then when I am commanded by the messengers of Yama, I shall long remain in great anguish"(BCA 4:24). Also relevant is Tillemans 2008, 153-55.

<sup>88</sup> See Meyers 2011, chap 4 for a careful explication of the meaning of *cetanā*. I rely on her analysis in what follows. Meyers suggests "intending" as a translation that captures the depersonalized verbal sense of *cetanā*, without implying "rational deliberation or choice" (172). See especially pps. 166-173. Although I do not fault her translation, intending seems to me to connote a deliberate quality that need not precede or accompany *cetanā*. In this chapter, I leave the term untranslated.

<sup>89</sup> In other words, the intentional object in the phenomenological sense of the term.

picture, such as the attention (*samādhi*) needed to focus on the picture, the concept (*samjñā*) through which I experience it as a picture, my affective reaction (*vedanā*) of pleasure or distaste, any emotional response I might have such as a desire (*rāga*) to possess it, and so on. *Cetanā* groups all of these mental factors together so that they can each play their role in our experience of the picture. It has the same function in instances of mental awareness. When I remember a past conversation, *cetanā* moves awareness (*citta*) which here takes the form of a mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*) along with the requisite mental factors to that memory. *Cetanā* plays this role in any conscious state whatsoever.

In the second verse quoted above, Śāntideva is complaining that the *cetanā* that is impelling his mind and mental factors does not belong to him. In other words, he has committed intellectually to the bodhisattva path, and identifies this as the entire purpose of his life. As such, he also commits to a host of supporting practices, such as various forms of meditation, creating meritorious karma through helpful speech and actions, study of Buddhist teachings and so forth.

Instead, his mind is constantly driven by anger and attachment to rest upon harmful objects, such as distasteful features of sentient beings that arouse anger, diversions that distract him from spiritual practice and so on. Alternately, the object itself may be neutral, as in the case of thinking of a friend, but *cetanā* might move afflictive mental states to the object, such as jealousy when I am envious of my friend's success. The problem resembles *akrasia*, since Śāntideva intellectually recognizes that he is behaving in ways that harm his purpose in life. There is a stronger and weaker reading of this verse, both of which I think are appropriate here. In the stronger, he finds himself

fixated on these objects literally against his deliberate control. In the weaker reading, Śāntideva allows his mind to be influenced by the afflictive mental states, even though it is within his power to resist their sway.

“*Cetanā*,” the word referring to the key mental state in Buddhist weakness of will, has a broader semantic range than the terms generally used to translate it into English, such as “will,” “intention,” “volition” and “choice.” These English terms most naturally refer to deliberate action, and choice in particular suggests that rational deliberation preceded the action in question. *Cetanā* does accompany rational and deliberate action, but since it is a required element of any conscious experience, it also functions in habitual action, as well as mental experience not under a person’s direct control.<sup>90</sup> This means that the range of experience referred to by Śāntideva in these verses is much broader than *akratic* action as traditionally understood. When I habitually obsess over the brownie, for instance, this is an example of Buddhist weakness of will, even if I have limited conscious control over the trajectory my thoughts take.

Although contemporary discussions of *akrasia* usually focus on *akratic* action, Amélie Rorty, in her influential article “Where does the *akratic* break take place?” broadens the discussion to illustrate how *akratic* response can take place at multiple psychological levels. Like the Buddhist, Rorty is concerned with unskillful mental reactions, even in cases when these reactions may not result in a physical action against our better judgment. As a way of broadening our understanding of the forms Buddhist weakness of will can take, below I survey relevant varieties of *akratic* reaction identified by Rorty. In order to suggest these breaks were of concern to Śāntideva also, and to give

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<sup>90</sup> I am indebted to Meyer’s (2011) for this point. I follow her in holding that conscious deliberation and choice cannot be essential to the meaning of the term, since *cetanā* accompanies all conscious states. See especially Meyers 2011, chap 4.

an initial indication of his strategy in responding, I offer citations from his text in which he appears to confront the *akratic* break in question. I offer a more detailed account of his solution to weakness of will in a later section.

**1) *Akrasia* of Direction or Aim.** Rorty characterizes *akrasia* of aim as a break between general beliefs about what is good and the commitment to guide one's actions by these evaluations (Rorty 1980a, 335). I might, for instance, acknowledge that eating animals is needless and cruel, but refrain from becoming a vegetarian. For the Buddhist, *akrasia* of aim occurs when there is acknowledgement of the Four Noble Truths, but no commitment to practice Buddhism. It might also involve acknowledgment of the greater value of the bodhisattva path, while maintaining an aspiration for individual liberation. For the Buddhist, this occurs because, under the influence of mental afflictions like greed (*rāga*) and hatred (*dveṣa*), the *cetanā* does not move a mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*) and associated mental states (*cetasika*) to the mental representation of a particular Buddhist goal that has been intellectually acknowledged as what should be done.

In the BCA, Śāntideva formally commits to the bodhisattva path in the third chapter. If he were to offer a solution for *akrasia* of aim, we would expect it to come before this point. In fact, Śāntideva offers two motivations to undertake the bodhisattva path. In the first chapter, he praises the nobility of the bodhisattva path, suggesting the bodhisattvas are great men (BCA 1:30) worthy of veneration by gods and humans (BCA 1:9). In the second, he reminds us of the horrible suffering that awaits us if we do not commit to Buddhist teachings. Below are two sample verses from an extended section detailing the trauma of death.

One completely languishes while being led today to have the limbs of one's body amputated. Parched with Thirst and with pitiable eyes, one sees the world differently. (BCA 2:43)

How much more is one overpowered by the horrifying appearances of the messengers of Death as one is consumed by the fever of terror and smeared with a mass of excrement? (BCA 2:44)

Śāntideva is aware that we have deeply engrained psychological blocks that prevent our experiencing the terror of our awaiting death. For this reason, he offers us the image of amputation as a contrast. The image of having a leg or arm cut off as punishment for a crime or as treatment for an infection creates a visceral reaction. Reading the lines or hearing the words forces us to imagine the event, and we have a sense of the terrible suffering of fear and pain that accompany the event. Śāntideva can then point out that the suffering of death will be much greater than this, since not just a limb but one's entire body, as well as friends and possessions, will be lost. We should note in the second line the language Śāntideva uses to help us feel some sense of the terrible pain resulting from the separation from everything at the time of death. One suffers from the fever of terror (*jvara-mahātrāsa*) which is so great that one literally defecates in petrification! This will motivate us to take up the bodhisattva path that intellectually we have already judged to be best.

**2) *Akrasia of Interpretation.*** According to Rorty, in *akratic* interpretation one interprets a particular situation in a way that conflicts with the principles one has adopted (Rorty 1980a, 338). Below, I consider three subspecies of *akratic* interpretation identified by Rorty that are relevant to Śāntideva's text.

As will become clear, these kinds of *akratic* interpretation are closely related, and therefore Śāntideva's treatments of each will largely overlap. Below, I refer to passages

that seem particularly appropriate to the *akratic* break in question, but all these passages, I think, would have some beneficial impact on treating other forms of *akratic* interpretation.

**2a) *Akrasia of Perception:*** *Akrasia* of perception occurs when I interpret and categorize what I perceive in a way that conflicts with my principles (Rorty 1980a, 338). For instance, even though I am committed to disabled rights, I might interpret a person using a wheelchair as weak. Rorty gives voluntary shifting between aspects of a gestalt, like the painting of two women or a vase, as evidence that we have some control over perceptual interpretation (Rorty 1980a, 338). For Rorty, to the extent that they are voluntary, perceptual interpretations and categorization can be *akratic*. As I suggested above, Buddhist weakness of will is a broader phenomena, and will also be concerned with involuntary perceptual reactions against what one intellectually judges to be best. One purpose of Buddhist meditation is to bring these involuntary reactions under our conscious control.

For a Buddhist monk, viewing a woman's body as beautiful would conflict with his commitment to reducing lust. Śāntideva's solution to this case of *akratic* perception is to use descriptions calling to mind repulsive images to counteract such habitual interpretations.

You fear a skeleton that has been seen like this, even though it does not move. Why do you not fear it when it moves as if set in motion by some ghost? (BCA 8:48)

If you have no passion for the impure, why do you embrace someone else, who is a skeleton of bones tied by sinews and smeared with a mire of flesh? (BCA 8:52)

A monk struggling with sexual impulse should view the woman to whom he is attracted as an animated skeleton draped by a flesh covering. The imaginative reinterpretation counteracts the monk's usual perception of the woman's body as beautiful, allowing for it to be seen as repulsive and fearful instead.

**2b) Verbal Characterization.** In verbal *akrasia*, we characterize situations in ways that conflict with our principles and considered judgments. Rorty gives the example of a person committed to nonsexist attitudes characterizing an assertive woman's behavior as "unreasonable" and "demanding," while calling similar behavior in a man "self-respecting" (Rorty 1980a, 339).

Although we can distinguish *akrasia* of verbal characterization from perceptual *akrasia*, it is closely related, since we ordinarily verbally characterize a situation based upon our perceptual interpretation of it. Not surprisingly then, Śāntideva's strategy for dealing with such cases will overlap. His strategy here will be to use provocative language that interferes with our habitual characterizations. A female body, usually characterized as "beautiful", for instance, is referred to as "being smeared with flesh" (BCA 8:52), "a sack of muck" (BCA 8:53), and "composed of filth" (BCA 8:56), as a means of helping the monk avert his lust.

A startling feature of Śāntideva's text is his employment of grim humor in his recharacterization of what we usually take to be beautiful.

Either you have seen that bashfully lowered face before as being lifted up with effort, or you have not seen it as it was covered by a veil. (BCA 8:44)

Now, that face is revealed by vultures as if they are unable to bear your anxiousness. Look at it! Why are you fleeing away now? (BCA 8:45)



Śāntideva taunts his reader (and perhaps himself), pointing out that since the lover longed for and fantasized about the face of the beloved when it was covered by a veil, he should be delighted now that the vultures of the charnel ground have removed the flesh and laid open the face. The characterizations, disturbing and playful at the same time, sharply contrast with the usual romantic characterizations of the woman's body.

**2c) Emotional Reactions:** Rorty suggests that emotional reactions can be *akratic* when they conflict with the person's judgment of the situation (Rorty 1980a, 340). We might, for instance, judge that a colleague deserved a promotion more than we did, but still feel jealous towards him. As I will discuss below, Buddhists believe that over time habitual tendencies (*anuśayas*) to experience negative mental states increase, entailing particularly strong harmful emotional responses. It is not surprising, then, that Śāntideva spends much of the text offering techniques to influence them. For instance, remembering that one has vowed to help others achieve the supreme welfare of awakening will dissolve jealousy arising as a result of their material prosperity (BCA 6:83), and remembering the sufferings that await one in hell as a karmic result of anger acts as an antidote to this affliction (BCA 6:89).

Śāntideva's systematic treatment of emotional *akrasia* is to develop virtuous qualities like patience and generosity that act as antidotes to these emotional responses, a strategy that incorporates the types of description and images that I have commented on in this section. I consider this strategy in a later section.

**3. *Akrasia* of Character:** This is the variety of *akrasia* that has attracted the most philosophical attention, in which one acts against one's better judgment (Rorty 1980a,

343). Śāntideva, however, gives relatively little attention to physical behavior in his text. His emphasis is on perfecting one's character by developing the virtues of the bodhisattva. Once the *akratic* breaks identified in this section are resolved by these virtuous dispositions, then *akratic* action will cease with little further effort.

### **The Strength of Buddhist Weakness of Will**

In the last section, I argued that the Buddhist version of weakness of will is broader than the traditional problem of *akrasia*, in that it includes non-deliberative action as well as mental states not ordinarily under conscious control. Drawing upon Rorty's article, I suggested that the concerns of Buddhists like Śāntideva extend to our commitment to inappropriate goals, harmful perceptual categorization, negative emotional response and unwise verbal characterization. In this section, I turn to the depth of the problem of Buddhist weakness of will, and explore two interrelated reasons why it requires immense effort to overcome.

The first of these difficulties is a version of a cause of *akratic* action Amélie Rorty identifies in her article "Akrasia and Conflict." According to Rorty, the *akratic* course of action is often the one we habitually take, and as a result requires no extra motivation to pursue. If the course we judge to be better departs from habitual action, we will likely need additional motivation to pursue it, and this may result in performing the habitual but *akratic* action instead (Rorty 1980b, 210).

Buddhism accepts a particular strong case of this *akratic* motivational drift, since Buddhist psychology holds that one of the effects of acting and feeling is the strengthening of a habitual tendency (*anuśaya*) to feel an emotion or perform an action in

the future. Feeling angry, even when I do not act on it, is dangerous in part because it strengthens my propensity to feel anger in the future. These habitual tendencies (*anuśayas*) are the dormant forms of the defilements (*kleśas*), and Buddhists hold that they travel with the mental stream when it takes rebirth. This means that these propensities increase over countless lifetimes, resulting in a severe inclination to respond in adverse ways in the future. Moreover, the strengthening of these habitual tendencies will result in increased *akratic* drift towards every one of the kinds of weakness of will explained in the prior section. Because of the strengthening of the habit of attachment, for instance, I will be likely to commit to harmful goals like *saṃsāric* success, and I will perceive phenomena in harmful ways such as viewing a woman as sexually attractive and so forth.

In addition to habitual tendencies, Buddhist psychology also posits a series of cognitive mistakes that take place in the structuring of conscious awareness which provide a second related explanation for Buddhist weakness of will. This process is called *prapañca*, or conceptual proliferation, in which the bare data that is processed by the senses and the various factors of consciousness is reified into the dual constructions of self and objects, both understood as enduring entities existing independently of each other.<sup>91</sup> What a person really experiences is a stream of dependently arisen sensory events, but in proliferation the stream is divided into subject and object poles, with the subjective side erroneously believed to be an enduring self (*ātman*), and the object side unified and reified into distinct enduring and independent objects. Subprocesses involved

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<sup>91</sup> I draw upon Hamilton 2001, especially pps. 55-60 in my interpretation of *prapañca*. See also Waldron 2003, chapter 1. This is the same series of cognitive mistakes that I alluded to in chapter two as causing the two deeper forms of suffering (pps. 66-69) In this chapter, I am interested in the role these they play in giving rise to craving and the other mental afflictions.

in conceptual proliferation include the processes of I-making (*ahaṃkāra*) and mine-making (*mamakāra*), resulting in the belief in a lasting subject who may possess and interact with a world of independent objects. What follows is the superimposition of unrealistic expectations on these mentally fabricated objects. In reality (*yathābhūtam*) what exists lacks independence (*anātman*), is impermanent (*ānityam*), and is incapable of providing lasting satisfaction (*duḥkha*), but I perceive these things as if they were independent and enduring objects that are capable of satisfying me. As a result, I suffer.

Conceptual proliferation means that in Buddhist psychology we must distinguish two levels of cognitive error: a deep level in which the stream of experiences are interpreted as enduring subjects and objects, and a surface level of ordinary perceptual mistakes that are at least partially within conscious control of ordinary persons.<sup>92</sup> Interpreting a stream of interconnected moments of matter and consciousness as a woman is an example of the first, deeper level, while interpreting this woman as capable of providing lasting pleasure is an example of the second. Buddhists would claim that conceptual proliferation results in a particularly pernicious form of what Rorty calls perceptual *akrasia*, in which momentary and dependent phenomena are experienced as if they were enduring and independent. Further, conceptual proliferation and its processes of I-making and mine-making are themselves types of the habitual tendencies (*anuśayas*) just discussed. At this deep psychological level, my reification of experience into subject and object poles will itself strengthen my propensity to reify experience this way in the future.

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<sup>92</sup> These two levels correspond to the two levels of unsatisfactoriness associated with pleasure that I discuss in the second chapter as the object and subject related drawbacks of pleasure.

Much of the attention in the Western philosophical tradition on weakness of will has focused upon the question of how it is possible to intentionally act against what one recognizes to be the better course of action. For Buddhists, the process of conceptual proliferation explains why this takes place. Buddhist texts indicate that *cetanā*, which moves mind and its mental factors, can arise from perceptual and affective experience (*samjñā* and *vedanā*) prior to reflective thought (*vitarka*) (Heim 2003, 532-535). This perceptual and affective experience, when entangled with active processes of conceptual proliferation, results in craving and the other defilements. Therefore, prior to reflective thought (*vitarka*), I am already motivated to react aversely in the situation in question. I may intellectually believe the brownie to be harmful, but an intention to grasp it will have already arisen from these deep psychological processes.<sup>93</sup>

Combining these accounts of conceptual proliferation and the underlying habitual tendencies lets us reconstruct the vicious feedback loop that constitutes *samsāric* experience and accounts for the deep forms of weakness of will with which Śāntideva must contend.<sup>94</sup> In conceptual proliferation, I misinterpret the interdependent and impermanent stream of experience as an enduring subject standing apart from

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<sup>93</sup> I believe that my account of conceptual proliferation as an explanation for Buddhist *akrasia* is for the most part in accord with that given by Tillemans 2008. Tillemans draws on Dharmakīrti's explanation of defiled intelligence (*klistā-prajñā*) which reifies the self and causes the defilements of anger and attachment. He suggests Buddhist *akrasia* can be understood on a compartmentalization model, in which practitioners may acknowledge the dangers of *samsāra* and the value of Buddhist practice, while their defiled intelligence makes the opposite assessment, leading to *akratic* pull. See Tillemans 2008, 158-160. What I want to emphasize, in partial contrast to Tillemans, is that the functioning of this afflicted intelligence (which I have discussed as *prapañca*) generally occurs at a more basic level of consciousness than ordinary reflective intelligence, leading to the very strong form of *akratic* response with which Śāntideva must contend. Tillemans does note the role of subconscious or semi-conscious processes in the conclusion to his article, and insightfully points out that *akrasia* can be a mark of spiritual achievement for the Buddhist, since it indicates the practitioner has attained at least the possibility of intentionally intervening in his habitual harmful patterns of thought and action. See Tillemans 2008, 161-2. See Hayes 1996 for another explanation of acting against one's acknowledged best interests as a result of compartmentalization.

<sup>94</sup> Waldron (chap 1) describes the processes constituting *samsāric* perception as a feedback loop.

independent objects. Adverse emotional reactions arise as a result of these cognitive errors, and I engage in harmful physical behavior. Each of these processes reinforces the habitual tendency (*anuśaya*) to engage in this error in future experience. Higher level reflective thought, even if it is directed towards virtuous action, may not be strong enough to intervene in the process.

### **Weakness of Will and the Bodhisattva's Virtuous Qualities**

Above we saw that the Buddhist version of weakness of will arises when the *cetanā* which moves conscious awareness and its accompanying mental factors falls under the influence of afflictive mental states such as greed and anger. Śāntideva's solution to the problem is to develop the virtuous qualities (*kuśala-dharmas*) to act as antidotes to the afflictions. This results in conscious experience in which *cetanā* moves awareness and accompanying mental factors to virtuous or at least neutral objects, instead of harmful ones.

Śāntideva organizes his text according to the Mahāyāna classificatory scheme of the six perfections (*pāramitās*), the virtuous qualities (*kuśala-dharmas*) of generosity (*dāna*), ethical discipline (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*) energetic perseverance (*vīrya*), concentration (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*).<sup>95</sup> One of the vital functions of these virtuous qualities is to act as an antidote to one or more of the afflictions. Generosity and patience are said respectively to be the antidote to attachment and anger. Although it does not have its own chapter, generosity is a frequent theme throughout the text; in the fifth chapter, for instance, it is defined as the mental state that arises when one adopts the

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<sup>95</sup> I examine these virtues in more detail in the following chapter, but here limit my consideration to the role they play in dissolving Buddhist weakness of will.

intention to give all possession and karmic benefits away (BCA 5:10). Patience receives an entire chapter consisting largely of techniques to dissolve anger, such as the following:

If there is a remedy, then what is the use of frustration?  
If there is no remedy, then what is the use of frustration? (BCA 6:10)

The verse encourages us to remember that anger, and any other negative mental state, is always an additional and needless suffering on top of whatever difficulty one faces.

Śāntideva, as a Madhyamaka, takes wisdom to refer to the realization of the emptiness of all phenomena. It acts as antidote to the defilement of ignorance, and when realized at the deepest level it stills the conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*) which is the deepest form of ignorance, and from which all the other defilements arise. Śāntideva also applies wisdom as an antidote in dissolving various emotional afflictions including anger, attachment, and fear. Many of these occur in the ninth chapter, which is dedicated to its development, but Śāntideva resorts to this strategy frequently throughout the text. The following example comes from the fourth chapter.

Mental afflictions do not exist in sense  
objects, nor in the sense faculties, nor in the  
space between, nor anywhere else. Then  
where do they exist and agitate the whole  
world? This is an illusion only. Liberate  
your fearing heart and cultivate perseverance  
for the sake of wisdom. Why would  
you torture yourself in hells for no reason? (BCA 4:47)

In this passage, Śāntideva deploys one of the stock arguments for the emptiness of phenomena to the defilements (*kleśas*). He points out that if a defilement, like anger for instance, existed intrinsically, as a real thing independent of our conventions, then we should be able to mentally locate it. As an example, consider feeling angry with a person

who cuts us off on the freeway. Careful examination of our mind will reveal only a continuous stream of mental moments, some of which have an energetic and tight feeling, but none of which are individually accurately described as the anger we feel. But of course our anger does not exist in the other person either, nor in the space between us and them. The conclusion is that anger is a conceptual imputation we place on a series of moments of mind arising in quick succession. Careful meditation on this fact will dissolve the anger we feel towards the other person, and similar techniques can be used to dispel the other defilements.

The fifth chapter of the BCA, which as I explained in the introduction serves as Śāntideva's chapter on ethical discipline (*śīla*), focuses on two supporting conditions that allow the effective application of the various techniques that redirect or dissolve the defilements. These are mindfulness (*smṛti*), an overall awareness of what is occurring in the body and mind, and introspection (*samprajanya*). Introspection, Śāntideva says, arises once mindfulness is present (BCA 5:33) and is defined as "the repeated examination of the state of one's body and mind" (BCA 5:108). Introspection allows one to apply whatever antidote is needed when the mind is contaminated by one of the defilements (BCA 5: 54). In this chapter, Śāntideva gives examples of how one can intervene to combat attachment and repulsion (BCA 5:48), pride, arrogance and deceit (BCA 5:49), the inclination to abuse others (BCA 5:50) and so on.

If one's mindfulness and introspection are perfected, one will continuously apply the needed antidote whenever a defilement begins to arise, and therefore successfully eliminate all but perhaps the most deeply engrained instances of Buddhist weakness of will. The difficulty is that for all but the most advanced practitioners, both mindfulness



and introspection require great effort to consistently apply. As in the case of *akratic* action, the practitioner will be susceptible to falling into habitual patterns of mental activity, in which mindfulness and introspection are absent. Obviously, positing a second order level of mindfulness and introspection would only lead to a regress as well as mental exhaustion. Further, sustaining mindfulness and introspection may themselves be hindered by a form of perceptual *akrasia*. The practitioner might interpret their present mental state as having the required level of mindfulness and introspection, and thereby convince themselves that no further effort is needed, while in fact their mind is dull and subject to the arising of the defilements.

What is needed, then, is a source of motivational energy to enable the practitioner to continually apply mindfulness and introspection. One obvious source of motivational energy is the root bodhisattva virtue of *bodhicitta* itself. For most beginning bodhisattvas, however, compassion for others will not have developed sufficiently to provide the needed amount of motivational energy. Śāntideva's solution is to employ another of the six perfections, energetic effort (*vīrya*), which he defines as "enthusiasm for virtue." It is said to be the antidote to sloth, clinging to the reprehensible, apathy and self-contempt (BCA 7:2).

It is, however, of little help to merely tell a practitioner to develop his effort, and Śāntideva's solution here is to again employ repulsive imagery reminding us of the *samsāric* horrors to come. Chapter seven which is devoted to the development of effort contains some of Śāntideva's most graphic descriptions of the sufferings that accompany death and rebirth.

Scented out by the hunters, the mental afflictions, you have entered the snare of rebirth. Why do you not recognize even

now that you are in the mouth of death? (BCA 7:4)

You do not see that those of your own kind are gradually being killed. You even fall asleep like a buffalo among butchers. (BCA 7:5)

When Yama watches you and your path is blocked on all sides, how can you enjoy eating, and how can you sleep and have sexual intercourse? (BCA 7:6)

Realizing "I am like a live fish," your fear is appropriate now. How much more when you have committed vices and face the intense suffering of hell? (BCA 7:11)

So, delicate one, you burn even when touched by hot water. Upon performing deeds leading to hell, how will you remain at ease? (BCA 7:12)

The actual energy of effort, for most of this seventh chapter, comes from contemplating the suffering one will endure at the time of death and beyond if one does not progress quickly on the Buddhist path. Similarly, one is encouraged to maintain mindfulness (BCA 5:29), keep one's bodhisattva vow (BCA 4:4-4:12), and devote one's present rebirth to Buddhist practice (BCA 4:23) all by imagining the terrors that await one in hell if Buddhist practice is not successful.

### **Śāntideva's use of Defiled Energy**

In this chapter, I have argued that Buddhists like Śāntideva face a particularly broad and deep form of weakness of will. Unlike the usual understanding of its Western counterpart, Buddhist weakness of will takes place not just at the level of action, but also perceptual interpretation, emotional response, commitment to goals and verbal characterization. Moreover, weakness of will, in the expanded sense that Buddhists contend with it, is a particularly difficult problem, both because of the ever-strengthening

force of the habitual tendencies towards unskillful action, and because of a series of embedded cognitive mistakes that result in habitual unskillful perceptual classification at the deepest level of cognitive experience. In the last section, I explored how the various virtuous qualities of the bodhisattva act as antidote to weakness of will, but require motivational energy to function. I ended the section by considering Śāntideva's use of our fear of negative rebirth to provide this energy. In this section, I consider in more depth Śāntideva's use of the afflictive mental states to provide motivational energy needed to engage and progress along the bodhisattva path.<sup>96</sup>

The ultimate motivational source for the bodhisattva will be *bodhicitta*, the mind aspiring towards awakening for the sake of all sentient beings. Although Śāntideva offers praises of *bodhicitta* in the first few chapters, it is not till halfway through the eighth chapter that he offers actual meditations designed to develop compassion for others.<sup>97</sup> One can surmise that compassion is not tapped as a motivational resource until late in the text because developing a sufficiently strong sense of concern for others requires weakening one's sense of self, and the corresponding attachment to one's own welfare. This will require progressing some way down the bodhisattva path, and of course the bodhisattva will require sufficient motivation to get to this point. Resorting to the energy arising from the defilements acts as a stopgap measure in the meantime.

Perhaps the most obvious appeal to the energy arising from aversion comes from directing anger towards the defilements, which would include of course anger itself.

I shall be tenacious in this matter; and fixed  
on revenge, I shall wage war, except

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<sup>96</sup> On the use of energy arising from the afflictions, see also Jenkins 1999, 45-6.

<sup>97</sup> These begin at BCA 8:89, and continue for much of the remainder of the chapter. In the early chapters, *bodhicitta* is also praised, but the motivation to develop it tends to focus on *bodhicitta*'s benefits for oneself, rather than compassion for others.

against those mental afflictions that are related to the elimination of mental afflictions. (BCA 4:43)

The energy anger provides is afflictive, in that it arises out of deeply engrained ignorance. We have some control over emotional responses like that of anger, and the BCA seeks to extend this level of control. To this end, Śāntideva often provides techniques meant to dissolve these negative responses, such as the verse reminding us that anger never serves any purpose. For all but highly advanced Buddhist practitioners, however, there is a limit to our control over emotional response. In such cases, Śāntideva's strategy will often be to redirect this energy towards aims of the Buddhist path. It would be better to avoid anger altogether, but until this is possible it is best to redirect its energy towards liberative purposes.

By far, the most common use of negative energy in the BCA is that of fear, especially the terror that grips us when we contemplate death. We have seen a number of examples of this already, in the passages I quoted to illustrate Śāntideva's response to perceptual *akrasia*, and in his fueling of the virtuous quality of energetic effort (*vīrya*). Since the fear of death arises because we are averse to the loss of vitality, possessions and companions that occurs at that time, it can be classified as one of the afflictions that arise from the defilement of aversion.<sup>98</sup>

Śāntideva's use of our fear of death illustrates particularly well his strategy of turning defiled energy back upon the delusion that is its source, since for the Buddhist the fear of death itself arises in dependence upon the delusion of permanence. The point is made well in the following passage from Buddhagoṣa's *Visuddhimagga*:

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<sup>98</sup> Ultimately, fear arises from ignorance that believes the self to endure, a point made by Śāntideva in the ninth chapter (BCA 9:56).

[The deluded person] is confused about death, instead of taking death thus, ‘Death in every case is break-up of aggregates’, he figures that it is a [lasting] being that dies, that it is a [lasting] being’s transmigration to another incarnation, and so on. (Buddhagoṣa 1991, 555)

The passage illustrates that there are in fact two types of death referenced in Buddhist texts. The first is momentariness, the continual breaking up all physical and mental phenomena upon their very arising. The second is the death of the conventional person, what we ordinarily refer to as “death.” Recall that for Buddhists, persons are actually streams (*santāna*) of closely connected momentary mental and physical processes. Such a stream is labeled a person merely for convenience, but because of ignorance (*avidyā*) we mistake this stream to be an enduring entity. As a result of this cognitive mistake, we falsely believe that this enduring entity perishes upon death, and fear of this event arises.

In reality, then, the perishing of the physical being is no different in kind from any other moment of the causal stream, in which every item associated with the conventionally labeled person arises and dissolves. Because of our ignorance, however, we mistakenly attribute an underlying unity to this constant series of momentary deaths.<sup>99</sup> As a result of the reification of the moments of the stream into an enduring entity, the event in which the final moments associated with the stream dissolve is also reified into the death of an enduring entity. The fear of death, itself, is predicated upon this cognitive mistake.

The insight that Śāntideva manipulates to such devastating effect in the BCA is that these pockets of defiled energy, themselves predicated upon cognitive mistakes, can

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<sup>99</sup>This point is made by the seventh century Madhyamaka Candrakīrti. “People, with such misleading ideas as “this is that” and “the self is that,” attribute unity to a continuum of constructed things, a continuum that is not something different from the individual things that constitute it. For this reason, they act without understanding that it is momentary” (Lang 2003, 122).

be redeployed against that very source of the cognitive error. Śāntideva spurs deluded beings into greater heights of imaginary terrors for the sake of salvation. The strategy is particularly apparent with death, but actually all defiled energy arises because of cognitive error. It is because we see beings as enduring entities, for instance, that anger can arise towards them.

The use of energy arising from attachment is less pronounced in the BCA. In one verse Śāntideva talks about desiring (*tr̥ṣṇā*) to benefit others (BCA 8:109). But this strategy is most obvious in the first chapter, where somewhat surprisingly Śāntideva extols the root bodhisattva virtue of *bodhicitta*, the mind that strives towards awakening for the sake of all beings, by listing its many benefits for the bodhisattva himself. He states that we should achieve *bodhicitta* because it quickens our own path to liberation by purifying vices (BCA 1:13-14), increases our supply of karmic merit (BCA 1:17-22), and leads to our being esteemed by gods and humans (BCA 1:9).<sup>100</sup> Again, we can see the same strategy at work that Śāntideva used with regard to anger and suffering above. Toward the end of the bodhisattva path one's compassion towards others will be all the motivation one needs, but while the defilement of attachment remains strong, it is likely to outweigh what little pull our concern for others has. Therefore, it is attachment to one's own welfare itself that must be channeled into the aspiration to attain full buddhahood for the benefit of all.

As for ignorance, since it is the root of both attachment and aversion, Śāntideva's use of the other defilements implicitly depends on the manipulation of ignorance as well. There are also places in the text where Śāntideva uses false conceptualization directly as an aid. Above I considered a passage from the eighth chapter in which Śāntideva asks us

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<sup>100</sup> See also pps. 17-18 of this study.

to view a woman as a walking skeleton to avert lust. The passage reveals that much of Śāntideva's text is not attempting to stimulate accurate perception, but is rather trading off a pernicious cognitive error for a useful one. The stream of mental and physical parts we identify as a woman is no more a walking skeleton than it is a thing of beauty; considering it as inherently one is as much an error as the other. Viewing the body as a skeleton, however, counteracts our habitual tendencies of lust, and for this reason Śāntideva suggests that we do this when necessary.

Perhaps the most intriguing use of ignorance as an aid to development on the bodhisattva path is the series of verses in the eight chapter explaining what Śāntideva refers to as the great mystery of exchanging oneself with others. In these series of meditations, the practitioner imaginatively takes up the identity of another person who is either inferior, equal, or superior to himself, and then from their vantage point contemplates himself. A fascinating aspect of this meditation is that Śāntideva encourages the meditator, while contemplating himself from the other person's standpoint, to develop negative emotional responses, such as envy and pride, towards himself.

Placing your own identity in inferior ones  
and placing the identity of others in your  
own self, cultivate envy and pride with the  
mind free of discursive thoughts. (BCA 8:140)

*He is respected, not I. I am not wealthy as he is. He is  
praised, while I am despised. I am unhappy, while he is  
happy. (BCA 8: 141)*

The second quoted verse illustrates the thoughts of the meditator, who has taken up the identity of an inferior person, and from their vantage point experiences envy towards what are now viewed as his own superior qualities. The point of the meditation

is to help the meditator to gain empathy for the inferior person through understanding the pain they feel in relation to him. Similar meditations awaken empathetic understanding with one who is our equal, or superior to us. In these meditations, the practitioner uses his habitual tendency to reify momentary mental and physical events into an enduring person creatively, applying this reification and identification to the imagined mental stream of another person. The identification is so strong that if it is successful even the negative defilements habitually accompanying reification of self will occur in our imaginative identification as the other person.

These meditations on exchanging self with others are located late in the eighth chapter, where Śāntideva finally turns his focus to developing great compassion for others as a way of fueling progress on the remainder of the bodhisattva path. Fascinatingly, even at this late stage Śāntideva uses energy arising from the defilements, here ignorance and the pride and envy that arise from it, to fuel the development of compassion.

### ***Bodhicitta as motivation***

It is remarkable that a text like the BCA, which characterizes itself as a manual for the development of the virtuous qualities of the bodhisattva, places so much of its emphasis on the manipulation of various forms of negative energy arising from delusion. Nevertheless, Śāntideva's commitment to the goal of complete emotional transformation in which concern for others saturates our mental continuum is never in doubt. He expresses these aspirations most forcefully in chapter three, when *bodhicitta* is adopted, and chapter ten where he dedicates his efforts to others.



May I be a protector for those who are without protectors, a guide for travelers, and a boat, a bridge, and a ship for those who wish to cross over. (BCA 3:17)

May I be a lamp for those who seek light, a bed for those who seek rest, and may I be a servant for all beings who desire a servant. (BCA 3:18)

To all sentient beings may I be a wish-fulfilling gem, a vase of good fortune, an efficacious mantra, a great medication, a wish-fulfilling tree, and a wish-granting cow. (BCA 3:19)

Through my merit, may all those in all directions who are afflicted by bodily and mental sufferings obtain oceans of joy and contentment. (BCA 10:2)

As long as the cycle of existence lasts, may their happiness never decline. May the world attain the constant joy of the Bodhisattvas. (BCA 10:3)

For as long as space endures and for as long as the world lasts, may I live dispelling the miseries of the world. (BCA 10: 55)

Ultimately, as the strength of the defilements are reduced, the bodhisattva will use the energy of *bodhicitta* itself, the motivation to attain full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings, as a resource to provide energy (*vīrya*) and disentangle *cetanā* from influence by the afflictive mental states. This resource is unavailable to the early Buddhist practitioner who has not committed to the bodhisattva path, and therefore this in itself provides a deep benefit of following the way of the bodhisattva. In addition, love (*maitrī*) is one of the antidotes for anger, and therefore since the bodhisattva's love for sentient beings is greater than the early Buddhist, control over the afflictive mental state of anger will be much easier for him to develop.<sup>101</sup>

Śāntideva's greater emphasis on the energy arising from afflictive emotions, rather than these motivational sources that are more closely linked to the bodhisattva's

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<sup>101</sup> See Buddhagoṣa 1991, 314. See also Jenkins 1999, 40.

commitment to others' welfare, is at first puzzling. It can be understood, however, as his acknowledgement of the particularly strong varieties of weakness of will that I have explicated above as resulting from habitual tendencies (*anusāya*) and conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*). *Cetanā*, at the beginning of the path, is simply too deprived, buffeted to and fro by festering mental afflictions, to assemble for any length of time a collection of virtuous mental states able to motivate progression along the path. Since defiled energy is mainly what he has to work with, it is what Śāntideva employs.

### **Conclusion:**

In the previous chapter, I argued that the bodhisattva gives up far less than it initially appears in leaving behind *samsāric* pursuits, since all such pleasures are afflicted with subtle forms of suffering. Therefore, entering the Buddhist path aiming at either individual liberation or bodhisattvahood will always be in the benefit of the individual, in comparison to the alternative of remaining in *samsāra*. In this chapter, I have argued that one of the deep benefits accruing to the bodhisattva is overcoming particularly deep forms of weakness of will that prevents aspirants from deeply engaging in Buddhist practices. I explained how Śāntideva overcomes this difficulty by developing virtuous qualities to act as antidotes to the afflictive mental states that cause weakness of will. I then explored Śāntideva's use of afflictive mental energy arising from the defilements themselves as a motivational resource to fuel effort (*virya*) and overcome weakness of will.

One of the beneficial results of his practice, therefore, is that the psychology of the bodhisattva is altered so that his awareness and mental states are moved by *cetanā* to only beneficial objects. The practice of cultivating virtuous qualities as antidotes to

afflictive emotions is shared by early Buddhist practitioners and bodhisattvas, and therefore the benefit of overcoming weakness of will is shared as well. We have also seen, however, that Śāntideva is able to appeal to our great compassion for suffering sentient beings as an additional motivation to transform our mind, a strategy which will have far more resonance for the Mahāyānist traveling the bodhisattva path than the early Buddhist disciple.

In the next chapter, I consider in more detail the function of the virtuous qualities emphasized by Śāntideva, with particular attention to their role in lessening the suffering the bodhisattva experiences when he makes apparent sacrifices for sentient beings.

## Chapter 4: The Virtues of the Bodhisattva

In the last chapter, I explored one aspect of the virtuous qualities of bodhisattvas: their ability to control the particularly severe form of weakness of will posited by Buddhists. In this chapter I continue to explore their potential benefits for the bodhisattva. For the Buddhist, these virtuous mental states (*kuśala dharmas*) are the qualities that eliminate the suffering of oneself and others. Most of the virtues are held in common by both early Buddhist and Mahāyāna traditions, although the bodhisattva places greater emphasis on other-regarding virtues like compassion (*karuṇā*) and generosity (*dāna*), and incorporates the root bodhisattva virtue of *bodhicitta*, the mind dedicated to attaining full awakening for the benefit of sentient beings. For early Buddhism, the relationship between the development of the virtues and one's own well-being is straightforward: it is replacement of afflicted mental qualities with virtuous ones that ultimately eliminates the suffering of the practitioner, and therefore development of these virtues makes a life go well. For the Mahāyānist, the relationship is more difficult, since she remains in *saṃsāra* as a result of developing generosity and compassion for sentient beings.

In the first part of this chapter I comment on some general features of Buddhist virtue theory that apply to both early Buddhist and Mahāyāna sources. In the second, I provide brief descriptions of the virtues emphasized by Śāntideva in his BCA. In the third, I illustrate how nurturing the bodhisattva's virtues makes her path less demanding than it appears, since their development results in a deeply rooted tranquility that is resistant to mental suffering, even during temporary experiences of painful sensation. I suggest that this greatly lessens the demandingness of the bodhisattva's path, but does not

of itself show that committing to the bodhisattva path is actually in the bodhisattva's interest. In the final section, I focus on a perfectionist element in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, in which Śāntideva claims that development of the bodhisattva's virtues represents a praiseworthy achievement far greater than the accomplishments of the seeker after individual liberation. This provides good reasons to pursue the bodhisattva path, even if it is not in one's best interest.

### **Buddhist Virtue Theory: General features**

The strategy of all Buddhist virtue theory is to replace the afflictive mental states (*akuśala dharma*, or *kleśa*) derived from ignorance with virtuous mental states (*kuśala dharma*) conducive to liberation from suffering. A great deal of attention is given to these virtuous and afflictive mental states in early Buddhist texts, and they are classified systematically in the later abhidharma manuals. These abhidharma texts analyze reality into lists of fundamental and irreducible elements, or *dharmas*, although different schools accept slightly different lists. Sarvāstivādins, for instance, posit 75 *dharmas*, while Theravadins accept 82. The most general classification of dharmas is into conditioned, that is causally dependent, and unconditioned elements, the latter category including in some systems only *nirvāṇa* (Gethin 1998, 210). Classification of the conditioned *dharmas* differs somewhat from school to school, but all include the category of consciousness (*citta*), and that of associated mental factors (*cetasika*). As we saw in the last chapter, consciousness is the bare awareness that accompanies any mental episode. The mental factors that accompany a moment of consciousness are subdivided into a number of categories, including neutral factors like sensation (*vedanā*) and recognition

(*saṃjñā*) that process experiential data. Most important for our purposes are the categories of virtuous mental factors (*kuśala cetasika/dharmas*) and unvirtuous mental factors (*akuśala cetasika/dharmas*). These are the mental qualities which are conducive to liberation or bondage to *samsāra*, respectively.

Although Śāntideva's own school of Madhyamaka Buddhism wrote no abhidharma manuals of their own, their sister Mahāyāna school of Yogācāra created several treatises that became influential for both Mahāyāna schools. In Asaṅga's *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, for instance, the unvirtuous mental factors are categorized according to the three root afflicted mental states, or *kleśas*, of ignorance (*avidyā*), craving (*rāga*) and hatred (*pratigha*) (Asaṅga 2001, 11). Hatred is defined as “malevolence with regard to living beings, suffering, and conditions of suffering” (Asaṅga 2001, 11). It is subdivided into a number of further mental states, including anger (*krodha*) which arises in a particular situation, and rancor (*upanāha*), in which one holds a desire for revenge (Asaṅga 2001, 15). Ignorance and craving are also subdivided into further mental states, such as pride (*māna*), defined as “exhalation of the mind” (Asaṅga 2001, 12) and avarice (*mātsarya*), defined as attachment to riches and esteem (Asaṅga 2001, 15). Many of the positive mental states are defined at least partially in opposition to a negative mental state: for instance absence of hatred (*adveṣa*) and absence of delusion (*amoha*). Other virtues are instrumental to progressing along the path to liberation, such as effort (*vīrya*), defined by Asaṅga as “firm effort aimed at virtuous things”, and serenity (*praśrabdhi*) which is defined as “maneuverability of the body and mind” (Asaṅga 2001, 10). Śāntideva in the BCA does not attempt to give an exhaustive

survey of the positive mental factors, but chooses a handful of essential ones for analysis and development.

There are a number of fairly distinctive features of Buddhist virtue theory, as seen in the early Abhidharma texts and later works like Śāntideva's BCA, that deserve comment. First, great attention is paid to negative states of mind. Asaṅga is not atypical in itemizing more than thirty unvirtuous mental states, all having their root in the series of cognitive errors that make up ignorance. One reason for the greater attention given to negative mental states is that *nirvāṇa*, the complete cessation of suffering, is achieved when all such afflictive mental states are wholly removed. Further, the proliferation of both negative and positive mental states in the Abhidharma lists have their origin in the practice of meditation, in which extreme states of awareness and concentration enabled distinguishing between very close mental states.

Second, in contrast to Aristotle, who classifies the virtues as dispositions (*hexis*) for responding well emotionally and in action, the primary element of Buddhist virtue theory is the mental event itself, *kuśala* or *akuśala dharma*, lasting only a fraction of a second. "Anger (*krodha*)", for instance, refers primarily to the mental moment of anger arising in the mind.<sup>102</sup> Habitual responses are also theorized, however, being referred to as *anuśaya*, the dormant tendency for negative mental states to arise in the future. In the last chapter we saw that these habitual tendencies are particularly pernicious, since any occurring mental state increases the power of the relevant habitual tendency, which travels with the stream of mental moments to the next life. Positive habitual tendencies

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<sup>102</sup> I follow the common practice of using the term "virtue" to translate "*kuśala dharma*," but it should be kept in mind that the Sanskrit term refers to a momentary mental event, and not the disposition to respond virtuously. Buddhists are concerned with developing virtuous dispositions, but do not mark this with any specific term.

also are strengthened by occurring positive mental states, and accompany the mental stream to the next rebirth.

A third significant feature of Buddhist virtue theory is the importance it places on negative mental factors, even when physical or verbal action does not follow. A moment of anger, for instance, not only increases the habitual tendency to become angry in the future, but also creates karmic propensities (*vāsanā*) that will ripen into future unpleasant experience, or even a negative rebirth in a lower realm. This is not to say that physical and verbal action is neglected: actions to be avoided, such as killing, stealing, lying and so on appear in multiple lists, including the five lay precepts (*pañcaśīla*) and the ten unwholesome paths (*daśākarmapatha*). Further, monks and nuns commit to following several hundred additional rules severely restricting all aspects of their lifestyle. Nevertheless, Buddhist ethical texts view restraint of speech and physical action as a second line of defense against the strengthening of the negative mental states which are the primary cause of suffering and bondage to rebirth.

A fourth feature is the close relationship between negative and positive affective states and respectively conceptual error and correct understanding. This has already been commented on in the last chapter where we saw that mental afflictions arise as a result of a series of cognitive errors in which momentary mental and physical events are reified into twin enduring constructions of subject and object. Since many of the virtuous mental qualities are defined as the absence of a defiled mental state, elimination of these cognitive errors is essential to the development of positive mental states as well. In addition, in Mahāyāna texts the root virtuous qualities like generosity and patience are perfected by understanding the absence of self in all phenomena.



In the last chapter, we already explored one of the main functions these positive mental states play in the transformation of the mind. Positive mental states that are defined at least partly in opposition to a negative mental state act as antidotes to their opposites. Meditations designed to develop absence of hatred (*adveṣa*), or love, for instance, dissolve hatred, since these mental factors cannot coexist. Similarly, no afflictive mental state can coexist with deep concentration, and so the development of concentration is one way to temporarily cease all afflictive emotions. The virtue of wisdom (*prajñā*), which accurately sees things as impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless, is the ultimate antidote to all afflictive mental states; once it is perfected, not just ignorance, but anger, attachment, and all other negative mental states will be eliminated forever.

Another main function of many of the virtuous mental states is to act as supporting conditions to skillfully manipulate the mind. Certain forms of awareness, like introspection (*samprajanya*) and mindfulness (*smṛti*), facilitate recognition of what mental states are occurring in the mind. It is only by recognizing that we are angry, for instance, that we create the possibility of applying the antidote of love. Similarly, serenity (*praśrabdhi*) which is defined as “maneuverability of the body and mind” keeps the mind fluid and responsive, while energy (*vīrya*) defined by Asaṅga as “firm effort aimed at virtuous things” (Asaṅga 2001, 10), provides the motivational force to develop the other virtues and combat negative mental qualities.

The endpoint of this psychological transformation is to completely rid the mind of all afflictive mental states, and any tendency for these mental states to arise in the future. Early Buddhist texts describe this as a mental seclusion that is both the parallel to,

and the motivation behind the monastic seclusion from social life. This is the mental seclusion obtained when the mind is completely and permanently separated from the root afflictions of ignorance, attachment and aversion, as well as the other negative mental states (*āśravas*) and habitual tendencies (*anuśayas*) that arise out of them.<sup>103</sup> The early texts describe the *arhat* who has achieved this state as literally unable to perform negative verbal and physical actions; he cannot steal or kill, for instance, because the intention to steal can no longer arise in his mind.<sup>104</sup> For a Mahāyānist like Śāntideva, development of the virtuous qualities continues long after the stage at which the early Buddhist practitioner has achieved this level of mental perfection, with the emphasis now turned to perfecting the other-regarding virtues like generosity and compassion. I turn to a brief survey of Śāntideva's characterization of the role of the virtues below.

### **The Virtues of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra***

Although Mahāyānists presuppose the classification of positive and negative mental states found in abhidharma texts, two major innovations are introduced in their development of Buddhist virtue theory. First, Mahāyāna virtue manuals emphasize a scheme of six, or sometimes ten perfections (*pāramitās*) essential to the development of full Buddhahood. The six, which become close to ubiquitous in Indian Mahāyāna texts, are generosity (*dāna*), ethical discipline (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), effort (*vīrya*), meditative concentration (*samādhi* or *dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). All of these virtues are recognized in the early Buddhist tradition, but they receive new emphasis in Mahāyāna texts. The second development, which is a core feature of Śāntideva's text, is

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<sup>103</sup> Bodhi 2000, 859-60: S iii 9-10. See also Bodhi 2000, 720-21: S ii 282. On the seclusion of the *arahat*, see Harvey 1995, 58-60.

<sup>104</sup> See Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 627: M i 523.

the emphasis on *bodhicitta*, the mind aspiring to attain full awakening in order to help sentient beings, as the root virtue of the bodhisattva.

Śāntideva's account of the virtuous qualities of the bodhisattva presupposes both the mainstream abhidharma accounts, and these Mahāyāna innovations. His own presentation, however, is somewhat idiosyncratic. Chapters one, three and four of the BCA focus on the bodhisattva's root virtue of *bodhicitta*, with the first chapter explaining its value, and the third and fourth explaining how it is adopted and protected. The second chapter focuses on preparing the mind to develop *bodhicitta* and commit to the bodhisattva vow, by making offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and by confessing past negative actions. In the tenth chapter karmic merit (*puṇya*) from practice is dedicated for the sake of all sentient beings. The five remaining chapters are each named after a virtuous quality essential to the bodhisattva's path. These virtues overlap with the six perfections stressed in other Mahāyāna texts, although generosity and ethics are missing, while introspection (*samprajanya*) is given a chapter of its own, in which the importance of mindfulness (*smṛti*) is also emphasized. This difference is less than it appears, however, since upon closer examination it becomes clear that the introspection chapter is about ethical discipline in its role of restraint of the mind. It is noteworthy that there is within the BCA no explicit extended treatment of generosity. The virtue of generosity, however, is briefly defined in chapter five. Further, it is sometimes claimed that the chapters dealing with the root bodhisattva virtue of *bodhicitta* also act as Śāntideva's treatment of generosity (Wallace and Wallace 1997, 12).

The virtues treated in detail within the BCA, therefore, are as follows:

Chap 1, 3, 4: *Bodhicitta*

Chap 5: Introspection, Mindfulness, Ethics, Generosity:

Chap 6: Patience:  
Chap 7: Effort  
Chap 8: Meditative Concentration:  
Chap 9: Wisdom:

*Bodhicitta* can be translated as the thought or aspiration (*citta*) that strives for full awakening (*bodhi*). The aim is the fully enlightened state of a Buddha, distinguished from the lesser awakening of an *arhat*, who escapes from rebirth without developing the advanced trainings necessary to liberate others from suffering.<sup>105</sup> Śāntideva distinguishes between two forms of *bodhicitta*, aspiring and venturing, comparing these with one who wishes to travel, and one who actually travels (BCA 1:15-16). *Bodhicitta* causes an uninterrupted stream of merit (*puṇya*) to accumulate in the mind-stream of the one in whom it arises (BCA 1:17-27), and Śāntideva suggests that emphasizing this fact can be used to convince those inclined towards personal liberation to strive for full awakening (BCA 1:20). Another feature of *bodhicitta* that is of immediate benefit to the practitioner is that it protects one from the ripening of negative karmic effects (BCA 1:13).

The organization of the fifth chapter around introspection and mindfulness is particularly interesting, revealing Śāntideva's tendency to prioritize control of the mind above physical and verbal action. It becomes apparent that he intends this chapter to act as his chapter on ethics by his definition of the perfection (*pāramitā*) of ethical discipline (*śīla*) as a restrained mind (*virati-citta*) in the eleventh verse. The chapter has strong resonances to the early Buddhist *Dhammapada*, repeating the earlier text's emphasis on

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<sup>105</sup> To what extent the liberation of the *arhat* and the full awakening of a Buddha differ is a difficult question that has been treated differently within the Buddhist tradition. Bodhi 2010 suggests that in the early Pali texts there is no distinction, although as the Abhidharma schools develop, the Buddha was ascribed additional faculties of knowledge, including a form of omniscience. See Bodhi 2010. In the Mahāyāna, progress towards full Buddhahood comes to be understood as progressing through ten stages, the bodhisattva grounds, at the sixth of which the bodhisattva perfects wisdom and could, if she chose, end rebirth. The remainder of the bodhisattva path is dedicated to developing the ability to skillfully teach, as well as developing omniscience that enables him to most skillfully work for others well-being. See Williams 1989, 200-208.

the power of the mind to create all future happiness and suffering. Śāntideva talks at length about the danger of allowing afflictive mental states (*kleśas*) to arise, emphasizing in particular the karmic effect of rebirth in hell (BCA 5:7), but we can understand here as well the strengthening of habitual tendencies (*anuśaya*) for negative mental states to arise again, as well as the performance of harmful physical and verbal actions that occur when the mind is not restrained.

Śāntideva's emphasis on restraint of the mind as the core of ethics explains why the chapter is named after introspection (*saṃprajanya*), which, along with the closely related mental factor of mindfulness (*smṛti*), is of particular importance in restraining the arising of negative mental factors. Introspection (*saṃprajanya*) is explicitly defined as "the repeated examination of the state of one's body and mind" (BCA 5:108).

Mindfulness is not defined, which is unfortunate since the term has a variety of uses in Buddhist texts. Śāntideva spends much of the chapter detailing the importance of careful attention to one's physical actions, and one's mental state, and therefore the term seems to mean a fluid flexible awareness of one's experience. These two mental factors allow us to guard the virtuous mind (*kuśala-citta*) filled with positive mental states. (BCA 5:22). Mindfulness, then, makes us aware of whether our mind is in a virtuous state, and introspection acts as an auxiliary mental factor that repeatedly checks to see if the factor of mindfulness is still in place. These two factors together provide an essential line of mental defense against the arising of afflictive emotions. Further, when an afflictive emotion has arisen, they ensure the practitioner will become aware of it and be able to apply the correct antidote to dispel it.

We also find a brief treatment of generosity (*dāna*) in the fifth chapter, where Śāntideva defines it as “a state of mind due to the intention of giving away everything to all people” (BCA 5:10). Here again we find Śāntideva’s inclination to locate the core of any given virtue in the sphere of mental intention. One can be generous without giving *any thing* away, as long as one’s aspiration to give is perfected. Such a definition also renders coherent how virtues such as generosity might be perfected during lifetimes of solitary meditation.

The virtue of patience (*kṣānti*), which is the focus of the sixth chapter, is also not explicitly defined in the text, but it is clear that Śāntideva uses the term to refer to the complete lack of animosity towards any living being. What is particularly remarkable about this chapter is the great variety of techniques offered to eliminate anger. Some of these strategies are independent of Buddhist metaphysical or soteriological commitments. Śāntideva points out, for instance, that anger is always a useless additional suffering, since if there is a remedy to a problem, we can simply fix the problem without frustration, and if there is no remedy then anger merely makes the situation worse (BCA 6:10). Likewise, he points out that over time we will become used to certain kinds of pain, thereby lessening our distress (BCA 6:14). Meditations like these could be incorporated without tension into non-Buddhist therapy. Another meditation points out that experiencing suffering increases compassion for other suffering beings, and lessens arrogance (BCA 6:21). Although applicable to non-Buddhists, this meditation is particularly appropriate for the Mahāyānist, since it suggests that anger is an inappropriate response to suffering, since pain helps increase the bodhisattva’s compassion for sentient beings.

Other meditations in this chapter depend at least partly upon acceptance of Buddhist presuppositions in order to be effective. In a long sequence of verses, for instance, Śāntideva claims that sympathy rather than anger is appropriate towards beings who are driven by the mental afflictions to perform harmful actions (BCA 6:22—6:41). Further meditations focus on the individual’s responsibility for the suffering he or she experiences, as a result of past negative karmic actions (BCA 6:42—6:46). Other sections of the text urge the reader to restrain anger for fear of creating future negative karmic results, such as rebirth in hell (BCA 6:69-74). The chapter finishes with a verse listing the traditional positive karmic consequences of patience: beauty, health, charisma, long life, and the joys of a king (BCA 6:134).

Effort (*vīrya*), the subject of the seventh chapter, is defined as “enthusiasm for virtue,” and is said to be the antidote to factors that impede spiritual progress like sloth, apathy and self-contempt (BCA 7:2). Śāntideva spends much of this chapter characterizing with graphic intensity the terrors that await us at the time of death and in future negative rebirths. The eighth chapter is named after meditative concentration (*dhyāna*), although much of it focuses on the faults of *saṃsāra*. It also includes an extended series of meditations designed to develop compassion towards other beings, some of which are commented on elsewhere in this dissertation.

A distinctive feature of Mahāyāna texts is the claim that the most significant virtues of the bodhisattva path, in particular generosity, ethical discipline, patience, effort, and concentration, are perfected through the wisdom that realizes the emptiness of all phenomena. Generosity, for instance, is perfected when one sees oneself as giver, the gift, and the recipient as empty of intrinsic existence (Candrakīrti 2004, 61). As a result,

no attachment for any particular result from the giving will arise. Consider, for instance, feeling indignant that a person is not grateful for a carefully chosen gift, or does not repay a gift in the future. The claim of the Mahāyānist is that it is only by realizing the emptiness of phenomena that such attachment-laden responses will be eliminated. Similar remarks apply to the other Mahāyāna virtues; for instance, realizing the emptiness of one's ethical restraint will ward off pride. Śāntideva's own treatment of wisdom (*prajñā*), which occupies the ninth chapter of the BCA, focuses largely on warding off misunderstandings of the Madhyamaka Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness, and defending it against various Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical opponents.

### **Buddhist Virtues and Psychological Flourishing**

I have already remarked that the virtuous mental qualities (*kuśala dharma*) are those that reduce the suffering of oneself or other persons. These virtuous mental qualities, however, do not directly eliminate either the physical or the mental sensation (*vedanā*) of pain, but rather the negative mental factors (*akuśala dharma*) such as anger and attachment.<sup>106</sup> In Buddhist psychology, unpleasant sensation (*vedanā*) and negative mental factors (*akuśala dharma*) are closely related; negative emotional states like anger and attachment arise in response to pleasant or unpleasant feeling (*vedanā*). Nevertheless, both physical and mental painful and pleasant sensation are distinct from our emotional responses to them. I experience a pleasant sensation when I see, touch or taste the apple, and then the mental state of greed arises. I feel an unpleasant mental sensation when I think of the dentist, and then aversion to my impending visit arises.

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<sup>106</sup> I discuss the distinction between mental and physical pain on pps 11-12 of this study.



Strictly speaking, it is only sensation that is affective, not the mental factors like compassion and attachment. Certain mental factors are reliably linked to strong negative or positive sensation, however, so through association we think of them as being pleasant or painful in themselves. Take anger (*krodha*) as an example, which Asaṅga defines as “mental malevolence . . . caused by a present prejudice”(Asaṅga 2001, 29). Anger itself is the desire to harm the person we are angry at. It is always coupled by a sensation (*vedanā*) of mental pain (*caitasika-duḥkha*, or *daurmanasya*), and since these consistently co-occur, we identify the emotion of anger as itself being painful. What has really happened, however, is that an initially unpleasant sensation has given rise to an emotional response, which itself increases the strength of subsequent painful mental sensations that accompany the emotion. The painful physical feeling as I cut my knee is relatively mild, but my aversion to the discomfort increases newly arising painful mental sensations that accompany this emotional state.

Buddhist virtues dispel or prevent negative emotions (*kleśas*) from arising, and they therefore prevent the painful mental sensations that accompany this emotional response. They cannot, however, directly affect physical or mental painful sensation (*vedanā*) itself.<sup>107</sup> In fact, there are a number of passages in the Pali canon that portray the Buddha as experiencing physical pain, often with great mental tranquility.<sup>108</sup> As to whether enlightened beings can experience painful mental sensation (*caitasika-duḥkha vedanā*), here the early texts are divided. *The Questions of King Milinda* claims they

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<sup>107</sup> Ultimately, eliminating the afflictive mental states will also eliminate painful sensation, since sensation arises as a result of negative karmic traces (*vāsanā*) deposited by the afflictive mental states. Buddhist virtues do not directly eliminate painful sensation, however.

<sup>108</sup> For instance Bodhi 2000, 116-18: S i 27-30.

cannot,<sup>109</sup> but elsewhere the Buddha is portrayed as susceptible to mental discomfort. Perhaps most famously, upon attaining liberation he gives as a reason for his hesitation to teach that doing so would cause him weariness of mind (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, 260: M i 168).

Regardless of the textual tradition, according to Buddhist karma theory there should be nothing mysterious about mental pain arising in even fully awakened beings. Buddhists hold that pleasant and painful sensations (*vedanā*) arise as a result of past karmic action. For instance, when I touch the cactus, I feel tactile pain as a result of past karmic imprints ripening. Further, Buddhists accept that in addition to the five physical sense organs, there is a mental organ (*manas*) that synthesizes sensory data, and also experiences mental objects like thoughts and memories. When I think of the dentist, the unpleasant sensation that results when my mental organ (*manas*) connects with the idea of the dentist is also the result of the ripening of past karma. After attaining liberation by eliminating ignorance, *arhats* and Buddhas create no new karma, and at least according to the early Buddhist texts, do not take rebirth. For the remainder of their current life, however, they continue to feel physical painful sensation (*kāyika-duḥkha-vedanā*) as a result of past karma ripening. Although the texts are not consistent about this, it seems as though even a Buddha should continue to experience mental painful sensation (*caitasika-duḥkha-vedanā*) as well, as a result of contact between the mental organ and mental objects. Just as a Buddha is karmically wired to experience physical pain when he touches a cactus, he may be karmically wired to experience mental unpleasant sensation when he thinks of the dentist. Since all his afflicted mental states (*kleśas*) have been eliminated, however, he experiences no increase in painful mental sensation that would

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<sup>109</sup> Rhys Davids 1890, 69: Mil. 44. See also Bodhi 2000, 1263-4: S iv, 208.

accompany emotional aversion to these unpleasant physical or mental sensations. He does not become angry when stepping on the cactus, nor fearful when thinking of the dentist. Although he experiences unpleasant sensations, he experiences no deep suffering as a result of them.

If my account is correct, then the positive effect Buddhist virtues will have on welfare is a deeper abiding tranquility that is not disturbed by surface-level unpleasant physical and mental sensations. This marks a partial contrast between Buddhism, and hedonists like Mill and Bentham for whom surface-level hedonic sensations are at least an important element of what happiness consists in. This propensity of Buddhist virtues to diminish deep emotional pain, while leaving unaffected surface-level painful physical and mental sensation, suggests a similarity with the account of happiness developed by contemporary scholar Daniel Haybron. The key to Haybron's account of happiness is to distinguish between what he calls central and peripheral affective states. Central affective states are connected with one's emotional life, such as contentment, joy, anxiety and depression. Haybron contrasts these to peripheral affective states like momentary pleasure and pain, or "mild amusement or irritation." Haybron's claim is that happiness depends on central affective states, but has little to do with peripheral ones (Haybron 2008, 29-30). Experiencing a twinge of pain in one's back, eating a piece of candy, or even feeling mild irritation when unable to find one's keys will have little effect on how happy one is. Irritation that crosses over into anger, the joy of seeing old friends, and the satisfaction one takes from a long day's work, on the other hand, affects one's happiness. Haybron also includes in his account what he calls mood propensities, the disposition to experience relevant moods including "high-spiritedness" and "peace of mind" (Haybron

2001, 506). Happiness, for Haybron, is better characterized as “psychic flourishing,” rather than simply a predominance of pleasurable mental states over painful ones (Haybron 2008, 31).

Examining Śāntideva’s emphasis on restructuring our mental life to eliminate afflictive mental states (*kleśas*) suggests that the state the bodhisattva achieves through perfecting the virtues is much closer to the psychic flourishing model presented by Haybron, than a surface level pleasure and pain centered hedonism. The following verses come from the fifth chapter in which Śāntideva connects development of the virtuous mental habits of mindfulness and introspection with a deeply tranquil mind.

Where would there be leather enough to cover the entire world? The earth is covered over merely with the leather of my sandals. (BCA 5:13)

Likewise, I am unable to restrain external phenomena, but I shall restrain my own mind. What need is there to restrain anything else? (BCA 5:14)

The point of the image in BCA 5:13 is this: there are two ways to walk from my house to the store without hurting my feet. The less practical solution would be to cover the entire distance with a rubber mat to walk on. A better solution, of course, is to wear shoes. Likewise, an unpractical solution to avoid mental distress from anger and craving is to rearrange the entire universe so that nothing interferes with my desires. Since this is impossible, Śāntideva suggest that we instead adapt our minds so that anger and craving never arise, no matter what the situation. This is done in part by developing mindfulness and introspection, the closely related virtuous qualities emphasized in BCA chapter five, by means of which negative states are identified and immediately counteracted.

In the sixth chapter, which focuses on patience (*kṣānti*), Śāntideva talks explicitly about the pain that anger brings. Here we should remember that this is not simply painful mental sensation (*vedanā*) that even a liberated being (theoretically at least) could experience, but rather the deeper forms of painful sensation that accompany the emotion of anger arising when we do not get what we are attached to.

The mind does not find peace, nor does it enjoy pleasure and joy, nor does it find sleep or fortitude when the thorn of hatred dwells in the heart. (BCA 6:3)

Even dependents whom one rewards with wealth and honors wish to harm the master who is repugnant due to his anger. (BCA 6:4)

Even friends fear him. He gives, but is not served. In brief, there is nothing that can make an angry person happy. (BCA 6:5).

Much of the sixth chapter of the BCA is spent providing antidotes to anger, like the ones discussed in my brief survey of Śāntideva's virtues above. As a result of perfecting patience, Śāntideva claims that we should be able to maintain a happy state of mind, even when facing extreme adversity (BCA 6:9). At times, he is even more explicitly that it is possible to experience pain while maintaining a tranquil mind.

Not even in suffering (*duḥkha*) should a wise person disrupt his mental serenity, for the battle is with the mental afflictions; and in battle pain (*vyathā*) is easily obtained. (BCA 6:19)

None of this is to say that eliminating all painful sensation is not a concern of Śāntideva, or of Buddhism as a whole. In fact, the early Buddhist emphasis on ending rebirth must be explicable at least in part by a motivation to end all painful sensation. Since the *arhats* have eliminated the negative emotional states, the only reason for them to seek an end to rebirth is to end the painful physical (and perhaps also mental) sensations that continue to occur as a result of past karma. Nevertheless, passages like

these make clear that the main focus of a text like Śāntideva's BCA is eliminating the deeper suffering that accompanies the mental afflictions (*kleśas*).

Of course, the early Buddhist will also develop virtues like patience, and therefore benefit from their role in lessening the depth with which we experience pain. But an advantage the bodhisattva has is that compassion and love, both developed to an extraordinary degree on the bodhisattva path, are antidotes to anger. This is made explicit in *The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literature (Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra)* traditionally ascribed to Maitreya and Asaṅga:<sup>110</sup>

For a pigeon who greatly cherishes her young and stays and gathers them to herself, anger is precluded; it is just the same for a compassionate one concerning beings who are her children.

Where there is love, the thought of anger ceases. Where there is peace, malice ceases. Where there is benefit, deceit ceases. And where there is comforting, there is no more intimidation. (Thurman 2004, 172. 13:22-23)

The bodhisattva, then, will be able to develop these virtues more easily than his early Buddhist counterpart.

Although Haybron's psychic flourishing model of happiness helps illustrate the mental state of a highly advanced bodhisattva, there are a couple of qualifications that need to be made. First, it might be thought that the account given here provides evidence that Buddhism should be classified as a mental state theory, with the provision that the relevant state should be interpreted as an overall psychological state, rather than occurring sensations of a particular type. The Buddhist, however, need not necessarily identify the bodhisattva's mental state itself as constituting the agent's well-being. In line with the arguments I make in chapter two, we can here ask the further question of

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<sup>110</sup> Here, I use Robert Thurman's English translation of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*. A more literal translation would be *The Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras*.

whether it is the desire to obtain a state of psychic flourishing, or the psychological state itself, or the development of the virtues which lead to this state that contribute at the deepest level to the bodhisattva's welfare. In other words, accepting the importance of psychic flourishing is compatible with desire-satisfaction and objective-list theories of welfare, as well as expanded versions of mental-state theory. Although Buddhist texts pay great attention to what makes a life go better, it is simply not part of their project to mark out the foundational units of well-being, and therefore the Buddhist texts themselves will not answer this question.

Second, I want to address a potential tension between a psychic flourishing model of welfare like that developed by Haybron and Buddhist virtue theory. As explained above, Buddhist virtue theory takes occurring momentary positive and negative mental states as their primary object of analysis. It is not dispositional mood propensities or durable emotional states that are explicitly theorized in Buddhist virtue theory, but rather fragmentary emotional instants. This may appear to be in tension with Haybron's account of psychic flourishing. The concern here is that the Buddhist fragmentary account of causally connected instants cannot represent the rich and fluid psychological state assumed by an account of mental flourishing like Haybron's.

The best answer to this concern, I think, is to point out that the Buddhist must claim that the abhidharmic analysis of experience into radically discrete causally connected moments is able to explain many ordinary features of our experience that seem to possess continuity, such as watching a performance, having an engrossed conversation, athletic activity and so on. He could therefore likewise claim that the apparently enduring mental state of psychological flourishing would likewise be found, upon careful

mental analysis, to be comprised of discrete but closely connected mental experiences. In other words, if there is a tension between the abhidharmic analysis of experience and a Haybron like model of psychic flourishing, it is no greater than the tension between the abhidharmic analysis and our ordinary experience as a whole.

Further, we should remember that as a Madhyamaka, Śāntideva does not accept the abhidharma claim that experience can be analyzed into discrete mental states that are themselves unanalyzable. For Madhyamakas, the virtuous and unvirtuous mental factors themselves are analyzable into their causal conditions, and therefore are themselves conventional designations (*prajñapti*) empty of essential nature (*svabhāva*). What this means is that Madhyamakas like Śāntideva use the abhidharmic analysis as a convenient shorthand to help gain better control of mental development, rather than as an accurate representation of our mental lives. Tension between the abhidharmic analysis and ordinary experience, therefore, would be less troubling to the Madhyamaka, since he does not believe the abhidharmic list of virtues correctly characterize the reality of our mental lives.

In this section, I have argued that one of the ways Buddhist virtues increase the well-being of their possessor is by nurturing a deeply entrenched sense of emotional well-being, something close to what Daniel Haybron calls “psychic flourishing.” Realizing that this is the bodhisattva’s psychological condition goes a long way to explaining how development of the bodhisattva’s virtues drastically reduces the actual suffering a bodhisattva experiences in lives undertaken to benefit sentient beings. The bodhisattva would still experience physical, and for at least a time mental painful sensation during voluntarily rebirths. But a psychic flourishing account of happiness like Haybron’s can



accommodate the possibility that a person might be happy even while experiencing a good deal of pain. This is because the psychic flourishing model grounds happiness in deeply rooted emotional propensities, which have the potential for enduring painful surface sensations. We have already seen that Śāntideva claims the bodhisattva should maintain his mental tranquility even when enduring hardships. Making a connection between Śāntideva and Hayborn's psychic flourishing model of happiness suggests that such a bodhisattva might be called happy, even while experiencing pain in her attempt to help sentient beings.

### **Buddhist Virtues and Perfectionist Value**

In the last section, I showed that the development of certain virtues essential to the bodhisattva path, like introspection, mindfulness, and patience, results in a deeply rooted tranquil psychological state that is resistant to distress even when painful sensation is experienced. This provides yet another way that the bodhisattva path will be less demanding than it seems; however, it does not show that it is actually in the practitioner's interest to aspire to full Buddhahood. This is because these virtues can be developed fully, or at least to a very high level, by the early Buddhist aiming at individual liberation, as well as by the bodhisattva. It would seem, then, that it would be better for the individual to concentrate on the self-benefiting virtues like patience, and avoid intense development of virtues like generosity, compassion and *bodhicitta* that lead the bodhisattva to make sacrifices for the sake of sentient beings.

In this section, I explore another kind of potential positive effect that the development of the bodhisattva's virtues has for the practitioner, which I will refer to as

“Śāntideva’s perfectionism.”<sup>111</sup> A perfectionist theory focuses on the development of traits important to, and perhaps distinctive of human beings. Following Thomas Hurka, we can distinguish between narrow and broad kinds of perfectionisms. Narrow perfectionists emphasize developing our essential nature; for instance, Aristotle’s ethics stresses performance of rational activity throughout a lifetime. Likewise, broad perfectionists emphasize the development of human talents and abilities, but unlike narrow perfectionists, they do not claim that humans have an essential nature to develop (Hurka 1993, 4).

It is difficult to argue that Śāntideva is a narrow perfectionist, since as a Madhyamaka he believes nothing has an essential nature (*svabhāva*), and therefore cannot literally hold that humans possess a unique essence that can be developed. It would be possible, however, for a Madhyamaka to ascribe to a broad perfectionism. Taking the Buddhist stock example of the chariot to illustrate this point, it is unproblematic for a Buddhist to point out that this assemblage of causally connected parts is conducive to quick speed, and valuing this property in no way commits him to a metaphysics emphasizing the existence of an independent unitary chariot with essential properties. Likewise, a Madhyamaka can claim that there are facts about certain assemblages of physical and mental moments that result in certain human capabilities such as the ability to prevent or lessen suffering. A Buddhist broad perfectionism, then, can claim that developing the bodhisattva’s suffering-reducing virtues has perfectionist value, in being a distinctive and important kind of human achievement.

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<sup>111</sup> See also Jenkins (1999, 109) who characterizes full awakening as the “supreme self-empowerment” of the bodhisattva. .

An analogy may be helpful in explaining what is distinctive about this approach. We value the achievements of Olympic athletes not because of their direct benefits to us, but because they are the highest examples of a certain kind of achievement possible for human bodies and minds. There is nothing intrinsically wonderful about thrusting a metal ball through the air, and yet we praise the excellent shot-putter because he has excelled at demonstrating the limit of what human strength can achieve. Likewise, part of our admiration for actors such as Katherine Hepburn or musicians like Yo-yo Ma is that they have reached the greatest heights of a unique kind of human achievement. We can praise these accomplishments without committing ourselves to a metaphysics that claims these talents rise out of a distinctive human essence. Likewise, Śāntideva can claim that the bodhisattva's skill in removing suffering is itself praiseworthy, and in this sense has a value that goes beyond the total amount of pain she eliminates.

This perfectionist strand is seen in verses from the BCA that characterize the bodhisattva ideal, and the development of *bodhicitta*, as praiseworthy.

When *bodhicitta* has arisen, in an instant a  
wretch who is bound in the prison of the cycle of existence is  
called a Child of the Sugatas and becomes worthy of  
reverence in the worlds of gods and humans. (BCA 1:9, translation altered)

Now my life is fruitful. Human existence is well obtained.  
Today I have been born into the family of the Buddhas. Now  
I am a Child of the Buddha. (BCA 3:25)

Thus, whatever I do now should accord with [the  
Bodhisattvas'] family, and it should not be like a stain on this  
pure family. (BCA 3:26)

The reference in the first quoted verse about the bodhisattva being praised by “gods and humans” shows that the achievement of full Buddhahood, which the bodhisattva aims at, is seen as an accomplishment worthy of veneration by any being in

the universe, no matter how powerful. The second verse comes after the bodhisattva commits to the bodhisattva path, and illustrates that this alone makes human rebirth worthwhile. All three verses, moreover, emphasize that the praiseworthiness of the beginning bodhisattva is due to being in the lineage of the Buddhas. Even an early stage bodhisattva still struggling with the mental afflictions has a share in the perfectionist value achieved by the Buddhas who have come before.

Other verses suggest that we should accept the bodhisattva path as praiseworthy, since it has been examined by the Buddhas and past bodhisattvas and has been found to be worthwhile.

Although one has made a commitment, it is appropriate [to reconsider] whether or not to do that which has been rashly undertaken and which has not been well considered. (BCA 4:2)

But shall I discard that which has been examined by the sagacious Buddhas and their Children, as well as by myself according to the best of my abilities? (BCA 4:3)

Here we can remember that one of the qualities of a Buddha is a limited omniscience, and so they would be particularly well suited to judge the value of what they have achieved.

Often the focus of praise is not the bodhisattva path per se, but the root bodhisattva virtue of *bodhicitta*.

The world's sole leaders, whose minds are fathomless, have well examined its great value. You who are inclined to escape from the states of mundane existence, hold fast to the jewel of *bodhicitta*. (BCA 1:11, translation altered)

Just as a plantain tree decays upon losing its fruit, so does every other virtue wane. But the tree of *bodhicitta* perpetually bears fruit, does not decay, and only flourishes. (BCA 1:12, translation altered)

Just as a blind man might find a jewel amongst heaps of rubbish,  
so *bodhicitta* has somehow arisen in me. (BCA 3:27, translation altered)

In other verses, the bodhisattva who travels on the path to full awakening is directly praised.

He satisfies with all joys those who are starving for  
happiness and eliminates all the sorrows of those who are  
afflicted in many ways. (BCA 1:29)

He dispels delusion. Where else is there such a saint? Where  
else is there such a friend? Where else is there such merit? (BCA 1:30)

The world honors as virtuous one who makes a gift to a few  
people, even if it is merely a momentary and contemptuous  
donation of plain food and support for half a day. (BCA 1:32)

What then of one who forever bestows to countless sentient  
beings the fulfillment of all yearnings, which is inexhaustible  
until the end of beings as limitless as space? (BCA 1:33)

The perfectionist strand of Śāntideva's thought represented in these verses is important because it provides another answer to the question of why one should commit to the arduous process of becoming a bodhisattva. One response to this question that reappears throughout the text is that the development and finally perfection of the bodhisattva's virtues represents a uniquely valuable human achievement that is praiseworthy much as the achievements of an Olympic athlete would be. Even the deities acknowledge that the life of the bodhisattva is simply the most admirable life any sentient being might lead.

Does this perfectionist strand to Śāntideva's text provide a way that developing the virtues of bodhisattvahood actually benefits the bodhisattva? It has been a controversial point in Western philosophy as to whether perfectionist value, of itself, benefits its possessor. Aristotle claims that developing our rational nature, which he

takes to be essential to human beings, is largely what human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) consists in. Aristotle, however, is a narrow perfectionist in Hurka's sense, and makes this claim because he believes rational activity constitutes what is essential to being a fully functional human. The connection between a narrow perfectionism and the flourishing of the agent is quite close. If humans have an essential nature, then quite plausibly our lives would be deeply impoverished if we did not develop it. In fact, some varieties of Mahāyāna Buddhism might endorse a narrow perfectionism. In particular, the *tathāgatagarba* tradition holds that there is an essential Buddha nature that is recovered when the defilements are eliminated. Such a school might claim that developing the compassion of a bodhisattva represents an aspect of recovering our true nature, and that this is therefore necessarily to lead a truly flourishing life.

I have already noted, however, that a Madhyamaka like Śāntideva cannot be characterized as a narrow perfectionist. Moreover, it is less clear how closely related perfectionist value and well-being are for a broad perfectionism which simply emphasizes developing distinctive human talents and abilities without claiming they represent an essential human nature. The Olympic athlete may be universally praised for her achievements on the field, and yet we might still hold that her many years of self-sacrifice to her sport have left her less well off than had she lived a more balanced life. Likewise, one might claim that the bodhisattva's virtuous development is admirable, without accepting that the achievement it represents of itself makes the bodhisattva's life go better. What this suggests, instead, is that for Śāntideva the perfectionist value of fully developing the bodhisattva's virtues provides good reasons for adopting the bodhisattva's path, even if it does not increase our well-being in any obvious way.

## **Conclusion:**

In this chapter, I have argued that the suffering the bodhisattva experiences as a result of committing acts of apparent self-sacrifice motivated by development of other-regarding virtues like generosity and compassion is less than it appears. This is because the development of other virtues, such as introspection, mindfulness and patience results in a deeply rooted tranquil psychological state that is resistant to emotional distress, even when surface level sensations of pain are experienced. Nevertheless, these suffering-reducing virtues are also developed by early Buddhists who do not commit to perfecting the other-regarding virtues. This suggests that it is not obvious that completely developing the full set of the bodhisattva's virtues is in her interest, since early Buddhists can prioritize development of the virtues that benefit oneself. Of course, this loss may be outweighed by other factors, such as the bodhisattva's psychological identification of their own good with the good of others that I will discuss in the next chapter.

I also considered whether the perfectionist strand of Śāntideva's text might compensate the bodhisattva for the sacrifices he makes to help others. I argued that since Śāntideva cannot be plausibly construed as a narrow perfectionist, who holds there is an essential human nature to be developed, this is unlikely. Nevertheless, the perfectionist value of the bodhisattva's virtues still provides good reasons for taking their development as a goal, even though this might not directly result in an increase in the well-being of the bodhisattva.

## Chap 5: No-Self and Demandingness

In the last chapter, I showed how the development of certain Buddhist virtues, like patience, mindfulness, and introspection, greatly lessens demandingness by helping the bodhisattva to radically decrease mental pain, even when undergoing physically painful experience. This chapter will continue to consider how virtues contribute to well-being, although here the virtue to be examined will be wisdom (*prajñā*), in its aspect of understanding the nonexistence of any enduring, independent self. I begin by examining a passage from the Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu in which he considers how bodhisattvas are psychologically able to commit to the demanding task of becoming fully awakened Buddhas. I argue that Vasubandhu's comments provide insight into several closely related demand-lessening strategies connected to the development of wisdom. First, developing wisdom benefits the bodhisattva by reducing mental pain from fear and attachment to one's body and well-being. Second, the bodhisattva uses the psychological flexibility achieved from realizing no-self to radically identify his well-being with that of others. I illustrate how these strategies are developed by Śāntideva in his BCA, and argue that they lessen the demandingness the bodhisattva faces, or even result in a gain of well-being when he satisfies his desire to help others, or experiences joy from doing so.

Although as far as I know no Buddhist text explicitly formulates and responds to the overdemandingness objection, one of the authors to come close to doing so is Vasubandhu, in his *Commentary to the Treasury of Higher Doctrine*, or *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, where he considers the question of why anyone would take on the incredibly difficult task of becoming a bodhisattva. Vasubandhu's concern is to show that it is *psychologically possible* to adopt the bodhisattva path, and he is not trying to



show how benefiting others also benefits the bodhisattva and lessens demandingness.

Nevertheless, after considering Vasubandhu's comments, I will argue that they help us understand how several elements of a Buddhist response to the overdemandingness objection would go.

For what reason do they undertake the effort? They make the effort for the welfare of others, so they would become able to rescue others from the great flood of suffering. How does the welfare of others benefit them? Since they desire the welfare of others, it is their own welfare.<sup>112</sup>

Vasubandhu claims that bodhisattvas undertake the demanding task of becoming buddhas because they identify their own well-being with the well-being of others.<sup>113</sup>

Many of us have this kind of attitude towards our children or close friends and family; a parent will herself flourish when her child flourishes, even if this requires undertaking hardships for the child's well-being. What is astounding is that the bodhisattva takes this attitude towards all sentient beings, including strangers. Here we might wonder how this is even psychologically possible. Vasubandhu continues:

Some people take delight in the pain of others because they lack compassion as a result of always focusing on their own welfare. Likewise, [bodhisattvas] take delight in doing actions for the welfare of others, since they lack all concern about themselves, because of repeatedly feeling compassion. Just as those who are ignorant of the mark of conditionality of conditioned selfless elements, who by the power of repeated practice have become settled in attachment to the self, endure suffering because of this [self]. Likewise, [bodhisattvas], after eliminating attachment towards the self arising from these [erroneously grasped selfless

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<sup>112</sup> yadyapyanyathâpyasti mokṣâvakâûa:, kimarthaṃ ta iyantaṃ yatnamârabhante? parârthaṃ ta iyantaṃ yatnamârabhante 'kathaṃ parânapi mahato duḥkhaughât paritrâtuṃ úaknuyâm' itil ka eṣâṃ parârthena svârthaḥ? eṣa eva teṣâṃ svârtho yaḥ parârthaḥ, tasyâbhimatatvât| Vasubandhu 1988, 430. See also the English translation by Pruden in Vasubandhu 1988, 480-81. The reference to desire might be taken to suggest Vasubandhu ascribes to a desire-satisfaction theory of wellbeing, but I think this is too quick. It is compatible with this quote to hold that Buddhists are hedonists who hold satisfaction of desire is valuable since it brings pleasure. Other theories of wellbeing might also be defended. My point is that mentioning satisfaction of desire provides little evidence for a particular foundational theory of wellbeing, since most theories will give some value to the satisfaction of desires.

<sup>113</sup> See also Vasubandhu's commentary to the *Universal Vehicle Discourse Literature* (*Mahâyānasūtrālamkāra*): "When suffering must be endured, the bodhisattva will be able to find pleasure even in that suffering, as it serves as the cause of helping others" (Thurman 2004, 209).

elements], through the power of repeated practice, increase concern for others and endure suffering on account of them. The family [of bodhisattvas] comes from another lineage which experiences suffering because others suffer, and happiness because other are happy, not from their own happiness.<sup>114</sup>

In the above passage, Vasubandhu links the selfish attitudes persons obsessed with their own welfare display to ignorance about the selfless and conditioned nature of the elements making up the conventional person. In other words, the selfishness of ordinary persons arises because they erroneously believe themselves to be unitary, enduring and self-subsisting selves. The reason bodhisattvas are psychologically able to care more for strangers than they do for themselves is that they have overcome this belief in an enduring self. Here, we should remember that Buddhists hold that there is no enduring self (*ātman*) that grounds our identity, but rather that “person” is merely a conventional designation (*prajñapti*) we give to mental and physical events in close causal interaction, what Vasubandhu calls “the conditioned elements,” that account for human experience. Further, they claim that our egoistic concern is rooted in misidentifying this impermanent conventionally existing self as an enduring unitary self that is not dependent on conventional labeling for its existence. Since the bodhisattva has eliminated his belief in this self, his egoistic selfishness has been destroyed.

According to Vasubandhu, then, understanding the nonexistence of any enduring independent self has two related psychological effects that explain how it is psychologically possible for bodhisattvas to commit so radically to the welfare of others. First, elimination of belief in self eliminates self-cherishing, and once this deeply rooted

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<sup>114</sup> yathā ceha kecidabhyastanairghṛnyā astyapi svārthe paravyasanābhiratā upalabhyantel tathā - narabhyastakārunyā asatyapi svārthe parahitakriyābhirāmāḥ santīti sambhāvyam| yathāiva cābhyāsavaśādanātmabhūteṣu saṃskāreṣu saṃskṛtatalakṣaṇānabhijñā ātmasnehaṃ niveśya taddhetorduḥkhānyudvahanti, evaṃ-unarabhyāsavaśādātmasnehaṃ tebhyo nirvartya pareṣvapekṣāṃ vardhayitvā taddhetorduḥkhānyudvahantīti sambhāvyam| gotrāntarameva hi tat tathājātīyaṃ nirvartate yat pareṣāṃ duḥkhena duḥkhāyate sukkena sukhāyate, nātmana itil Vasubandhu 1988, 430. See also the English translation by Pruden in Vasubandhu 1988, 481.

selfishness has been destroyed, it will be easier for the bodhisattva in training to give up his possessions and even his life for others. Second, the destruction of the belief in an enduring self results in an extreme psychological flexibility, which allows the bodhisattva to radically identify his well-being with the well-being of others. Unlike most of us, who can only deeply do this with close friends and family, the bodhisattva takes the well-being of everyone in the whole universe as his goal.

In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, Vasubandhu is writing from the perspective of early Buddhism that holds *arhatship* is an acceptable goal, and he does not claim that destroying the innate belief in self will necessarily lead one to become a bodhisattva. His remarks here are distinct from Śāntideva's arguments that we are obligated to commit to impartial benevolence and accept the bodhisattva path. Further, his goal is not to argue that the bodhisattva path is not overly demanding, but to show how it is psychologically possible for one to undertake its difficulties. Nevertheless, as I will explain below, both of the psychological effects of realizing no-self Vasubandhu identifies are also relevant to the goal of Mahāyāna authors like Śāntideva who seek to reduce the demandingness of the bodhisattva path.

This point may be seen as an extension of the strategy I developed in the last chapter, which focused on the demand-lessening aspects of the bodhisattva's virtues. The virtue in question is now wisdom (*prajñā*), which Śāntideva devotes the ninth chapter of his BCA to explaining and defending. Wisdom, for Śāntideva, refers to the realization that all phenomena are empty (*sūnya*) of intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*). This means that they have no essence of their own, but arise only in dependence upon their parts, causes and conditions and conceptual labeling. This doctrine is an expansion of the early

Buddhist belief in no-self. Like the early Buddhists, Śāntideva and the Madhyamaka Buddhist school to which he belongs hold that persons are merely conventional designations (*prajñapti*), a way of conveniently treating an assemblage of mental and physical impermanent events together. The Madhyamaka emphasizes, in contrast to certain early Buddhist schools, that all phenomena are empty of essence (*svabhāva*) in this way; not just persons, but the objects they encounter in the world, as well as the parts making up these objects are conceptual fictions, themselves designated upon an assemblage of parts, causes and conditions and so on. For our purposes, however, we can ignore the difference in scope between the early Buddhist doctrine of no-self and the wisdom realizing emptiness emphasized by Śāntideva and other Madhyamakas. This is because the demand-lessening aspects of the realization of wisdom that I will be emphasizing from Śāntideva's text focus upon the realization that no enduring self exists.

Śāntideva provides arguments at several places in the BCA intended to establish the truth of the nonexistence of an enduring self. These passages double as meditations designed to help the aspirant who intellectually accepts selflessness to deepen this understanding and integrate it into her life. One of the strategies Śāntideva uses repeatedly is to run through various possible referents of the I and point out that none of them are acceptable.

Teeth, hair, and nails are not I, nor am I bone, blood, mucus, phlegm, pus, or lymph. (BCA 9:57)

Bodily oil is not I, nor are sweat, fat, or entrails. The cavity of the entrails is not I, nor is excrement or urine. (BCA 9:58)

Flesh is not I, nor are sinews, heat, or wind. Bodily apertures are not I, nor, in any way, are the six consciousnesses. (BCA 9:59)

The assumption behind verses like this is that if a unitary enduring self existed, we should be able to find it by surveying the contents of our body and mind. Obviously, none of the above body parts can be the enduring self, since they are all impermanent. Moreover, they do not match the attributes of the self, since they are unconscious.

In other passages, Śāntideva considers whether any mental aspects of my experience might serve as the referent of the I.

The past or future mind is not "I," since it does not exist. If the present mind were "I," then when it had vanished, the "I" would not exist any more. (BCA 9:73)

Just as the trunk of a plantain tree is nothing when cut into pieces, in the same way, the "I" is non-existent when sought analytically. (BCA 9:74)

Here, Śāntideva points out that entities in the past and future can't be the referent of the word "I", since they have not yet come into existence, or have already perished. Current moments of consciousness, however, are impermanent, arising and dissolving all the time, and therefore cannot be the enduring self.

One of the benefits of eliminating the belief in any enduring self, according to Śāntideva, is the lessening and finally elimination of the pain accompanying fear. One connection between fear and the realization of selflessness, made by other Buddhist authors, is that realizing we are not enduring selves means understanding that there is literally no enduring self to face death and harmful situations. The great Buddhist commentator Buddhaghōṣa makes this point in a passage we already considered in another context in the third chapter:

[The deluded person] is confused about death, instead of taking death thus, 'Death in every case is break-up of aggregates', he figures that it is a [lasting] being that

dies, that it is a [lasting] being's transmigration to another incarnation, and so on. (Buddhagoṣa 1991, 555)

The basic idea is simple. Once one has realized at the deepest level that there is no enduring independent entity that grounds identity, then fear of the destruction of that being will be gone. Intellectually accepting the nonexistence of self may result in some lessening of fear, but deeper benefits accrue when one realizes this deeply in meditation, and begins to actually relate to oneself as a dependently arisen convention entity.

Although Śāntideva would accept this point made by Buddhagoṣa, his own treatment of the relation between selflessness and fear is slightly different.

If there were something called "I," fear could come from anywhere. If there is no "I," whose fear will there be? (BCA 9:56)

Śāntideva points out here that if we accept no-self, then there is no enduring being to possess fear. Realizing this will undercut the terror we experience when we face difficult experiences. We can connect this insight with Śāntideva's use of afflicted energy arising from fear that I considered in my third chapter. As long as we do not deeply believe in the nonexistence of an enduring self, fear will arise, and can be rechanneled towards liberative purposes. Once this belief is eradicated, however, then the suffering of fear itself will be no more.

The well-being enhancing role of passages like these is fairly obvious. Although they will explain its disvalue slightly differently, almost any theory of well-being will assign a negative value to at least most instances of the pain accompanying fear. Most mental state theories will classify it as a kind of suffering that lowers the welfare of the experiencing individual. Of course, this mental pain may still have an instrumental value

in keeping the individual from greater kinds of suffering, but at least of itself it has a negative value. Likewise, a desire-theory would recognize that almost everyone desires to be free from fear, and the suffering it causes, and thereby assign value to satisfying this goal. An objective list theory could incorporate one or both of these ways of treating the pain of fear into its list of what makes a life go better.<sup>115</sup> Wisdom, then, which is partly constituted by the realization of selflessness, helps protect the well-being of the individual by guarding her from this kind of pain.

For the bodhisattva who undergoes severe austerities for sentient beings' benefit, this advantage of wisdom has a particular importance. Most of us would experience terrible fear when facing horrible events such as amputation of a limb, sacrificing our life or taking rebirth in a negative realm. The bodhisattva, however, will not attempt these tasks until her realization of selflessness is strong, and therefore her experience of fear will be greatly attenuated. Wisdom, thereby, lessens the demandingness of the bodhisattva path by reducing the mental pain the bodhisattva experiences as she works for sentient beings.

A second benefit from realizing the nonexistence of the self is alluded to explicitly in the passage by Vasubandhu when he talks about eliminating attachment to the self. Śāntideva treats this issue in a passage referred to in the introduction when I discussed the gradual nature of the bodhisattva path.

At the beginning, the Guide<sup>116</sup> prescribes giving vegetables and the like. One does it gradually so that later one can give away even one's own flesh (BCA 7:25).

When wisdom [*prajñā*] arises that one's own flesh is like a vegetable,

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<sup>115</sup> Of course, this is not an exhaustive survey of possible theories of well-being, but arguably any plausible theory will at least usually place negative value on experiencing fear.

<sup>116</sup> Guide here refers to the Buddha.

then what difficulty is there in giving away one's flesh and bone? (BCA 7:26, translation modified)<sup>117</sup>

The verses refer to the bodhisattva's practice of sacrificing his body for others.

The reference to one's own flesh being like a vegetable indicates his realization that the body does not belong to oneself in any deep way. Rather the body is merely a collection of momentary physical events in close causal association with mental events that are together labeled the person. There is no enduring entity within this collection that owns anything. In this way, the body is like any external possession, such as a vegetable.<sup>118</sup> Śāntideva's claim is that once this is realized, our attachment to our body will be radically diminished, so that giving away our limbs or even our lives will be no different in kind than giving up any other possession. This strategy is matched with other meditations within the BCA that emphasize the foul and unpleasant nature of the body, which suggest it is not even a particularly valuable possession that we should be distressed about surrendering.<sup>119</sup>

As before, the value of this realization to our well-being is easy to establish.

Whether we talk about it in terms of mental states of suffering, or the desire to avoid these states, our attachment to our body threatens our well-being when the body is threatened. Once selflessness is realized, according to Śāntideva, the bodhisattva will

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<sup>117</sup> Wallace and Wallace translate "*prajñā*" as "insight." I use "wisdom" to make explicit the connection with the theme of this chapter.

<sup>118</sup> Also relevant here is the following passage from Śāntideva's ŚS: "Well-born son, just as a medicinal plant, when it is stripped of its roots, stripped of its stalk, branches, bark, or leaves, stripped of its flowers, fruits, or sap, does not imagine, "I am being stripped of my roots," and so on until "I am being stripped of my sap," but instead without imagining [this] at all, it eliminates the illnesses of living beings—whether they are lowly, average, or superior living beings—so too, well-born son, a bodhisattva mahāsattva should regard his bodied being [ātmabhāva], which is composed of the four great elements, as medicine, [thinking], "Let any living beings whatsoever take absolutely anything of mine for any purpose whatsoever— a hand for those wanting a hand, a foot for those wanting a foot," as stated previously." Cited in Mrozik 2007, 24, translation by Mrozik.

<sup>119</sup> Numerous examples can be found during Śāntideva's charnel ground meditations in BCA 8:41-71.



stop experiencing mental suffering resulting from this attachment. Of particular importance to this study, it will therefore result in a great lessening of mental anguish when the bodhisattva is called upon to sacrifice his body for others.

The two kinds of benefits of realizing no-self just discussed are similar in that they both emphasize a reduction in mental pain during what would usually be extraordinarily demanding tasks. There is, however, another kind of demand-lessening strategy that can be reconstructed from the passages I quoted by Vasubandhu. This is referred to when he says that the bodhisattva takes the welfare of others to be his own welfare, and because of this, takes great joy when sentient beings are benefited. We see this kind of identification with the well-being of others to a limited degree in the identification of a parent with their child. Even if the parent sacrifices great amounts of time and money, we will probably agree that the parent's life goes better when the child flourishes. Most of us, however, only strongly identify with the well-being of close friends and family. What is extraordinary about the bodhisattva is that he takes this attitude towards all living beings.

The reason the bodhisattva can so radically identify his well-being with all persons is that, as a result of his realization of selflessness, his conception of his identity has become extremely fluid. This allows him to take the role of parent to all sentient beings, fully identifying his welfare with theirs. The result is psychological transformation that, on most plausible theories of well-being, connects the well-being of the bodhisattva with those he serves. First, he experiences great joy when sentient beings are liberated from suffering. Second, she desires the well-being of others, and successfully satisfies these desires by aiding them. Since most plausible theories of well-

being will give value to the satisfaction of desires, or experiencing joyful mental states, this identification with the needs of others will result in an increase in the well-being of the bodhisattva when she successfully aids others.

Śāntideva, drawing upon the realization of the nonexistence of any enduring self, writes in detail about this psychological transformation, in which concern for one's own well-being is replaced by concern for others. In the verses below, he describes how the bodhisattva undergoes this shift.

Just as the notion of a self with regard to one's own body, which has no personal existence, is due to habituation, will the identity of one's self with others not arise out of habituation in the same way? (BCA 8:115)

Therefore, just as you wish to protect yourself from pain, grief and the like, so may you cultivate a spirit of protection and a spirit of compassion toward the world. (BCA 8: 117)

The first verse points out that, since there is no enduring self, the body does not belong to us in any deep way, and it is only because of habit that we believe it to do so. Therefore, we can take that same habit of identification and shift it to others, thinking of their bodies as if they are our own. The second verse claims that this imaginative reidentification of our identity with other people results in the concern for their well-being arising with the same strength as we currently feel for our own well-being.

Śāntideva also provides a number of meditations and arguments to help us value the well-being of others as much as our own, such as this one, in which he draws our attention to the suffering that others experience.

One should first earnestly meditate on the equality of oneself and others in this way: "All equally experience suffering and happiness, and I must protect them as I do myself." (BCA 8: 90)

In the verse below, he combines the claim that eliminating self cherishing reduces my own suffering with the claim that identifying our well-being with that of others brings us great joy.

All those who are unhappy in the world are so as a result of their desire for their own happiness. All those who are happy in the world are so as a result of their desire for the happiness of others. (BCA 8: 129)

There is a *jataka* story telling of a former life of the Buddha in which we find a particularly graphic employment of the demand-lessening strategies explained above. In the story, the Buddha is born as a bodhisattva who is the ruler of a kingdom, and has been asked by hungry demons for flesh and blood to feast on. The bodhisattva feels pity for the demons, but since he will not harm his subjects to satisfy their needs, he decides to offer his own flesh and blood as food (Āryaśūra 2010, 84-87). Fascinatingly, the description of the bodhisattva cutting at his flesh with a sword acknowledges the physical pain he feels, while insisting it is overwhelmed by the joy he experiences in his act of giving.

The pain of being cut was not able to disturb the mind of [the bodhisattva] because of his continual experience of the joy of giving during the whole time of deprivation. (8:44)

The pain, called forth by the falling of the sharp sword, but cast far away by this continual joy, was slow in entering his mind, as if lazy and despondent. (8:45)

Thus he, being filled with deep joy, was satisfying those demons with his own flesh. (8:46ab, all three verses my translation)<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> hriyamāṇāvakāśaṁ tu dānaprītyā punaḥ punaḥ| na prasehe manastasya cchedaduḥkhaṁ vigāhitum||44|| ākṛṣyamāṇaṁ śitaśasrapātaiḥ prītyā punar-dūmramapāsyamānam| khedālasatvādiva tasya duḥkhaṁ manaḥsamutsarpaṇamandamāsīt||45|| sa prītimāneva niśācarāmstānsantarpayansvaiḥ piśitaistathāsīt| I used the online version of the P.L. Vaidya edition (1960) from the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon to make my translation. <http://www.dsbcproject.org/node/7096>. In verse 45, I read “dūram” for “dūmram,” and “śastra” for “śasra.”

The second quoted verse makes clear that the bodhisattva experiences the physical pain, which would ordinarily be agony, of the sword cutting away at his flesh. Nevertheless, as all three verses explain, the bodhisattva's joy at the act of giving is so great that his mind is not disturbed by it. The image of the bodhisattva hacking away at his flesh to feed evil demons is graphic and disturbing, but we can imagine common sense equivalents, like a tattoo aficionado taking delight in getting a new tattoo, even though he does not like the pain of the needle itself. The bodhisattva's joyful self-mutilation represents the limit-case, most plausibly made possible by his realization of selflessness which allows him to radically identify his wellbeing with that of others.<sup>121</sup> In these quoted verses, then, we find all of the demand-lessening techniques I have identified in this chapter. The bodhisattva displays no fear or mental anguish over the sacrifice he is about to make. More explicit in these passages, however, is the great joy the bodhisattva experiences as a result of acting to benefit others, which compensates him for the physical distress he endures.

In Śāntideva's own writing, we see the results of the bodhisattva's radical identification with the well-being of others in the pair of verses that I quoted in the introduction in which he links what appears to be the ultimate sacrifice of descending into hell with the great joy the bodhisattva experiences when suffering beings are aided.

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<sup>121</sup> Although realization of the non-existence of the self is not explicitly referenced in these passages, since a high-level bodhisattva will have made great progress towards this realization, it is a fair assumption that this at least partially accounts for the bodhisattva's ability to face this physical torture without mental distress. Interestingly, however, the strategy that is explicitly referred to in the story is more closely aligned to the analysis of ordinary experience as pervaded by suffering explored in the second chapter of this dissertation, with the bodhisattva's body itself being viewed as contaminated and unsatisfactory. "Like a malignant ulcer, this body is always sick and an abode of pain. Now I will return it that grief by availing myself of it for the accomplishment of an extraordinary performance of surpassing loveliness" (Āryaśūra 2010, 87).

Thus, those whose mind-streams are cultivated in meditation and who equally accept the suffering of others dive into the Avīci hell like swans into a pool of lotuses. (BCA 8: 107)

They become oceans of joy when sentient beings are liberated. Have they not found fulfillment? What is the use of sterile liberation? (BCA 8: 108)

Although the image of the bodhisattva joyfully descending into hell beautifully illustrates Śāntideva's linkage of altruism and self-interest, both it and the story of the bodhisattva sacrificing his flesh raise an obvious objection to this strategy. The bodhisattva's embracement of these apparently extreme demands might seem a fantasy of self-flagellation, rather than a praiseworthy ideal of personal perfection. The initial response to this concern is to point out that the basic strategy of psychological transformation employed by Mahāyāna Buddhists is an intuitively plausible way of at least *somewhat* lessening demandingness. We can see this by using everyday examples, such as the parent caring for the child, or the cheerful volunteer taking great joy while giving up his Sunday afternoon in service. Surely it is plausible to claim that a well-off donor, signing away a modest portion of a paycheck to a scholarship fund, while taking great pride in having increased educational accessibility, has contributed to the flourishing of his own life.

Many of us will judge, however, that there are limits to the level of time and resources that an individual can contribute before putting her own flourishing into jeopardy. One concern, here, is the possibility of psychologically deluding ourselves about how much it is healthy for us to give. Theories of welfare would characterize this concern in different ways. For example, a hedonism might give the agent welfare credit for an initial burst of manic generosity, but this would be outweighed by regret, as well as distress from future lack of resources. In response, the Buddhist can claim that when

belief in an enduring self is completely eliminated, because selfishness is eradicated, future regrets will not arise and mental distress from future poverty will be minimal or nonexistent. What this shows is that although the Buddhist strategy of demand-lessening is itself sound, the Buddhist's radical use of it depends upon controversial assumptions about the psychological effects of realizing no-self.

A second concern arises if we accept a theory of well-being that marks as particularly valuable pursuits like artistic achievement, career success, time spent with family and so on. An objective list theory might grant these items intrinsic value, while a desire-satisfaction or hedonic theory might claim achieving these types of goals, or experiencing the pleasure associated with them has a particularly high welfare value. The concern now is that the requirements of the bodhisattva path will not allow us to pursue these items. Even if we grant that the satisfaction taken from helping others has welfare value for the individual, this will be outweighed by the loss of these welfare-contributing items.<sup>122</sup>

Again, the Buddhist response will depend on a controversial principle, this time the Buddhist analysis of ordinary existence as saturated by subtle forms of suffering (*duhkha*) which I explored in chapter two. The Buddhist will claim that family relationships, career success, artistic achievements and so forth, when pursued by a mind filled with craving for permanence, can never provide any lasting satisfaction. Therefore, giving them up will be much less of a loss to well-being than it might appear. Evaluating the plausibility of the Buddhist analysis of suffering, or their claims about the psychological effects of realizing no-self, go beyond my present purposes. We can,

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<sup>122</sup> Susan Wolf 1982 develops this kind of an objection to moral sainthood in her influential article, "Moral Saints".

however, conclude that the Buddhist strategy of demand-lessening is itself sound, but keep in mind that the extent to which the Buddhists employ it depends upon the acceptance of these potentially controversial Buddhist presuppositions.

### **Buddhist Demand-lessening Strategies and Contemporary Ethical Theory**

Drawing upon passages from Vasubandhu, as well as meditations provided by Śāntideva, I have in this chapter focused on several related benefits of realizing the nonexistence of any enduring self for the bodhisattva. First, she will no longer experience fear once she realizes at the deepest level that there is no being who is destroyed, and no being who is afraid. Second, she will experience no mental pain arising from attachment to her body or possessions when called upon to give these up for sentient beings. Finally, realizing no-self results in an extremely fluid conception of identity that allows her to radically identify her well-being with the well-being of others. As a result, when she makes apparent sacrifices to help others flourish, her own well-being will be increased as well.

I also pointed out that the Buddhist depends upon potentially controversial assumptions about the psychological effects of realizing no-self in claiming these benefits for the bodhisattva. Both the depth and the breadth of her concern for others, which she extends to all living beings, all of whom she views as equally important to herself, goes well beyond what anyone not ascribing to Buddhist beliefs about no-self is likely to accept. One obvious difficulty is that some philosophers may reject the Buddhist metaphysical position about the nonexistence of the self. Alternately, one might accept this doctrine, but reject Buddhist claims about the psychological effects of realizing no-

self, like the dissolution of selfishness and the possibility of radically identifying one's well-being with others.<sup>123</sup> We might wonder, therefore, how useful the demand-lessening strategies surveyed in this chapter would be for ethical theories that do not accept Buddhist positions about no-self.

At least the strategy of identifying one's well-being with others, however, can be at least partly decoupled from its Buddhist psychological presuppositions. The underlying Buddhist point, that we have at least some control over our desires, and what brings us pleasure, does not depend on Buddhist premises. Reflecting on the needs of others, for instance, will make most of us want to help them, and viewing the effects of such aid will likely bring us joy as well. Of course, the image of the bodhisattva whose welfare consists wholly in helping others will be beyond reach. Nevertheless, it is a basic fact of the psychology of most persons that our desires and our joyful affective states are often directed towards the well-being of others. Likewise, most of us will also accept that we have at least some ability to increase this concern that we feel for others.

This suggests that this Buddhist insight can be incorporated into a response to the overdemandingness objection acceptable to non-Buddhist ethicists. The basic strategy will be for the theory to require that one sacrifice whatever portion of one's welfare is reasonable (whatever that turns out to be), and couple this with a requirement to slowly modify one's concerns to lessen the tension between self and others. One might begin by donating a tenth of one's income, for instance, but also develop an intimate relationship with the benefiting aid organization to facilitate greater appreciation of the positive effects of the gift. This will likely stimulate additional desires to be of increased benefit,

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<sup>123</sup> In *Reasons and Persons* Parfit notes that he became less concerned about his own future wellbeing upon accepting reductionist views about personal identity, but notes that others may have the opposite reaction. See Parfit 1984, p. 251-2). I return to this issue in the conclusion.



as well as a sense of joy at what one has accomplished. On most theories of welfare, either the joy experienced, or the satisfaction of these new desires will increase the giver's welfare. The theory can then require a greater percentage of income be donated, without becoming overly demanding, and the process can continue.

Such an approach will itself avoid the overdemandingness objection as I have formulated it, since at no time will the adherent be required to act in a manner that sacrifices too great a portion of his welfare in a situation where this would be unacceptably demanding. How high the theory may ultimately raise an adherent's obligation will depend on the individual's psychological flexibility, as well as the effectiveness of the methods employed in stimulating other-regarding joys and desires. Perhaps the obtainment of moral sainthood conjoined with personal well-being will be unlikely or impossible to achieve for most, without the incorporation of an additional premise, such as the effects of realizing no-self that Vasubandhu identifies as explaining how bodhisattvahood is psychologically possible. Nevertheless, the non-Buddhist version of this response to the overdemandingness problem has the virtue of showing how a theory can increase well above initial levels the amount it could reasonably ask of its adherents.

## Conclusion

### Summary of my Argument

In this dissertation, I reconstructed the response Śāntideva can make to the overdemandingness objection, the claim that a moral theory asks too much of its adherents. I argued that if we grant Śāntideva certain key presuppositions, in particular the efficacy of certain Buddhist virtues, the psychological effects of realizing no-self, and the saturation of ordinary experience by subtle forms of suffering, then Śāntideva's moral requirements are not unreasonably demanding. In my introduction, I also suggested that it will be difficult to evaluate my defense of this thesis, since we are not likely to have reliable intuitions about whether the severe torments the bodhisattva undergoes are adequately assuaged or compensated by her progress towards psychological perfection. I therefore also offered a weaker version of my thesis, which is that, assuming these same presuppositions, the demandingness of the bodhisattva path is significantly less than it appears, although it may still be unreasonably demanding. Both versions of the thesis achieve my goal of showing how demandingness lessens and self-interest and benevolence converge as the bodhisattva progresses on the way to liberation.

In the first chapter, I clarified that the version of the overdemandingness objection I am concerned with is one in which a moral theory requires an individual to sacrifice an unfair amount of their well-being. I claimed that Śāntideva faces this version of the objection as a result of his argument that we should commit to impartial benevolence and adopt the bodhisattva path. As I explained in the introduction, the bodhisattva path at least appears extremely demanding, since it requires the bodhisattva to remain in *saṃsāra*

and take almost limitless rebirths, including ones where she sacrifices limbs and her life, or voluntary rebirth in a negative realm to work for the benefit of suffering beings.

The first chapter also argues that demandingness in the well-being version of the objection should be assessed relative to the resources of the individual, which can include psychological strengths and mental resilience. This means that the demandingness of the bodhisattva path need not be assessed from the standpoint of one outside it, but rather can take into account the psychological development of the bodhisattva to the extent that this reduces demandingness. The remaining chapters each argued either that the bodhisattva path is less demanding than it appears, or that the psychological transformation the bodhisattva undergoes lessens the demandingness she faces, or contributes to her well-being and therefore compensates her for any real sacrifices that she endures.

The second chapter explored the early Buddhist analysis of suffering (*duḥkha*), which is presupposed by Mahāyāna authors like Śāntideva. I gave particular consideration to the two deeper forms of suffering, conditioned suffering (*saṃskāra-duḥkhatā*) and the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkhatā*), which arise as a result of ignorance and craving. I argued that the Buddhist analysis of suffering provides a defense of Buddhist conceptions of what a good life looks like by constraining the shape any acceptable theory of well-being may take. In particular, it excludes many items of supposed value, like sense pleasures, career success, ordinary relationships and romantic love that Buddhists focusing on spiritual practice forgo. This analysis of suffering reveals that the bodhisattva path is much less demanding than it appears, since the *saṃsāric* goals the bodhisattva abandons are infected with suffering and are not really worth pursuit.

The third chapter focused on the first of the psychological benefits the bodhisattva attains as he progresses in his training. By developing and deploying the virtuous qualities (*kuśala-dharmas*), he overcomes a particularly pernicious form of weakness of will that is both broader and deeper than many versions of the problem found in the Western tradition. I argued that Śāntideva redeploys defiled energy arising from the mental defilements of craving, attachment and ignorance to provide the necessary energy to fuel the development and employment of these virtues. I also argued that as she continues to progress along the path, the bodhisattva will be able to draw upon her compassion for sentient beings for the needed motivation to continue her practice. Although the benefit of overcoming weakness of will is shared with early Buddhists, the bodhisattva has greater access to the motivational energy stemming from compassion, and therefore this represents a particular benefit of traveling the bodhisattva path.

The fourth chapter continued to examine the self-benefiting aspects of the virtuous qualities developed by the bodhisattva. In particular, I argued that the development of mindfulness (*smṛti*), introspection (*samprajanya*) and patience (*kṣānti*) results in a deeply rooted mental tranquility that is resistant to surface level disturbance by painful sensations. This means that the bodhisattva can undergo physical hardships without experiencing deep emotional distress. I also considered a perfectionist strand of Śāntideva's thought that praises the development of the virtues of the bodhisattva as a valuable human achievement. I argued that this perfectionist element does not in any obvious way increase the bodhisattva's well-being, but provides independent good reasons for her to commit herself to perfecting the qualities of full buddhahood.

The final chapter examined a group of closely related demand-lessening strategies that become available to the bodhisattva as a result of fully realizing the nonexistence of the enduring self. First, accepting no-self removes all fear that a bodhisattva faces, since he realizes that there is no being to perish, or to even possess the emotion of fear. Second, his clinging to his well-being, and particularly his attachment to his body is eliminated, since he now understands the body is not possessed by any enduring entity. As a result, he experiences no additional mental pain when sacrificing these things. Finally, he is able to radically identify his well-being with the well-being of others, and thereby flourishes when others attain happiness. This last strategy at least partially compensates the bodhisattva for actual sacrifices he makes as he travels the bodhisattva path.

There are a couple of ways these various strands of Śāntideva's response to the overdemandingness objection can be divided. First, we can group them according to the type of benefit they confer on the bodhisattva. One type of response is not really a benefit at all, but rather explains why the bodhisattva path is less demanding than it appears. The Buddhist analysis of suffering explored in the second chapter falls under this category, since it shows that the bodhisattva gives up much less than is initially apparent. A second kind of response does not directly benefit the bodhisattva, but instead lessens the demandingness of a painful experience. The deep mental serenity resulting from the development of the virtues of patience, mindfulness and introspection, explained in the fourth chapter, is an example of this kind of benefit, since these virtues lessen the demandingness of experiencing physically painful sensations, in particular by ensuring no painful mental sensations arise. The elimination of fear and the eradication of

clinging to one's own well-being that occurs after realizing no-self, which I explore in the fifth chapter, are also examples of this second strategy. The third type of benefit actually increases the well-being of the bodhisattva. In this category are the overcoming of weakness of will detailed in the third chapter, and the identification of one's own well-being with the well-being of others that leads to joy and the satisfaction of other-regarding desires. My argument has been that these various strategies will lessen the demandingness of the bodhisattva path sufficiently so that Śāntideva is no longer vulnerable to the overdemandingness objection.

A second way these various benefits can be organized is according to whether they are unique to the bodhisattva path, or are shared with the early Buddhist aiming for personal liberation. The Buddhist analysis of suffering detailed in chapter two is shared between both early and Mahāyāna Buddhists. The deployment of Buddhist virtues to overcome weakness of will is largely shared with early Buddhism as well, but here the bodhisattva will have greater access to motivational energy arising from compassion and *bodhicitta*. Likewise, both early Buddhists and Mahāyāna Buddhists will develop a deep abiding tranquility as a result of perfecting virtues like patience, although the bodhisattva will deploy this in a way that the early Buddhist does not need to, since the bodhisattva maintains this serenity when she sacrifices her body or takes painful rebirths to benefit others. In addition, both will eliminate fear and self-clinging by realizing selflessness. Only the bodhisattva, however, radically identifies her well-being with the well-being of others, and therefore this is a benefit that accrues only to her.

It is this shared nature of many of the bodhisattva's benefits that makes me skeptical about the accuracy of Śāntideva's claim that undertaking the bodhisattva path

actually benefits the individual, at least once we set aside the karmic benefits of benevolence. As we saw in the introduction, the bodhisattva undergoes numerous additional painful rebirths that the *arhat* who attains individual liberation will avoid. Nevertheless, most of the demand-lessening benefits the bodhisattva attains are shared with the *arhat*. Therefore, although we can conclude that the bodhisattva path is far less demanding than it appears, it is unclear that it would actually result in a greater benefit for the bodhisattva than the quicker path to individual liberation.

This does not mean that the bodhisattva does not have good reason to adopt the bodhisattva path. In this dissertation I have explored two reasons for doing so that do not depend upon self-interest. As explored in my first chapter, Śāntideva argues that given the nonexistence of the self, it would be irrational to prioritize our own well-being over others. Second, in my fourth chapter I explored a perfectionist strand of Śāntideva's thought, in which Śāntideva claims that developing the virtues of buddhahood provides a unique human achievement. I argued that this perfectionist element provides good reasons for the bodhisattva to commit to developing the virtues, even though it does not appear to benefit him personally. We should conclude, then, that although adopting the bodhisattva path is not obviously in the bodhisattva's interest, not only is it much less demanding than it appears, but when compared to *arhatship*, the bodhisattva may still have good other-regarding and perfectionist reasons to adopt it.

### **Benefits of this study**

One of the benefits of this study is historical, in the sense that considering the way that benevolence and self-interest converge in the BCA helps us understand its role in the

intellectual history of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Bodhisattvahood is recognized and admired in early Buddhist texts, but it is not until proto-Mahāyāna texts begin to appear in the last couple of centuries BCE that it is affirmed as a goal for ordinary persons. As the Mahāyāna movement continues to develop, and begins to conceive of itself in opposition to the early Buddhist goal of individual liberation, more stress is placed on the possibility and even desirability of ordinary persons devoting their lives to the bodhisattva path. This culminates in texts like *The Lotus Sutra*, which claims that full Buddhahood is the only possible endpoint of spiritual practice, and in arguments like the one by Śāntideva that I considered in my first chapter that claims it is irrational to prioritize one's own well-being above others.

This emphasis upon the desirability of becoming bodhisattvas creates a conceptual tension in which ordinary persons are encouraged to commit to a seemingly superhuman process of virtue development. Bodhisattva manuals like Śāntideva's BCA begin appearing at least in part as a way of resolving this tension. The role of any how-to manual is to guide large amounts of people through complex and potentially difficult tasks. By breaking down the bodhisattva path into a series of manageable steps, these bodhisattva manuals for the first time transform bodhisattvahood from a praiseworthy but unreachable ideal, into a concrete series of practices by which humans can structure their lives. In this study I have demonstrated some of the ways bodhisattva texts actually go about lessening the demandingness experienced by followers of the bodhisattva path. In so doing, I help illustrate the role they play in the conceptual development of the Mahāyāna in making the goal of bodhisattvahood accessible to all.



A related benefit of my study in the area of intellectual history is its role in helping us appreciate both the continuity and the development of the virtues as conceived by early Buddhist and Mahāyāna traditions. Within early Buddhism, the virtuous qualities, including the other-regarding virtues, are valued largely for their conduciveness to individual release from suffering. One of the main roles of compassion, for instance, is as part of a meditation designed to bring the practitioner to liberation.<sup>124</sup> In the Mahāyāna, virtues like compassion and generosity are radicalized, and the bodhisattva is now portrayed as sacrificing his limbs and life out of concern for others. Chapter four of my study demonstrates how other Buddhist virtues, like mindfulness, introspection and patience, attenuate the newly demanding character of these other-regarding virtues. This helps demonstrate the creative development of Buddhist virtue theory, in which both self and other directed virtues play new roles as the conception of spiritual realization shifts to the bodhisattva ideal.

Although a greater appreciation of the role the BCA plays in the intellectual history of the Mahāyāna is an important benefit of my study, my main purpose has been to demonstrate the philosophical importance of the demand-lessening elements of Śāntideva's text. Śāntideva does not formulate the overdemandingness objection and as far as I am aware none of the Buddhist's traditional opponents raise it explicitly against Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nevertheless, Śāntideva's apparent vulnerability to the objection is a significant potential philosophical weakness of his moral thought. I have suggested that Śāntideva, like other Mahāyāna authors, sensed the need to reduce the demandingness of the bodhisattva path, and therefore incorporated demand-lessening

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<sup>124</sup> See for instance Walshe 1995, 194: D i 251-2, and Ñānamoli 2010: A ii 128. This is not, of course, to suggest that the other-regarding virtues developed by early Buddhists lead to no altruistic action. See Aaronson 1980 for a study of the role of other-regarding virtues in Theravada Buddhism.

strategies into his text. His BCA, therefore, possesses the elements necessary to provide a powerful defense against the overdemandingness objection. My role as a comparative philosopher has been to frame these elements against the overdemandingness objection as developed in contemporary ethics and thereby illustrate their philosophical significance for Śāntideva as a moral philosopher.

In addition to demonstrating the philosophical significance of elements of the BCA, this study also acts as a resource for contemporary thinking on moral demandingness. Nagel, and following him several contemporary philosophers have noted the possibility of employing psychological transformation to lessen the tension between self-interest and benevolence as a response to the overdemandingness objection, but as far as I am aware no contemporary thinker has developed this possibility in any detail.<sup>125</sup> Instead, contemporary solutions have focused on altering the structure of normative theories to lessen what is owed to others, with this approach sometimes being combined with political strategies to ensure that human needs are met.<sup>126</sup> The strategy of psychological transformation developed in Śāntideva's text, however, has advantages which commend it for serious consideration. For instance, since it functions by preserving or increasing commonly accepted units of welfare value like desire-satisfaction or mental states of joy, it is compatible with multiple foundational theories of well-being and theories of the right. As I illustrate at the end of my fifth chapter, elements from Śāntideva's text can profitably be incorporated as demand-lessening strategies into multiple normative theories facing the overdemandingness objection.

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<sup>125</sup> The possibility of lessening demandingness through psychological transformation is noted by Nagel 1986, 205-207; Scheffler 1992, 128-9; and Hooker 1996, 144.

<sup>126</sup> See the introduction of this study.

In supporting my thesis about the demandingness of the bodhisattva path, I have also tried to illustrate ways that contemporary philosophical work in ethics is relevant to understanding Buddhist moral thought. Drawing upon recent writings in the areas of moral demandingness, theories of well-being, virtue ethics, *akrasia* and perfectionism, I have argued that Buddhist ethical texts often struggle with philosophical issues that contemporary ethicists theorize, even though Buddhist authors tend to be less explicit about what they are doing. Buddhist texts do not mark out foundational units of well-being, for instance, and yet they constrain the kind of elements that may be accepted into a theory of well-being through their analysis of suffering. Buddhists do not develop explicit accounts of why we knowingly act against our better interests, but I have demonstrated that Śāntideva recognizes weakness of will as a particularly deep and broad problem, and utilizes creative strategies to treat it. Likewise, regarding the issue of moral demandingness that I have used as a frame for this study, Śāntideva and other Buddhist philosophers recognize moral demand as a problem for the Mahāyāna path and develop sophisticated demand-lessening responses to it, even though they never explicitly frame the problem itself. All of this suggests the value of comparative philosophy between the disciplines of Buddhist moral thought and contemporary ethics. Framing Buddhist insights against contemporary work can often make explicit strengths of these ancient texts that might otherwise be unrecognized.

Finally, my study illustrates that, at its ground level, much of Buddhist moral thought stands or falls depending on the plausibility of its key presuppositions, in this case the psychological effects of realizing no-self, the pervasion of ordinary experience by suffering, and the efficacy of Buddhist virtues. All the demand-lessening strategies I

have surveyed in this study depend upon at least one of these assumptions. I have also claimed that my study is intended to be philosophical, meaning in part that it does not depend upon premises that would be wholly inaccessible to someone from outside the tradition. It is for this reason that I did not incorporate into my argument the karmic benefits of compassion, a point stressed by Śāntideva himself. Therefore, I need to explain briefly why the assumptions upon which Buddhist demand-lessening techniques depend are worth careful consideration, and are plausibly at least partly correct.

Regarding the Buddhist analysis of suffering, it seems to me that at least some of the drawbacks of pursuing pleasure identified by the Buddhist as the suffering of change are at least sometimes obviously correct. The Buddhist claims, for instance, that sensual pleasure cannot provide any lasting satisfaction. In support of this, surely all of us have had the experience of deriving less gratification than expected from sensual indulgence. Likewise, most of us will have experienced disappointment and frustration when achieving a sought after goal left us feeling dissatisfied. This does not mean, of course, that we will accept the Buddhist's more radical claim that all ordinary experience is saturated with one or more forms of suffering. Still, careful attention to the dissatisfaction inherent in much human experience will move us close enough to the Buddhist to enter into philosophical conversation with him.

Something close to the Buddhist rejection of an enduring self has been defended in detail by contemporary philosophers, including most influentially by Derek Parfit in *Reasons and Persons*. Even if we find such arguments convincing, however, this does not necessarily mean we will accept Buddhist claims about the psychological effects of accepting this metaphysical position. Here, it is perhaps worth quoting the reflections of

Derek Parfit himself. In the following passage, he records his sentiments upon accepting the truth of reductionism about personal identity, a position which is roughly equivalent to the Buddhist rejection of any enduring self.

Is the truth depressing? Some may find it so. But I find it liberating, and consoling. When I believed that my existence was such a further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others. (Parfit 1984, 251)

Like the bodhisattva referred to by Vasubandhu, Parfit claims his selfishness decreased and his concern for others grew when he accepted that personal identity is not grounded on what he calls a further fact, one version of which would be the enduring self rejected by Buddhists. Parfit also points out in the passage that others may not share his reaction. For my purposes, I will content myself with pointing out that it seems likely that at least many of us will experience some of the psychological effects Vasubandhu and Śāntideva attribute to the realization of no-self. In addition, I argued in chapter five that the Mahāyāna strategy of identifying one's well-being with the well-being of others does not wholly depend upon accepting no-self, although the depth to which this identification can be made will be reduced when it is decoupled from Buddhist presuppositions.

As for the efficacy of Buddhist virtues like mindfulness, introspection and patience, it should be uncontroversial that careful control of the mind matched with the meditations on patience offered by Śāntideva will have at least some potency for reducing mental distress that results from anger. Of course, we may remain skeptical of

the Buddhist claim that a state of psychological perfection in which anger is completely eliminated is possible. Nevertheless, there should be at least partial agreement between the Buddhist and contemporary thought about the demand-lessening results of developing many Buddhist virtues.

What this means is that we should be sympathetic to the general demand-lessening strategy laid out in Buddhist texts, at least to the point of taking their insights seriously. We may well remain skeptical, however, about Buddhist claims regarding the psychological perfectibility of humans. For this reason, the stunning image of the bodhisattva joyfully diving into hell will likely remain out of reach. Nevertheless, we can trace the logic in these Buddhist texts and come to understand why this image makes a good deal of philosophical sense, given Buddhist presuppositions. Simultaneously, we can acknowledge that, at a minimum, elements of these presuppositions themselves are well worth serious philosophical consideration.

## Abbreviations:

BCA: *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva.

ŚS: *Śikṣāsamuccaya* of Śāntideva.

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