

## **Questioning Karma: Buddhism and the Phenomenology of the Ethical**

### **1. Introduction: Questioning Karma**

From a phenomenological perspective, one can see how devotion or faith without reflection can become the certainty of an ideology that is indifferent and unresponsive to others and the world. The danger of any such structure of belief is that in dictating to things it no longer addresses or is addressed by the phenomena themselves. Unable to hear the other, untouched and unmoved by the event of the world, its passion advances from the naiveté of an unquestioning to the isolation of an unquestionable attachment.

One of the virtues of Buddhism—or at least some varieties of Buddhist thought—is that it places such attachment, especially self-attachment as a prevailing source of delusion and suffering, into question and therefore not only allows but calls for self-inquiry. The moment of conceptual argument and knowledge is not short-circuited since, like the Socrates of Plato's *Gorgias*, the Buddha portrayed in the Pali Canon sees genuine persuasion as requiring experiential verification and knowledge. Belief, because it is potentially realizable in this very life through one's own insight<sup>1</sup>, opens up rather than closes off the mindfulness that consists of being awakened by and responsive to the suchness of others and things. Without these self-inquiring and reflective processes, persuasion is—or risks becoming—the manipulation of desires and fears, love and hatred. Even if reflection ultimately needs to be transcended in Buddhist awakening, its significance in this world and role in the way cannot be denied. The case can thus be made that reflection—as a necessary element for morality, meditation, and wisdom—is in part constitutive of that very awakening. As recent research on Madhyamaka and Chan/Zen Buddhism has shown, concepts and language are necessary to unsettling the sedimentation of the conceptual and discursive that allows one to forget the barriers between self and other and be awakened by all things.<sup>2</sup>

As can be seen in the “skeptical” and self-questioning strategies of the Buddha, Madhyamaka and Chan/Zen<sup>3</sup>, Buddhism can involve challenging ordinary beliefs, habits,

and practices—or a “de-structuring” of reified structures.<sup>4</sup> These strategies do not aim at producing a state of doubt or negatively defined “nothingness” but enact an encounter with the phenomena themselves. The self-manifestation of things is powerfully formulated in Zen, when *Dōgen* spoke of the self-blossoming of the world as it is and in its suchness or the liberation and non-abiding of things as an abiding in their own phenomenal expression.<sup>5</sup> In Western thought, phenomenology has come closest to this insight by reminding us of this need.<sup>6</sup> Given this analogue or resonance, phenomenology can be used heuristically to help articulate the Buddhist question of karma in a western context.<sup>7</sup>

This process of de-structuring in order to attend to and be mindful of the phenomena themselves—or the suchness (*tathata*) of things—is already a primary element in Buddhism. Nevertheless, Buddhists still face the problem of a belief or structure of belief becoming reified such that it disables rather than enables being responsive to things and compassionate to others. This danger can especially be seen in some popular conceptions of karma, beliefs not only held by western critics but by Buddhists themselves. Hence, this paper will attempt to challenge—unfortunately, in an abbreviated sketch-like manner—some of these reified beliefs about karma by returning to the very phenomenon that karma was intended to address—namely, the ethical character of action—in order to open up possibilities for mindfulness and perhaps awakening.

## **2. Is Karma Fate?**

Although borrowed from pre-Buddhist thought, Karma is one of the central concepts of Buddhism. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that its significance remains contested among scholars and used in ways that excuse indifference to others’ suffering in some popular interpretations. Despite its centrality in South Asian thought, karma has multiple meanings within its Indian context as well as its western reception. The consequent need to clarify and rethink karma calls for a return to (1) the traditions and contexts from which it emerged and (2) the basic phenomena that the notion of karma is supposed to address and articulate. That basic phenomenon is the experience of action itself. Karma is action, and not the result or consequence of action, considered from the

perspective of (1) intention, (2) the conditions of one's life, and (3) its appropriate or inappropriate, wholesome or unwholesome character. In addition, karma is often thought to involve a causality that we can neither fall into nor ignore. Some identify it with a non-moral natural causality, arguing that Buddhism consequently has no ethics and no notion of responsibility. Others metaphysically identify karma with a type of destiny, fate or theodicy.

Beginning with the last first, one critique of Buddhism maintains that karma is equivalent to the relentless determinism of the will of an indifferent God, nature, or some other metaphysical necessity and would consequently be a doctrine without the possibility of transformation or hope.<sup>8</sup> On this basis, karma can be seen as rationalizing and justifying suffering rather than calling for a compassionate response. The suffering other need not be attended to because her suffering is a result of past actions and is therefore in some sense deserved. Some might appeal to the type of logic seen in the opening passage of the *Dhammapada*:

Preceded by perception are mental states,  
For them perception is supreme,  
Having sprung from perception.  
If one speaks or acts with inappropriate perception,  
Then suffering follows  
As a wheel the draught ox's foot (I,1).<sup>9</sup>

Every action (physical, mental or verbal), every condition or disposition, has its consequences. As almost all Buddhist literature insists, we are inevitably caught in the effects of these causes. Doesn't the image of the rolling wheel imply that it cannot be stopped but only accepted as in the Stoic metaphor of the cart that we either willingly follow or which drags us unwillingly along? The very next lines of the *Dhammapada* suggest an alternative to the idea that the causal series has an unchangeable necessity, since appropriate action, speech and thought can alter the outcome:

Preceded by perception are mental states,

For them perception is supreme,  
Having sprung from perception.  
If one speaks or acts with tranquil perception,  
Thence ease follows  
As a shadow that never departs (I,2).

Causality, whatever it might be, is not then unalterable if how one thinks, speaks, and acts can produce a different result. Causation cannot entail the necessity of a destiny or fate without exception insofar as these words mean what must happen regardless of what one does, says or thinks. The possibility that one's action might make a difference distinguishes Buddhist karma from the *niyati* of Ājivaka, for whom the necessity of destiny rather than an ethics of karma determines the effects or outcome of one's actions. For the Buddha, consequences follow from one's way of life, i.e., how one relates to the world, others, and to oneself. Despite a variety of circumstances and situations, some more and others less enabling, it is not impossible to influence and transform how one lives one's life through—for example—the cultivation of compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom. It is the potential intentional or voluntary character of an action that distinguishes the Buddhist account of karma from the fate of the Ājivaka and the Stoic caricature of Buddhism.

Is the definition of karma as intentional action purely descriptive of how humans do in fact act: “if x occurs, then y follows”? Or does this account involve a prescriptive or normative dimension: “do x in order to achieve y” or “x is the right thing to do”? Since Buddhism is a path of awakening it cannot help but suggest ways in which one can be awakened. It consequently has to have at least pragmatically or hypothetically prescriptive structures. Yet do such conditional imperatives (or “oughts” and “shoulds”) imply normative standards that can be used to evaluate some conditions and actions as being morally better than other ones: i.e., as good or right?

If Buddhism is purely descriptive, it would imply no good or right nor standard by which to evaluate them. But does Buddhist thought neutrally describe or explain the nature of action and reality? This cannot be the case insofar as the Dharma addresses and unfolds the realities of human and sentient life in order to (at least pragmatically) engage

and respond to them. Both cultivating a Buddhist life and awakening entail prescriptive statements of what should be done in order to achieve them—even if it is ultimately purposiveness without a purpose or one absolute, preordained, and static goal. The absence of an absolute purpose does not imply the absence of prescriptive statements. It only introduces the question of their significance.

As can be seen from the Pali and Mahāyāna Canons, such as the Abhidhamma and Yogācāra literature, Buddhism has a richly developed psychology and phenomenology. A primary aspect of this literature is that it articulates a moral psychology or a phenomenology of ethical life. On the one hand, these works descriptively account for different conditions and states of existence such as suffering, pleasure, and indifference on the basis of actions. On the other hand, the analysis of karma has a prescriptive and a normative dimension insofar as it communicates how to effect or alter such outcomes by acting, speaking, and thinking otherwise. There is no possibility of awakening without this otherwise. Karma is not a “theory.” Since this analysis of action is not disinterested but tied to existential questions that have an ethical dimension, karma does not only provide an account of the world but opens up a response to the suffering of the world.

If intentional action is tied to prescriptions and norms, then the question of Buddhist ethics and responsibility becomes unavoidable. The Buddha remarked to Subha that: “beings are the owners of their actions (kamma), heirs to their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior.”<sup>10</sup> Yet it is not any aspect or quality of action that is at issue. The focus on intentionality implies questions of accountability, blame, debt, guilt, and responsibility. Popular Buddhism, not without foundation in the Pali canon, connects these moral phenomena with expectations about the transfer of merit, rewards, and punishments—which flow from my own actions rather than a judicial sentence—in this life and in rebirth. It is therefore the moral quality of my actions that distinguish me from others and that are in effect my arbitrator. For the Buddha, the path intrinsically involves the cultivation of morality even if morality is insufficient for liberation (SN IV.898). If the character of one’s life is revealed in deeds rather than rules and rites (SN II. 249-250), then one should clearly focus on moral

conduct and cultivating virtue instead of worrying or speculating about the fate or destiny of categories such as caste and birth (SN I. 136-140, III. 462, III. 648-650).<sup>11</sup>

Karma is primarily concerned with the moral quality of an action. It is said in the *Dhammapada*: “By oneself is wrong done, by oneself is one defiled. By oneself wrong is not done, by oneself, surely, is one cleansed. One cannot purify another; purity and impurity are in oneself [alone]” (XII, 165). I am my actions in such a way that I am accountable in and through them. My wrongs have no other source than my own actions (XII, 160-161). Rather than being victimized by an arbitrary fate or will over which I have no influence and to which I must sacrifice myself, this understanding of action as inherently intentional suggests that existence is not only the facticity of the circumstances in which I am born but a field of possibilities in which I can act, speak, and think otherwise.

### **3. Is Karma a Theodicy?**

Another prevalent view is that karma is the Indian equivalent for the western onto-theological concept of theodicy, which literally means “God’s justice” and is concerned with explaining how the suffering and evils of this world are compatible with the justice of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and moral God. That is, theodicy explains that this is the best possible world.<sup>12</sup>

Whitley Kaufman recently argued that the Indian notion of karma cannot provide an adequate answer to the question of theodicy.<sup>13</sup> Even if this question is a problem for theistic Hinduism, which combines karma and the divine, karma does not play an analogous role to theodicy in Buddhism. There is no family resemblance because Buddhist karma is primarily about the moral status of an action. It does not aim at excusing, justifying or normalizing suffering as a necessary good. We are not summoned to accept and resign ourselves to the suffering and evils of the world as part of nature, providence or God’s divine plan, since this would undermine the meaning of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Karma is not a destiny justifying suffering but opens up the possibility of confronting and responding to the reality of suffering. The First Noble Truth that life involves suffering, dis-ease (*dukkha*), is not an invitation to stoically or religiously accept suffering as necessary or justified because it is natural or

divinely ordained. It misses the point not to notice that the significance of the first truth of suffering is found in three further Noble Truths that constitute a response to the reality of suffering. These show that suffering has its causes and conditions, such that it is not an incomprehensible and unquestionable destiny, and that one can respond to these through the cultivation of the Eightfold Path. If there is such a path, and if there is awakening, then suffering is the ordinary but not inevitable condition of things.

The Buddha's discourses did not fail to resolve the question of theodicy, since karma was never an answer to the question of how to reconcile God's goodness and the evil of the world. The question that karma answers is how am I a being that is both conditioned and capable of acting otherwise or how can I respond to my one and others' suffering. Whereas theodicy is conceptually necessary to any monotheism that wants to explain why God created a world full of suffering and evil, much as when Job's friends explain to Job how his suffering must have been due to previous wrongs<sup>14</sup>, karma is not fulfilled in resignation but in responding to the suffering of the world, oneself and others, with compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom.

Instead of justifying and thus potentially excusing evil, as Levinas and Blanchot have warned about theodicy in relation to the excess of suffering and evil of the Holocaust, karma concerns the practical qualities of intentional action such as appropriateness and inappropriateness, skillfulness and unskillfulness, wholesomeness and unwholesomeness. Given these characteristics, it is an ethical or moral question that is answered by the ethical way of life formulated in the Eightfold Path. The question that karma addresses is "What way of life is most choice-worthy given the reality of my own and others' suffering?"

Karma does not preclude action, as fate or theodicy in effect do, but is a question that I pose to myself about "what ought to be done?" Am I accountable or responsible for my situation beyond my immediate intention? How should I respond to my situation? Should I continue to act as I have done or should I act otherwise? Although these questions are often posed and answered in the mode of self-interest and general happiness, i.e., in terms of fruits and results, they reveal a more fundamental responsibility: I am responsible not only for what I do and why I do it but for the other as well. Although one might doubt the notion of "collective karma," it is never less the case

that karma binds selves together in relations and networks of interdependence and responsibility. This moral sense of karma is not only a “scholarly” as opposed to a “popular” concern. According to Jonathan S. Walters, the notion of rebirth in Sri Lankan popular Buddhism only deepens one’s sense of responsibility for others and the social character of karma. My relations with others are unavoidable, given that I am bound to them not only in this life but in others as well.<sup>15</sup> The suffering that I ignore today, because I believe the other person deserves that suffering because of past deeds, will become part of my own suffering.

Socrates describes in the *Symposium* how love begins in self-interested desire and how desire can become love of the good as such. Likewise, in structure if not in content, the Buddha’s appeal to self-interested happiness as a motive for morality (for example, DN 16, 1.23; ii 85) does not conclude but begins an awakening that transcends both meritorious and detrimental attachments (*Dhammapada*, XXVI, 410-412). Even if such self-interested concern were true of the Arhat, the Bodhisattva’s infinite and spontaneous responsiveness to “the unequalled agony of every single being”<sup>16</sup> transcends self-interested redemption.

This transition from acting for the sake of oneself (i.e., one’s own happiness) to acting for the sake of the other (i.e., the happiness of all sentient beings) suggests that a Buddhist notion of responsibility cannot be based in the egoism of self-interest or in the commands of obligation. Śāntideva remarked how one is praised for the merit of returning a favor. Such doing of good reflects the logic of exchange that informs ordinary thinking about self-interest and obligation. He then asks: “What, then, can be said of the Bodhisattva who does good without obligation?”<sup>17</sup> It might be argued that this absence of obligation implies an absence of responsibility, especially if one believes that responsibility signifies acting from a debt according to a sacrificial logic of command and exchange. However, might not the thought of a responsibility without obligation reflect an alternative way of thinking about the ethical rather than being “immoral”? If the highest sense of the ethical is acting spontaneously for the sake of others, for all sentient beings and the entirety of things regardless of reward or punishment, then responsibility fulfills itself as the unforced and spontaneous freedom of the gift—of, in the words of the *Diamond Sutra*, a giving without support or foundation.<sup>18</sup> The spontaneity of giving,

according to Dōgen, is appropriately the first of the perfections (pāramitā) because nothing more thoroughly transforms the mind.<sup>19</sup> Pure action is not characterized by calculation of interests or expectations about the reciprocity of exchange but is effortless.<sup>20</sup>

Buddhism does not of course reject all arguments about the virtues of suffering, since it retains the notion that suffering can be an opportunity for transformation and is consequently itself a condition of awakening.<sup>21</sup> However, karma does not necessitate the further step of reconciling oneself with the evil and injustice present in the world. Suffering calls for a compassionate response rather than acceptance. Suffering conditions responsibility as how or the way in which one responds to others. Such responsibility means that it is (1) up to you yourself (DN 16, 2.26; ii 101), based on the classic Buddhist motif that your own mind and disposition is your greatest enemy and friend on the path to awakening<sup>22</sup>; and (2) that this claiming of answerability for oneself can make a difference because of the dependent origination of things, i.e., they are both conditional and impermanent and interdependent in multiple ways. Thus, according to Śāntideva, “since there is dependent origination there can be the cessation of suffering.”<sup>23</sup> This ethical response is not accidental to the way but its very condition. Overcoming good and bad, right and wrong (as dualistic thinking) does not mean abandoning but fulfilling the ethical or the cultivation of moral life without which awakening is impossible.

One further challenge for this account of the primary ethical character of karma is the idea that karma is a speculative-metaphysical construction about the nature and causality of things. Does not karma explain why things are the way they are? In response, I will argue that karma is at most a moral rather than a natural causality. It should be compared to Kant’s causality of freedom rather than his deterministic causality of nature. It is about the sentient (not only rational as for Kant) character of agency such that we should take the Buddha’s rejection of speculative questions for the sake of moral and meditative practices (as portrayed in the Pali canon) seriously. We can also make this point via the Mādhyamaka and Chan rejection of empty conceptualizing. This is not so much a rejection of rationality as it is a critique of its absolutization and overextension.

Karma is not so much a metaphysical proposition about the world, whether understood as a speculative or naturalistic explanation of it, as it is an ethical claim to

consider the merit of one's present actions. Accordingly, there is another meaning of karma, karma as agency without an absolute agent, as responsibility without a predetermined and fixed self. It is only because the self is its actions that its actions matter for it and it is responsible for them. The denial of an absolute substance or self is then not the impossibility of an ethics but its very condition. There is no ethics when actions—i.e., what the self does and does not do—are irrelevant to the self.

The moral meaning of karma serves as the basis for its other uses. These should accordingly be evaluated according to whether they elucidate the conditions of our responsibility for what we have done, are doing, and will do. I have critically examined speculative-metaphysical constructions of karma as fate and theodicy in order to suggest that karma should be understood instead as part of a moral psychology or, more appropriately, a phenomenology of ethical life. This means that even if karma has a primarily normative instead of an explanatory function, it cannot be considered purely normatively independent of questions of actuality and existence. The primary reason for this is that Buddhism does not (deontologically or otherwise) posit an absolute difference between the ought and the is, value and fact, or the prescriptive and descriptive. However, articulating ethics differently does not imply the negation of the ethical. Even if its precepts are neither purely normative in the sense of a rule-based ethics of principle nor a list of commands by a divine or human authority as in legalistic command theory, this absence of two conventional western ways of ethical thinking does not entail that Buddhism is unethical or nihilistic. This “even if” is important, since many Buddhists do take the precepts as rules and/or commands. In either case, the ethics of karma outweighs metaphysical speculation about karma.

#### **4. Conclusions: Karma and the Phenomenology of the Ethical**

One significant definition of ethics is that it answers questions of how I ought to live or what is the life that is most worth living? That is, how should I relate to myself, to others, and the world? The Buddha repeatedly insisted that (1) karma means action, (2) the kind of action it means is intentional or voluntary action, and (3) intentional action can be appropriate or inappropriate, skilful or unskillful, wholesome or unwholesome. The importance of the second and third claims suggests that karma is first and foremost

an ethical or moral category concerned with what persons ought to do or how they ought to act. The emphasis on morality (the precepts, Eightfold Path, etc.), meditation, and wisdom shows that Buddhism is a way of life. It answers the question of what is the life that is most worth living.

Given the arguments of this paper, we can tentatively formulate Buddhist ethics in terms of the following principle (even though we should avoid reducing it to a rule-based principle): Act as if every action has consequences that follow from the moral qualities of the action that produced them. It is this moral claim that grounds the classic Buddhist position on karma and its fruits: good actions lead to good consequences (pleasure and joy) and bad actions to bad consequences (regret and tears) (*Dhammapada*, V, 67-68). Yet even if we cannot treat the Buddhist notion of karma purely normatively, exclusively according to a causality of freedom, the phenomenon which karma addresses is primarily the impermanent self awakening to its responsibility for what it does and does not do; i.e., how it relates to itself, others, and the world. This insight remains active in later Buddhist thinkers such as Dōgen, who discussed focusing on one's own activities and faults rather than those of others and described mindfulness as a realization of responsibility rather than its evasion.<sup>24</sup> Verse 50 of the *Dhammapada* makes clear that the primary issue is what you yourself do and leave undone:

Let one regard neither the faults of others, nor what is done or left undone by others, but only the things one has done oneself or left undone (IV, 50).

Yet the primacy of one's own actions does not imply egoism or self-centeredness, since an essential aspect of one's actions is how one relates to others—whether with loving-kindness, generosity, and compassion or without these qualities. Rather than blaming others or one's own past for one's "fate," or indifferently blaming the other's fate on their past deeds, one has the possibility of realizing the truth of action (karma) as awakened action (Dharma). This is a kind of responsibility, although not that of an absolute unchanging and unconditioned agent or self whose actions do not matter. It is responsibility as the capacity to be responsive to oneself, others, and the world in general and the suffering of each in particular.<sup>25</sup>

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> This formula is found repeatedly in the Pali canon. See, for instance, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Translated by Maurice Walsh (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), Sutta 6, verse 13; i 157 and 19, 6; ii 222. Hereafter cited as DN.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, see Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism: The Other Way of Speaking* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (eds), *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). This is also the dominant Gelukpa interpretation.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, these three varieties of Buddhism are not identical and there are other varieties that differ more radically and in other ways from the account given here. Buddhism itself is not one phenomenon or position but a name designating a plurality of philosophical and religious approaches. This paper will be a work of constructive philosophy about the ethical presuppositions of karma. As such, it provides a basis for but not an exhaustive account of related concepts such as rebirth, transfer of merit, salvation through a Bodhisattva, etc. These go beyond the merely moral notion of karma, but I would like to maintain that this variety retains a moral basis, e.g., transfer of merit presupposes a notion of moral merit.

<sup>4</sup> Although such tendencies are clearly present in these varieties of Buddhism, many Buddhists never engage in them. Some western interpreters are consequently surprised by the cultural conservatism of most forms of Asian Buddhism. But, as in the west as well, philosophical or existential radicalism and political radicalism are not usually related and in fact often opposed to each other.

<sup>5</sup> *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*. Edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi (New York: North Point Press, 1995), pages 98, 102.

<sup>6</sup> I am more interested in phenomenology as a way of thinking or immanently articulating experience rather than a particular content (or mistake) of a particular phenomenologist. Phenomenology emphasizes returning to the things themselves (Husserl), responding to things as they show themselves from out of themselves to us (Heidegger), recognizing the

---

embodied and worldly character of meaning (Merleau-Ponty), and responsively attending to the Other precisely in his/her Otherness (Levinas).

<sup>7</sup> There is of course already a large body of work on phenomenology and Buddhism, especially Heidegger and Zen. Keiji Nishitani's discussion of karma as (1) heightening self-awareness in the present and (2) the infinite finitude and thus debt of existence is particularly relevant given that finitude is articulated in Heidegger as freedom and responsibility without a subject (or non-worldly non-embodied self). Compare Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*. Translated by Jan van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), page 243-244.

<sup>8</sup> The implausible view that Buddhism aims at Stoic indifference without the possibility of transformation is not only found in conservative Christian critics but also postmodern thinkers such as Gillian Rose in her critique of what she calls Levinas's "Buddhist Judaism" in *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially pages 37-38.

<sup>9</sup> *The Dhammapada*. Translated by John R. Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Translations have been silently modified.

<sup>10</sup> MN 135, 4; ii 203. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Translated by Bikkhu Nanamoli and Bikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Most of the passages cited from SN can be found in the following incomplete translation: *The Sutta-Nipata*, tr. H. Saddhatissa (Curzon, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> This is ironic, given the conflation of Buddhism and Stoicism, since theodicy was developed as a Christian reinterpretation of Stoic acceptance of fate as providence. Theodicy was most elaborately developed by the German philosopher Leibniz in order to argue for a Christian *ataraxia*, i.e., Stoic acceptance of the universe modified by faith, hope, and love. See, for instance, G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), pages 39, 61 (on the role of imperfection); and 118, 212, 241 (on Stoic *ataraxia* plus Christian hope).

<sup>13</sup> Whitley Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil." *Philosophy East & West*, 55:1, pages 15-32.

---

<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, however, unfolds a conception of monotheism as inherently ethical—and thus not a sacrificial ideology—through the example of Job who does not resort to the theodicy-like explanations of friends—and good as the interruption/ break with evil. See, in particular, “Transcendence and Evil” in *Of God Who Comes To Mind*. Translated by Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pages 122-134.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan S. Walters, “Communal Karma and Karmic Community in Therāvada Buddhist History,” pages 9-39, see especially 10, 18, 28. *Constituting Communities*. Edited by J.C. Holt, J.N. Kinnard, Jonathan S. Walters (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Śāntideva, *The Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Translated by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), I, 22, page 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, I, 31, page 8.

<sup>18</sup> On giving without conditions, or “charity” without reliance on attachments and appearances, see the references to giving without the support of signs (ch. 4) or qualities (ch. 14). This generosity is effortless and spontaneous (for its own sake), since it is no longer concerned with merit or reward (ch. 28). *The Diamond Sutra*. Translated by Edward Conze (New York: Vintage, 2001) / Translated by A.F. Price (Boston: Shambhala, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> *Moon in a Dewdrop*, page 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, I, 35, page 8.

<sup>21</sup> For example, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, VI, especially 12 and 21, page 51.

<sup>22</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, see especially chapters IV and V.

<sup>23</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, VI, 32, page 53.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, pages 50, 59. The Tenzo in a sense overcomes the anxiety of responsibility by fulfilling it in a responsive mindfulness attentive to things and others.

<sup>25</sup> I would like to thank William Edelglass and Lori Witthaus for discussing some of the issues of this paper with me. They are not to blame for any of its contentions.