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MEDITATION AS ETHICAL ACTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions developed substantive ethical systems on the personal, interpersonal and social levels, they did not develop systematic theoretical reflections on the nature and scope of ethics. Precisely because very little attention is devoted to the nature of ethical concepts, problems are created for modern scholars who are thus hindered in making comparisons between Buddhist and Western ethics. This paper thus examines the continuity between meditation and daily life in the context of understanding the ethical character of meditation as practiced by Tibetan Buddhists. The discussion is largely limited to the practice of meditation as taught in the //lam rim// (or _Gradual Stages of the Path_).

TEXT

"We have to cure our faults by attention and not by will."

Simone Weil, _Gravity and Grace_, 105.

OBJECT OF THE STUDY

Let me start by expressing my concerns over the project I am about to engage in, a discussion of the ethical framework implied by the practice of some basic meditations in Tibetan Buddhism. Although this discussion is certainly interesting and is perhaps important, it is also deeply problematic, for at least two reasons.

First, Tibetan Buddhist traditions did not develop systematic theoretical reflections on the nature and scope of ethics. This is not to say, as has been often misunderstood, that these traditions are

ethically weak. Like other rich traditions, Tibetan Buddhist traditions have developed substantive ethical systems, at the personal, interpersonal and social levels, while lacking a theoretical reflection on the nature of their ethical beliefs and practices. This lack of theoretical ethics, what we could call second degree ethics in opposition to substantive ethics, affects not only Tibetan Buddhism, but Indian Buddhism and other related traditions, and is quite remarkable given the richness of Indian Buddhist philosophical reflection in general. Compared to domains such as the philosophy of language and epistemology, Indian Buddhist traditions never developed a similar systematic reflection on the nature of ethical concepts. This is not to say that notions such as virtue or goodness are unknown in Indian Buddhist traditions, but that they are not taken to be philosophically interesting. Ethical concepts are studied, but they are not thought to warrant a theoretical discussion. For example, in the Vinaya literature, which is often taken as the main reference in ethical discussions in many Buddhist traditions, there are extensive substantive discussions: what are the precepts, what is included in them, what is excluded, etc. Very little attention is devoted, however, to the nature of ethical concepts. Precepts are discussed practically, but their status is not systematically theorized.

This situation creates problems for modern scholars who want to describe Buddhist ethics. They cannot proceed to a straightforward comparison between Buddhist and Western ethicists, but must first construct the studied object. When studying other philosophical topics such as Buddhist epistemology or metaphysics, scholars can discuss and compare well formed theories. Ideas are interpreted, but this work is a task of translation, which remains within a domain open to relatively unproblematic validation. The situation is quite different in the domain of philosophical ethics, where Indic Buddhist texts offer little theoretical reflection. Instead of delineating and translating the structures of an articulated system, scholars must pull together the often scattered elements of substantive ethics found within the tradition, and construct the logic of the tradition's ethical system, without getting much assistance from the tradition itself. This situation creates obvious problems of validation and risks the imposition of an alien scheme of thought. Nevertheless, running the risk seems preferable to leaving the impression that the practice of meditation in Buddhist traditions is ethically irrelevant.

The second source of my discomfort concerns the object of my study. A study of the ethical nature of certain Buddhist meditations is often in danger of blurring the line between the descriptive and the normative. In examining the ethical nature of meditation, I am not interested in extolling the value of meditation. My point is not that meditation is good, but that ethical concepts are relevant to the development of a theoretical understanding of meditation.

I believe the modern academic study of Buddhism does not address meditation adequately. Whereas we seem to find little problem to describe the myths, rituals, and narratives of Buddhist tradition, we seem to find it much more difficult to explain meditation in terms that are accessible to the educated public. When speaking

about meditation, our usual conceptual overflow dries up and we are reduced to using either emic terms or general concepts such

as mysticism or religious experience.

These terms are not necessarily false, but are certainly limited.[1] They tend to reinforce the stereotypes of meditation as alien, oriental, and as a part of "eastern religious practices." Even if meditation is not seen as alien, it is still viewed as non-rational or irrational, and as a practice separate from normal activities. Meditation may exist in Catholicism or Islam, but it is the exclusive domain of the few interested in mysticism, outside fields such as philosophy, or psychology. Viewing meditation as a mystical activity or a "religious experience" removes meditation from the activities of daily life, isolating it into a possibly glorious but unbreakable isolation. Anyone who knows how meditation is actually practiced in Buddhist traditions, which is the focus of this essay, will realize how unfortunate and inadequate this understanding is.

I am not claiming that this continuity between meditation and daily life is a particularity of Buddhist practice. In fact, a similar understanding is reflected in the works of Christian contemplatives such as Theresa of Avila and others. Modern academic discourse has difficulty, however, in capturing this continuity. This difficulty is not just due to the attrition of originally useful concepts such as mysticism, but reflects the deeper problem of the way in which religion has been constructed in modernity.[2] Rather than being a practice continuous with other human activities, religion has become a separate domain of private beliefs and experiences implemented in public rituals. As long as this picture dominates our understanding, practices such as Buddhist meditation will be hard to account for.

To overcome this limited understanding of religious practices, and to explore a variety of new theoretical approaches that emphasize a continuity with common experience rather than reify distinctions into unbridgeable separations, we need to drop our obsession with boundaries between disciplines. The study of meditation is, in this respect, exemplary. Although there is no denying that meditation is a religious activity, it is found also in secular traditions. For instance, forms of meditation were widely practiced among the Greeks, in particular during the Hellenistic period. In a book that has not received the attention it deserves, the French classicist Pierre Hadot has written brilliantly on how Stoic, Skeptic and Epicurean philosophical texts were in fact manuals for contemplation.[3] These practices, which he calls spiritual exercises, were forms of meditation. Thus, far from being limited to the practice of a few "mystics", meditation can be seen as a much more widespread phenomenon.

The approach which I adopt here is philosophical. I analyze the ethical nature of meditation as carried out in some Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Meditation is often viewed as an activity irrelevant to ethics. This supposedly non-ethical character of meditation is celebrated by some as going beyond the limited categories of good and evil. Though I am referring here mostly to a popular misunderstanding

of meditation, this view is not absent from the scholarly literature, where the goal of Buddhist traditions is sometime described as "beyond good and evil".[4] Within the framework of these particular traditions, such a description makes limited sense, but it does not represent a final theoretical statement on the non-ethical nature of meditation and its goal. These statements, which are mostly pragmatic and performative, should not be mistaken as meta-ethical descriptions

of the ethical nature or, rather, lack thereof, of the practices of these traditions.

Others view this perceived amorality with great suspicion, tying meditation to the modern culture of self-discovery, which, for them, displays an exaggerated sense of self-involvement and a narcissism deleterious to moral life. Whether they are right or not, one thing needs to be emphasized: it is a serious mistake to assume that the practice of meditation in modern culture reflects the "nature" of meditation in general. Meditation cannot be understood as being just a technique whose meaning remains independent of the cultural context in which it is practiced. Meditation is a technique of the self, in the sense that Foucault has delineated,[5] but this is quite different from the crude instrumental understanding often displayed in modern culture.

Thus, I intend to set this discussion on firm ground by looking at the way in which meditation is practiced by Tibetan Buddhists and how this reveals its ethical character. Although it might be possible to make a few general statements about meditation, I hold that meditation is a practice that takes place in particular contexts from which it can hardly be divorced. Meditation is not a disembodied phenomenon that is identical regardless of how, when, where, and by whom it is practiced. To avoid the fallacy of decontextualization, I will limit my impressionistic comments to the practice of meditation as taught in the //lam rim// (_Gradual Stages of the Path_) literature of Tibetan Buddhism.

This type of text was introduced in an early form to Tibet in the eleventh century by the Indian teacher Atii"sa. His work, _The Lamp of the Path to Enlightenment and its Explanation_, [6] became the model for a genre of Tibetan Buddhist literature, which later became known as //lam rim//, describing a large range of meditations preliminary to the practice of Tantra. This literature is particularly significant for our purpose. It represents a basic view of Buddhist practice which is widely accepted in Tibet, both among lay population and //virtuosi//. It is practiced by all the contemporary schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, its views resonate with the understanding of other Buddhist traditions, particularly Theravaada, which share a similar gradualist approach. Although the //lam rim// literature is Mahaayaanist, its framework includes the practices found in //Nikaaya// Buddhist traditions as well.[7] Hence, several of our conclusions will be applicable to other Buddhist traditions.

THREE OBSTACLES

Even when meditation is seen as relevant to the ethical domain,

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the relation between meditation and ethics remains external. In the Buddhist tradition, ethics, //"siila//, is mostly understood in terms of injunctions, such as the five precepts emphasized by the Theravaada tradition, or the ten virtues emphasized by the Tibetan tradition.[8] Many Buddhist writers have described how respecting moral rules is basic to the practice of meditation.[9] More preoccupied by practical than theoretical considerations, these authors have emphasized the preliminary and instrumental or auxiliary value of //"siila// with respect to meditation.[10] Many modern scholars have recognized the fundamental role of //"siila// within the tradition. Following the statements of Buddhist thinkers, these scholars have tended, however, to see the role of //"siila// as preliminary. They have concluded that

ethics play only a limited role within the Buddhist tradition.

Why is meditation often depicted as irrelevant or external to moral life? These assumptions come, I believe, from the dominance of a certain picture of ethics in modern thought, a picture that has a hold on our minds regardless of its limitations. Since Buddhist meditation does not fit into this model, we automatically assume that it is not directly relevant to moral life.

This picture of ethics has been described by Iris Murdoch as the "visit to the shop" view of morality. It compares the realm of moral life to a visit to a shop, where I enter "in a condition of totally responsible freedom, I objectively estimate the features of the goods, and I choose".[11] This picture is very widespread in our culture, with an influence that goes well beyond the explicit allegiance to a particular moral philosophy (such as Kantian deontology or utilitarian consequentialism), and often determines the assumptions made by modern scholars studying Buddhist ethics. To understand the ethical nature of certain Buddhist practices, we must undo the hold of this picture. We must become conscious of some of our key assumptions about ethics. Here, I would like to identify three key related presuppositions.

The first assumption is the idea that ethics primarily concerns the domain of rules and injunctions, and is less concerned with the development of a good character than with what is right. This emphasis is common to most of the important modern moral theories. It is central to a utilitarian view of morality, which emphasizes the importance of choosing the right course of action for the sake of the greater happiness of the greater number. Notions of injunctions and righteousness are also central to deontology, the approach that dominates modern ethical reflection. This view of moral life, which is associated with the name of Kant, holds that the moral character of a life must be appraised in terms of duty. For Kant, the goodness of moral life does not consist of the development of human qualities or a good heart, but consists of the ability to act according to the universal moral law. To be moral is to decide to act upon certain agreed rules of action, the maxims, which conform to the universal law.

The second, related assumption about ethics is the opposition between reason and emotion and the privileging of the former. This

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dualism is strongly marked in the Kantian tradition. To greatly simplify, we cannot help what we feel but only what we do. Hence, I cannot be said to have a duty to have certain emotions or to act from certain emotions. Ethics is to be understood in terms of obligations. Since emotions cannot be made objects of obligations, they are without moral relevance. Their presence or absence cannot reflect on a person morally since they lie outside of the scope of personal responsibility.

This opposition between rationality and emotion goes well beyond the Kantian deontological tradition and is assumed by most modern ethical thinkers. For them, character and emotions are considered marginal to moral life, which centers around the notion of rules. A person is moral not because she has a good character, and is kind and patient, but because she manages to choose the right rule. Ethics is then seen as being concerned with the exploration of the rationality

of punctual and limited decisions reached through weighting advantages and disadvantages of alternatives, in isolation from global life projects and memberships in traditions.

Finally, a third assumption is the opposition between external agency and internal attitudes. Here again, the Kantian tradition is representative of the widely shared view that ethics concerns the domain of external activity, not the realm of internal emotions, which are passive. Ethics is a matter of thinking clearly, and then proceeding to outward dealings with other human beings. Hence, the attitudes that we have and the feelings that we experience are morally irrelevant. To be good does not mean to have good human qualities, as in most traditional cultures, but to choose the right course of action.

This picture of ethics as consisting of rational choices regarding external actions is very widespread in our culture. Contemporary philosophers such as Simone Weil, Charles Taylor, Iris Murdoch, Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams, Martha Nussbaum, and others, have commented on its weaknesses.[12] To briefly summarize and greatly simplify, these critics have insisted on the limited and even pernicious nature of this view of morality. They have argued that such a model represents an impoverishment of our understanding of moral life. Instead of being relevant to the way in which we lead our lives at the most pedestrian level, ethics becomes restricted to the discussion of limited and isolated situations. There is no denying that moral choices concerning the death penalty or abortion are morally important, but how often are we confronted with such choices, either personally or even as citizens?

More relevantly for my project, I would like to argue that as long as we are dominated by the picture of ethics described above, we will not be able to understand the ethical nature of meditation. For, if ethics primarily concerns the rationality of choices regarding punctual issues and has little to do with internal emotions, motivations, and moral perception, meditation can hardly be relevant to ethical life. It is clear that meditation is not very helpful in making such decisions. Thus, it must remain incidental to ethical

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life. It may help to make a particularly difficult choice, but it remains external to ethical life. The ethical moment is not constitutively involved in the practice of meditation.

To explore an alternative view, we need other broader ethical models, in which ethics is not reduced to a kind of informed consumer's choice, but includes both internal and external domains of our lives. Internal emotions must be seen as fully relevant to the moral character of a person. It is true that we cannot be obliged to have certain attitudes towards our fellow human beings. It does not follow from this that these attitudes are irrelevant to ethical life, but that ethical life cannot be reduced to the domain of obligations and injunctions. In order to appreciate the ethical character of meditation, we need ethical models that transcend the dualism of most contemporary ethics, that overcome the divide between reason and emotion, activity and passivity, and that include the whole range of human endeavour, both internal and external, within the purview of ethics.[13]

A MORE INCLUSIVE MODEL

As several contemporary thinkers have emphasized, a richer picture of ethics can be found in the ancient Greeks' views, particularly those of Aristotle and the eudaimonic tradition. Following this tradition, our attention shifts away from the notions of obligation and choice to that of goodness. Ethics is to be understood as being about the good life, that is, the life oriented towards a good end. This //telos// is //eudaimonia//, that is, human happiness and well-being, in which the good is a whole made up of interlocking parts, forms of activity, internal and external, in accordance with the practice of certain virtues.

Philosophically informed Buddhist scholars have begun to realize the importance of virtue ethics (the view of ethics as being about the good life in accordance with the practice of virtues) and teleological models for the understanding of ethics in Buddhist traditions. A particularly valuable attempt has been Damien Keown's study of Buddhist ethics from an Aristotelean perspective,[14] which uses virtue ethics as a model to describe Buddhist ethics in relation to other traditions. It is tempting, however, to go too far in this assimilation of Buddhist ideas to those of Aristotle. I believe that this is the danger that threatens Keown's otherwise excellent work. There are certainly similarities between the two sides, but there are also differences (a familiar picture). The problem with the assimilation of Buddhist ethics to an Aristotelean model is that it privileges the similarities, and relegate differences to the inessential, leading to unwarranted assimilations.

An example in Keown's work is the assimilation of the Buddhist concept of //cetanaa// (usually translated as volition) to Aristotle's notion of moral choice. In the Abhidharma, //cetanaa// is the direction that the mind takes when it is impelled to move toward its object. Hence, it is certainly involved in moral choice, but does this warrant their assimilation? For example, the Buddhist concept of

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//cetanaa// does not imply rational deliberation. //Cetanaa// is present in non-reflective spontaneous mental states. Choice takes place when we pause to reflect on the spontaneous direction that the mind has already taken. I believe that Keown's translation of //cetanaa// as choice and his explicit assimilation of the two concepts is inadequate to the Buddhist understanding. It forces an Aristotelean understanding on a concept which is quite different.

Keown does a very good job of unearthing some of the important resemblances between Aristotelean psychology and Buddhist ideas. He is right to emphasize that it is simplistic to describe Buddhism as advocating a complete eradication of desire.[15] Buddhism distinguishes between attachment, that is, excessive desire, and other forms of affectivity (such as the desire to help others), which are clearly recommended. The similarity with Aristotle's thought has been hidden by the simplistic descriptions of Buddhism as denying validity to any affective involvement. But, while acknowledging similarities, large differences are also present, for much of what Aristotle holds as healthy emotional involvement (desire for sense objects, attachment to one's community, etc.) is, in the Buddhist view, problematic. Aristotelean and Buddhist evaluations of the health of human desires vary, for while Aristotle holds that human desires are basically sound and just need education, Buddhists hold that most humans are dominated by unhealthy desires.

Keown uses Aristotle's binary opposition between the cognitive

and the affective to explicate Buddhist ideas.[16] Buddhists do recognize these aspects of mind, for instance, in the concept that wisdom is cognitive whereas attachment and compassion are affective. However, I would argue that applying a binary model to Buddhist psychology is inappropriate, for it forces a number of mental factors

such as mindfulness, enthusiasm, and deliberation into one of the two sides of the dichotomy. The Buddhist view emphasizes that these mental factors are common to both affective and cognitive states. Any mental state in which the degree of attention is sufficient is said to contain these mental factors. I would like to argue that from a Buddhist perspective, these factors are neither strictly affective nor cognitive in and of themselves, but are best described as enabling either side. Buddhist models of the psyche do not conform to the opposition cognitive-affective, and forcing them into this mode distorts the picture.

My point here is not to cast aspersion on Keown's work, which is an important contribution to the study of Buddhist ethics. I wish to emphasize that the use of a virtue ethics model does not necessarily imply an adherence to Neo-Aristoteleanism. There have been many teleological systems that were not Aristotelean. The Hellenistic ethical systems, for example, offer examples of virtue ethics that are teleological without being Aristotelean.

Whereas Aristotle emphasizes that the good (or, at least, one of the aspect of the good) is found in common activities pursued within political communities, Hellenistic thinkers such as Epicurus, Pyrrho or Seneca emphasize a more ascetic and individualist ethics. The good

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is found less in conversations within human communities than in the development of internal virtues that free oneself from the limitations and faults of society. Human happiness is found in a state of equanimity (//ataraxia//) achieved by removing the disturbances brought about by passions and anxieties. The achievement of such a state is the goal of ethics, which is intensely therapeutic. Not only is ethics practical, as Aristotle also emphasizes, but it is transformative. [17] Epicurus says:

Empty is the philosopher's argument by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated. For just as there is no use in a medical art that does not cast out the sickness of bodies, so too there is no use in a philosophy, if it does not throw out suffering from the soul.[18]

The central motive of Hellenistic philosophy is the urgency of human suffering and the commitment of philosophy to help this condition. Hellenistic ethics is based on the practice of certain virtues, such as trust or suspension of belief, that constitute the good life. Although Hellenistic ethics is, like Aristotelean ethics, teleological, it does not share the metaphysical presuppositions of Aristotelean ethics, nor is its descriptions of the //telos// identical. Whereas Aristotle emphasizes at one level the common life of the //polis//, optimistically assuming that most of our attitudes and beliefs are essentially healthy, Hellenistic philosophers believe this view is overly optimistic. Societies are not healthy. Humans are not rational and their values are unsound. They need philosophical therapy to become healthy.

The goal of the Buddhist tradition, freedom from negative emotions, resemble that of many Hellenistic philosophers, freedom from disturbance. Moreover, like Hellenistic philosophies, Buddhist views emphasize the importance of certain virtues, detachment and compassion, which are both therapeutic and constitutive of the good. Buddhism is practical in the highest degree, holding that the value of philosophy is not theoretical but lies in its ability to transform humans. Virtues are not meant to just remedy some deficiency or resist some temptation, but to achieve a transformation of the person. Hence, both these traditions offer examples of teleological views that clearly differ from Aristoteleanism, despite being virtue ethics.

Thus, my reference to virtue ethics does not imply a commitment to some form of Neo-Aristoteleanism, but is more minimal. In my view, virtue ethics implies that actions are oriented towards certain ends that humans consider to be good. Ethics discusses the nature of these ends, separating the positive from the negative goals in relation to the values and ideals provided by a culture or a tradition, more specifically by what is usually described as its ethos. The ethos of a people is "the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude towards themselves and their world that life reflects." [19] Virtue ethics reflects on the nature of these goals, and delineates the virtues that lead to and constitute these ends. [20] A virtue ethics is not

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necessarily committed to more than this. [21]

The ethical views of the //lam rim// tradition satisfy these minimal criteria. The //lam rim// tradition does not provide a complete view of the "good", [22] but presents a broad model of Buddhist goals and practices. Its literature describes Buddhist practice as aiming at three types of "good". On a lower level is the attainment of a good rebirth through the practice of moral precepts. This goal is traditionally taken by laity in Buddhist societies, and is considered by the //lam rim// to be limited. It is not seen as worthless or separated from other Buddhist practices, [23] but as provisional, a way to move the mind away from attachment to worldly concerns. On the middling level is Arhathood, the state of a person liberated from the causes of suffering, the negative emotions (//nyon mongs//, //kle"sa//), through the practice of the threefold training (//bslab ba gsum//, tri"sik.saa) of morality, concentration, and insight. The //lam rim// literature considers this goal, which is taken by //Nikaaya// traditions as central, to be valuable, but still limited. On the highest level is Buddhahood, the state of a person having reached the perfection of knowledge and compassionate activities. This is the goal emphasized by the //lam rim// tradition, and which corresponds to its Mahaayaanist perspective.

It is clear from this description that the //lam rim// tradition offers a teleological model. It posits certain goals to Buddhist practice which are reached by the development of certain excellencies that are constitutive of them. Although the goals posited are different, they all share in certain fundamental virtues that constitute the good life, summarized as being a life of compassionate detachment or detached compassion, according to whether one pursues the first two levels or the third. Moreover, this tradition is eudaimonist, for it describes human beings as first and foremost concerned with happiness (understood not as pleasure but as well-being and flourishing). It further holds that ordinary life is unable to provide such a happiness, which can only be reached through practices

such as meditation. Only then will we be able to partake in the more developed forms of what Buddhist traditions consider the good life.

In this broader picture of ethics, the whole of Buddhist practice becomes ethically relevant. Meditation in particular becomes central to ethical life, understood as the development of the virtues or excellencies constitutive of human flourishing that is the goal of the Buddhist tradition. It is in the practice of meditation that the central virtues of the tradition, detachment and compassion, are developed. Hence, far from being irrelevant to Buddhist ethics, meditation turns out to be central.

This is obviously not to say that the practice of Buddhist ethics requires that of meditation. Meditation is usually reserved in traditional Buddhism to religious //virtuosi// such as monks and nuns. Although the separation between these highly trained specialists and laity is more blurred in modernity,[24] the average person in Buddhist societies still never practices meditation. However, values central to the life of many Buddhists, such as compassion and certain

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forms of detachment manifested in giving, are related to the practice of meditation. According to the understanding of many Buddhists, these virtues can be fully developed only through the practice of meditation. Hence, meditation is central to a full understanding of Buddhist ethics, even for the majority, who will never engage personally in any meditation. Moreover, the importance of this practice is understandable if we adopt the more inclusive perspective provided by the standpoint of virtue ethics and distinguish the domain of prohibitions and injunctions from ethics as understood in this broader sense.

This model of ethics is strengthened by making a distinction between ethics and morality, which goes back to Hegel and which has been developed by contemporary thinkers such as Williams, Ricoeur, etc. Put briefly, the distinction between ethics and morality marks two domains of ethical life. "Morality" refers to the limited domain of rules and injunctions. "Ethics" entails an appreciation of activities from the point of view of whether or not they are good, and refers to a more global dimension of life lived in accordance with the practice of virtues.

Such a distinction is useful from several perspectives. It avoids reducing ethical life to punctual rational choices of appropriate rules, but it also allows for an appreciation of the integrity of both domains. Ethical life is not reduced to morality, but morality is not eliminated either. To state that there is more to ethics than prohibitions and injunctions could lead to the other extreme of dismissing rules and obligations altogether.[25] This, I believe, is going too far. P. Ricoeur is quite right to emphasize the importance of prohibitions and duties, the domain of morality. Ethics avoid falling into a romantic effusion of good sentiments only if it submits itself to the test of norms. Accepting norms limits the dangers created by our almost unlimited capacity for self-deception, by testing our ethical project against the norms provided by prohibitions and injunctions. Norms are necessary to insure the ethical nature of a global vision. Norms cannot, however, necessarily be expected to cohere, and, in fact, lead to unavoidable conflicts as evidenced by complicated contemporary bio-ethical issues. Thus, ethical life is not limited to the choice of the right norms. We need to return to the overall ethical vision of our lives in order to resolve the conflicts

over competing norms. Norms are not self-sufficient, but must be understood in the larger context of an ethical vision concerning one's whole life.[26]

I find this model particularly appropriate for the discussion of Buddhist ethics. The distinction between ethics and morality is philosophically important. It broadens ethics to include the realm of internal attitudes and emotions, without sacrificing the necessary rigor. It also fits the study of ethics in the //lam rim// tradition, where we find similar suggestions.

THE DOUBLE MEANING OF //"SIILA//

As argued above, //"siila// mostly concerns precepts and rules

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within the Buddhist tradition. However, in the //lam rim// literature it is also suggested that the meaning of //"siila// should not be limited to the domain of injunctions. While discussing the meaning of //"siila// as one of the six perfections (//phar phyin//, //paaramitaa//) in the bodhisattva practice, Atii"sa distinguishes three meanings in the Mahaayaana understanding of //"siila//: //"siila// as a prohibition of faults (//sdom pa'i tshul khirms//), //"siila// as a collection of virtuous factors (//dge ba chos bsdus pa'i tshul khirms//), and //"siila// as working for the sake of sentient beings (//sems can don byed pa'i tshul khirms//).[27]

Roughly speaking,[28] the first level of //"siila// concerns the domain of injunctions, the keeping of the precepts and rules to ward off faults. It resembles Ricoeur's morality, although it is not yet clear to me whether this //"siila// can be understood deontologically or not. Atii"sa explains faults as being of two types:[29] natural faults (//rang bzhin gyi kha na ma mtho ba//) and conventional faults (//bcas pa'i kha na ma mtho ba//). This is a distinction, well discussed in the Vinaya literature, which Atii"sa uses to flesh out what //"siila// means //qua// morality. Natural faults are actions such as killing. These actions are negative in that they directly harm others. Everybody engaging in them would incur a fault, and would engender a negative karma, regardless of who they are. The second type of fault incurred by breaking a conventional rule. For example, it is not non-virtuous to eat after noon. For monks, however, such an action constitutes a fault because of the conventional rules they have accepted.[30] Among these two types of fault, the former is far more important. Hence, morality is defined in the //lam rim// tradition as the development of the resolution to abstain (//spong sems//) from harming others.[31]

The second meaning of //"siila// concerns the more inclusive ethical moment.[32] It is the whole range of virtuous practices in which a person engages after making a commitment to reach Buddhahood for the sake of other sentient beings. Practices such as patience, giving, contemplation, and meditation are then forms of //"siila//. For Atii"sa, this form of //"siila// is identified with the practice of the bodhisattva and does not concern other forms of practice. Implicitly, however, his description broadens the meaning of //"siila// and takes us beyond the domain of injunctions. //"siila// is not just keeping to precepts, but any virtuous activity. This implicitly suggested view of //"siila// corresponds to Ricoeur's ethics, the good life in accordance with the practice of virtues.

Similarly, the third level also goes beyond the domain of

injunctions. Working for the sake of sentient beings is described by Atii"sa as virtuous activity oriented to the service of others: nursing the sick, leading the blind, helping the downtrodden, feeding those who are hungry, providing lodging and clothing for the needy, etc.[33] This third level of ethical practice is interesting in more than one respect. First, it dispels the misrepresentation of Buddhism as promoting self-involvement. Secondly and more importantly, this level of ethical practice shows the importance of relations with others in Buddhist tradition. The third level of ethical practice is more

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specifically Mahaayaanist than the second. Though intended for bodhisattvas, the ethics of collecting virtues can be extended to other Buddhist practices. This is not the case with the ethics of helping others, for this ethics is resolutely oriented towards others. Although similar practices are recommended in //Nikaaya// traditions, helping others is seen by these traditions as subordinate to the attainment of liberation for oneself. The Mahaayaanist tradition differs in that it holds that helping others is a goal in and of itself. The difference between these two traditions, which are represented unequally in the //lam rim// as level two and three, is clear in the presentations of the meditations on loving-kindness and compassion. Whereas //Nikaaya// tradition takes this type of meditation as a means to self-development, the Mahaayaana tradition emphasizes that compassion is aimed at helping others.[34] The goal is not just to develop a healthy concern for others, but to actually help them.

The difference between these two views of Buddhist practice does not entail a commitment to different ethical models. In the Mahaayaanist tradition helping others does not imply a self-denial or ignore self-cultivation. Helping others is not a sacrifice of one's self, but a fulfillment of one's capacity for generosity. All beings seek happiness, and generosity does not contradict this search. Generosity is in fact its supreme fulfillment. Thus, the ethics of helping others can be integrated within a teleological model.[35] Helping others is a form of developing oneself, though concern for oneself is not an adequate motivation for helping others.

MEDITATION AND VIRTUE

Delineating some of the obstacles towards the understanding of meditation and providing a model that highlights the ethical character of meditation is a helpful first step. To develop a richer picture of the ethical role of meditation, we will have to analyze more closely the nature of meditation, and its relation to the development of virtues.

In the Theravaada tradition, meditation is described as //bhaavanaa//, that is, cultivation or development. In Tibetan Buddhism, meditation is called //sgom//, a word derived from the verb //goms//, to become accustomed. Meditation is a practice that aims at a process of self-transformation, in a cultivation of the desirable traits of one's character. Certain nefarious habits due to the domination of negative emotions, such as attachment, are transformed and gradually eliminated. Hence, meditation can be described as a process of becoming accustomed to and developing virtues such as concentration, mindfulness, detachment, compassion, etc., as well as an attempt to uproot internal negative obstacles to the good life.

At this juncture, two questions arise: what is the nature of

virtue developed by meditation, and what are the particular virtues that meditation develops? There is no exact equivalent to the word "virtue" in the //lam rim// literature. The closest term is probably //dge ba'i chos// (//ku"sala dharma//), that is, virtuous quality.

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Atii"sa gives the following explanation of the virtuous nature of practices:

[My] teacher said that such a threefold ethical training is virtuous because when it is properly taken and protected it [fulfills] the goals of oneself and others and leads to happiness and well-being.[36]

The three levels of ethical practice delineated above are virtuous inasmuch as they lead the self and others to happiness and well-being. This explanation, which emphasizes the relation between virtue and //eudaimonia//, is vague enough. It becomes clearer if we remember that, for Atii"sa and other Indian and Tibetan Buddhist thinkers, virtue and happiness have to be understood in relation to the doctrine of karma and its result. Actions and attitudes are defined as virtuous in relation to their positive karmic results. The Indian teacher Vasubandhu makes explicit this link between karma, i.e., action, and happiness when he says:

A good (//ku"sala//) act is salvific because it brings about pleasant retribution and in consequence protects from suffering for a certain time (this impure good act); or because it leads to the attainment of Nirvaa.na, and, in consequence, protects definitively from suffering (this is the pure good act).[37]

Actions, including mental attitudes, are virtuous because they correspond to the type of action that produces a good result. This result can be of several types. It can be a good rebirth, in the case of actions performed with what an inferior motivation as described by the //lam rim// literature. It can also be Arhathood or Buddhahood, in the case of middling or superior scopes. In all cases, the good result is brought about by the virtuous action.

This definition of virtue raises a number of problems. For, how are we supposed to evaluate the result of a given action? In many cases, recognized Buddhist virtues fail to bring immediate positive results, and the result described concerns the long term. But in this case, how do we know which result is produced by which action? The short answer to this complicated epistemological problem is that we do not know. To decide which action produces positive effects, we must rely on the testimony of an enlightened person as found in a scripture. Thus, in final analysis, it is the scriptural tradition that decides what counts as virtuous. This difficulty in defining virtue is typical of a virtue ethics system. Aristotle's definition of virtues as the states that are the means, that is, between extremes, is considered one of the most problematic parts of his Ethics.

To define virtue in term of karmic results raises complicated and difficult questions. I characterized the overall ethical framework in the //lam rim// tradition as teleological, but this definition seems to entail a consequentialist view, not to say a utilitarian one, since

practices are determined as ethical in relation to their results. My greatly simplified epistemological discussion shows that the description of virtue in terms of results is deceptive, since we must rely on a scriptural tradition to decide what the karmic consequences of a given action are. The scripture will help us not by explaining the particular results of a particular action, but by delineating the type of action which in general brings positive results. The question then becomes: how is the relation between certain types of action and their results in the //lam rim// tradition?

To respond, we must go back to our separation between morality and ethics. Our discussion of Buddhist virtue ethics does not concern the limited realm of injunctions. It concerns the overall ethical framework of the tradition as well as a limited range of important virtues involved in the practice of meditation, which are central to the tradition. The way in which injunctions are understood in Buddhist traditions is a topic which will require further inquiry. The virtues involved in the practice of meditation (in terms of the //lam rim//, principally the virtues of the middling and higher scopes) are understood by the tradition not consequentially, but teleologically.

The difference between the two is not always obvious. Like consequentialism, teleology understands ethical actions from the point of view of their consequences. An action is ethical in relation to a goal, a //telos//, which is defined in terms of happiness and human flourishing. The goodness of such an action depends on its relation to that end and, hence, is defined in relation to its consequences. The crucial difference between consequentialism and teleology concerns the relation between one's actions and the end that they pursue. Consequentialism sees the relation as instrumental: an action is good because it brings about the right result. Teleology sees the relation as constitutive: an attitude is good because it constitutes the desired end. This is where teleology is closer to deontology than to consequentialism. Virtuous actions are chosen for their own sake, not for their instrumental values. This is clearly the case of the virtues involved in the practice of meditation. Buddhist meditation is not, at least normatively, a technique that can be mechanically applied, and will lead automatically to greater happiness. The practice that constitutes virtue inasmuch as it is practiced according to the norms of the tradition. Thus, our definition of virtue is compatible with our assertion that meditation is best understood as a practice central to and constitutive of the good life.

The second question concerns the list of virtues that are relevant to the practice of meditation. In the Theravaada tradition, the Abhidharma provides lists of virtuous qualities, such as the five faculties (//indriya//, //dbang po//), which are: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. They are mental faculties to be developed by the practitioner, which lead to the development of liberating insight. The //lam rim// literature also refers to this type of list. Its central classification of virtue is different, however, for it emphasizes the central importance of the six perfections. The list is divided into two types of virtues. The first group constitutes virtues such as giving, ethics, and patience, which

are described by the tradition as belonging to the method (//thabs//, //upaaya//) aspect of the path, directed by compassion toward the welfare of others and leading to the development of the embodied aspect of Buddhahood. These virtues, which are part of the collection of merits (//pu.nya//, //bsod nams//), are other-regarding. They concern our relations with other beings. The second group is constituted by the self-oriented virtues, such as wisdom. These virtues, which take part in the collection of gnosis (//j~naana//, //ye shes//), concern our way of apprehending reality and lead to the development of the cognitive aspect of Buddhahood.

These two types of virtue resemble the usual distinction between emotional and cognitive virtues. The first three virtues are driven by compassion and imply a positive altruistic attitude toward other beings. Wisdom, on the other hand, is more cognitive. It brings about insight into the selfless nature of things, thus removing obstacles such as selfishness and attachment. Wisdom is not only insight into the selfless nature of reality, it is also the practical intelligence that is required by the practice of other virtues.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of these two aspects as being separate. As emphasized in this essay, emotions and cognitions are not separate. Emotions are cognitive and, vice versa, cognitions are emotional. For example, compassion in the //lam rim// tradition is not just a feeling of sympathy for others, but an attitude that needs to be cognitively enriched. Although compassion exists in all of us, it is usually shallow and narrow. We are sometimes compassionate towards a small number of beings. To become the basis for a practice of larger scope, compassion must be deepened and extended so that it can include all sentient beings. This enlargement is emotional (the ability to generate positive feelings towards the people one usually dislikes), as well as cognitive (the ability to perceive the suffering that is often hidden by apparent happiness). Similarly, giving is not just a sentimental thrust of generosity, but is to be cultivated into an intelligent attitude of sharing with others. It is to be practiced in combination with other virtues: with respect to morality, patience, energy, concentration, and discrimination. The good life can be reached, according to this tradition, only if the emotional and cognitive aspects of our personality are brought together.

THE PLACE OF MEDITATION IN ETHICS

But what is the role of meditation in the development of these virtues? The //lam rim// tradition distinguishes two types of meditation: meditation of stabilization (//'jog sgom//) and meditation of investigation (//dpyad sgom//). This distinction is broader than the distinction made by most Buddhist traditions (Tibetan included), that between tranquility (//"samatha//, //gzhi gnas//) and insight (//vipa"syanaa//, //lhag mthong//). [38] Meditation of stabilization involves a fixation of the attention on a single object, often one's breath or a visualized object. When the mind has reached a minimal level of calm and focus, the meditator has the choice between continuing to keep her attention on a single object, or opening the focus of her attention onto more than one object. The first type is a

practice of concentration that leads to the development of tranquility. The second category, investigative meditation, is extremely broad, for it includes all the meditative exercises that are not single-pointed. As soon as the practitioner considers more than one single aspect of any given object, as soon as, for example,

she starts to let her mind notice the difference in length of the breaths, her meditation has become investigative. In the case of a meditation on the breath, such meditation would be also a form of practice leading to insight. Not all investigative meditations are forms of insight, however. For example, a visualization in which more than one aspect is considered is a meditation of investigation, but not a practice of insight. Similarly, the meditation on loving kindness, the recollection of the Buddha's virtues, or the meditation on death are investigative, but not insight practices.

Among the two types of meditation, the //lam rim// tradition emphasizes the latter type. Investigative meditation, such as meditation on compassion or selflessness, is more important, because it is directly relevant to the practice of the path. In ethical terms, such a practice contributes directly to the development of virtues. When well practiced, it is in and of itself a virtue. In the //lam rim// tradition, meditation on compassion is not just developed for one's own spiritual comfort, but is thought to lead to caring for and helping others (as illustrated by the third level of ethics described above). The increased ability to help others is the measure of the success of one's practice. Compassion is an excellence that prefigures and constitutes the final goal of the path, Buddhahood.

But what about wisdom? A convincing answer to this question would require a lengthy discussion of the doctrine of selflessness and its relation to ethics. The following sketchy remarks will have to suffice within this limited essay. For the Buddhist tradition,[39] wisdom is a lived insight into the selfless nature of reality. This insight brings about a transformation of one's self-understanding that constitutes a virtue. When the meditator realizes selflessness, she loses her self-centered attitude and attachment to herself. This in turn leads to the abandonment of negative emotions such as attachment, hatred, and pride, which are all based on ignorance, that is, a self-grasping attitude. In the perspective of the middling scope, which corresponds to the views of //Nikaaya// tradition such as Theravaada, such a wisdom is the central virtue. Its development constitutes the goal, the ideal of Arhat, the person who is detached, and thereby equanimous and compassionate.[40] Other virtues are meant to facilitate the development of such a wisdom. In the perspective of the larger scope, which is privileged by the //lam rim// tradition and reflects the Mahaayaanist perspective, insight must be combined with the other-regarding virtues, such as giving to lead to the goal of Buddhahood. In both perspectives, however, wisdom is a virtue in and of itself. It constitutes a good, a detached self-understanding which, according to the tradition, leads towards greater care for others. It is //eudaimonia//.

The other type of meditation, stabilization or concentration, is not considered by the tradition as a virtue in and of itself, though

it is an indispensable preparation for the practice of more ethically relevant types of meditation. Concentration and energy, the fifth and fourth virtues, play a role which could be described as enabling. They are virtues inasmuch as they enable the practice of other virtues, particularly wisdom, which grows out of the practice of special insight. To reach insight, the practitioner must first develop a high level of concentration. Only when the mind is powerfully focused, can she develop the sharp vision of reality that is required to develop wisdom.

The relation between concentration and the other emotional virtues brings us to attention and its importance for the development of virtues. Attention is in fact what all the different forms of meditation developed by the //lam rim// tradition have in common. They are all activities that require and lead to the development of attention. In the practice of stabilization, attention is focused on a single point. In the practice of investigation, attention is more open, considering the different aspects of a phenomenon. In all cases, the practice of meditation consists of a development of attention. It is here that the relevance of meditation as an ethical practice appears more clearly.

Attention is an essential factor in ethics. Its importance can be understood at several levels. At the simplest level, a person needs to be attentive in order to be ethical. A distracted person fails to see that a situation requires a particular course of action. The contribution of attention to the practice of ethics, however, goes much further than this simple requirement that one not be absent-minded. As Simone Weil claims, the role of attention in ethics is central. She says:

The poet produces the beautiful by fixing his attention on something real. It is the same with the act of love. To know that this man who is hungry and thirsty really exists as much as I do--that is enough, the rest follows of itself.[41]

For Weil, the role of attention is not limited to the mere fact of paying attention. It is the central element of the good life which allows a person to develop the virtues that constitute the good. To understand this, we must go back to the beginning of our discussion where we emphasized the limitations of modern ethical models. There we critiqued the dominance of intellectualism over Western ethics and the dualism between emotion and cognition.

Both these views seem to me quite inadequate to account for ethical life, for they overly privilege activity over passivity and the intellect over emotions. The point here is not to do the opposite and present an emotivist view of ethics. Buddhist traditions are quite remarkable in that they emphasize the cognitive side of ethical life. One of the main obstacles to the development of an ethical behaviour is cognitive (ignorance), and so is the means (wisdom) to address these obstacles. This cognitive factor, however, profoundly differs from modern cognitivism. For the Buddhist tradition, the cognitive

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nature of ethics is not divorced from the emotional side. When Buddhists speak of the importance of cognition in ethical life, they are not speaking about a disincarnated computer-like rationality. Rather, they are referring to the development of insight through the practice of meditation. Such insight is an embodied cognitive faculty, bound with emotional factors. Thus, the point here is not to emphasize emotion at the expense of cognition, passivity over activity, but to overcome this duality to restore a balance to ethical life.

ATTENTION AND THE GOOD LIFE

It is here that the role of attention becomes central to the good life. For, in most cases, our difficulty in behaving ethically does not come from cognitive difficulties, at least understood in the ordinary sense of the word. The cases in which we are genuinely

puzzled do exist, but they are relatively rare. In most cases, our problem does not come from a lack of information, but from an emotional inability to see the ethically relevant features of a situation.[42] For example, I see a homeless person. I know that this person is in trouble. I also know that I could help this person, but that would involve some trouble. I decide to remain uninvolved. This decision is not due to a cognitive deficit, but an emotional inability to overcome my fear, as well as an inability to feel strongly enough for the person. This fear and indifference lock me into a certain vision in which I focus on the aspects of the situation that threaten me. This prevents me from considering other perspectives, particularly the ethically salient aspects of the situation, the fact that a fellow human being requires help that I can provide. In particular, this precludes me from engaging in what Strawson describes as "the range of reactive feelings and attitudes that belong to involvement or participation with others in interpersonal human relationships".[43]

It is here that the type of attention developed by meditation becomes particularly relevant. Most forms of Buddhist meditation rest on the development of a form of attention usually described as mindfulness (//dran pa//, //sm.rti//). It is the type of attention that we use when we focus on whatever appears to our mental or physical senses. When we are mindful, we are alive to the situation that unfolds in us and outside of us. In our example, a mindful person notices the homeless person as well as a reluctance to help him. The //lam rim// tradition insists on the centrality of this quality, which is not reflective, but allows us to be aware of our attitudes and emotions. Attention is not introspection. Being mindful does not imply an active search of one's feeling, but, rather, a receptiveness to them. We are ready to notice events, both outside and inside us, but we are not searching for anything in particular.[44]

Mindfulness is central to the development of a good life within the Buddhist tradition. It is the basic attitude that allows the practitioner to develop other forms of meditation, which as we have seen lead to the development of emotional and cognitive virtues. Mindfulness is also particularly significant in that it links categories usually considered apart. For example, mindfulness binds

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body and mind together. Although mental, it is embodied, intertwined with the physical sensations. It is mindfulness that makes one realize the embodied nature of one's being and brings the meditator a sense of being grounded. More relevantly, mindfulness bridges the gap between domains that are often kept apart in modern ethics, such as activity and passivity. As both a state of heightened receptivity as well as a starting point for further action, mindfulness is both active and passive. Mindfulness also brings together emotion and cognition, acting as the basis of both, and thereby enabling and keeping together these aspects of the human psyche.

Mindfulness is also directly relevant to the development of basic moral sensitivity. If we go back to our example, we can see that the development of mindfulness would have helped me to deal with the situation more appropriately. It would have given me the awareness of the emotional obstacles, here fear and indifference, that prevented me from helping a fellow human being. It would have allowed me to notice the limitations of my perception, and shift to another more compassionate perspective.[45] Being mindless, however, I was carried away by my emotions. I was led to act unethically, not because I did

not know what needed to be done, but because I was unable to resist my impulses. I walked away from the homeless person displeased with my inability to help and yet unable to do anything else.

Buddhist meditation is meant to address this type of problem. At a higher level, it is meant to modify these powerful emotions by eradicating self-grasping, their root. More immediately, though, the practice of meditation is meant to develop mindfulness. This basic virtue, which enables us to develop wisdom, is ethically relevant, for it helps us to gain some awareness and freedom from our emotions. This increases our ability to deal more effectively with negative emotions and develop positive ones. When it is well developed, mindfulness brings our emotions into focus very quickly, we become almost immediately aware of our responses. This is quite important, for emotions such as fear develop gradually in our minds. Because we usually lack attention, we do not notice this process until these emotions dominate our minds. At this stage, it is often too late to do very much, for we are trapped by these emotions. The more we try to overcome them, the more we become entangled in them. Attention helps us, because it brings these emotions into focus right from the start. At this point, they are still weak patterns that are starting to set the tone without yet being dominant. Being attentive, we notice them and this may enable us to bring about other emotional responses. For example, instead of feeling fear and indifference, I become sympathetic to the plight of the homeless person. This in turn, allows me to open myself to this person.

A FEW MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Although attention is essential to the development of a good life in the Buddhist tradition, it would be a great mistake to consider it as some kind of panacea. The development of attention does not ensure that our attitudes and actions will be ethical. Attention brings about a certain connectedness to the object. We relate to the object

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and often seem to become absorbed in it, especially in concentration. But this connection is not inherently good. We can become engaged in an object that we are about to destroy. The ethical character of attention cannot be appraised in isolation from the overall framework of the practice in which we are involved.[46] In my example, attention becomes good only because it allows me to develop a more ethically informed attitude. Such an attitude is not just the result of attention, but depends on the moral education provided by traditions. It is because I have been made aware that helping is good that I can develop the appropriate virtues.

Another misperception is to see attention as providing an immediate and certain access to our mental states. This is again a mistake. The point in developing attention is not that by being mindful we unfailingly understand our emotions. The understanding of mental life gained through attention is not a direct knowledge by acquaintance. Knowledge of the workings of our minds does not proceed in isolation from our understanding of external reality. For example, we do not become aware of anger just by mere acquaintance with our mental states. The awareness that we are angry at somebody depends on a number of concepts and information that we have about that person. Thus, when I become aware of my anger, I am not directly noticing some kind of autonomous mental factor going on in my mind, like a fish swimming in a pond. Rather, I become aware of an emotional aspect of the global situation. This in turn allows to pay

some attention to this aspect, rather than being driven blindly by it.

Thus, it is clear that the ethical quality of attention or mindfulness is not intrinsic, but depends on its integration into a larger ethical framework. There is nothing, I would claim, in attention that guarantees the ethical nature of my attitudes or actions. Attention becomes an enabling virtue only in relation to other virtues. Simone Weil's insistence on attention clearly refers to a particular quality of attention. It is not any attention that "is enough", but a loving and just attitude. In the Christian framework, such an attention is in and of itself a sufficient condition for the good life. Similarly, in a Buddhist tradition, not any form of attention is virtuous. Only the forms of attention that enable us to develop emotional virtues, such as compassion, and cognitive virtues, such as wisdom are virtuous. Attention is sufficient in the Buddhist tradition only when it becomes detached and compassionate. Then, it does embody the central virtues that make for the good life. It is only within the larger framework of a tradition that meditation is an ethical practice.

NOTES

1. These remarks address the common understanding of mysticism and leave out the more sophisticated views. See, for example, M. de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).
 2. See, for example, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
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3. P. Hadot, *Exercices Spirituels et Philosophie Antique* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1987).
 4. See, for example, I.B. Horner, *The Basic Position of Siila* (Colombo: Baudha Sahitya Sabha, 1950), 11. Quoted in D. Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: St. Martins, 1992), 15.
 5. M. Foucault, "Technologies of the Self", in L. Martin, H. Gutman and P. Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16-49. We will come back to this point.
 6. *byang chub lam gyi sgron me dan de'i bka' 'grel* (Dharamsala: The Tibetan Publishing House, 1969).
 7. The term "*Nikaaya* Buddhism" is meant to designate the traditions such as Theravaada which are depicted by Mahaayaana traditions as *Hiinayaana*, while avoiding the loaded connotation of this term.
 8. The five precepts are an undertaking to abstain from: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, taking intoxicants. The ten virtues are: the former first four, plus abstention from slanderous, harsh or frivolous speech, abstention from covetousness, malevolence and false views. Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, 29-32.
 9. The importance of this type of morality for the overall tradition is well illustrated by the anecdotal fact that Radio Sri Lanka starts every day with the taking of the five lay precepts.

10. H. Saddhatissa's statement that " the precepts were never ends in themselves, confined to the mundane level, but were the essential preliminaries, as also the permanent accompaniments, to the attaining to the Highest State" is fairly typical of the limited view of ethics in Buddhism. Buddhist Ethics: Essence of Buddhism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), 113.
11. I. Murdoch, The Sovereignty of the Good (London: Ark, 1970), 8.
12. See more particularly A. MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1981), M. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and B. Williams who rejects morality, calling it "this peculiar institution", Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).
13. This is well argued by L. Blum, "Compassion", in A. Rorty, Explaining Emotions (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
14. Keown, The Nature of Buddhist Ethics.
15. Keown, The Nature of Buddhist Ethics, 222.

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16. Keown, The Nature of Buddhist Ethics, 210.
17. M. Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
18. Quoted in Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire, 102. The author elaborates a complex model of therapeutic ethics. She notices the similarity with certain Asian traditions (312), but does not discuss this comparison. In general, Western philosophers have resisted the comparison between Hellenistic philosophies and so called "Eastern philosophies", afraid of the assumed irrationality and mystical character of such traditions. I believe that it is time to drop such assumptions (I am not sure what are the essential characteristics common to Theravaada Buddhism and Confucianism that justify their being "Eastern philosophies!"). They are far from innocent, stemming from a desire to keep these traditions in marginal isolation. Moreover, what scholarly sense does it make to compare the thought of a single Western author with the many traditions of an entire continent?
19. C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture (New York: Basic, 1973), 127.
20. A further determination, which we may want to add to the concept of virtue ethics is that such a view holds that the good for humans is //eudaimonia//, happiness in the large sense of the word. This eudaimonist requirement does not seem, however, strictly necessary to virtue ethics. For example, Mencius' ethics is not directly eudaimonic and yet still presumably qualifies as virtue ethics. The notion of //eudaimonia// is important, however, in the Buddhist context, for this tradition emphasizes the centrality of happiness, understood in the large sense of the word. It also emphasizes the similarities between Greek and Buddhist ethics, a point generally lost to those who remain happy with empty labels such as "Eastern philosophy".

21. I leave aside another important point usually associated with teleological models, that is, the question of whether or not such a model needs to imply a normative idea of human nature. Virtue ethics is committed to the idea that the goals that humans pursue are not infinite, but constrained by human nature. Human nature does not need, however, to be understood essentially, but as implying certain constraints on the range of activities that are good. Thus, a virtue ethics can be committed to a minimal view of human nature. In particular, it does not need to hold that certain naturally found conditions (toddlers, animals, etc.) exemplify human nature. There is nothing further from a Buddhist view than a fascination for the non-reflective lives of babies or animals.

22. The //lam rim// leaves out goals in the domains that are not explicitly connected with Buddhist soteriological goals, such as economico-political life (//artha//) and the life of sensuous and artistic enjoyment (//kaama//), which are described in traditional Indian culture as possible goals of a healthy human life. Hindu tradition describe four goals, the other two being the domains of

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norms and behaviour (//dharma// in the Hindu sense), and liberation (//mok.sa//). See W. de Bary, _Sources of Indian Tradition_ (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 206-294.

23. As M. Spiro, who separates kammatic Buddhism, i.e., folk Buddhism, which is not seriously soteriological but merely interested in good rebirth, and Nibbanic Buddhism, true original Buddhism, in which morality is superseded by wisdom. _Buddhism and Society_ (New York: Harper, 1970). The view of the //lam rim// is here much closer to R. Gombrich, who argues for the continuity of the village and elite forms of practice. See //Precept and Practice// (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

24. See G. Bond, _The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka_ (University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

25. For example, Williams calls morality "this peculiar institution". _Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy_, 174-196.

26. P. Ricoeur, _Soi-Meme Comme un Autre_ (Paris: Seuil, 1990).

27. Atii"sa, _The Lamp to the Path of Enlightenment and Its Explanation_, 125-7.

28. The correspondence is less than perfect because there are injunctions in the second and third types of //"siila//. Nevertheless, this level of practice is less concerned with injunctions than with motivations and attitudes.

29. Atii"sa, _The Lamp to the Path of Enlightenment and Its Explanation_, 125.

30. The issue of knowing whether every fault is a negative karma is an interesting issue I cannot go into now. Vinaya commentators seem to hold that this is not the case. A fault is not necessarily karmically consequential.

31. See, for example, Tsong kha pa's discussion in his _Extensive Gradual Stages of the Path to Enlightenment_ (//byang chub lam rim chen mo//, Dharamsala: Shes rig par khang, Block), 254.

32. Atii"sa, The Lamp to the Path of Enlightenment and Its Explanation, 127.

33. Atii"sa, The Lamp to the Path of Enlightenment and Its Explanation _, 127-8.

34. H. Aronson, Love and Sympathy in Theravaada Buddhism (Delhi: Motilal, 1980). As Aronson makes clear, meditations on loving kindness in the Theravaada tradition are not meant to promote active sympathy towards others, but greater concentration, and balance of mind. This does not mean that sympathy is not actively promoted, as, for example, in the Vinaya literature where monks are enjoined to help each other, care for sick brothers, etc.

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35. I am quite aware of moving rather quickly over difficult issues involved in the ethics of the gift, but such an issue is quite obviously beyond the purview of this essay.

36. //bla ma'i zhal nas de lta bu'i tshul khrims kyi bslab ba gsum ni yang dag par blangs pa dang rjes su bsrubs (bsrungs?) pas bdag dang gzhan gyi don dang phan pa dang be bde bar 'gyur ba'i phyir dge ba'o//. Atii"sa, The Lamp to the Path of Enlightenment and Its Explanation _, 129-30.

37. L. de La Vallee Poussin, trans., L' Abhidharmako"sa de Vasubandhu (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1971), III.106.

38. I find it puzzling that many Theravaada scholars insist that insight is a specialty of this tradition. Insight is widely discussed and practiced in Tibetan Buddhist traditions as well as in several schools of East-Asian Buddhism.

39. My description of "the selfless nature of reality" reflects the Buddhist tradition's own understanding, not the epistemological status of its insights.

40. Another topic into which I cannot go is the differences between equanimity and indifference. Whereas the latter is thought by Buddhist traditions to be an obstacle, the former is a quality which allows the person who has developed it to be equal towards all beings. This does not mean to ignore them, as has often been misunderstood, but to be equally compassionate towards them.

41. S. Weil, Gravity and Grace (London: Ark, 1952, 1987), 108.

42. R. de Souza, "The Rationality of Emotions" , in Rorty, Explaining Emotions_, 127-151.

43. P. Strawson, Freedom and Resentment (London: Meuthen, 1974), 9.

44. Introspection is shown by some studies to negatively influence decisions. When asked to examine their reasons for making certain choices, people often become confused and change their decisions. See, for example, T. Wilson, D. Dunn, D. Kraft and D. Lisle, "Introspection, Attitude Change, and Attitude Behaviour Consistency: The Disruptive Effects of Explaining Why We Feel The Way We Do", Advances in Experimental Psychology (1989), 287-343. It should be

clear that mindfulness is quite different from introspection in that it is not reflective. It does not objectify mental states but attempts to keep with them in a quasi-liminal way.

45. E. Langer contrasts mindlessness, a capacity-fixing ability that tends to be rigid and inflexible, and mindfulness, a creative and capacity-increasing faculty that enables us to see the limitations of categories and contexts. "Minding Matters: The Consequences of Mindlessness-Mindfulness", Advances in Experimental Psychology

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(1989), 137-173.

46. A related point is well made R. Gimello, "Mysticism in its Contexts", S. Katz, Mysticism and Religious Traditions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 61-88.