



## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

By

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*Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 9 (2002): 34-88

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### Should we be concerned about the welfare of others, and if so, why?

One of the central sources for the *bodhisattva* ideal in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism has been the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* — *Undertaking the Way to Awakening*,<sup>1</sup> by the Indian monk and scholar Śāntideva, who is thought to have flourished at the Nālandā University around 700 C. E. One indication that this book has been a source of inspiration for the *bodhisattva* ideal is that the title of the book has traditionally been changed to the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* — *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.<sup>2</sup> Both versions will be abbreviated as *BCA* in the following. Śāntideva has been read this way in Tibetan Buddhism, and still is. A number of the publications of the present Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatzo, are devoted to this text, not least to chapter six on patience,

chapter eight on meditation of the equality of oneself and others, and the exchange of oneself and others, and chapter nine on wisdom.<sup>3</sup> Many of the other Tibetan lamas now living in exile follow up this line of interpretation.

Recently, however, Paul Williams has published a book entitled *Altruism and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryāvatāra*.<sup>(4)</sup> Surprisingly, he argues that Śāntideva attempted to establish a foundation for the *bodhisattva* path on the basis of a reductive conception of the person along the lines of the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma School. This entails a number of absurd consequences that have the net effect of undermining the *bodhisattva* project.

The title of the concluding section of the book is "How Śāntideva destroyed the bodhisattva path." Williams bases his conclusion on a somewhat selective reading of the text. He works mainly on five of Śāntideva's 912 verses, without paying much attention to their context. The main arguments for this conclusion are given in chapter five, where he discusses *BCA* 8: 101-103. Further support is given in chapter two, where he discusses *BCA* 8: 97-98.

Williams's interpretation appears to be oriented toward the following question, which he states on page 30:

Put more pointedly, why should we care if other people are suffering? What does it matter to us? The point is raised by Śāntideva's opponent, and it might be thought to be the very foundation question for a construction of an ethical system.

I agree that this is a good question to have in focus when reading Śāntideva's text. It may be, however, that the question should be reformulated in a somewhat more general way: Should we be concerned about the welfare of others, and if so, why? This can be specified in two aspects — concern for the suffering of others, and concern for the happiness of others.

It may be that this question should be supplemented with the following one as well: Should we have respect for the freedom of others, and if so, why? This is also a central question for Buddhists and others, especially in a multicultural society, but I shall leave that to one side at present.

The "others" here include not only all human beings but also all sentient beings. This is a kind of sentientism with regard to the question of who or what is morally considerable. It stops short of biocentrism, however, which would include all living beings, whether sentient or not. This would include plants and microorganisms as well. The Jains took this position, not the Buddhists, although there was some uncertainty with regard to trees, due to the assumption that they may be the abode of sentient spirits.<sup>5</sup>

Suppose we answer the basic question about welfare in the negative: We need not be concerned about the welfare of others: neither their suffering nor their happiness, except in so far as it promotes our own welfare. This would amount to an egoistic position not unknown throughout history or in the present.

Egoism has a number of problems of its own, not only for others, but for oneself as well. These problems have been a major challenge to moral thinking in many traditions. I believe that in one way or another most ethical theories attempt to find solutions to these problems. Very often, these solutions are sought in the direction of how to restrict egoism or how to overcome it. Different solutions have been sought within the framework of ethical theories based on duty, rights, justice, utility, virtue, and so forth.

In Buddhist thinking, there seem to be two main approaches to this question: one by means of elimination of the self, the other by means of reintegration into a more holistic understanding of oneself in an interpersonal sense. The first of these approaches has been developed especially in the Abhidharma Schools of Hīnayāna

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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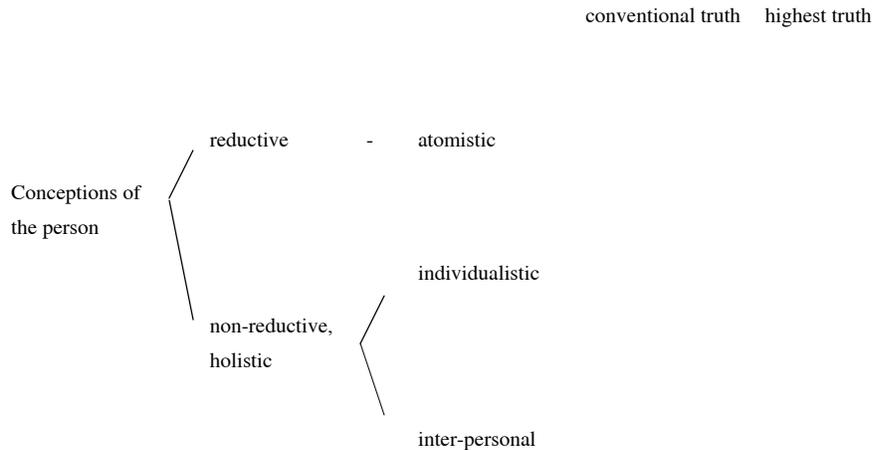
Buddhism, while the second approach has been developed in various schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Both are based on wisdom, implying insight into the real nature of the person (*pudgala*), and hence of the ego.

The reductive conception understands the person as nothing but the sum of its parts, or rather, elements. The parts (*dharmas*) are supposed to have primary reality (*dravyasat*) with an ontological being of their own (*svabhāva*) as indivisible momentary energetic atoms of experience. So, this amounts to a kind of atomism. When we construct our conceptions of persons, living beings and other things, they have only a secondary existence (*prajñaptisat*). These constructions can be analysed into compounds of parts, they are nothing in themselves, and they are without any self (*pudgala-nairātmya*).

The non-reductive conception understands the person as something more than the sum of its parts. This "something more," however, is understood only as a conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*), and not as the highest truth (*paramārthasatya*). The highest truth is still that the person is not a substantial self (*anātman*), it is only characterized by emptiness of own-being (*svabhāvasūnyatā*). Nevertheless, it is ascribed unity and identity, as a matter of convention and linguistic usage (*vyavahāra*), when we use singular terms such as names, pronouns, indexicals and definite descriptions. Then we assume that they have the same reference when we ascribe different properties to them, and locate them at different positions in space and time. This presupposes the assumptions about unity and identity. These assumptions are not eliminated through a reductive analysis. This conception has been developed especially in Madhyamaka Buddhism, for instance as interpreted by the Gelukpa School. It is a middle way avoiding the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. It avoids eternalism because it does not assume that the person is a substantial Self (*ātman*) with an independent own-being

(*svabhāva*) — in the way it is done in other schools of Indian philosophy, such as Sāṃkhya, Vaiśeṣika, and the Advaita Vedānta. And it avoids nihilism because it does not assume that the person is a pure nothing that can be eliminated by reductive analysis, as assumed by the Abhidharma Schools.

Moreover, I believe we can distinguish two varieties of a non-reductive, holistic conception of the person in Buddhist thinking: one individualistic and the other interpersonal. The distinctions I have drawn here can be summarized in the following diagram:



The reductive response to the challenge of egoism appears to have been epitomised in the *arhat* ideal in Hīnayāna Buddhism, while the non-reductive response was epitomized in the *bodhisattva* ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism. On Williams's interpretation, Śāntideva attempted to establish the *bodhisattva* ideal on a reductive conception of the person, and this did not work.

### The notions of altruism and egoism

Before we have a closer look at Williams's argument, let us first attempt to further clarify the notions of *altruism* and *egoism*. These terms have a certain ambiguity both in everyday discourse and in

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

specialized studies. This is also true of Williams's usage in his book on altruism. I believe that I have found at least four different senses of *altruism* in his book, and I assume that the term *egoism* has a corresponding set of contrasting meanings. We should keep in mind that these different interpretations also have repercussions for the initial question mentioned above. As a point of departure we may use the formulation that:

Altruism<sub>0</sub>: A given person *a* has an altruistic attitude.

When this is interpreted in the sense of altruism<sub>1</sub> it may mean the same as:

Altruism<sub>1</sub>: *a* is concerned about (or cares for) the welfare (pain or suffering, and happiness) of others, and *a* is motivated to do something to prevent or remove the pain and suffering of others and to promote their happiness.(6)

When the term "egoism" is interpreted in contrast to this, we have:

Egoism<sub>1</sub>: *a* is not concerned about (or does not care for) the welfare (pain, suffering or happiness) of others, or *a* is not motivated to do something to prevent or remove the pain and suffering of others or to promote their happiness.

Altruism<sub>2</sub> is more demanding because it presupposes not only concern but also impartiality:

Altruism<sub>2</sub>: *a* has an impartial concern for the welfare of all parties concerned, without discriminating between the welfare of himself or herself and others.(7)

The notion of impartiality can be understood in accordance with the formal principle of equality: Cases that are relevantly similar should be treated in a similar manner; differential treatment should not be given unless it can be justified by relevant differences. Here it is assumed that there are no relevant reasons for a differential treatment. The contrasting notion of egoism could be formulated in this way:

Egoism<sub>2</sub>: In so far as *a* cares for the welfare of other parties concerned, his or her care is partial in favor of his or her own welfare more than the welfare of others, and concern for others is dependent on its instrumental value for his or her own interests.

Moreover, altruism<sub>3</sub> is even more demanding because it requires the subordination of one's own interests to those of others:

Altruism<sub>3</sub>: In all cases where *a*'s interests conflict with the interests of others, *a* is disposed to give priority to the interests of others.(8)

The contrasting notion egoism<sub>3</sub> has the opposite priority:

Egoism<sub>3</sub>: In all cases where *a*'s interests conflict with the interests of others, *a* is disposed to give priority to his or her own interests before those of others.

In this interpretation, both "altruism" and "egoism" are understood within the framework of an individualistic self-conception. There is, however, a further interpretation altruism<sub>4</sub> within a wider framework, which I will call an interpersonal holism. Broadly, all non-reductive conceptions of a person may be regarded as holistic in the sense that the person as a whole is more than the sum of its parts. Williams characterizes his individualistic conception as holistic.(9) The holism I

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

have in mind here, however, is not individualistic, but interpersonal. Others are conceived as part of oneself at a deeper level:

Altruism<sub>4</sub>: *a* has a concern for his or her own welfare, and *a* considers the welfare of others as his or her own; hence that person has a concern for the welfare of others.

It may be somewhat misleading to call this altruism because in a way it transcends the distinction between ego and alter. Perhaps it should rather be called something else, for instance generosity.<sup>(10)</sup> Both are integrated within a wider conception of the self. It may be asked in this connection whether the term *egoism* could be interpreted in contrast to altruism<sub>4</sub>? If we tried, it might turn out as something like this:

Egoism<sub>4</sub>: *a* has a concern for his own welfare, but *a* does not consider the welfare of others as his or her own.

I am reluctant, however, to consider this as a reasonable interpretation of *egoism* because a person of this type may still be an altruist in one of the three former senses, and then it would be odd to call that person an egoist. I believe, however, that Williams has misgivings about this kind of altruism. Perhaps he does not regard it as a psychologically feasible concept.<sup>(11)</sup> Nevertheless, I believe that it deserves to be explored somewhat further, and in fact I believe that Śāntideva used it.

### **Williams's approach to *BCA* 8: 101-103**

Williams bases his reductive interpretation of Śāntideva mainly on *BCA* 8: 101-103, which he translates as follows:<sup>(12)</sup>

101: A continuant and a collective — such as a [caste] row (*paṅkti*) or an army — are fictions (*mṛśā*) / The one of whom there is pain (*duḥkha*) does not exist. Therefore of whom will there be the ownership of that? //

102: Pains without an owner are all indeed without distinction / Because of its quality as pain indeed it is to be prevented. What limitation can be made there? //

103: If one asks why pain is to be prevented (Tib: 'the pain of all is to be prevented'), it is [accepted] (Skt: 'by all') without dispute / If it is to be prevented, all also is thus. If not, oneself also is like [other] beings. //

Williams assumes that Śāntideva is the proponent of all three of these verses. He reads them as an argument where the premises are laid out in verse 101-102 and the conclusion is drawn in verse 103. He assumes that Śāntideva is aiming at a formally valid deductive argument.

Williams reads the conclusion in verse 103 as stating the *bodhisattva's* ideal of universal altruism, or the "universal thesis," as he calls it. He reformulates as follows:

I shall call the position that morality requires that if I am to remove my own pain I must (moral imperative) act to remove the pains of others without discrimination the universal thesis. (p. 104)

I am not so sure that this should be called a "moral imperative," because that sounds more like a deontological ethics, while I suppose that Śāntideva's ethics should rather be interpreted as an ethics of virtue. Nevertheless, I agree that verse 103 seems to point to some kind of universalism.

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

In fact, we can distinguish two kinds of universalism in this verse. In the first place, it requires some kind of universal altruism. Within the framework of a reductive conception of the person, one would try to formulate this norm impersonally, without reference to oneself or others. The following might be a possible formulation: If one agrees that suffering should be prevented or removed, this pertains to all suffering or none of it.

On the other hand, within the framework of a non-reductive conception of the person, one would try to formulate this norm personally, with reference to oneself and others, for instance in this way: If one agrees that suffering should be prevented or removed from sentient beings, this pertains to all sentient beings or none of them, without discrimination or differential treatment between oneself and others.

It seems that Williams is inclined to read 103 in a reductive way, but I will argue that a non-reductive reading is more plausible and has a stronger support in the wider context.

There is also a second kind of universalism implied in verse 103. According to the Sanskrit version of the text, the universal thesis is accepted by all; that is to say, Śāntideva assumes that there is a universal agreement or consensus about it. I suppose that this can be understood as an indication that Śāntideva adheres to some kind of pragmatic theory of normative validity (that is, the binding character of moral norms), based on acceptance, recognition, endorsement or consensus. This idea would fit very well with the notion of conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*), which we should probably not interpret as a strong meta-ethical cognitivism based on truth, or a moral realism based on moral facts, but rather as a weak moral cognitivism based on pragmatic criteria of the kind mentioned.

Let us move on to the premises in verse 101-102. We can distinguish at least three different interpretations of them: (1) A

reductive interpretation, which Williams criticizes for its absurd consequences, (2) a non-reductive and individualistic interpretation, which Williams criticizes for being insufficient to justify the desired conclusion, and (3) a non-reductive and interpersonally holistic interpretation, which Williams does not seem to consider, and which may save Śāntideva from the dilemma, with which Williams confronts him.

**(1) Williams's reductive interpretation of *BCA* 8: 101-102**

In verse 101, Śāntideva appears to draw an analogy between the notion of a person or a self on the one hand, and the notion of a collective like an army; and of a continuant, like a row or queue, on the other. In the second line of the verse it is said that there exists no one for whom there is pain or who owns pain. The notion of a person is characterized as a fiction, analogous to the notion of a collective and a continuant.

In a Buddhist context the notion of a person (*puḍgala*) is analyzed into five groups (*skandha*) of bodily and mental phenomena (*dharma*): the sense-organs, which pertain to the body, feelings, perceptions, dispositions, and consciousness of these phenomena. These elementary phenomena have an atomic structure, much like the sense-data in David Hume's empiricism. Each element is numerically different from all other elements, and each element lasts for only a moment and is numerically different from the elements in the preceding and succeeding moments.

When a compound thing like a person is constructed out of these elements, it appears to have a unity in the multiplicity of parts, and to have an identity through time and change. If we believe that there is something like this, we may believe that there is a conventional person or a metaphysical person. Verse 101 appears to deny both of these possibilities because it affirms that they involve fictions, much in the same way as Hume's skeptical analysis of personal identity.<sup>(13)</sup>

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

When we analyze the apparent unity and identity of a person, we find nothing but a sum of parts, or rather, elementary phenomena. The unity is reduced to a collective and the identity to a continuant; both are reduced to a sum of parts. A collective like an army is nothing but a sum of soldiers, and a continuant like a queue or a rosary is nothing but a series of individuals (people or beads). In the same way, the person as a unity is nothing but a sum of elementary phenomena existing synchronically; the person as an identity is nothing but a sum of elementary phenomena existing diachronically, each element being numerically distinct from all the rest.

In both cases, appearance does not match reality. If we believe it does, then that is due to our basic ignorance or delusion, which engenders unwholesome effects such as greed and hatred, and these unwholesome roots engender suffering and rebirth to new lives of suffering. Liberation from suffering presupposes an insight into this root delusion, and that is the crucial wisdom. This is an insight into the nothingness of the assumption about a person, as understood in the Abhidharma Schools, especially in the Vaibhāṣika School.

This analysis is brought one step further in verse 102. If the notion of a person or self is a fiction, there can be no owner of pain or suffering. As a consequence, it must be assumed that these feelings can be had independently of a subjective context. Williams characterizes them as "free-floating feelings." In this analysis, feelings like suffering and compassion, for instance, must be understood independently of the subjective contexts of persons or other sentient beings who supposedly *have* these feelings. Compassion must be assumed to be motivated by the perception of pain or suffering, without any reference to whether it belongs to others or to oneself. When these personal references are bracketed, there is no basis for egocentric discrimination. All personal characteristics that might be

used to justify a differential treatment of oneself and others are eliminated, and only equality is left as a possibility.

From these premises in verse 101-102, then, the universal thesis in verse 103 can be drawn as a conclusion. In this way a universal altruism of some sort can hopefully be established.

**Williams's refutation of 101-102, when interpreted reductively**

I think this is the argument that Williams ascribes to Śāntideva. Williams's next move is to criticize this position and show that it entails a number of absurd consequences, which prevents it from being a workable solution. Let me briefly summarize some of the main absurdities to which Williams draws attention.

It must be said that Williams is making a real *tour de force* in these parts of his book. He draws a parallel between the reductive conceptions of the person in Abhidharma Buddhism and in Hume's chapter "Of Personal Identity" in the *Treatise* (1739-1740), which has been followed up in recent times by Derek Parfit in *Reasons and Persons* (1984) and Susan Blackmore, among others.<sup>(14)</sup> Williams draws on the criticism against Parfit by S. Shoemaker, J. Stone, J. Campbell, and G. Strawson.<sup>(15)</sup> He also draws on the criticism of reductionism in general by a number of philosophers in modern Anglo-American analytical philosophy, like R. M. Chisholm, G. Gillett, J. Glover, R. L. Gregory, S. Guttenplan, D. W. Hamlyn, E. J. Lowe, H. Putnam, W. V. O. Quine, J. R. Searle, P. F. Strawson, D. Wiggins, and many others.<sup>(16)</sup>

Quite a few of Williams's criticisms have a presuppositional structure. If I may be excused for a rash summary of Williams's argument, I take it that he argues that the attempt to reduce the notion of a person to a collective and a continuant is question begging, at least if the collective is understood as a sum of simultaneous elementary phenomena, and the continuant is understood as a sum of successive

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

momentary phenomena that are causally related. Here the compound notion of the person as a whole is to be constructed as a sum of these elements. However, which elements are to be included or excluded from the basis of this construction? How are elements selected so as to function as parts of the whole person, which is to be constructed? And how are elementary phenomena to be ascribed to the construction of one person rather than another? The elements must be of *the right sort*, as Parfit calls it, but what are the criteria of relevance for this selection? Williams argues that this presupposes a preconception of the person as a whole on which it is parasitic. Here I would add that the notion of a collective probably presupposes the conception of the unity of the whole, and the notion of a continuant probably presupposes the conception of the identity of the whole through time and change. In other words, the reductive explanation of the whole presupposes the whole, which should be explained, and therefore the explanation becomes circular and question begging.

Williams employs a number of variations of presuppositional arguments of this kind. He follows Kant's transcendental argument that *I think* must be capable of accompanying all my experiences, and for this reason subjectivity is inherent in all mental events. A consequence of this is that if the subject is eliminated through reductive analysis, so is the possibility of experience, mental events, learning to use a language, conceptual thought, reasoning, decision-making, engaging in choices, agency, responsibility, merit, demerit, karma, the fruits of karma, punishment, reward, and furthermore, also the possibility of having feelings, and hence pain and suffering. Without this, there is no point in the *bodhisattva's* vow to help all suffering beings become free from suffering and attain happiness. Nor is there any point in the *bodhisattva's* decision or vow because he or she will not be the same person making the decision and carrying it through. In short, the reductive conception of the person will destroy the *bodhisattva's* path.

**(2) A non-reductive and individualistic interpretation of *BCA* 8: 101-103**

How shall we assess Williams's interpretation of Śāntideva? Did Śāntideva really adhere to a reductive conception of the person or the self? From a methodological point of view, I think there are two requirements that we should keep in mind. First, are there any plausible alternatives to Williams's reading of *BCA* 8: 101-103? Secondly, are there other verses that support an alternative interpretation rather than Williams's? I think Williams has paid some attention to these requirements, but perhaps not quite as much as would be desirable.

I believe there are two main alternatives to Williams's interpretation. Both of them read verse 101 as a denial of a metaphysical Self (*ātman*), but not of a conventional person (*pudgala*). This opens the possibility of a non-reductive understanding of the person, provided that this is understood as a conventional truth and not as the highest truth.

Williams considers one of these interpretations, where the non-reductive conception of the person is understood in an individualistic manner. Williams concedes that this interpretation might have been a theoretical possibility for Śāntideva. Śāntideva is commonly regarded as a proponent of the Madhyamaka School of Mahāyāna, and some, if not all, interpretations of this school have found room for such a non-reductive conception of the person. This, at least, is true of the Tibetan Gelukpa School. It is not inconceivable that Śāntideva could have attempted to do the same himself.

Let me expand on this a little.<sup>(17)</sup> The first commentator on Śāntideva's text, Prajñākaramati (tenth century), interpreted Śāntideva at this point from within the framework of the Vaibhaṣika Abhidharma School. It seems, by the way, that Prajñākaramati's interpretation has been a major source of inspiration for Williams's reductive

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

interpretation as well. According to this school, the notion of a person or a self is regarded as a whole (a collective and a continuant), which is taken to be nothing but the sum of its parts, or rather, of the elementary, momentary phenomena, which are its constituents. Because the whole is nothing in itself, it can be reduced to its elementary constituents. Therefore, it is redundant and can be eliminated.

The Gelukpas, on the other hand, agreed with the Abhidharma philosophers that the notion of a person is a conventional construction. But they did not conceive of it in a reductive manner. They acknowledged that the notion of a person presupposes the assumption that there is a unity in the multiplicity of parts, and that it has identity through time and change. They also acknowledged that it presupposes subjectivity. These assumptions amount to something more than the sum of parts, and that is the reason for the notion being non-reductive. But still this is only a conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*). This is based on linguistic usage (*vyavahāra*) when we employ singular terms to refer to others or ourselves by means of names, pronouns, indexicals, or definite descriptions. These terms are used as supervenient terms, and are imputed to others or ourselves on the basis of elementary phenomena falling under the five groups of corporal or mental phenomena. These phenomena are used as subvenient grounds for the ascription of the status of a person. The attribution of person terms is not, however, assumed to be the highest truth (*paramārtha-satya*) of the matter. The highest truth is still that a person is not a substantial self (*pudgala-nairātmya*), and is characterized by emptiness of independent own-being (*svabhāva-sūnyatā*).

Williams appears to have two objections against this interpretation of verses 101-102. In the first place, it does not seem to fit so well with the wording in 101 where it is said that "the one of whom there is pain does not exist," or with the expression in verse 102

about "pains without an owner." To some extent, these expressions seem to support a reductive interpretation of 101-102 as a denial of both a conventional and a metaphysical person or self.

But this argument is not decisive. Williams admits that if Śāntideva had accepted a conception of the person along these lines, he would have avoided the absurd consequences of the reductive conception. But Williams holds that Śāntideva had a further reason for not doing that. Williams assumes that if Śāntideva had accepted a non-reductive conception of the person, it would have to be an individualistic conception. And in that case, he would have to abandon the hope of establishing premises that could give a deductive justification for the desired conclusion in verse 103. This conclusion contains a universal thesis, which requires a high degree of altruism. A non-reductive individualism cannot guarantee for such altruism. Whenever a person understands himself or herself as different from other persons, there is always the possibility that he or she will give priority to his or her own interests before those of others in cases where they conflict. Because this is possible, altruism does not follow with necessity.

Williams amplifies this argument with the following observation. It will not help if a person accepts the thesis of no-self or emptiness of own-being as a highest truth, if this person at the same time accepts an individualistic conception of the person as a conventional truth. This combination of premises does not entail altruism. There is no lack of counter-examples either. Many people, who reject the assumption of a substantial self, nevertheless turn out to be more or less egoistic.

In view of these arguments, Williams holds that Śāntideva faced the following dilemma. If Śāntideva wanted to give a deductive justification of the universal altruistic conclusion in verse 103, he had to accept a reductive conception of the person. But then he also had to take the absurd consequences into the bargain. On the other hand, if

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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Śāntideva wished to avoid these absurd consequences, he had to abandon his hope of giving a deductive justification of the universal altruistic conclusion. In this situation, Śāntideva chose the first horn of the dilemma. Unfortunately, he thereby destroyed the *bodhisattva* path.

Williams expresses his regrets for this, and he hopes that a better solution may be found. Because Williams has not proposed any suggestion about how this might be done, I think it could be worthwhile to investigate the following hypothesis.<sup>(18)</sup>

### **(3) A non-reductive and interpersonally holistic interpretation of *BCA* 8: 101-103**

Let us pass on to the second non-reductive interpretation of the verses 101-102. Here it is assumed that when a *bodhisattva* is understood as a person, this need not be understood individualistically within a dualistic distinction between oneself and others, but it may be understood holistically in an interpersonal manner. Or, perhaps it would be better to say that in this interpretation the *bodhisattva* path is understood as a transformation of the motivational structure of a *bodhisattva* from an individualistic to an interpersonal self-understanding.

This might provide the premises needed for deducing the desired universal altruistic conclusion in verse 103. Let us just remember what the initial question was: Should we care if other people are suffering? Or, more generally: Should we be concerned about the welfare of (all) other sentient beings, and if so, why? Obviously, Śāntideva answers this question in the affirmative, and when his justification for it is given within the framework of a non-reductive conception of the self, it may be spelled out in terms of the following two premises:

(1) I should be concerned about the welfare of myself, and endeavor to prevent or remove my own pain and suffering, and to promote my own happiness.

This reading is fairly close to the text in verse 103, and it is in harmony with some of the other verses such as 99, 110 and 117. As I remarked earlier, this verse indicates that there is wide agreement. This may be interpreted in terms of a pragmatic theory of validity according to which the binding force of norms have their source in endorsement or agreement. In so far as it is not contested, there is no need to justify it further. This would be in keeping with a contextual model of justification.

(2) The welfare of (all) other sentient beings is part of my own welfare.

This premise, of course, is not self-explanatory, and the question is whether it can be interpreted in a meaningful and tenable way in view of other verses in the context. I shall return to that presently. From these premises, we can conclude:

(3) I should be concerned about the welfare of (all) sentient beings.

When Śāntideva's argument for the universalistic altruism of a bodhisattva is reconstructed in this way, it seems to be all right from a logical point of view. It is a plain *modus ponens*. I suppose that this meets Williams's requirement, and that it is not necessary to assume that Śāntideva has to be excused for bad logic in order to defend him from Williams's charges, which seems to be the position taken by Barbra Clayton.<sup>(19)</sup> On the other hand, I believe that this reconstruction brings out why the conclusion cannot be reached by logic alone. It presupposes that the second premise is established, and

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

that requires something more than an academic exercise in argumentation. It requires meditative and moral practice. I agree with Barbra Clayton, who also refers to John Pettit at this point, that Williams has underrated this side of the matter quite seriously.<sup>(20)</sup>

To some extent, this looks like a casuistic argument. It starts with one's own case as a paradigmatic example and extends it to others. Usually casuistic arguments are based on analogical extensions. If we accept and agree how to treat a paradigmatic case, and we accept and agree that another case is relevantly similar to the first one, and if we, furthermore, accept and agree that there are no sufficient countervailing differences between these cases, then this can be used as a reason for concluding that the other case should be treated in a similar manner. This kind of argument seems to presuppose an individualistic conception of the parties concerned, and to be based on the formal principle of equality. The equality in question here is based on similar properties of the individuals concerned.

The argument above, however, transcends this kind of individualistic equality and moves into some kind of interpersonal conception of the person. Or, perhaps it presupposes that the notion of a person must be stratified in two or more layers, one at the surface, which is individualistic, and another at a deeper level, which is more interpersonal.

In this reading, it is most likely that Śāntideva himself would have welcomed Williams's criticism of verse 101-102, except for its being directed against Śāntideva instead of his opponent. In so far as these verses are interpreted within a reductive conception of the person, they have a number of absurd consequences. In pointing out these consequences, Williams is engaging in an exemplary exercise in the kind of dialectical argumentation that is the hallmark of the Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka to which Śāntideva himself belonged — refuting the opponent by means of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments.

Moreover, Śāntideva would agree with Williams that these absurd consequences could be avoided by assuming a non-reductive conception of the person as a conventional truth. Śāntideva would not agree, however, that a non-reductive conception must necessarily be individualistic. Even if this is the most common conception, it can be transformed into an interpersonal holistic conception. In so far as that is done, one obtains the kind of altruism that is required as a premise for the universal thesis in the conclusion in verse 103. To do so is a central objective for a *bodhisattva*.

Before we look at other verses that may supplement this reading of Śāntideva within the framework of a non-reductive interpersonal conception of the person, let us first consider briefly how Williams interprets and criticizes *BCA* 8: 97-98.

### **Reductive and non-reductive readings of *BCA* 8: 97-98**

Williams translates these verses as follows:(21)

97: Supposing one says that the suffering which happens to that [other] person does no harm to *me*, therefore (s)he should not be protected against [it] / Then since future suffering (Skt.: 'the suffering of future bodies') also is doing no harm [to you now] why is that to be protected against? //

98: If you consider that 'I will experience that,' such conception is false / Indeed other the one who died; other also is the one who is born. /

Let us first ask, "Who are the antagonists here?" I think it is safe to say that there are two parties: one party holding a reductive conception of the person, the other holding a non-reductive conception. Williams assumes that Śāntideva is a protagonist of the former conception,

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

while I assume he is a protagonist of the latter. That certainly makes a difference here. I shall set forth my own reading and attempt to characterize Williams's interpretation as I go along.

As a hypothesis I suppose that Śāntideva as his initial move in the discussion formulates the first sentence in 97 with the opponent, who is a follower of the Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma. It says, "Supposing one says that the suffering which happens to that [other] person does no harm to *me*, therefore (s)he should not be protected against [it]." This seems to imply the following sentence:

(1) If and only if a suffering happens to me should I be concerned about it, and attempt protect myself against it so as to prevent it or remove it.;

From this, it would seem to follow,

(2) If a suffering does not happen to me, I need not be concerned about it.;

The point of this is to draw some absurd implications from the reductionist's denial that the person as a whole is more than the sum of constituent parts or elements. If one denies that the person has an internal unity in the multiplicity of parts, and also denies that he or she has identity through time and change, several odd consequences will follow with regard to planning for one's own future. It seems that Śāntideva, in verse 98, ascribes to the reductionist the view that future sufferings belong to another person than the present person. Williams points out two versions of this, a narrower and a wider — where the narrower is connected with future bodies, and the wider with future sufferings without referring to any particular body. According to the narrower view, my future sufferings may be related to future bodies in which I am reborn. These bodies are clearly numerically different from

my present body. According to the wider view, my future sufferings need not be specifically related to any body at all. Because all the elementary phenomena that constitute a person are new in each moment, there is strictly speaking no ground for saying that the future sufferings are mine at all. Only present sufferings belong to me now; future sufferings belong to someone else, and a new one in each moment.

In view of this, it may be asked whether I should take measures in the present to avoid suffering in the future. Because future sufferings do not happen to me now, and hence do not happen to me, it would seem to follow that I need not be concerned about them. On the other hand, it appears to be a fact that most people do plan for the future and take measures in a more or less prudent way in order to avoid future suffering. If we accept that this is just what we should do, we will have a good reason for rejecting the reductive conception. So, this argument amounts to an attempt at a *reductio ad absurdum* of the reductive view.

The battle is not won yet, however. According to Williams's interpretation, the reductionist has further resources. He may retort that the non-reductionist has not understood how radical his view is. Because he considers the notion of a person to be a fiction and an illusion, he does not need to rely on the distinction between oneself and others at all. All he needs is the occurrence of suffering. That alone will motivate compassion, and hence altruism, without regard to the persons concerned. There will be no relevant difference between one's own suffering and that of others, and hence no ground for a differential treatment. The feelings of pain, suffering, compassion, and so forth will be "free-floating," and artificial borders between others and myself will not limit their scope.

If we suppose that a *bodhisattva* is motivated in this way to prevent or remove all pain and suffering, simply because it is pain or suffering, we will have the premise needed in order to explain his

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

universal altruism. We may suppose that this motivation is basically there in everybody, but in most people and other sentient beings it is obscured by hindrances such as the three unwholesome roots (delusion, greed, and hatred). In the *bodhisattva*, however, it will shine forth again in proportion as he or she removes these hindrances. And that is all the normative justification a *bodhisattva* will need.

It seems that Williams has two kinds of arguments against this defense. In the first place, he argues against this explanation on the basis of the transcendental or presuppositional arguments of the type we have already considered. If experience and feeling necessarily presuppose someone who experiences and feels, then there can be no free-floating experiences or feelings in the absence of a personal context. In that case, there can be no basis even for an egoistic motivation, let alone a universal altruistic motivation.

Secondly, Williams argues against this normative justification by pointing out that it is begging the question. Even if we grant, for the sake of the argument, that a compassionate *bodhisattva* will be motivated to prevent or remove all pain and suffering, without regard for personal context, then we will presuppose the very thesis that we were supposed to explain or justify. And that is question begging, which is to say that it is not really an explanation or justification at all.<sup>22</sup>

As I said, Williams assumes that this is a refutation of Śāntideva's position, while I suppose that it is a refutation of Śāntideva's opponent, and that Śāntideva himself would have endorsed Williams's arguments. I believe that Śāntideva would have understood verse 97-98 as a non-reductive argument that may perhaps be reconstructed along the following lines:

(3) I can envisage future sufferings that will happen to me because I can identify with these future states and

incorporate them into my conception of myself as a unity with identity through time.;

This unity and identity of the person, it should be remembered, can here be understood as a conventional truth. Conventional truths are conditioned by linguistic and other usages, such as the use of singular and general terms to isolate and identify individuals referred to, which is a precondition for identifying with them. Hence, this could only be understood as a non-reductive conventional conception of oneself.

(4) More generally, I can envisage my own future states of welfare, both with regard to suffering and happiness because I can identify with these future states and incorporate them into my conception of myself as a unity with identity through time.;

(5) Therefore, I should be concerned about my own future states of welfare.;

(6) There is no relevant difference between my own future welfare and the present or future welfare of others because I can identify with both, and thus incorporate these states of welfare into my conception of myself.;

This is an assertion that would need further clarification and justification, which we may look for on a broader basis in Śāntideva's text.

(7) Therefore, I should be as concerned about the welfare of others as for my own.;

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

The scope of this concern may be particularistic if it extends to some others, such as certain other human beings or certain sentient beings, or it may be universalistic if it extends to all others. And, it may be broadened through certain kinds of meditation practice. I shall return to this.

One advantage of this interpretation is that it would provide an answer to the initial question: Should I care about the suffering or welfare of others, and if so, why? Yes, I should, at least if I accept that I should care for the suffering and welfare of myself, and if I understand myself at a deeper level as united with others. This latter *if*, however, is a large one. Has Śāntideva anything more to say about it?

### **Other verses supporting a non-reductive interpretation of Śāntideva**

When we take into consideration a broader context than Williams has done, we find a number of verses where Śāntideva appears to propound a non-reductive conception of the person in a conventional sense. Moreover, Śāntideva does not seem to share Williams's assumption that a non-reductive conception of the person must be individualistic. Even if most people do entertain an individualistic conception of themselves, and therefore may be more or less egoistic, the whole point of becoming a *bodhisattva* is to transform this motivational structure in the direction of what I called altruism<sub>4</sub> above, and become as concerned for the welfare of others as one is for one's own. A means for doing this is to change one's conception of oneself into an interpersonal conception.

I believe this is the main point in the greater part of Śāntideva's text in so far as it is focused on the notion of an awakening mind (*bodhicitta*). This notion is interpreted differently within a gradual and an instantaneous understanding of the path to awakening. In Śāntideva's text it is mainly understood in the gradual way. The first three chapters of *BCA* may be interpreted as an explanation of how an

awakening mind can be aroused, the next three chapters explain the methods by which one maintains an awakening mind and prevents it from deteriorating, and the three chapters after these explain how to increase *bodhicitta* when it has been engendered.<sup>23</sup>

Śāntideva's text contains a wealth of exercises and techniques of meditation that may be helpful in this connection. Of particular interest are his meditations in chapter six on forbearance, and in chapter eight on the equality of self and others in 8: 90-119, and on the exchange of oneself with others in 8: 120-173. And of course, the meditations on wisdom in chapter nine have a further bearing on all of this, especially with regard to the transition to selfless motives and actions.

I agree that there is a leeway for different interpretations of Śāntideva's text. In chapter eight, for instance, it is possible to interpret many of the verses either within the framework of a reductive conception of the person, or within a non-reductive and individualistic framework, or within a non-reductive and interpersonal framework. In the following, I shall mainly concentrate on the third of these possibilities. I believe that this kind of holism is explored especially in 8: 91, 99, 100, and 114, and that it gains further supported from 8: 111, 112, 115, 136, 137, and 158. We may start with verse 90. Here and in the following, I shall mostly use the translation of Wallace and Wallace, but I will also consult the five other translations I have at hand:

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

The point of verse 90 is to meditate on the equality of oneself and others. This equality is spelled out in descriptive terms as two properties that are attributed to oneself and others: everyone

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

experiences suffering, and everyone experiences happiness. We may perhaps add that everyone desires to avoid suffering and to gain happiness. This is used as a ground for a normative prescription: therefore, I must protect others as I protect myself.

It is interesting to notice here that this basic similarity is characterized both in a negative and a positive aspect: suffering (*duḥkha*) and happiness (*sukha*). Suffering, of course, is the object of compassion (*karuṇā*), motivating the compassionate person to have a concern for others who suffer, and help to prevent their suffering or remove it. Moreover, happiness is the object of loving-kindness (*maitrī*), motivating the gentle person to promote the happiness others. In this way Śāntideva starts from a broader basis than Williams's formulation of the basic problem. Williams mentions only the negative concern for the suffering for others, while Śāntideva mentions also the positive concern for the happiness of others. It is interesting to see how much the Dalai Lama makes out of this combined goal (avoiding suffering and obtaining happiness) in his public speeches. He takes it as a basis for a common morality in a multicultural world. This may be a fruitful idea. At least it is worth probing.<sup>24</sup>

Verse 90 is one of those verses that lends itself to an interpretation within all three of the conceptions of the person that I mentioned. If it is interpreted within a reductive framework, the basic similarity between persons or other sentient beings is that they are illusions. What really exist are only elementary phenomena, such as acts of pain or pleasure, or of compassion or loving-kindness. I shall not go further into this possibility because we have already discussed Williams's criticism of it.

If verse 90 is interpreted within a non-reductive and individualistic framework, pains and pleasures are regarded as properties belonging to individual persons. I think Williams has a good point here when he doubts that an individualistic conception of the

person will suffice to motivate a universalistic or egalitarian ethics. As we said earlier, although it is possible for an individualist to have such a universalistic motivation, there is no necessity that he or she must have it. And, if we assume that all persons are similar in being concerned primarily about their own welfare, then this alone will not guarantee that people will care for the welfare of others.

At least some more premises must be added that explain why people with this kind of individualistic interest should be motivated to agree on common moral or legal norms, abide by them, or even feel obligated by them. This has been one of the standard problems in much western philosophy since the time of Hobbes, if not before. A variety of contract theories have been proposed to solve it, some on a consequentialist basis, others on a deontological basis. If individualism had been the only kind of non-reductive conception the person available to Śāntideva, one could reasonably expect that he too would have probed into some kind of contract theory. But there is no trace of that in his writings. I take this as a confirmation of the assumption that he was rather exploring other kinds of non-reductive conceptions.

One such possibility is the non-reductive and interpersonal conception of the person. It is interesting that this seems to be the way Śāntideva develops his thought in the very next verse, which is translated as follows by Wallace and Wallace:

91: Just as the body, which has many parts owing to its division into arms and so forth, should be protected as a whole, so should this entire world, which is differentiated and yet has the nature of the same suffering and happiness.

Fletcher's translation differs a little from this. Instead of characterizing the body as a whole with the limbs as its parts, he characterizes the body as one with many limbs. In either case, the body

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

is to be protected as a whole or as a unity. The term *protect* in this context must be interpreted in a sense wide enough to include not only a concern to prevent or remove suffering, but also to promote happiness. This concern is both self- and other-regarding.

In a non-reductive and individualistic interpretation, one party's concern for others is based on the perception of a relevant similarity between one's own interests and that of others, combined with the lack of a sufficient countervailing difference, but in a non-reductive and interpersonal interpretation, one party's concern for others is based on the perception of oneself and others as parts of a more comprehensive whole that is assumed to have an organic unity. In so far as a person identifies with this whole, it becomes the deeper self of the person. Here others are viewed not only as more or less similar to oneself, but as parts of oneself.

An obvious objection against an interpersonally holistic conception of the self is that the feelings of one person are not identical with those of another. They may be more or less similar, but they are not the same. Even if they are qualitatively identical, they are numerically distinct. So it does not seem to make sense to talk about the feelings of another person as being my own. Each person has his or her own feelings. Following Williams, we could go on to say that feelings presuppose a personal context. If this is taken to be the end of the matter, we have an individualistic conception of the person.<sup>(25)</sup>

Adherents of an interpersonal conception of the self wish to say that the feelings of another person may be not only similar to one's own, but they may be one's own. Can this be reconciled with the common sense view that there is a numerical distinction between the feelings of different persons? One possible solution might be to distinguish two aspects in the attribution of feelings to others or oneself. In the first place, we may refer to acts of feeling. These acts can be individualized in such a way that the acts of one person are

different from those of another, and even the acts of one and the same person are different at successive moments. Secondly, we may refer to the person to whom these acts of feeling are attributed. If we suppose that the identity of this person is formed through a process of identification, and that it is possible for one person to identify with another, then it seems to make sense to say that the feelings of the other can be one's own, in spite of the fact that the acts of feeling are numerically different.<sup>(26)</sup> The feelings of the other can belong to one's conception of oneself at a deeper level of self-understanding, provided that the other is incorporated as part of this conception.

When this deeper notion of oneself as a whole is ascribed internal unity, it will imply indivisibility. Moreover, this implies that the different parts will be understood as having internal rather than external relations to each other. There will be an implicate order between them. This may be what Śāntideva has in mind in verse 91 where he seems to hint at the possibility that the different parts of the body will have a mutual concern for each other's welfare because the suffering or happiness of each part is the suffering or happiness of all the other parts on account of their internal unity. Here he mentions the arms, and in verse 99 he also mentions the feet. This seems to imply that the arms, for instance, will have a concern for the welfare of the feet in so far as they are understood as parts of the same person.

In verse 91 Śāntideva does not confine this organismic analogy to relations between parts within an organism; he hints at the possibility of extending it to relations between organisms, in so far as they are viewed as parts of a more comprehensive organism. I take it that this may include one's relations to other persons and other sentient beings in general. One might expect, perhaps, that it can be extended as far as one's identifications go, thus transforming one's self-conception from a smaller to a bigger self.

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

In the following verses, Śāntideva appears to go further into the objection I mentioned about the numerical distinctness of feelings belonging to different persons. It must be admitted that the text is ambiguous, and that the translators arrive at rather different renderings of these verses. I shall not attempt to go into the details of these divergences, but stick to a certain selection of translations. The translation of Wallace and Wallace is as follows:

92: Although my suffering does not cause pain in other bodies, nevertheless that suffering is mine and is difficult to bear because of my attachment to myself.

Alternatively, they render it by "that suffering of mine is unbearable because I cling to it as mine." Crosby and Skilton translate with "I should nevertheless find their suffering intolerable because of the affection I have for myself."

It appears that Śāntideva in this verse assumes that a pain becomes a suffering and is unbearable to a person only if he identifies it as his own. This amounts to an assumption that suffering requires a personal context and presupposes a non-reductive conception of the self. If this is a correct interpretation of Śāntideva, it is a good counter-instance against Williams's accusation that Śāntideva propounds a reductive theory of the self with "free floating" feelings and without a subjective dimension. On the contrary, it seems that Śāntideva propounds the very kind of theory Williams endorses himself.

Moreover, this verse seems to raise an objection against an interpersonal conception of the self because it implies that the feelings of one person do not directly affect another person. Depending on the translation, it may well be that Śāntideva attempts to meet this objection in the next verse. Three of the translations I work with point in this direction. Sharma, for instance, has this translation:

93: Similarly, even if other's pain is not borne by myself but that pain too becomes unbearable for me when others are conceived as my own self.

Batchelor uses the expression "by conceiving of (others as) 'I' their suffering becomes mine; Therefore it too should be hard to bear," and Fletcher says, "Because I take them for my own their suffering is likewise hard to bear."

I read this verse as stating that although the pains and sufferings of another person are numerically distinct from my own feelings, in so far as I conceive myself at a superficial level, it is nevertheless possible for me to regard the other's suffering as my own at a deeper level of self-understanding.

It must be admitted, however, that the three other translations do not support this reading. Crosby and Skilton, Matics, and Wallace and Wallace translate it as saying that I cannot experience another's suffering, and that it is hard for him to bear his suffering because of the affection he has for himself or because he clings to it as his own.

Williams has a brief reference to the verses 94-96, which I quote here in the translation of Wallace and Wallace:

94: I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering, just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings, just as I am a sentient being.

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

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

---

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

In his comment, Williams states that "Śāntideva had already urged that suffering is to be removed simply because it is suffering. . . . He appears to want to say that it makes no rational difference, and therefore for Śāntideva no moral difference, who actually experiences the suffering."<sup>(27)</sup> I agree that it is possible to interpret these verses in a reductive manner. But it seems to me that they might equally well be interpreted in a non-reductive manner, either individualistically on the basis of equality, or as a kind of interpersonal holism. On an individualistic interpretation, the point might be that in a public context the difference between my own happiness or suffering and that of others is by itself not relevant as a ground for a differential treatment. Here the consideration pertains to persons, not their effects only as the reductivist would have it. In any case, Williams appears to beg the question when he takes it for granted that the first interpretation is the only plausible possibility here.

I move on to verse 99, which is translated in this way by Crosby and Skilton:

99: If you think that it is for the person who has the pain to guard against it, a pain in the foot is not of the hand, so why is the one protected by the other?

The other translations do not substantially deviate from this. I read it as an objection against an interpersonal conception of the self, and a response. The objection is raised from an individualistic point of view. If each person has a concern for his own welfare, guarding against his own suffering, and caring for his own happiness, why should one person have a concern for the welfare of another? The response is

given in the form of an analogical argument in favor of an interpersonal conception of the self. Why should the hand guard against the pain in the foot? Because they are members of the same person. And why should one person have concern for the suffering of another person? Because they are members of the same interpersonal holistic self at a deeper level. I do not claim that this is the only reasonable interpretation. But I think it is possible and even plausible.

Verse 114 points in the same direction. Here is Fletcher's translation:

114: Hands and other limbs are thought of as the members of a body.

Shall we not consider others likewise  
Limbs and members of a living whole?

The other translations are not so different from this. Batchelor renders the part/whole relation as "limbs of Life," Crosby and Skilton translate it as "part of the universe," Matics has it as "members of the universe," Sharma as "limbs of the same world," and Wallace and Wallace as "members of the world." Here the notion of an organism is extended by analogy from the individual to the whole of life or the whole of the universe. I assume that this can be interpreted in terms of an interpersonal self.

In this connection, it would be interesting to know how a person can extend self-conception from an individualistic to an interpersonal orientation? Some of Śāntideva's verses give a hint of what he might think about this. Here, as elsewhere, I believe that Śāntideva argues casuistically from paradigmatic cases and by analogical extension to other cases. The paradigmatic cases are mentioned in verse 111, 115, and 158, and the analogical extensions are mentioned in verse 112, 115, 136, 137, and 158. Let us have a look at some of this. I quote from the translation of Wallace and Wallace:

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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111: Due to habituation, there is a sense that "I" exists in the drops of blood and semen that belong to others, even though the being in question does not exist.

Here the paradigmatic example is the notion of *I*, in so far as it has its origin and development in a process of habituation. The term "habituation" has been used in the translations of Crosby and Skilton and by Fletcher as well, while Matics uses "habit" and Batchelor translates with "through (constant) familiarity."

Verse 158 comes close to expressing the same idea. Wallace and Wallace translate this as follows:

158: Therefore, just as you formed a sense of self-identity with regard to the drops of blood and semen of others, contemplate others in the same way.

As an alternative reading, they have: "Therefore, just as you have identified with the I in the drops of blood and semen of others, so accustom yourself to others." This seems to be to be a very apt terminology. One forms one's self-identity through a process of identification. Batchelor renders this formation in terms of acquaintance; Crosby and Skilton use the expression "formed the notion 'I' regarding others' drops of sperm and blood." Fletcher uses "cling to it as though it were yourself," Matics uses "as you located the Ego-maker (*ahamkāra*) in drops of sperm and of blood," and Sharma uses "just as you own these other drops of blood and sperm, your body or yourself."

The idea seems to be that the notions of *I*, *me*, *myself*, *self*, *self-identity*, and the like are developed or constructed through a process of identification. At the outset the object of identification is one's body (see also verse 115), which can be traced back to the gametes of one's parents. At Śāntideva's time these were perceived as the semen of the

father and the blood of the mother — in any case corporal phenomena that were not one's own to begin with, but stemming from the bodies of other persons. Through a process of identification, these phenomena come to be owned by oneself. One endorses them, thinking, "This is mine, I am this, this is my self."(28)

The analogical extension of this idea is as follows: If I could form my self-identity through a process of identification with this body, why should I not be able to do the same with the bodies of other people? This is brought out in further verses such as 112. Here is the translation of Wallace and Wallace:

112: Why do I not also consider another's body as myself in the same way, since the otherness of my own body is not difficult to determine?

According to this verse, there is an analogy between identifying with one's own body and with the bodies of others. In both cases, the bodies are something other to begin with. One's own body derives from the blood and semen of one's parents, and even after they are merged, the emerging organism is *other* until one gets acquainted with it, used to it, and identifies with it. In this way, identification is a matter of usage and habituation. This may be connected with conventional truth (*samvṛti-satya*) based on usage (*vyavahāra*). If this can be done in relation to one body, why not also in relation to more bodies? This idea is followed up in verse 115, which is rendered by Wallace and Wallace as follows:

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

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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Moreover, in verse 136 this line of thought is followed up with regard to practical concern for others. I suppose that we may amplify the notion of identification with others with the traditional Buddhist notions of the natural ability of empathy and sympathy (*anukampā*) and its reinforcement by means of tranquility meditation on the four immeasurables, among them compassion. Through sympathy and compassion with the suffering of others, one expands one's conception of one's own self so as to include others, and then one has a motive to commit oneself to prevent or remove the suffering of others as one's own. Here, once again, is the rendering of Wallace and Wallace:

136: Therefore, in order to alleviate my own suffering  
and to alleviate the suffering of others, I give myself up  
to others and I accept others as my own self.

Furthermore, this concern for others can be extended beyond any particular border and become increasingly universal. One opens up toward the class of human beings and the class of sentient beings tending in the direction of including all. I suppose verse 137 can be read in this way, once more in the translation of Wallace and Wallace:

137: O mind, make this resolve: "I am bound to others."  
From now on you must not be concerned with anything  
but the welfare of all sentient beings.

This seems to support my earlier remark that Buddhist ethics has a sentientist conception of the scope of moral status, rather than a biocentric. Within an ethics of virtue, like the one considered here, moral status may be ascribed to all and only those beings toward which we take an attitude of direct moral concern.<sup>(29)</sup> As a hypothesis I suppose that this is equivalent with the class of beings with whom we identify and include into our conception of ourselves at a deeper level.

### **Sympathy and the Golden Rule as a basis for Buddhist ethics**

There are different ways of reconstructing the basis of Buddhist ethics. Some suppose it should be understood as a teleological ethics of a consequentialist type. The theory of karma, for instance, may lend itself to an individualist or egoistic theory of utility. On the other hand, there are many Buddhist texts that may be interpreted as a consequentialist ethics of universalistic theory of utility comparable to classical utilitarianism.<sup>(30)</sup> This pertains also to Śāntideva's text, for instance, to *BCA* 8: 96, 102, 104-105. This, however, does not exclude the possibility of interpreting the same texts within the framework of a teleological ethics of the holistic type, comparable to Aristotle's ethics of virtue. Damien Keown has argued that this is the most suitable way of understanding Buddhist ethics, and I believe he is right.<sup>(31)</sup> There are even some who have attempted to interpret Buddhist ethics along the lines of a deontological ethics of a Kantian type.<sup>(32)</sup> I do not think that this is very plausible, however.

It seems to me that the most likely foundation of Buddhist ethics is simply our capability of having empathy and sympathy (*anukampā*) with others, combined with the Golden Rule — which enjoins us to do (or omit to do) to others what we wish that others do (or omit to do) to us.

The ability to empathise or sympathise with others may be assumed to be part of our natural endowment. It may be more or less well developed in different persons, depending on many kinds of factors. It may degenerate through lack of use, but it may also be reinforced through cultivation, for instance through different kinds of Buddhist meditation. Meditation of the four sublime attitudes (among them loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy) are a case in point.

As for the so-called Golden Rule, this refers to a family of more or less similar formulations that are found in many, if not most,

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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cultural traditions. Some of the oldest Buddhist texts contain an interesting version. One example is the *Dhammapada* 129-132.

Thomas Cleary translates verse 129 in this way:

Everyone trembles at the whip, everyone is afraid of death. Considering others as yourself [*attānam upamam*], do not kill or promote killing.(33)

A related example is the *Sutta Nipāta* 705, which I translate as follows:

They are as I am. Considering others as myself (*attānam upamam*), I should neither kill nor cause others to kill.

Usually the Golden Rule is formulated as a norm of reciprocity between two or more parties. This fits well together with an individualistic conception of the person along the lines discussed above in connection with *BCA* 8: 90. On this interpretation, the Golden Rule can be understood as an application of the formal principle of equality. Relevantly similar cases should be treated in a similar manner; a differential treatment requires a relevant difference. The crucial question here will be, "How can we decide which factual similarities or differences are relevant as grounds for a similar or differential treatment?" From a pragmatic point of view, some kind of recognition might do the job, for instance one's own endorsement in a thought experiment where one takes the role of the other in bilateral cases, or some kind of consensus where one takes the roles of all parties concerned in multilateral cases. I shall not go further into these possibilities here because I do not think that this is what Śāntideva had in mind. It would bring us far into the field of many schools of contemporary moral theory.

I believe that Śāntideva developed his interpretation of sympathy and the Golden Rule within the framework of an interpersonal holistic conception of the person along the lines discussed above in connection with *BCA* 8: 91, 99, and 114. Perhaps this may be formulated as follows: We should do (or omit to do) towards others what we wish to do (or omit to do) towards ourselves.

To my mind, there are several advantages with this line of interpretation. For one thing, it appears to fit well with a virtue ethics of the holistic teleological type. This seems to be comparatively independent of assumptions about rebirth, which for many people is a question-begging assumption and therefore unsuitable as a foundation for ethics. Thirdly, it avoids a consequentialist ethics based on utility functions, either egoistic or collective as in utilitarianism. Fourth, it also avoids a deontological ethics.

The Golden Rule appears to be a suitable principle for the justification of other norms and actions. It is interesting to see how it may function in the context of Christian ethics. The formulation in Matt 7:12 adds a comment that says that the Golden Rule is the law and the prophets. As Richard Hare has pointed out, this can reasonably be interpreted in the direction of taking the Golden Rule of the New Testament as the founding principle (or *prima facie* guideline) for the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, or at least those commandments that have a moral bearing.<sup>(34)</sup> In this way, the Golden Rule functions as a principle for reasoning about more specific norms of action. This function it may very well have in Buddhist ethics as well.

### **Compassion and loving-kindness**

In connection with *BCA* 8: 115 and 136 above, I made the point that the scope of moral status in Buddhist ethics may extend as far as one's identifications, and that this goes as far as we conceive ourselves

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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at a deeper level. I would like to amplify this idea and connect it with the two main types of Buddhist meditation — tranquillity meditation (*śamatha-bhāvanā*) and insight meditation (*vīpaśyanā-bhāvanā*) — which may be instrumental in the construction of our conception of ourselves.

First a few observations about tranquillity meditation. I shall not go into the details, but only mention that one important variety of this kind of meditation aims at developing our interpersonal attitudes. This is the meditation on loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekṣā*). This is commonly called meditation on the four sublime abodes (*brahma-vihāra*), or on the four immeasurables (*apramāṇa*).

There are a number of interesting parallels with Christian ethics of love at this point, for instance as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 38-48). The precepts in both cases point in the direction of returning hatred with love, and violence with non-violence. The Buddhists, however, have done much more to develop a meditative practice, which may enable people to develop their attitudes in this direction. Śāntideva's *BCA* is a case in point, especially his chapter six on patience, and his chapter eight, which we have been considering.

I believe that Aronsen has got it right when he emphasizes the distinction between sympathy and love in Buddhism.<sup>(35)</sup> Sympathy is a natural capability and functions as a direct basis for moral practice, while love (including loving-kindness, compassion and the other immeasurables) are objects of tranquillity meditation. They do not function directly as a foundation for morality, but they may have an indirect function when they are used to reinforce the natural capability for sympathy.

In some Buddhist traditions, especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism, a distinction is drawn between ordinary loving-kindness (*maitrī*) and

compassion (*karuṇā*) on the one hand, and great loving-kindness (*mahā-maitrī*) and compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*) on the other. They appear to differ in both strength and scope. The former type seems to be more particularistic, being based on the transformation of the small to the big self within the framework of conventional truth, while the latter type seems to be more universalistic, being based on the awakening to the non-self or the emptiness of the conventional self within the framework of the highest truth. This insight or wisdom (*prajñā*) implies a critical stance to all purportedly relevant differences between oneself and others, used as grounds for the justification of a differential treatment, thus implying a loving-kindness and compassion that is without conditions and without limits. There are interesting parallels here to the Christian notion of divine love (*agape*).

It seems that the former type has its source in particular cases where one has a positive attitude towards friends whom one likes and loves. From these paradigmatic cases, one extends the positive attitudes by analogical extension to neutral persons, and lastly to enemies towards whom one bears resentment or hatred. In this way, these meditations proceed by a casuistic procedure. This approach belongs to the gradual path to liberation from suffering. It is a step-by-step procedure, and it is particularistic in scope in the sense that one may practice this extension of attitudes toward a more or less encompassing class of persons or sentient beings.

As a parallel to these two kinds of loving-kindness and compassion, there is also a distinction between two kinds of *bodhicitta* — one within the framework of conventional truth, the other within the framework of the highest truth.<sup>(36)</sup>

These meditative techniques for the transformation one's conventional self from an individualistic orientation to a more interpersonal and holistic orientation have been further developed in Buddhist Tantric traditions. Some of these techniques are grounded in

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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elaborate visualizations, for instance of the bodies of the Buddha, of the lineage of *bodhisattvas* and gurus, culminating in one's own root guru. One visualizes how these merge into one encompassing Buddha-nature, and how oneself merges into this. I take it that all of this points in the direction of a non-reductive, interpersonally holistic conception of the person as a conventional truth, and even if Śāntideva did not move so far in this direction, I see no incompatibility between his position and these trends.

With regard to meditation on the three bodies of the Buddha, I assume, as a hypothesis, that it is possible to interpret the *dharmā āya* as a symbol for the unity of the holistic self, the *sambhogakāya* as a symbol for its wholeness, and the *nirmāṇakāya* as a symbol for the parts of the whole, understood as individual historical persons. Buddhist meditation on these dimensions of the holistic self may have an integrating function, parallel to Christian meditation on the Christian symbolism of the Father as the inner unity of all there is, the Son or Christ as the *logos* of the whole of all things, and the historical Jesus as part of the whole, and as one historical individual human person among others.<sup>(37)</sup> This does not quite correspond to the Trinity, however, because it does not bring in the Holy Spirit, understood as the mutual love between the Father and the Son. But as I remarked above, in the Buddhist conception there is an internal relation between wisdom and love, and this is quite as close as in the Christian conception of the Trinity.

In both the Buddhist and the Christian cases, it seems that this integrative symbolism may give a motive for a universal altruistic orientation. If a person perceives his or her deeper self as including all persons, and this whole is perceived as a unity, this will imply a concern for the welfare of all persons as for himself or herself. The second commandment of love in the Jewish and Christian traditions may be understood as an expression of this: one should love one's

neighbor as oneself. That would take care of the moral intention. I suppose the same thing can be said for the Buddhist tradition, except that here one would extend the scope of one's concern to all sentient beings, while in the Jain tradition one would extend it to all living beings. With regard to moral action, one should do to others as one would do to oneself. The scope of this beneficent action would be analogous to the scope of the benevolent motivation.

This may also explain the *bodhisattva's* universal altruism or concern. If all beings are integrated in his conception of himself, he or she will not have completed the promise to help all suffering beings before this is accomplished for the very last of them. And this, of course, has its parallel in Christianity — compare Jesus' saying that what we do to the least of our brothers, we do to him (Matthew 25: 40). This follows from the assumption of unity, which implies indivisibility.

### **Wisdom**

This is not the end of the matter, however. Beyond this, there is the possibility of developing the highest truth (*paramārthasatya*) about the person and other phenomena. In Buddhist meditation there are a large number of themes for this kind of insight meditation, and among them the theme that the person is not a substantial self (*anātman*), but is characterized by emptiness of own-being (*svabhāva-śūnyatā*). These are the themes for Śāntideva's chapter nine on wisdom (*prajñā*).

This has a bearing on the Buddhist and Christian symbolisms that I referred to above, with regard to unity, wholeness, and part. In a Buddhist setting, they will be interpreted as conventional truths and they will be assessed in view of their pragmatic function for the integration of the holistic person. These meditative functions are sometimes emphasized in a Christian setting too, especially in the contemplative traditions. Quite often, however, these symbols have

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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fossilized into metaphysical dogmas, especially in the hands of academic theologians. It may well be that the Buddhist meditations on such symbolisms could be a source of inspiration in a Christian context as well.

In the light of these insights, it is possible to develop the highest *bodhicitta*.<sup>(38)</sup> From a moral point of view, I suppose that one of the functions of this kind of insight meditation may be to remove the hindrances for a universal extension of one's conception of oneself as a conventional person. If one's identifications with certain particular groups of persons or sentient beings degenerate into fixations, they may establish barriers in relation to other persons or sentient beings who are beyond the pale. It may be, for instance, that one identifies oneself with and attaches oneself to certain properties on the assumption that they provide a relevant ground for discrimination between those who have these properties and those who do not. But if one comes to see these properties as non-substantial and empty of own-being, one will adopt a more detached attitude to them, thereby removing the grounds of discrimination. As a result, one will be more willing to include those beings who were discriminated against on these grounds. In this way, insight meditation may function as a kind of critique of ideology.

It might be said, perhaps, that those parts of the *bodhisattva* path that we have been discussing in the preceding are concerned about the transformation of the self from a small self to a big self. This pertains to conventional truth. The highest truth is concerned with the further transformation into no-self or selflessness.

Emptiness is not so empty as one might expect. This has been a rich field of cultivation. In Tibetan Buddhism, a distinction has been drawn between two kinds of emptiness that is especially pertinent in this connection: emptiness of own-being (in Tibetan called *rangtong*) and emptiness of other (*shentong*). The former is ascribed to all things

that can be an object of our consciousness, while the latter is ascribed to the subjective consciousness itself. This notion has been much discussed over the centuries in Dzogchen and other schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

There is hardly any doubt that Śāntideva subscribed to the *rangtong* interpretation of emptiness. It is more doubtful, however, whether he might also have room for a *shentong* conception.<sup>(39)</sup> But this is another discussion than the one we have looked at above. Either of these alternatives is compatible with a non-reductive conception of the conventional self, and even if Śāntideva would have rejected a *shentong* conception of emptiness, this does not imply that he accepted a reductive conception of the conventional self.

We may add that when the meditation on emptiness is practiced in the direction of the *shentong* conception, we are facing an alternative to the gradual way to liberation, notably the sudden way that has been amply explored in the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition (in part also in the Mahamudrā tradition), as well as in the Chinese Ch'an, the Korean Son, the Japanese Zen, the Vietnamese Thien traditions. But I do not think that this approach would be so congenial to Śāntideva. His book has, first of all, been a source of inspiration for the gradual path — what the Tibetans call *lam rim*.

### **Conclusion**

Did Śāntideva destroy the *bodhisattva* path? If Williams is correct in his reductive interpretation of Śāntideva's justification of this path, he may have destroyed it. But I believe there are good reasons to doubt that Williams is correct. I do not think that Williams has paid sufficient heed to alternative interpretations of the few verses on which he bases his conclusion, nor do I think that he has paid sufficient heed to other verses that seem to favor a non-reductive interpretation, notably of an interpersonal holistic kind. I therefore believe that the

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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traditional reception of Śāntideva can be maintained, according to which he was a central contributor to the *bodhisattva* path, not only to its theoretical foundations, but also to its practical implications. I feel confident that his text still holds the promise of many fruitful developments in the new environment of the modern world.

### Endnotes

- (1) There are three translations from the Sanskrit text currently available in English: Crosby and Skilton 1995, Maties 1971, and Sharma 1990. Crosby and Skilton use Shantideva's title on their front page, *The Bodhicaryavatara*, but on p. xxx, they translate the title as *Undertaking the Way to Enlightenment*.
- (2) Another three translations from the Tibetan text are also currently available in English: Batchelor 1979, Fletcher 1997, and Wallace and Wallace 1997.
- (3) Tenzin Gyatso 1994 is a commentary of the whole text of Shantideva. Tenzin Gyatso 1997 is a commentary to chapter six of Shantideva's book. Tenzin Gyatso 1991, chapter eleven, "The Seven-Point Cause and Effect Method," and chapter twelve, "Equalizing and Exchanging Oneself with Others" are mainly a commentary on chapter eight of Shantideva. Tenzin Gyatso 1988, is a commentary on chapter nine. Two commentaries on chapter nine, translated on the recommendation of the Dalai Lama, are contained in Khenchen Kunzang Pelden and Minyak Kunzang Sšnam 1993. The first of these is written from the perspective of the Dzogchen tradition, the second from the perspective of the Gelukpa School.

In Tenzin Gyatso 1991, p. 165 the Dalai Lama remarks: "The instruction for training one's mind in the method of equalizing and exchanging with others is best found in *Bodhisattvacaryavatara*. This text — particularly the sixth chapter, the chapter on patience — is in

fact like a king among all the texts dealing with the thought transformation practices. When you are able to perceive enemies as kind to you, you will have overcome a great stumbling block because the enemy is the greatest stumbling block for the cultivation of the thought cherishing the welfare of others. From this viewpoint, the very factor that normally serves as an obstacle and stumbling block for others in their spiritual progress is transformed into a favorable condition and actually becomes an impetus for practice. This mindset is indeed effective and powerful. The instruction for the cultivation of this mind of equality, explained in the eighth chapter of *Bodhisattvacaryavatara*, the chapter on concentration, is to be practiced in particular."

This judgment is also reaffirmed in Tenzin Gyatso 1992, p. 101, where he writes: "In order to have pure ethics, it is necessary to cultivate patience. The practice of patience is extremely important because it is the main bulwark for training in the equalizing and switching of self and others. It is most helpful to practice together the techniques that Shantideva sets forth in the chapters on patience and on concentration in his *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, in which he explains the equalizing and switching of self and others. The practice of patience establishes the foundation, the basis, for equalizing and switching self and others. It is hardest to generate a sense of affection and respect for enemies."

(4) Cp Williams 1998a.

(5) At this point Professor Eli Franco has referred me to Dharmakīrti's *Short Treatise of Logic with a Commentary by Dharmottara*, translated by F. T. Sterbatsky, 1962, p. 173. According to Dharmakīrti's understanding of the Buddhist position, there can be no difference between sentientism and biocentrism because life presupposes sentience. Strange as it may seem, it follows

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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from this that trees cannot be said to have life. This, however, is not accepted by all Buddhist schools.

- (6) Cp My formulation is a generalized version of the one used by Williams 1998a, pp. 30, 48, which concentrates on concern for the pain of others.
- (7) Cp Williams 1998a, pp. 51, 144, 164 f, 175 f.
- (8) Cp Williams 1998a, p. 164 f. In this context, Williams explicitly formulates what I call the concept of egoism<sub>3</sub> — giving priority of one's own interests before those of others. As a contraposition, he seems to imply the concept of altruism<sub>3</sub> — giving priority to the interests of others before one's own. This is a quite common concept in the literature, for instance in Sober and Wilson 1998, p. 6.
- (9) Cp Williams 1998a, p. 121.
- (10) Cp Williams 1998a, p. 175 f. Williams holds that a genuine altruism requires recognition of the other as a unique individual different from oneself. This ties altruism to individualism. I think, however, that in fact some people use the term *altruism* in the sense of altruism<sub>4</sub>, so I am willing to retain it.
- (11) Cp Williams 1998a, p. 175 f.
- (12) Williams 1998a, p. 105 f.
- (13) Hume 1739-1740, Book 1, Part 4, Section 6: "Of Personal Identity."
- (14) Cp Parfit 1984, Blackmore 1991.
- (15) Cp Shoemaker 1985, Stone 1988, Campbell 1994, Strawson 1994.
- (16) He does not, however, go into analogous criticisms in modern phenomenological philosophy, such as for instance the contribution by Gurwitsch 1964.
- (17) Here I follow Williams 1998a, p. 144 f and especially note 72, p. 237 f.
- (18) Cp Williams 1998a, pp. 51, 176.

- (19) Clayton 2001, pp. 92-94.
- (20) Clayton 2001, p. 92; Pettit 1999.
- (21) Cp Williams 1998a, pp. 30, 39.
- (22) Cp Williams 1998a, pp. 51, 111.
- (23) The notion of an awakening mind (*bodhicitta*) is explained in BCA 1:10, 15-19, 3:22-24, 4:11-12, 41-48. In 3:15 it is divided into (a) the mind resolved on awakening (*bodhipranidhicitta*) and (b) the mind proceeding towards awakening (*bodhiprasthāna*). The latter comprises the six perfections or virtues of a bodhisattva: generosity (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), vigour (*vīrya*), meditative absorption (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). Cp Thrangu Rinpoche 1999, p. 51.
- (24) Cp Tenzin Gyatso 1999, p. 4 ff. See also the comments on this double motivation in Hopkins 2000, pp. 15, 22, 30, 32, 34, 40, 82, 89, 91, 100, 107, 115. I would like to add that there are other and more profound ways of conceiving of equality within Buddhist philosophy, such as in the Tathāgatagārbha tradition where all sentient beings are assumed to be equal on the basis of their inherent Buddha nature, which is interpreted in the sense of emptiness of the shentong variety — emptiness of other. See, for instance, Yin-shun 1998, p. 318. But this does not seem to be the line taken by Śāntideva.
- (25) Cp Williams 1998a, p. 146 ff.
- (26) The relation between acts of feeling and one's conception of oneself here seems to be parallel to the relation between noetic acts and a noematic system in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.
- (27) Cp Williams 1998a, p. 30.
- (28) This corresponds to the formula in the oldest Buddhist texts, such as what is traditionally taken to be the second sermon of the Buddha, the Anattalakkhaṇasutta in Samyutta-nikāya, XXII, 59.

## Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?

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- (29) In a deontological ethics, the same point can be made with regard to beings toward whom we have direct moral duties. I have elaborated this in my paper Wetlesen 1999.
- (30) Cp Keown 2001, Chapter 7: "Buddhism and Utilitarianism." (31)  
Cp Keown 2001, Chapter 8: "Buddhism and Aristotle."
- (32) Cp Olson 1993.
- (33) Cp Cleary 1994.
- (34) Cp Hare 1975a and 1975b.
- (35) Cp Aronsen 1980, pp. 3, 14-17, 22.
- (36) Cp Gyatso 1993, treats "Conventional Bodhicitta" on pp. 13-46.
- (37) Cp Coomaraswamy 1956, p. 239, who draws a parallel between the Buddhist *trikāya*: *svabhāvika-kāya*, *sambhoga-kāya* and *nirmāṇika-kāya* on the one hand and the Christian Trinity: the Father, the figure of Christ in glory, and the visible, historical Jesus on the other. See also the critical reservations in Nagao 1991, pp. 112-114.
- (38) Cp Gyatso 1993, treats "Ultimate Bodhicitta" on pp. 47-56.
- (39) Cp Williams 1988b, especially his excellent discussion in note 4 on pp. 194-206, which is also reproduced in *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 6, 1999, in his "Response to John Pettit" who in the same volume has a review of Williams 1998a. Moreover, cp the commentaries on chapter nine of Śāntideva's text in Khenchen Kunzang Pelden and Minyak Kunzang S nam 1993.

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