

Special Issue: Buddhism and Free Will

Journal of Buddhist Ethics

ISSN 1076-9005

<http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/>

Volume 25, 2018

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A Role for Primordial Wisdom in the Buddhist Free Will Controversy

Marie Friquegnon¹

Abstract

In *Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will* (Repetti), I set forth my position on Buddhism and free will in terms of three ways of understanding the issue of freedom in Buddhism. Here I first offer a sketch of that threefold analysis, and then I analyze certain key passages in some of the other essays in that collection through that lens. Each of these three ways of understanding Buddhist conceptions of freedom harmonizes with some of the essays. I then analyze Śāntideva's view on the acceptability of the action of the bodhisattva who shot a pirate to save 500 people; I contrast that with Śāntarakṣita's view; and I try to dissolve an apparent contradiction. I then take Śāntideva's use of *upāya* (skillful means) in the pirate case and apply it to his position on free will. Lastly, I conclude by suggesting that the way out of some of the discrepancies in the analysis of free will in Buddhism may be resolved by appealing to primordial wisdom

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as a hypothetical construct, making reference to what appears to be an analogous use of the concept of a hypothetical construct that may be found in Aquinas.

A Role for Primordial Wisdom in the Buddhist Free Will Controversy

In my contribution to *Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will*, I argued that the Buddhist position on free will has to be understood in three ways, and that each of these ways is designed to appeal to different types of practitioners. In general, the Buddha rejected control over the future by gods and by karma. He wanted his followers to believe they were making their own choices, and that at least some of the time they could reverse bad karma. As Garfield put it:

the freedom achieved through the cultivation of this [Buddhist] path, understood in the Madhyamaka framework of Candrakīrti and Śāntideva, is not a freedom of the will, but of authority—freedom of a conceptually imputed person from the bars of a self-constructed prison, a freedom that demands no indeterminism . . . (55)

Śāntideva, following the law of cause and effect, claims that one should not blame anyone for bad deeds any more than one should blame fire for causing smoke. So, it seems that even though one should feel that one is free from gods and from some karma, one should understand that one is never independent of causal conditions. Nevertheless, for most Mahāyānists, since everything is the body, mind, and speech of the Buddha, on the ultimate level all phenomena are a manifestation of the Buddha nature. The ultimate is non-causal, nondual, free of self and other; yet, insofar as it is the manifestation of wisdom and compassion, it could be considered free. Although, in most of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva is

exhorting Buddhists to act virtuously, in the ninth chapter he argues that ultimate reality is emptiness, beyond conception.

Apparent contradictions in Śāntideva should first be understood in terms of his audience in eighth century India. Monastic life was similar to that in Medieval Europe. In the Middle Ages, the only way a poor peasant could escape a life of toil was to become a monk or nun. With effort and intelligence, he or she could become an abbot or abbess and be respected and venerated by kings and queens. This was equally true of the Buddhist monastic system. Suffice it to say that the motivations of the monks to which Śāntideva was addressing were not always path oriented. Śāntideva seems to be aware of this. For example, when discussing patience and generosity, he points out the practical advantages of possessing these virtues, as well as the usefulness of these virtues in pursuing enlightenment. Practicing generosity, for example, will help lessen attachment and make it easier to realize the nonexistence of the individual self. In the ninth chapter, Śāntideva opens the door to the ultimate by introducing emptiness. Unlike Śāntarakṣita, he makes short shrift of idealist views, perhaps because the four Chittamatra (mind-only) schools were clinging to mind as substantially existing. These were quite unlike the views of Vasubandhu, who, as Jonathan Gold has brilliantly shown, were Madhyamaka, seeing the mental as phenomenal and mind itself as empty and not substantially existent. Śāntarakṣita's views do not contradict those of Vasubandhu (Gold).

Similarly, the putative contradiction with Śāntarakṣita, in the example of a bodhisattva killing the pirate, must be understood in the same way. (See Appendix 1 below.) *Upāya* ranges from impure conventional truth up to pure conventional truth. Śāntideva deals with morality on the pure conventional level. In this example, a bodhisattva, when seeing that a pirate is about to kill five hundred people by sinking their boat, kills the pirate. Because Śāntideva views killing as a natural negativity, he suggests

that the bodhisattva will have to suffer a bit, perhaps a day in hell. In the *Tattvasiddhi*, however, Śāntarakṣita says that there are no natural negativities, and therefore the bodhisattva will not incur karmic consequences. Śāntarakṣita knew Śāntideva's teachings and refers to them. But while Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is addressed to a mixed-ability audience, Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasiddhi* is addressed only to an elite, highly-realized group of readers.

Is there, then, a contradiction between the two great philosophers? Perhaps not. The key to understanding this complex issue, I think, is found in Śāntideva's training anthology, the *Śikṣā-samuccaya*. Here Śāntideva encourages the bodhisattva to break the rules, citing the *Upāyakaśālyā Sūtra*:

Suppose a bodhisattva could cause one sentient being to engage in wholesome actions, but in doing so would undergo a downfall that would lead to burning in hell for a hundred thousand aeons. Blessed One, the bodhisattva should enthusiastically undergo that downfall and experience the pain of hell, rather than sacrifice the welfare of that one sentient being. (Goodman 165, quoting Tatz 29)

In the case of the pirate, the bodhisattva acts out of compassion not only for the passengers on the boat, but to spare the pirate from the negative consequences of murder. In the same text, Śāntideva recalls the story of the youth Jyotis, a Brahmin who had practiced celibacy for 42,000 years, who is confronted with a woman who threatened suicide if the bodhisattva did not have union with her:

He was seven steps away when compassion arose in him. He thought, "If I break my spiritual discipline, I may go to hell. But I can experience and patiently endure the pain of hell. May this woman not die, but be happy." Noble sir, the

Brahmin youth turned around and holding that woman with his right hand, he said, “Rise sister. I shall do whatever you want.”

Noble sir, because I aroused a thought of great compassion, even though lowly and having to do with sensual desires, (my time in cyclic existence) was reduced by ten thousand aeons. Noble sir, take note: what would lead other sentient beings to hell can lead a bodhisattva who is skilled in means to rebirth in the world of Brahma. (Goodman 164-165)

Śāntideva further qualifies the suffering of the bodhisattvas in hell by saying that, although they are in pain, they are experiencing happiness. He quotes the *Meeting of Father and Son Sūtra*:

There is, Blessed One, a meditative absorption called Everything is Covered by Happiness. Bodhisattvas who attain this feel only happy feelings to all objects they are aware of, with no feelings of suffering or unhappiness If their bones are being pulled out, or they are impaled on stakes, or led away to be killed, or their heads are cut off, they have only happy thoughts, not thoughts of suffering, nor thoughts that are neither happy or suffering. (Goodman 180)

So, on further analysis, there seems to be no contradiction between Śāntideva and Śāntarakṣita. Śāntarakṣita accepts all activities done by the bodhisattva in compassionate meditative absorption. Śāntideva seems to be saying the same.

To return to skillful means, as mentioned above, whereas Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasiddhi* is addressed to an elite group of bodhisattvas, Śāntideva is addressing the monastic community at large. Śāntideva is careful

not to encourage breaking the rules in ordinary circumstances. In addition, he wants people to be willing to make the sacrifice of breaking the rules to save others even when they believe this will send them to hell. But, as is evidenced from the passages just cited, it does not follow that the bodhisattva will incur pain through breaking the rules.

This analysis of skillful means may be fruitfully applied to the problem of free will. I think that the entire *Bodhicaryāvatāra* should be understood as *upāya*, except for the ninth chapter, which is on emptiness. There are passages in which Śāntideva admonishes people never to blame anyone for anything because all faults are due to causal factors; e.g., we do not blame fire for causing smoke. “There but for a different set of causal conditions go I,” so to speak. Nevertheless, the entire text is intended to convince people that they are better off acting virtuously, that is, with generosity, patience etc. In the ninth chapter, however, in arguing in accordance with Nāgārjuna that causality is incoherent, it follows that even Śāntideva’s teachings on morality must be understood as *upāya*, as useful on the conventional level. As with Śāntarakṣita, for Śāntideva there are no natural negativities on the ultimate level.

We have to conclude that the world of appearances, including causality, is empty of substantial existence. The world we experience is an illusion. But why is the illusion so orderly, especially as it conforms to our expectations of causal relationships? Is this an unanswerable question?

As a typical Madhyamaka philosopher, Śāntideva shies away from discussions of appearances as manifestations of Buddha Nature or primordial wisdom. The fear is that people will make Buddha Nature and primordial wisdom into a god.

Śāntarakṣita finesses this problem by dividing ultimate truth into that which we can indicate and that which we can talk about—that is, the real ultimate and the proximate ultimate. I think this move in his

argument presents the ultimate as a hypothetical construct (also known as a theoretical posit). In scientific theory, particularly within psychology, a hypothetical construct is an explanatory variable which is not directly observable. For example, the concepts of intelligence and motivation are used to explain phenomena in psychology, but neither is directly observable.

In theology, we find an example of a hypothetical construct (on my interpretation) in Aquinas's third proof for the existence of God, the necessary being needed to account for the continuity of the world. Since God is beyond conception, Aquinas ends his five proofs not with "therefore there is a God," but with either "this all men call God" or "this all men understand to be God." Karsten Struhl has objected that in science, hypothetical constructs are used to generate testable propositions, which is not the case with God. However, John Hick, a logical positivist, argued that God is not possible to disconfirm, but could be confirmable after death. Some Buddhists, including Śāntarakṣita in the *Tattvasiddhi*, argue that primordial wisdom is not disconfirmable, but is directly confirmable in enlightenment. Unlike the post-mortem possibility of confirming God, however, enlightenment is claimed to be confirmable during life, and has been claimed as such. And the behavior of allegedly enlightened beings may be understood as indirect evidence of the veracity of that claim.

Primordial wisdom, likewise, may be understood as a hypothetical construct. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, and to some extent in all Mahāyāna, primordial nature is the foundation of the phenomenal, of time, of space, and of interdependent co-origination. It is also known as emptiness, the *dharmakāya*, the primordial Buddha and the Buddha nature. All reasoning about time, space, causality, perception, selfhood, mind, and matter reveals paradoxes: the time problem of the indivisibility of the present moment, causality (as per Nāgārjuna's critique), the divisibility/wholeness of space problem, the perception problem, subject/object problems, self-

identity and continuity problems, mind and the infinite regress problem (that is, what is the mind that knows the mind that knows the mind, etc.), matter and mereological problems, etc. We are relatively clueless about the nature of these concepts and the phenomena to which they refer. Nevertheless, there are ubiquitous experiences that are more or less orderly, and we can account for them as the display of primordial wisdom, as pointing to primordial wisdom without our understanding it. This is what Śāntarākṣita calls “the proximate ultimate.”

Why should we care about necessary being or emptiness? Aquinas claims that the necessary being is all-good, all-powerful, and all knowing. But how can one make these claims if God is beyond conception? Here Aquinas introduces his theory of analogical predication. When we say, for example, that God is good, we mean that God’s goodness is similar to human goodness. Aquinas needs to say this because otherwise God’s goodness could not be like human goodness at all, in which case we might wind up worshipping something very unpleasant (Aquinas 1:13:5).

Gregory Rocca struggled valiantly with this problem. (See Appendix 2 below.) It is perhaps unsolvable because we only know one side of the analogy, i.e., human goodness. But if we can say nothing good about God, how can God have any value for us? Does emptiness present the same problem? I do not think so, because of emptiness meditation. We can compare the experiences we have in emptiness meditation with our experiences of a kind, wise, powerful loving person. Interestingly, this could also work for Aquinas’s problem. At the end of his life, Aquinas said that all he had written (recall, volumes of complex argument and analysis) was straw, and he stayed in a meditative state (Rocca). Similar views are expressed in the fourteenth century text, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Anonymous, Walsh, and Tugwell). These mystics may be thought to have experienced the Biblical “peace that surpasses all understanding.”

There are some problems here. Could our beautiful experiences of emptiness be an illusion? I think we can answer that we do have the experience, and that as long as we do not claim it to be something substantial, like a god, there should not be a problem. *Experiences* of love, peace, etc., are neither true nor false. One either *has* them or not; whether they are *veridical* is another question. As Śāntarakṣita said, “You cannot fault me because I do not claim anything to be true.” Śāntarakṣita does say, in the *Tattvasiddhi*, that the attainment of suchness (reality, enlightenment) is not provable. He argues that it is also not disprovable. But having argued (in the *Madhyamakālaṅkāra*) that matter, space, and so forth, are not existent because our concepts of what they consist of are incoherent, and that perception when analyzed is shown to be impossible, Śāntarakṣita settles on *svasaṃvedana* (self-awareness) as real, yet beyond conception. *Svasaṃvedana*, too, seems to function as a hypothetical construct, despite the fact that, as with Descartes, we cannot deny awareness without awareness. The difference can be explained as follows.

The type of awareness that Śāntarakṣita has in mind is *non-dual* awareness, which is radically distinct from the usual understanding of awareness in terms of subject, object, and activity. This mundane view of ordinary awareness would be an incorrect way of understanding *svasaṃvedana*, self-awareness. There is no subject, object or activity. Awareness is emptiness. Nondual experience of emptiness is also the cessation of suffering, pure bliss. In the *Tattvasiddhi*, the path to this happiness cannot be harsh ascetic practices, but as like producing like, ordinary happiness, such as enjoying music in a non-dual meditative state.

How can we say anything about primordial wisdom if it is beyond conception? I think we can only compare our experiences in nondual meditation with our experiences with a good, kind, wise person. Meditators have claimed that their experience can be characterized as engendering compassion, bliss and wisdom. This can be compared with our

experiences of a good and wise person, and thus it would not be incorrect to claim that primordial wisdom is harmonious with these qualities.

Perhaps in light of the parallels with our reasoning in connection with Aquinas above, some proponents of primordial wisdom in the Vajrayāna, especially Dzogchen, have been accused of theism. Concerning the title of Heidi Koppl's book on Ronzompa, *Transforming Everything into the Divine*, the word Ronzompa uses for "divine" in Tibetan is *lha*, which is *deva* ("god") in Sanskrit. But this is not "God" in the theistic sense. "*Lha*" is understood as a synonym for "Buddha," thought to be divine—not in a monotheistic sense, but rather in the senses employed in such ideas as the divine immeasurables, divine pride, etc.

Ronzompa's *lha* has no substantial existence. It is not a creator, nor does it stand apart from the world. Rather, it is a way of seeing phenomena, one that is associated with compassion, love, and happiness. To return to the issue of testability, we can say, with Wittgenstein, that perspectives are neither true nor false. We either have them or we do not. Unlike most perspectives, however, *lha* is nondual. To coin a phrase from Tom Nagel, it is "the view from nowhere," or perhaps "the view from no-one."

Ronzompa's *lha* is not a god in the ordinary sense—neither a monotheistic God nor a polytheistic (nor henotheistic) god—because *lha* is nondual awareness. This interpretation follows directly from Śāntarakṣita's critique of subject/object perception. Our "identity" is nondual: It is the perspective, the source of bliss and happiness. That is why Śāntarakṣita rejects asceticism in favor of bliss arising from music, sexual union, etc., as a form of nondual meditation.

Most intriguing is the level of pure conventional truth, Śāntarakṣita's "proximate ultimate." He arrives at this through an analysis of perception, which reasoning may be delineated along the following lines.

A. To know the mind, one would need a different mind to know it. But what is the mind that knows the mind? This engenders an infinite regress.

B. What is the relation between mind and object? Are they one and the same, or different?

B.1. If they are held to be different, the following questions arise:

B.1.a. Can one mental state represent many objects or parts of an object? No, because the mental state would have to be compound if the object was compound. Since the subject must be affected by the awareness of an object, a subject that remained completely simple and unitary could not recognize distinct parts of the object. For example, the mental state that recognizes part of an object to be red cannot be exactly the same as that which perceives another part of it as blue.

B.1.b. Can many mental states each represent a part of an object in a single instant? No, because an object, even if mental, can be divided into an infinite number of aspects. It is absurd to think there could be so many separate mental states in a single instant of perception.

B.1.c. Can a series of quickly changing states of perception represent the object, as a firebrand, whirled about, produces a circle of fire? No, because we can only perceive the present moment, not a series of perceptions. Perception must be in the present.

B.2. Nor can the idealist school that holds that the subject and object of thought are the same be defended. For then

the subject of awareness could not be caused to change in any way. Each change in awareness must depend on a distinct causal condition.

In light of these difficulties inherent in the notion of mind, Śāntarakṣita only accepts the idealist view as true on the relative level. True, there must be awareness, but its real nature is beyond conception. Thus, Śāntarakṣita sides with the Mādhyamikas in viewing ultimate reality as beyond conception.

As one tries to lose the attachment to an illusory separate self, one's behavior begins to flow in unison with primordial wisdom. One's awareness becomes inseparable from the manifestation of that primordial nature. The following of the Eightfold Path, the cultivation of virtues, etc., all becomes a manifestation of primordial wisdom that leads to enlightenment. And as that nature manifests in the diversity we perceive, we are on the path always, even though it may seem as if we are not. But, we may ask, if there is ultimately no causality, then how does it seem as if we are able to act in a purposeful way? Śāntarakṣita argues that the idealist's conception of causally-related mental events—*ālaya*—will not work, given Nāgārjuna's critique of causality. In his contribution to *Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will*, Wallace shares this concern, appealing to primordial wisdom, Buddha nature:

Another way of interpreting divine pride is to identify one's Buddha nature, pristine awareness, as the basis of our identity now. The bases of designation of one's sense of personhood are ordinarily one's body and mind. When one refers to oneself as having past and future lives, the basis of designation for one's identity is one's substrate consciousness, which, according to the Great Perfection teachings, provides reincarnational continuity. When one assumes the identity of a Buddha, in divine pride, the basis of

designation of self is one's timeless Buddha nature. In the practice of the Great Perfection, one non-conceptually rests in this timeless, pristine awareness, allowing actions to arise spontaneously and effortlessly, aroused by the interplay of one's intuitive wisdom and the moment-to-moment needs of sentient beings. In this way, one realizes a trans-temporal kind of freedom And the Vajrayāna tradition, including the Great Perfection teaching, demonstrates how the freedom implicit in the teachings of the Middle Way and the Buddha nature may be put to use in the swift realization of liberation, enlightenment. (Wallace 121)

What preserves continuity? Not personal identity, nor the mental events. Nondual, non-spatial, non-temporal—all is manifestation of the Buddha nature. Strictly speaking, no one ever does anything, free or not free. Rick Repetti quotes the Buddha at the very start of *Buddhist Perspectives on Free Will*: “There is free action, there is retribution, but there is no agent that passes from one set of momentary elements into one another, except the lawful connection of these elements” (viii, quoting the *Paramārtha Śūnyatā Sūtra: Discourse on Ultimate Emptiness*). But this “lawful connection,” the system of causal relations, inter-dependent co-origination, is only conventionally, relatively real. Ultimate reality is beyond all concepts, nondual. It is non-temporal because there cannot be any differentiation: no before and after, no past present or future—in short, as Bergson put it, no a-series or b-series.

Wallace spoke of the Buddha Nature, primordial wisdom, above. I think his comments dovetail with Śāntarakṣita's comments on the proximate ultimate, a kind of hypothetical construct that is the source of awareness of phenomena and of the continuity and orderliness of this awareness. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, this is referred to

variously as Amitabha, Kuntuzangpo/Kuntuzangmo, the Buddha Nature, Primordial Wisdom, emptiness, etc. For example, this is mentioned in the Kuntuzangpo prayer, where one recognizes oneself as Kuntuzangpo:

Ho: All appearing Phenomena and the possibilities of samsara and nirvana
 Have one source, but there are two paths and two results.
 A miracle of knowing and unknowing . . .
 The source of everything is uncompounded.
 Self -arising, infinite, inconceivable,
 Beyond the labels samsara and nirvana . . .
 Therefore I Kuntuzangpo proclaim,
 The nature of the source is realized by spontaneously arising awareness . . .
 Self-arising awareness is free of discursive thought.
 (Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche 71-72)²

One of the six orthodox views of Hinduism that is similar to the Vajrayāna view attributes the liberation of sentient beings to the universe itself. In Sāṃkhya, which in its early form was non-theistic, *prakṛti* or nature provides beings with the circumstances they need to achieve liberation (*mokṣa*).

In one Buddhist ritual text, we find the following: “HUNG: The great treasure of the nine spaces of the dharmadhatu [r]ipens all sentient beings by profound and vast activities” (Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche 71). If this is true, they go on to say, then it is appropriate to practice patience:

We also need to train in applying patience to whatever circumstances arise during the course of our lives. All the

² Prayer translated by Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal and Richard Steinerg.

difficulties we encounter should be considered important aspects of the path. Ups and downs are inevitable in *samsara*, and if we can see them as manifestations of our own karma that, in essence, are no different than our experiences on the cushion, we will not be shaken or overwhelmed by these ups and downs any more than we are by the movements of our own thoughts. To remain firmly on the path to enlightenment, we should patiently move forward, facing the responsibilities of this life with spiritual dignity and courage of heart. (71-72)

Conclusion

Buddhists do not accept the existence of a substantially existing self that endures during a lifetime or beyond. All phenomena are governed by interdependent origination. The aggregates which compose what we characterize as a person are governed by cause and effect. Mahāyāna philosophers following Nāgārjuna argue that causality, when closely examined, is an incoherent concept. It, like all phenomena, is a mere appearance, albeit one that enables us on the phenomenal level to determine which appearances are functionally real. From this point of view, there is ultimately no agent. No one does anything, freely or unfreely. The only way to understand the orderly appearance of phenomena, the efficacy of the path, and the apparent freedom of sentient beings, is to appeal to primordial wisdom as a hypothetical construct, beyond conception, neither self nor other, the source of compassion wisdom and happiness, not known discursively, but experienced in meditation.

Appendix 1: Mipham, The Wisdom Chapter: Commentary on the Ninth Chapter of The Way of the Bodhisattva.

Murder with Skill in Means: The Story of the Compassionate Ship's Captain

132. Then the Lord again addressed the Bodhisattva Jnanottara:

“Son of the family: Once a upon a time, long before the Thus-come-one, the Worthy, the fully perfected Buddha Dipamkara, there were five hundred merchants who set sail on the high seas in search of wealth. Among the company was a doer of dark deeds, a doer of evil deeds, a robber well-trained in the art of weaponry, who had come on board that very ship to attack them.

He thought, “I will kill all these merchants when they have achieved their aims and done what they set out to do, take all possessions and go to Jambu Continent.”

Son of the family: then the merchants achieved their aims and set about to depart. No sooner had they done so, then that deceitful person thought:

“Now I will kill all these merchants, take all their possessions and go to Jambu Continent. The time has come.”

133. At the same time, among the company on board was a captain named Great Compassionate. While Captain Great Compassionate slept on one occasion, the deities who dwelt in that ocean showed him in a dream:

“Among this ship's company is a person named so and so, of such and such sort of physique, of such and such garb, complex, and shape—a robber mischievous, a thief of others' property. He is thinking, “I will kill all these merchants, take all their possessions and go to Jambu Continent.” To kill these merchants would create formidable evil karma for that person. Why so? These five hundred merchants are all progressing toward supreme,

right and full awakening; they are each irreversible from awakening. If he should kill these Bodhisattvas, the fault—the obstacle caused by the deed—would cause him to burn in the great hells for as long as it take each one of these Bodhisattva to achieve supreme, right and full awakening, consecutively. Therefore, Captain, think of some skill in means to prevent this person from killing the five hundred merchants and going to the great hells because of the deed.

134. Son of the family: Then the captain Great Compassionate awoke. He considered what means there might be to prevent that person from killing the five hundred merchants and going to the great hells. Seven days passed with a wind averse to sailing to Jambu Continent. Without wind during those seven days he plunged deep into thought, not speaking to anyone.

He thought, “There is no means to prevent this [one] from slaying the merchants and going to the great hells but to kill him.”

And he thought, “if I were to report this to the merchants, they would kill and slay him with angry thoughts and all go to the great hells themselves.”

And he thought, “if I were to kill this person, I would likewise burn in the great hells for one hundred-thousand eons because of it. Yet I can bear to experience the pain of the great hells, that this person not slay these five hundred merchants and develop so much evil karma. I will kill this person myself.”

135. Son of the family: Accordingly, the captain Great Compassionate protected those five hundred merchants and protected that person from going to the great hells, by deliberately stabbing and slaying that person who was a robber with a spear, with great compassion and skill in means. And all among the company achieved their aims and each went to his own city.

136. Son of the family: At that time, in that life I was none other than the captain Great Compassionate. Have no second thought or doubt on this point. The five hundred merchants on board, the five hundred Bodhisattvas who are to [nirvanize] to supreme, right and full awakening in [this] auspicious eon.

Son of the family: For me, Samsara was curtailed for one hundred-thousand eons because of that skill in means and great compassion. And the robber died to be reborn in a world of paradise. The five hundred merchants on board are the five hundred future Buddhas of the auspicious eon.

137. Son of the family, what do you think of this? Can curtailing birth and death for one hundred-thousand eons with that skill in means and that great compassion with gnosis of skill in means be regarded as the Bodhisattva's obstacle caused by past deeds? Do not view it in that way. That should be regarded as his very skill in means. (Mipham 192)

Appendix 2: Rocca, "Aquinas and God Talk: Hovering over the Abyss."

Aquinas's theory of God-talk, a subtle and nuanced view which hovers over the divine abyss between the crags of purely positive and purely negative theology, evinces Christianity's penchant for invoking and positively identifying a God who is at the same time essentially mysterious and hidden, a God who is neither univocally dissolved into us humans nor equivocally placed beyond every ability of ours to know and name in prayer and worship. Thomas's God-talk blends both the positive and the negative, but the positive is foundational for the negative, for God is the pure positivity of infinite Being who in creation has also acted positively on our behalf. This stance accords well with the views of other theologians who also see God as pure positivity, albeit in terms different from

Aquinas's—Kasper, e.g., who sees God as pure and positive Love, or even Barth, who toward the end of his career finally admits that a God-talk based on the world of creation and redemption must have something positive to say if Christ is ultimately the positive “Yes” from God to that world and from that world to God. Aquinas's analogy-based theological epistemology only escapes idolatrous univocity, however, to the degree that it is based on judgment rather than concept, is continually interpreted by the dialectics of negative theology, and is conscious that the concepts used in its true judgments about God cannot give us any insight into the inner nature of God. His theological epistemology gladly grasps, as the only viable alternative, the inescapable paradox that in all our theologizing we link judgmental truth with conceptual agnosticism. Finally, Thomas's theological epistemology implies that when we talk about God, the very meanings of the words we use are somehow dependent upon what we hold to be true about God. From his perspective, our theological epistemology is ultimately based on the perceived truth-status of our foundational theological judgments, not the other way around. This suggests that the theory of God-talk to which we subscribe will always be indebted to the truths about God we hold dear.

Nothing can be predicated univocally about God and creatures, since no effect whose production does not require the total power of its agent cause can receive a full likeness of the agent, but only a partial one; so that what occurs among effects separately and plurally, exists in the cause simply and unitedly, as the sun by its single force produces many different forms in all things beneath it. Likewise, all perfections existing in creatures separately and plurally, preexist in God unitedly. Thus, whenever any perfection term is predicated of a creature, it signifies that perfection as distinct in idea from all others: e.g., when we call a human wise we signify a perfection that is distinct from the essence, power or existence of humans; but when we call God wise we do not intend to signify anything distinct from the divine essence, power or existence. And so,

when wise is predicated of a human, the name somehow circumscribes and comprehends the reality meant; but this is not the case with God, where wise does not comprehend the divine reality but lets it remain as surpassing the name's meaning. It is clear, then, that the name wise is not predicated with an identical meaning of God and humans, and the same can be said for all other names. ([Aquinas] 1.13.5)

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