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Reflection on Martha Nussbaum's Work on
Compassion from a Buddhist Perspective

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Abstract The current philosophical debate between care and justice reflects the debate between an image of self that is either autonomous and invested with rights or a self that is contingent, feeling and thinking. Our goal is to bridge the polarization between the two ethical theories of care and justice. For this, an extended self image would be introduced, carrying traits of both views. We aim to show that Nussbaum's concept of compassion can bridge the dichotomy. But, rather than merely building on Nussbaum's findings, we think it is essential to investigate what Buddhism, as a philosophy where compassion is central, can bring to this project. The topic of this paper then, is to relate Nussbaum's work on compassion with Buddhist theory, at the same time opening the subject matter to the potentialities that are at hand in Buddhist philosophy.

Situating the Topic: Interweaving Justice and Care

This paper grew out of a concern with the current debate between care and justice,¹ which reflects an image of self that is either autonomous, independent, primarily engaged in pursuing "his" self-interest, living in competition with other individuals, invested with rights and freedoms only limited by those of others and a self that is contingent, contextual, feeling and thinking, relational, shaping its identity by action and interaction with others. Often the discussion polarizes between these images and symbolizes the struggle Western ethics experiences in reintegrating aspects of self that have been split off in modern moral philosophy with its emphasis on autonomy and reason. Our final goal would be to bridge the polarization between the two ethical theories of care and justice. For this, an extended self image would be introduced, carrying traits of both views.²

Then, we would use Martha Nussbaum's discussion about compassion. We aim to show that compassion as she defines it can bridge the dichotomy between care and justice ethics. In order to do this, rather than merely building on Nussbaum's findings, I think it is essential to investigate what Buddhism, as a philosophy where compassion is central, can bring to this

project. The topic of this paper then, is to relate Nussbaum's work on compassion with Buddhist theory, having in mind particularly the *Mādhyamika* school of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. The concluding section will suggest directions for future research.

Compassion and *Karuṇā*

In *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Nussbaum makes an experiential argument for emotions as judgments of value. Starting from Aristotle's account,³ she considers compassion as a painful emotion directed at another person's misfortune or suffering.⁴ She then unravels the cognitive structure of compassion. The first cognitive requirement of compassion is a belief or appraisal that the suffering is serious rather than trivial, the judgment of size. The second is the belief that the person does not deserve the suffering, the judgment of nondesert. The third is called the eudaimonistic judgment: this person or creature is a significant element in my scheme of goals and projects, an end whose good is to be promoted.

In Buddhism, *karuṇā* can be translated as compassion, active sympathy, gentle affection. Compassion extends itself without distinction to all sentient beings, all sentient beings hence being part of our circle of concern. It is based on the enlightened experience of the interdependence of all beings. In order to have the right effect, *karuṇā* must be accompanied by wisdom, *prajñā*, insight into emptiness as the true nature of reality. Some translations of *karuṇā* as pity or sympathy tend to suggest passive attitudes that do not contain the active help which is an essential part of *karuṇā*.⁵ Seen from a Buddhist perspective, the eudaimonistic judgment in Nussbaum's analysis seems to be related to the idea of interdependence. In Buddhism this is expressed in the *pratītya-samutpāda*, meaning conditioned or interdependent arising. This doctrine says that all psychological and physical phenomena constituting individual existence are interdependent and mutually condition each other or that they stand in a relationship that can be in terms of simultaneity as well as succession in time.⁶ This means that all living creatures have a place in the world for our concern. This way, Nussbaum's idea of compassion involves a quasi-ethical achievement: namely valuing another person/creature as part of one's own circle of concern. In Nussbaum's analysis empathy, involving a very basic recognition of another world of experience is a prominent route to extending one's eudaimonistic imagination, marking the world for our concern and directing our attention to the sufferings of its members.⁷ Empathy, Nussbaum finds, is uneven and

very malleable. Empathy is easier for the similar and the near at hand; therefore, it may make compassion uneven and malleable, making it an unreliable moral motive. In other words, the question of with which people should one be concerned and how much, is rhetoric in Buddhism, but not for Nussbaum.

Nussbaum's analysis is set against the background of an idea of self that is constituted by its evaluative engagements with areas of the world outside itself. Emotions, being thought of as eudemonistic evaluations, present a bifurcation: some expand the boundary of self, picturing the self as constituted in part by strong attachments to independent things and persons (for instance love and compassion). Other emotions draw sharp boundaries around the self, insulating it from contamination by external objects (for instance disgust).⁸ In Buddhism, the "personality" is seen as dynamic aggregate constituted by five interactive factors, the contents of which continually changes: corporeality or form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), mental formations (*saṃskāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*).⁹ The "personality" is transitory and changeable, and therefore prone to suffering. *Rūpa* is the experiencing of the phenomenal world by means of the six senses. Through corporeality, the "objective" environment is transformed into our phenomenal, conceptual world. *Vedanā* is the reception and processing of the signals picked up by the senses. The resulting perception is no longer pure, but colored by the person who has the experience. It provokes desire or contempt or creates an illusion. Starting from the experience, through *saṃjñā*, the person attaches concepts like good, bad, beautiful to the experiences of the world. In *saṃskāra*, the formation of concepts triggers the will to respond. The pleasant experiences cause grasping, the unpleasant repulsion. These reactions are conditioned by the past and in turn condition the future. In other words, *saṃskāra* is preceded by a value judgment, which then entails an exercise of the will. *Saṃskāra* can be seen as the intersection of past, present and future, from which action takes place. *Viññāna* stores all these experiences and reactions. Here experience is known, recognized and labeled as beneficial or not. It encloses our waking consciousness, memories, what Jung calls the Collective Unconscious, results of previous actions, and awareness of the other *skandhas*. Here the awareness of self is seated and the illusion of "me" is created, in the sense that the consciousness ascribes permanence to itself. The Buddhist concept of self/personality attributes roles to each of the contributing aggregates, the flesh as well as the mind. All our senses are carriers of experience, including the mind, showing as Peter Harvey puts it, that we are not in control of our own minds as we would like to think we are. It confronts the question of autonomy, central

in modern western ethical thinking about the self. Peter Harvey¹⁰ discusses the implications of this doctrine: *anātman* does not deny that each person has an individual history, it emphasizes that these are compounds of universal factors, that “your” suffering and “my” suffering are not inherently different. It breaks down the barrier of self-interest, directly opening the interrelational field for compassion.

Nussbaum further notes that societies and individuals vary to some degree in what they take to be a serious plight; they vary too in the level of damage required before something is taken to be a serious plight. Throughout the literary and philosophical tradition, the standard occasions for compassion involve losses of truly basic goods, such as life, loved ones, freedom, nourishment, mobility, bodily integrity, citizenship, shelter. Moreover, changes in the shape of life construct new predicaments. Nonetheless, the central disasters to which human life is prone are remarkably constant; constant as well is the fact that people take these disasters to be central. Nussbaum finds the recognition of one's own vulnerability to be an important and frequently indispensable epistemological requirement for compassion in human beings; this is what makes the difference between viewing hungry peasants as beings whose sufferings matter and viewing them as distant objects whose experiences have nothing to do with one's own life. Nussbaum discusses possible impediments to compassion that can block the movement of imagination that extend the experience of concern to others who are distant from me. She analyses shame, envy, and disgust and how these emotions interweave with social distinction, often through the projection of all too human aspects of self (weakness, penetrability, oozyiness) onto the group of people that is than loathed or even dehumanized.¹¹ For Nussbaum, a central challenge for a society that wants to cultivate a broad and appropriate compassion would be to produce people who can live with their humanity, who can surrender omnipotence.¹² The impediments are comparable to the Buddhist conception of desire, hate, aggression, and ignorance that cause the experience of suffering in individual life. These mechanisms are considered a part of the causes of the cycle of existence, represented by the *bhavacakra*. Realizing that we are merely limited, finite creatures, made of flesh, bones, and blood, wanting happiness and not wanting suffering,¹³ can wake us up to true compassion with all living creatures.

Compassion, Nussbaum finds, is linked with benevolent action.¹⁴ It appears to be so ubiquitously, and even without elaborate prior training. To explain this, Nussbaum suggests an evolutionary history for compassion, connecting it to attempts by our species to respond well to predicaments affecting the entire group.¹⁵ Alternatively, perhaps it is because all soci-

eties have conceptions of the good that do attach values to such losses, and because parents communicate these values to their children.

Nussbaum summarizes as follows:

Compassion makes thought attend to certain human facts, and in a certain way, with concern to make the lot of the suffering as good, other things being equal, as it can be—because that person is an object of one’s concern. Often that concern is motivated or supported by the thought that one might oneself be, one day, in that person’s position. Often, again, it is motivated or supported by the imaginative exercise of putting oneself in that person’s place. I have claimed that, other things being equal, the compassionated person will acquire motivations to help the person for whom she has compassion.¹⁶

For centuries, however, Western philosophy has been dominated by the Stoic tradition, which she describes as anti-compassion, because this tradition sees one’s own reason and will, one’s “moral purpose” (*prohairesis*) as the most important thing in life. Nussbaum goes to the crux:

This faculty of moral choice is the possession of all humans, and its virtuous use is always within our power, whatever the world does. It is a source of human equality, the possession of male and female, slave and free. Its dignity outshines all circumstantial differences and renders them trivial. Vastly superior in dignity and worth to any other good thing, it suffices all by itself, well used, for a flourishing life. The only way to be damaged by life with respect to one’s own flourishing is to make bad choices or to become unjust; the appropriate response to such deliberate badness is shame, not compassion. Blame respects the primacy of moral purpose in each person, treating people not as victims, but as dignified agents. As to the events of life that most people take to be occasions for compassion—losses of loved ones, loss of freedom, ill health, and so on—they do, of course, occur, but they are only of minor importance.¹⁷

To grant that differences with respect to what we call natural goods matter is to grant that the world and its morally irrelevant happenings can forge different ranks and conditions in humanity, contradicting the principle of equal human worth. Sufferings should be met by a definite intention to take charge of oneself.

Buddhism seems to have the more pragmatic view, translated in the concept of karma.¹⁸ It could not follow the above line of thought because it doesn't have the same restricted image of self and human worth. It sees all living creatures as submitted to the same law of cause and effect. Karma literally means deed, which produces a fruit under certain circumstances; when it is ripe it falls on the one responsible. For a deed to produce its fruit, it must be morally good or bad and be conditioned by a volitional impulse, which in that it leaves a trace in the psyche of the doer, leads his destiny in the direction determined by the effect of the deed. The effect of an action, which can be of the nature of body, speech, or mind, is not primarily determined by the act itself, but rather by its intention. Only a deed free from desire, hate, and illusion is without karmic effect. Seen this way, we live within a system in which we personally produce acts, but in which our actions are also conditioned by the system itself and by actions of others. We are not as autonomous and omnipotent as we would like to think.

Maybe this cognitive, rational approach of compassion is no coincidence. In order to reintegrate emotions in moral thinking that has discarded them because they are unpredictable, extremely variable, practically uncontrollable but nonetheless unavoidable aspects of our existence, one would need to sugarcoat the bitter pill. Focusing on the cognitive aspects of emotions would function as the sugar: it would lessen the resistance to accepting emotions in moral theory even though they are less controllable and extremely variable. From the title page of her book:

Emotions shape the landscape of our mental and social lives. Like geological upheavals in a landscape, they mark our lives as uneven, uncertain and prone to reversal. Are they simply, as some have claimed, animal energies or impulses with no connection to our thoughts? Or are they rather suffused with intelligence and discernment, and thus a source of deep awareness and understanding? If the latter, the emotions can not be sidelined in accounts of ethical judgment, as they often have been in the history of philosophy. They must then form part of our system of ethical reasoning, and we must be prepared to grapple with the messy material of grief and love, anger and fear, and in so doing to learn what role these tumultuous experiences play in our thinking about the good and the just.

Compassion and Politics

Nussbaum sketches the debate regarding compassion as follows, showing it to be a discussion about ethical value:¹⁹

The debate over compassion constructs two visions of political community and of the good citizen and judge within it. One vision is based upon the emotions; the other urges their removal. One sees the human being as both aspiring and vulnerable, both worthy and insecure; the other focuses on dignity alone, seeing in reason a boundless and indestructible worth. One sees the central task of community as the provision of support for basic needs, bringing human beings together through the thought of their common weakness and risk. It constructs a moral emotion that is suited to supporting efforts to aid the worst off. The other sees the community as the kingdom of free responsible beings, held together by the awe they feel for the worth of reason in one another; the function of their association will be to assist the moral development of each by judgments purified of passion. Each vision, in its own way, pursues both equality and freedom. The former aims at equal support for basic needs and hopes through this to promote equal opportunities for free choice and self-realization; the other starts from the fact of internal freedom—a fact that no misfortune can remove—and finds in this fact a source of political equality. One sees freedom of choice as something that needs to be built up for people through worldly arrangements that make them capable of functioning in a fully human way; the other takes freedom to be an inalienable given, independent of all material arrangements. One aims to defeat the selfish and grasping passions through the imagination of suffering, and through a gradual broadening of concern; the other aims to remove these passions completely, overcoming retaliation with self-command and mercy. One attempts to achieve benevolence through softheartedness; the other holds, with Kant, that this softheartedness should not be at all among human beings. One holds that it is the weakness of the human being that makes it sociable. The other holds that weakness is an impediment to community, that only the truly self-sufficient person can be a true friend.

For Nussbaum, compassion includes the thought of common humanity, which should lead us to be intensely concerned with the material happiness of others. The fact that a person is a bearer of human capacities gives that person a claim on our material concern, providing these capacities with appropriate support. She insists that we do not properly respect those capacities if we neglect the need they have for resources, or deny that hardship or social deformation of preferences can deprive human beings of flourishing.²⁰ Here, she further develops the idea that there are ways of arranging the world so as to bring external goods needed for the flourishing of their capacities, more securely within people's grasp; and acknowledging our deep need for them provides a strong incentive for so designing things. To do this she will be concerned with the inquiry in human flourishing and its material and social conditions, asking what things are important and how far they can be secured to people without losing what makes them important.²¹ The unavoidable problem of partiality²² associated with compassion requires that each of its judgments be met with an adequate ethical theory. The judgment of seriousness should be met with an account of the value of external goods; the judgment of nondesert with a theory of social responsibility, the eudaimonistic judgment with a theory of proper concern.

Nussbaum examines compassion in connection with a form of political liberalism, a political conception that attempts to win an overlapping consensus among citizens of many different kinds, respecting the spaces within which they each elaborate and pursue their different reasonable conceptions of the good.²³ As Nussbaum points out,²⁴ the insights of the compassionate imagination may be embodied in laws and institutions at different levels and in different ways. They may be involved in the construction of the basic structure of society and in the choice of its basic distributional principles. They may be involved in legislation at a more concrete level: in the creation of a tax code, a welfare system, the creation of levels of offense and punishment in criminal law, in democratic deliberation about human inequality at different levels and in reflecting about the duties of richer towards poorer nations, in promoting both political and economic wellbeing. With respect to institutionalization, compassion provides a motive to secure to all the basic support that will undergird and protect human dignity. In Nussbaum's view, these basic entitlements are best described as a set of capabilities, or opportunities for functioning, in some central areas of human life that are likely to prove important for whatever else the person pursues.²⁵ The list is more easily understood if associated with Nussbaum's prior work on nonrelative virtues.²⁶ In this paper Nussbaum starts off from important spheres of human experience (death, loss of loved ones, illness, political oppression,

loneliness, etc.), recognized by Aristotle to which he associated corresponding virtues; for instance, fear of death is associated with courage, distribution of limited resources with justice, bodily appetites and their pleasures with moderation. These spheres of human existence can serve as anchoring points for the basic support she mentions. Nussbaum's list of the central human capabilities, in which the level is to be set by internal political processes in each nation with the contribution of a process of judicial review, is as follows:

1. Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length, not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily health. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Senses, imagination, and thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, to think, and reason—and to do these things in a truly human way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.
5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grief, to experience longing, gratitude and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)
6. Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of

one's life. (Entailing protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)

7. Affiliation.

A. Being able to live with and towards others, to recognize and to show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of the other. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. (This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin, animals, plants, and nature.)

8. Other Species. Being able to live with concerns for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Play. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over one's environment.

A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.

B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being; exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.²⁷

Although Nussbaum explicitly examines compassion in connection with a form of political liberalism, accentuating choice and in terms of entitlements attributed to each citizen, in terms of the free autonomous agent/interdependent creature dichotomy, she has shifted to the middle, being very aware of the interrelatedness of people. She meets this aspect by use of the term *combined capabilities*. These combined capabilities acknowledge that external conditions must be favorable for the functioning of the capability.²⁸ One could

argue that truly compassionate societies would choose, or evolve organically into, a political conception that attempts to win an overlapping consensus among citizens of many different kinds, respecting the spaces within which they each elaborate and pursue their different reasonable conceptions of the good. In societies, compassion can function as an asset with which to evaluate the ways of institutionalizing (or fleshing the skeleton of the list) and with which to engage in a dialogue with other cultures. It will be interesting to read Nussbaum's thoughts on associating capabilities and compassion.²⁹ Because Nussbaum finds that we need to approach the issue of compassion on two levels, that of individual psychology and institutional design, she will want to structure institutions so that they are permeated by compassion, while cultivating compassion in the members of society through exercising the imagination and the capacity for empathy. In her work she makes a case for doing this through the use of literature, and art in general, in education.³⁰

We can compare Nussbaum's list of capabilities with the list of key responsibilities for Buddhist governments in order to look after their people, published at the occasion of the on-line conference on Buddhism and human rights, by the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* in 1995.³¹ Putting aside the difficulty of the conception of a self as bearer of unalienable entitlements because of the interdependence doctrine, Buddhists are more comfortable with talking directly about the responsibilities these entitlements imply for the individual and for society.³² The preamble to the Declaration of Interdependence sounds as follows:

Those who have the good fortune to have a "rare and precious human rebirth," with all its potential for awareness, sensitivity, and freedom, have a duty to not abuse the rights of others to partake of the possibilities of moral and spiritual flourishing offered by human existence. Such flourishing is only possible when certain conditions relating to physical existence and social freedom are maintained. Human beings, furthermore, have an obligation to treat other forms of life with the respect commensurate to their natures.

To repress our basic sympathy by abusing other sentient beings, human or otherwise, cripples our own potential, and increases the amount of suffering in the world for both others and ourselves. The doctrine of Conditioned Arising shows that our lives are intertwined, and abusing others can only be done when we are blind to this fact. As vulnerable beings in a condi-

tioned world, our mutual dependency indicates that whatever can be done to reduce suffering in the world should be done.

The Buddhist teaching that we lack an inherently existing Self (*anatta*) shows that suffering does not really “belong” to anyone. It arises, in the life-stream of various sentient beings. To try and reduce it in “my” stream at the expense of increasing it in another life-stream is folly, both because this will in fact bring more suffering back to me (karma), and because it depends on the deluded notion that “I” am an inviolable entity that is not dependent and can treat others as if only *they* are limited and conditioned.

Whereas in its teachings Buddhism recognizes:

1. The interdependency of all forms of life and the reciprocal obligations which arise from it, such as the duty to repay the kindness of those who in previous lives may have been our parents, relatives and friends;
2. The need for universal compassion for sentient beings who are all alike in that they dislike pain and wish for happiness;
3. The inalienable dignity which living creatures possess by virtue of their capacity to achieve enlightenment in this life or in the future;

The Conference affirms:

1. Every human being should be treated *humanely* both by other individuals and governments in keeping with the Buddhist commitment to non-violence (*ahimsā*) and respect for life.
2. Every human being must be treated *equally* and without discrimination on grounds of race, nationality, religion, sex, color, age, mental ability, or political views.
3. Human beings have obligations to other sentient beings and to the environment that all depend on for life and flourishing, now and in the future. Accordingly, humans have an obligation to present and future generations to protect the environment they share with other sentient beings and to avoid causing direct or indirect harm to other forms of sentient life.³³

These precepts are less concrete than Nussbaum's capabilities, but they are to be read together with the Buddhist precepts.³⁴ A reading of these shows similarities, albeit that they of course use a different terminology because they are more grounded in the eastern ways of life. Of course the precepts in the preamble could be used to construct a universal ethics, for which the vagueness is in fact a quality. It can then be fleshed out through a debate with different parties. Again, there is a similarity with Nussbaum's idea of individuals as agents in a society, inspired by compassion.

Buddhism is deeply aware that because the individual and society are interdependent, one's behavior as an individual is inseparable from one's behavior as a participant in society. Patterns of action may start from an individual and might then influence others and give rise to customs and institutions.³⁵ Buddhism sees the responsible individual as the starting point for the formation of ideas in and ethics of a society, as well as the institutions of the society. There is also the approach of socially engaged Buddhism, which seeks to actualize Buddhism's ideals of wisdom and compassion in today's world. It stands for active involvement by Buddhists in society and its problems, a kind of pragmatic actualization of compassion in the field of socioeconomic policy, thus pursuing most consequently the active component of *karuṇā*. Its practitioners seek to combine religious discipline (inner work) with becoming active in society (outer work). This outer work ranges from simple individual acts of compassion, teaching, training, organized kinds of service, right livelihood through community developments, as well as political activism.³⁶ It consists of a Buddhist presence in concrete contexts such as hospitals, nursing, the end of life, medical research, conflict areas, prisons, psychotherapy, scientific research, environmental issues, and so on. A socially engaged Buddhist methodology is seeking to use various methods for relating Buddhist tradition and practice with social theory.³⁷ They will look for Buddhist texts that are relevant for current social conditions, apply Buddhist principles to different social contexts, and try to apply inner experiences of Buddhist practice (for instance interdependence vs. inner-outer duality of personal and social transformation) to dealing with social problems.

We can summarize the findings of this section in the following table: The above description by Nussbaum of the two visions of political community may as well be seen as reflecting the debate between an ethics of justice attributing to every human being, seen as free responsible agents, equal rights, and care ethics, concerned with the interpersonal and dependency.³⁸ The description reflects the opposing images of self that are used in Western ethics of justice (in terms of rights attributed to a self as a free, au-

	<i>Buddhism</i>	<i>Nussbaum's Theory</i>
Theory	Declaration of Interdependence	Capability Approach (Nussbaum 2000, 2001)
Institutions	Individual-in-society vs. the individual-reaching-out-to-society	Compassionate individuals construct institutions that embody what they imagine; institutions influence the development of compassion in individuals. In connection with a form of political liberalism going for overlapping consensus. (Nussbaum 2001)
Grassroot level	Socially Engaged Buddhism	Cultivating compassion through education and the fostering of the ability to imagine the experience of others. (Poetic Justice, Nussbaum 1995)

onomous agent) and care ethics (in terms of responsibilities and which sees the self as interdependent and vulnerable). Here, Buddhism can teach us, through the middle way teaching handed down by *Nāgārjuna*, to work with seemingly opposing traits, and inspire us as we try to bridge dichotomies. Thus we would put forward a self image that is less polarized and encloses traits of autonomy, dependence, vulnerability, and contingency, using an and/or approach, rather than an (exclusive) or/or approach. An extended self would be conceived as a process (i.e. continuously changing), that is fragmented, fleshy, both thinking and feeling and continuously involved in a relation with its surroundings and with others.³⁹ From Nussbaum's analysis it is clear that she extends the image of the self dominant in Western philosophy. She argues for a self that incorporates aspects like dependency and vulnerability, which the dominant Western theory split off. For Nussbaum, if a person would recognize that the judgment characteristics of compassion are essential for the health of a complete adult rationality, it would provide for the development of a person capable of "mature dependence."⁴⁰ Such a person would take up a more narrative attitude in her judgments and use a sympathetic perception like the judicious spectator has in *Poetic Justice*.⁴¹ She notes that compassion *can* coexist with respect for agency, for it is only when we see to what extent external goods is involved in the development

of agency itself that we have the deepest possible basis for respecting and promoting human freedom.⁴²

Care and justice

We could also bridge this way between care and justice ethics, combining what is valuable in both. This would allow us to conceive a system that is more comprehensive, so that we are no longer stuck in the impasse of the debate between care and justice. Attempts have been made to bridge the abyss in some way, but these have not proven to be fruitful. Grace Clement presents a thorough overview of the care vs. justice debate and of its relevant authors. She describes the two views commentators take with respect to the relationship between both sides of the discussion: according to some, the interaction between justice and care results in a convergence into a comprehensive ethic (Manning 1992, Clement 1996), while others argue that the two ethics remain independent orientations on any given situation (Noddings 1984, Ruddick 1995). Authors of the convergence thesis have argued that the ethic of care can be assimilated in the ethic of justice (Manning 1992), or that care is a more basic ethic than justice (Held 1995).

Further Research Questions

Further research would attempt, using an extended image of self, together with the aspects of compassion (we would lean on both Nussbaum and Buddhism) to develop and substantiate some kind of comprehensive system of ethics. In doing so, we would be able to combine what is valuable care ethics and what is valuable in justice. For this, compassion would serve as a connecting idea between the ethics of justice and the ethics of care, functioning as a sort of liaison, a passageway from one discourse to another. Compassion and the mental ability of empathy, through which we can reconstruct the other's experience in our imagination, can allow us to descend downwards from abstract rights into the contextual, somewhat as if we were "fleshing out" a framework. But also because through compassion one can cast one's own contextual "coat" and try on another, it teaches us about relativity, and this allows us to climb from our own contingencies to some notion of ubiquitous needs that should be provided for all human beings. But using compassion that way without undergirding the theory with an extended self image would not only be inconsistent, it would sustain the illusion that compassion as a way to deal with interdependence is a choice

of the free autonomous individual, allowing us to discard our responsibilities in a global context.

Politically, interweaving justice and care this way could facilitate a “think globally, act locally”⁴³ way of being in the world, but also allow the discourse of rights to do its work in contexts where it is most needed, for instance the position of women in many patriarchal societies. It equally opens up citizens to the multifaceted benefits a contextual approach has to offer, for instance in the context of developing aid.⁴⁴

The difference with social contract doctrines such as Rawls's,⁴⁵ is that we would not imagine members of society as only agents, as “fully cooperating members of society over a complete life,” as Rawls puts it himself, but that we would take into account that all human beings have periods of profound neediness and dependency. Also, we would make an argument for choosing information and compassion over the combination of self-interest and ignorance, as Rawls does through the use of the veil of ignorance. This strategy would allow for a more dynamic approach to just societies rather than the momentaneous character of contract-models. Compared to communitarian models,⁴⁶ which stress common values as being the basis of a community, compassionate societies would add an ability to overcome the contingencies contained in their model's conceptions of the good, which would allow for more openness towards the other.

We would also investigate further how compassion, combined with a communicative rationality⁴⁷, might function in the sphere of globalization. Each time a community is confronted with otherness, compassion is challenged and in combination with a communicative rationality, ideally allows for opening up or stretching boundaries between us and others. Considered that way, it shows its promise for conceiving a peaceful international community that deals with multiculturalism in a receptive, encompassing way.

The bridging process of justice and care would be tethered to a view about basic goods, yielded by Nussbaum's approach with nonrelative virtues,⁴⁸ as they are associated to spheres of common human experience. We could ask what division principles compassionate societies would endorse. It seems logical to suggest with Nussbaum, to describe the basic entitlements of a society as a set of capabilities or opportunities for functioning in a number of particularly important spheres of human experience. These do in effect encompass liberal thinking, as the individual is attributed these as an independent agent, but they also explicitly reflect, through the capability of affiliation, Nussbaum's attention to the individual's embedding in society. In our view, this would then yield a dynamic model of international society,

which would continuously be evaluating itself with respect to compassion, subjecting itself to a kind of ethical audit based on democratic principles and using communicative rationality.

Notes

¹ An overview of the debate can be found in Clement 1996.

² Battersby 1998.

³ Nussbaum 1986.

⁴ Nussbaum works with descriptions and analyses of compassion from the theoretical accounts of Aristotle and Rousseau to the sociological data presented in Candace Clark. She concludes that these descriptions remain remarkably constant across place and time. Although she notes that compassion is also central to several Asian cultural traditions, she only hints from time to time to the Buddhist idea of the bodhisattva, focusing on the tradition of Western philosophical debate about emotion in general and about compassion in specific.

⁵ From *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, Shambhala, Boston 1991.

⁶ *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, Shambhala, Boston 1991.

⁷ Nussbaum 2001, p. 320-323.

⁸ Nussbaum 2001, p. 300.

⁹ See Vanden Eynde 1999.

¹⁰ Harvey 2000, p. 36.

¹¹ Nussbaum 2001, p. 342-350. Primo Levi describes dehumanization processes in *Se questo è un uomo* (If This Is a Man), 1958.

¹² Nussbaum 2001, p. 350.

¹³ As in the words of The Dalai Lama in *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, ed. F. Eppsteiner, Parallax Press, Berkeley, California, 1985.

¹⁴ An author focusing on these aspects is Batson. Batson, C.D. *The Altruism Question: Towards a Social-Psychological Answer*. Hillsdale, NJ:

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991. Nussbaum 2001 discusses compassion and altruism on p. 335-342.

¹⁵ Nussbaum refers to Sober, E. and Wilson, D.S. *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998. According to the findings of these authors, the most likely evolutionary story involves egoistic and altruistic mechanisms.

¹⁶ Nussbaum 2001, p. 342.

¹⁷ Nussbaum 2001, p. 357.

¹⁸ *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, Shambhala, Boston, 1991.

¹⁹ Nussbaum 2001, p. 368.

²⁰ Nussbaum 2001, p. 371-372.

²¹ Nussbaum 2001, p. 378.

²² Nussbaum 2001, p. 386-392.

²³ Nussbaum 2001, p. 401.

²⁴ Nussbaum 2001, p. 403.

²⁵ Nussbaum 2000.

²⁶ "Non Relative Virtues, an Aristotelian Approach," In Nussbaum, Sen 1993.

²⁷ Nussbaum 2001, p. 417-418.

²⁸ Nussbaum 2000, p. 84.

²⁹ *Compassion and Capabilities*. Committed to Cambridge University Press.

³⁰ Nussbaum 1995, 1997.

³¹ <http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/2/current2.html>

³² A discussion about Buddhism, precepts and rights can be found in Keown 1995.

³³ Harvey 2000, p. 121-122.

³⁴ The eightfold path. Peel 1995.

³⁵ Shiotsu 1999, p. 10.

³⁶ Examples are described in Eppsteiner 1988.

³⁷These concerns are formulated by “Think Sangha,” a group that combines Buddhist perspective on social suffering (wisdom) with practical efforts to address social suffering by Buddhists (compassion). They can be found on <http://www.bfp.org/html/home.html>.

³⁸ See Clement, Grace 1996.

³⁹ Battersby 1998.

⁴⁰Nussbaum 2001, p. 391.

⁴¹ Nussbaum 1995.

⁴² Nussbaum 2001, p. 383.

⁴³ Barber 1995.

⁴⁴ Nussbaum 1999, 2000.

⁴⁵ Rawls 1971, 1999.

⁴⁶ MacIntyre 1981, Walzer 1983.

⁴⁷ Habermas 1998 and Apel 1996.

⁴⁸ Nussbaum, Sen 1993.

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