Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics

Daniel Cozort and James Mark Shields, Editors

Rationale

Many forms of Buddhism, divergent in philosophy and style, emerged as Buddhism filtered out of India into other parts of Asia. But all of them embodied a moral or ethical core that was, and remains, remarkably consistent. Articulated by the historical Buddha in his first sermon, this moral core is founded on the concept of karma—that intentions and actions have future consequences for an individual—and is summarized as Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, three of the eight elements of the Eightfold Path. Although they were later elaborated and interpreted in a multitude of ways, none of these core principles were ever abandoned.

Ethical conduct is emphasized in Buddhism as in few other religions in part because it has historically been a tradition led by renunciants, the monks and nuns of the Sangha. They operate under the guidance of an elaborate set of rules: 227 for fully ordained monks and 311 for nuns in the Theravāda tradition. The Sangha collectively is Buddhism’s moral exemplar. Ethics are also particularly important in Buddhism because its religious ideal is not submission or obedience to a particular deity, but rather the perfection of virtue and the attainment of insight. Hence, although in practice many Buddhists merely observe the Five Precepts (against misconduct) and support the Sangha’s material needs, they admire and aspire to higher ethical standards. In the modern period, more explicit forms of “lay Buddhism” have emerged in various parts of Asia and the West. Here too, ethics is considered a central aspect of living the Dharma.

The academic study of Buddhism has existed in the West for several centuries, and for much longer, perhaps up to two millennia, in the various regions of Asia in which Buddhism has flourished. The past forty years in particular have witnessed a flourishing of Buddhist scholarship within both Western and Asian academies. However, recognition of the importance of ethics within Buddhism has not, at least until recently, resulted in much critical, scholarly treatment. In the past twenty years, the sub-discipline of Buddhist ethics has expanded in terms of the breadth of methodological perspective and depth of inquiry. One important venue for this scholarship is the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, founded in 1994 as the first journal entirely dedicated to the subject. The *JBE* has grown steadily and is now one of the largest journals in the field of Buddhist Studies. Both editors of the proposed volume have worked extensively with the *JBE*: Cozort as Editor-in-Chief since 2006 and Shields as Book Review Editor from 2002–2012 and Associate Editor from 2012.

Scholars have used Buddhist resources to analyze a number of contemporary controversies, including human rights, women’s rights, sexuality, war, terrorism, violence, social, economic and retributive justice, as well as various issues of concern to biomedical and environmental ethics. One area that has seen significant development is the scientific study of the effects of meditation on the brain, which has been accompanied by a growth of studies connecting Buddhist thought and practice to psychotherapy and psychology more generally. Although this work is still very much ongoing, it has already produced some fascinating results, many of which have direct implications for ethics. Finally, beyond matters of philosophical and applied ethics, anthropologists and sociologists have studied the effect of Buddhism upon various cultures of Asia, an area of research that we feel should also be included in the broader field of Buddhist ethics.

In line with the successful Oxford Handbooks series, the proposed *Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*is intended as a comprehensive overview of the state of the field of Buddhist ethics in the second decade of the 21st century. We have carefully chosen about two-dozen leading scholars to provide balanced and critical review essays on particular aspects of Buddhist ethics related to their current research. We strongly believe that the handbook will serve as a leading resource for current and future scholars in this burgeoning field of study.

Existing Works

Setting aside a number of non-academic works written from the standpoint of a particular sect or tradition such as Zen or Tibetan Buddhism, few books have attempted a cross-cultural and pan-sectarian analysis of ethics in Buddhist traditions. Hammalawa Saddhattissa’s *Buddhist Ethics* (Wisdom Publications, 1970; republished in 1997) was one of the first, but its focus is entirely on early Buddhism; it is notconcerned with contemporary issues or critical, historical scholarship. Damien Keown’s *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) may be the best single introduction to Buddhist ethics from a philosophical perspective. But because its primary concern is elucidating the “structure” of Buddhist ethics, it does not deal with contemporary moral and ethical issues. Among Keown’s other works is *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), an excellent, but “very brief” survey/guide.

The standard in the field is Peter Harvey’s *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge, 2000). It addresses many social, biomedical, and other ethical issues. However, it is, as its title suggests, an introduction and as such does not go deeply into the complexities of its subject. It is also now fifteen years old and hence is missing recent scholarship. Other notable recent books on Buddhist ethics are specialized to a particular subfield of ethics (*Buddhism and Bioethics*; *Buddhism and Human Rights*; *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics*; etc.).

The proposed *Oxford* *Handbook of Buddhist Ethics* differs from Harvey—as well as the other works mentioned above—in the following ways. First, it will be comprehensive. With over thirty essays in different areas, it will cover all of the important topics of Buddhist ethics. Among its proposed topics that were not treated by Harvey, for instance, are “Buddhism and the Psychology of Moral Judgments”; “Buddhist Ethics and Cognitive Sciences”; and “Tantric Ethics.” Second, its topics receive a much deeper treatment than was possible in an introductory text. Third, many topics are updated by more recent developments such as Asian movements for social justice and environmental protection, Tibetan self-immolations, and the revival of the order of *Bhikkhunīs* (fully ordained nuns). Fourth, it is organized not by Buddhist traditions but by major topic areas that can treat subjects across traditions and over time; the topic areas have been adapted from the successful model of the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. Finally, the *Handbook* is not the work of a single scholar attempting to master the entire Buddhist tradition; it involves more than two-dozen authors who are specialists in their assigned areas and who represent the finest standards of scholarship in Buddhist studies.

Readership

This volume will be of the greatest interest to those scholars around the globe working in the areas of Buddhist ethics and comparative moral philosophy. However, because of its scope it will also be of interest to anyone concerned with contemporary ethical problems and the social, psychological, economic and political ramifications of religious doctrines. Hence, we foresee a very broad appeal. This volume could furnish the “Buddhist perspective” for anyone interested in comparing the views of various religions on particular topics such as those of biomedical ethics.

Selling Points

First, as noted above, this volume would cover the entire contemporary spectrum of issues in Buddhist ethics. No other work would be as comprehensive or in-depth. Second, it will feature essays by many of the leading names in the field of Buddhist ethics. Readers will be exposed to multiple opinions and methodological perspectives, which will help to provide a fuller sense of the diversity within the field of Buddhist ethics today. Third, rather than present the material chronologically or by cultural or sectarian tradition, we have structured the volume thematically. This will facilitate readers who are interested in comparing Buddhist views to those of other religions or to secular perspectives.

Editors

**Daniel Cozort** is Associate Professor of Religion at Dickinson College (Carlisle, PA). A native of North Dakota, he earned a B.A. at Brown University and an M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Virginia. His research has concerned facets of Highest Yoga Tantra (*annutara-yoga-tantra*) and the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamaka philosophical school as understood in the Tibetan Gelukba tradition. He is the author of six books (including *Highest Yoga Tantra, Unique Tenets of the Middle Way Consequence School,* and *Buddhist Philosophy*), book chapters, journal articles, reviews, and a film about sand mandalas. He has been General Editor of the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* since 2006.

**James Mark Shields** is Associate Professor of Comparative Humanities and Asian Thought at Bucknell University (Lewisburg, PA). He was educated at McGill University (Canada), the University of Cambridge (UK), and Kyoto University (Japan). He conducts research on modern Buddhist thought, Japanese philosophy, comparative ethics and philosophy of religion. He has published numerous chapters, articles and translations in peer-reviewed journals, including *Asian Philosophy*, *The Eastern Buddhist*, *Japan Review*, *Studies in Religion / Sciences religieuses*, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, *Journal of Religion and Society*, *Kultura i Politkya*, and *Philosophy, Culture and Traditions*. He is author of *Critical Buddhism: Engaging with Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought* (Ashgate, 2011), and co-editor (with Victor Sōgen Hori and Richard P. Hayes) of *Teaching Buddhism in the West: From the Wheel to the Web* (Routledge, 2003). He is the Associate Editor of the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. He is currently working on a book manuscript on progressivism and radicalism in modern Japanese Buddhism.

Timetable

By January 2015: authors affirm commitment.

January 2016: submissions are due.

Delivery: not later than July 2017

Contents (caps = has committed tentatively)

1. Foundations
   1. **Karma**
      1. Description: Causality; intention; karma and rebirth; karma and free will; merit transfer; karma as habit or seed; fruition of karma; wholesome and unwholesome actions; fixed results vs. non-fixed results; karma and *nirvana*; collective or national karma; *kuśala*; *puñña*.
      2. Author: PETER HARVEY
   2. **The Bodhisattva Precepts**
      1. Description: Ethical injunctions found in Yogācāra texts such as Yogācāra bhūmi and those found in the apocryphal text, the *Fanwang jing* (*Brahmā’s Net Sūtra*), utilizing a doctrinal rubric called the three collections of pure precepts (precepts preventing evil, precepts promoting good, precepts benefiting sentient beings).  This rubric will lead to a discussion of the relation of the bodhisattva precepts with the precepts in the Vinaya.  Do the bodhisattva precepts augment the Vinaya, a position adopted by many monks in China and Korea, or do they replace the Vinaya, a position used by many in Japan.  I'll take a look at several issues, such as the precepts on killing.
      2. Author: PAUL GRONER
   3. **Ethics, Meditation, and Insight**
      1. Description: The relationships between the three disciplines of the Eightfold Noble Path. May include the effect of meditation on brain development and implications for ethical discipline; the insights gained through moral practice; and the practice of morality in meditation training.
      2. Author: ABRAHAM VELEZ DE CEA
2. Ethics and Buddhist Traditions
   1. **Moral Development in Early Buddhist Literature**
      1. Description: Moral development in the *Jātakas*, *avadānas*, and the Pāli *Nikāyas*.
      2. Author: MARTIN ADAM
   2. **The *Vinaya***
      1. Description: The origins and development of the *Vinaya*; its categories, structure, and organization; its provisions on specific matters; comparative studies of the *Vinayas* of different schools; legal and jurisprudential principles.
      2. Author: CHARLES S. PREBISH
   3. ***Bhikṣuṇī* Ordination**
      1. Description: The establishment of a *Bhikṣuṇī* *Sangha*; the eight *guradhammas* (Revered Conditions); modern developments in relation to the revival of *Bhikṣuṇī* ordination.
      2. Author: VEN. ANĀLAYO
   4. **The Bodhisattva Path**
      1. Description: Scriptural descriptions of virtues such as generosity (*dāna*) and forbearance (*k****ṣ****ānti*) in various Buddhist canons; Śāntideva’s depiction; later interpretations; modern adaptations.
      2. Author: BARBRA CLAYTON
   5. **Madhyamaka Ethics**
      1. Description: Ethics in the writings of Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, Bhāvaviveka, and other Indian Mādhyamikas; attempts to justify moral judgments by reference to the doctrine of the two truths; later East Asian and Tibetan reflections on Mādhyamaka ethics.
      2. Author: BRONWYN FINNIGAN
   6. **Ethics in Pure Land Schools**
      1. Description: Ethics in Indian Buddhist Pure Land sūtras; ethics in Chinese and Japanese Pure Land traditions; contemporary interpretations of Pure Land ethics.
      2. Author: MICHAEL CONWAY
   7. **Ethics in the Lotus Sutra**
      1. Description: Ethics in the Lotus Sūtra; interpretations of Lotus Sūtra ethics in the Tiantai/Tendai school and in the Nichiren School; modern interpretations of the ethics of the Lotus Sūtra.
      2. Author: GENE REEVES
   8. **Ethics of Zen**
      1. Description: Ethics in Chan and Zen; sectarian differences in ethics; Zen’s stance on social change, war, violence, etc.
      2. Author: CHRISTOPHER IVES
   9. **Tantric Ethics**
      1. Description: Tantric vows; tantric antinomianism; differences between Tibetan orders; tantric ethics in Newar Buddhism; tantric ethics in Shingon Buddhism.
      2. Author: GARETH SPARHAM
   10. **Buddhist Ethics in South and Southeast Asia**
       1. Description: Ethics in practice in Southeast Asian Buddhist societies; ethics and social mores; the influence of indigenous customs and attitudes on moral teachings; rites de passage; variation in marriage and other customs; the great tradition and the little tradition; moral relativism; cultural pluralism.
       2. Author: JULIANA ESSEN
   11. **Buddhist Ethics in East Asia**
       1. Description: Ethics in practice in East Asian Buddhist societies; ethics and social mores; the influence of indigenous customs and attitudes on moral teachings; rites de passage; variation in marriage and other customs; the great tradition and the little tradition; moral relativism; cultural pluralism.
       2. Author: RICHARD MADSEN
   12. **Buddhist Ethics in Tibetan Cultural Areas**
       1. Description: Ethics in practice in Tibetan Buddhist societies (both within Tibet and in the Tibetan diaspora); ethics and social mores; the influence of indigenous customs and attitudes on moral teachings; rites de passage; variation in marriage and other customs; the great tradition and the little tradition; moral relativism; cultural pluralism.
       2. Author: HOLLY GAYLEY
3. Comparative Perspectives
   1. **Buddhist Ethics Compared to Western Ethics**
      1. Description: Theories of ethics and meta-ethics; codes of ethics; moral obligations; altruism and compassion; virtues; patterns of justification; the virtues approach contrasted to deontological and consequentialist theories; situation ethics; the quality of life; the value of life; personhood; ethics and human good; natural law; the status of moral norms; moral absolutes; “skillful means.”
      2. Author: MEYNARD VASEN
   2. **Buddhist Ethics Compared to Christian Ethics**
      1. Description: Similarities and differences between Buddhism and other world religions in the field of ethics; the basis for dialogue; ethics and metaphysics; hermeneutics and the derivation of moral norms from scripture.
      2. Author: RITA GROSS
   3. **Buddhism and the Psychology of Moral Judgments**
      1. Description: The relationship between psychology and moral conduct; the psychology of moral judgments; the analysis of ethical terminology in the *Abhidharma* and elsewhere; the concepts of motive, intention, will, virtue, and character; the emotions; desire; love; moral choice and self-determination; mindfulness therapy; related issues in philosophical psychology.
      2. Author: EMILY MCRAE
   4. **Buddhist Ethics and Cognitive Sciences**
      1. Description: Brain imaging studies of meditators; mindfulness practices in therapeutic settings; cognitive therapy and Buddhism; the limits of cognitive science and of Buddhist meditation; the ethical implications of the discoveries of cognitive science.
      2. Author: DAN ARNOLD
4. Buddhism and Society
   1. **The Buddhist Just Society**
      1. Description: Right Livelihood, Right Speech, Right Action; punishment, the nature and role of the state; rights and duties of governments and citizens; democracy and alternative political systems; Buddhist law; law and ethics.
      2. Author: PETER HARVEY
   2. **Buddhist Economics**
      1. Description: Economic ethics for laypersons; socialism, communism, and capitalism; social, educational, and welfare provisions.
      2. Author: JAMES MARK SHIELDS
   3. **Buddhist Environmental Ethics**
      1. Description: Responsibilities and obligations toward nature; philosophy of biology; future generations; the relationship between Buddhist and other environmental philosophies.
      2. Author: STEPHANIE KAZA
   4. **Buddhism, War and Violence**
      1. Description: War; terrorism; violence; nuclear warfare; revolution; capital punishment; justifiable killing; pacifism and ahimsa.
      2. Author: MAHINDA DEEGALLE
   5. **Engaged Buddhism in Asia**
      1. Description: Thich Nhat Hanh; engaged Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, Taiwan, Korea; Asian Buddhist organizations; Asian Buddhist leaders.
      2. Possible authors: SALLIE KING
   6. **Engaged Buddhism in the West**
      1. Description: Engaged Buddhism organizations; activities in the West and in Asia; Buddhist leaders.
      2. Author: CHARLES S. PREBISH
5. Perspectives on Contemporary Issues
   1. **The Buddhist Basis for a Doctrine of Human Rights**
      1. Description: The Buddhist basis for a doctrine of human rights and its provisions; the concept of “rights” in Buddhism; fundamental rights of individuals; autonomy and self-determination; human dignity; equality; justice; freedom; privacy; the protection of rights; women’s rights; international codes, charters and declarations; human rights abuses in Buddhist cultures.
      2. Author: DAMIEN KEOWN
   2. **Buddhism and Women**
      1. Description: Establishment of the Bhikṣuṇī sangha; early Buddhist conceptions of gender; limitations on women’s spiritual attainments; female birth and karma; women and Buddhahood; ordination; gender discrimination; women and Buddhist practice.
      2. Author: ALICE COLLETT
   3. **Buddhism and Sexuality**
      1. Description: Family life; sexual orientation; sexual morality; the fifth precept; celibacy; sexual yoga.
      2. Possible authors: AMY LANGENBERG
   4. **Abortion and Reproduction**
      1. Description: Scriptural views on abortion; differences between Buddhist traditions and Buddhist cultures; embryo research; reproductive technologies (IVF, AID etc.); genetic engineering.
      2. Author: MICHAEL BARNHART
   5. **Euthanasia**
      1. Description: Coma patients and the persistent vegetative state; criminal and medical law; defining death; terminal care.
      2. Author: DAMIEN KEOWN
   6. **Suicide**
      1. Description: Scriptural sources on suicide; suicide and terminal illness; assisted suicide; altruistic suicide; state medicine and health.
      2. Author: MARTIN KOVAN
   7. **Buddhism and Animal Rights**
      1. Description: Animal rights; the moral status of animals and non-sentient life; experimentation on animals; speciesism; evolution.
      2. Author: PAUL WALDAU

Contributors and Academic Affiliations

Martin Adam University of Victoria, Canada

Ven. Anālayo University of Hamburg and Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, Taiwan

Dan Arnold University of Chicago, USA

Michael Barnhart Kingsborough Community College, USA

Barbra Clayton Mt. Allison University, Canada

Alice Colette York St. John, UK

Michael Conway Ōtani University, Japan

Daniel Cozort Dickinson College, USA

Mahinda Deegalle Bath Spa University, UK

Juliana Essen Soka University of America, USA

Bronwyn Finnigan Australian National University

Holly Gayley University of Colorado, USA

Paul Groner University of Virginia

Rita Gross University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Peter B. Harvey (2) University of Sunderland, UK

Christopher Ives Stonehill College, USA

Stephanie Kaza University of Vermont, USA

Damien Keown (2) Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK

Sallie King James Madison University, USA

Martin Kovan University of Melbourne. Australia

Amy Langenberg Auburn University, USA

Richard Madsen University of San Diego, USA

Emily McCrae University of Oklahoma, USA

Charles S. Prebish (2) Utah State University, USA

Gene Reeves Rikkyo University, Japan

James Mark Shields Bucknell University, USA

Gareth Sparham University of Michigan, USA

Meynard Vasen University of Ghent

Abraham Vélez de Cea Eastern Kentucky University, USA

Paul Waldau Canisius College, USA