

Journal of Buddhist Ethics

ISSN 1076-9005

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

Volume 26, 2019

Buddhist Responses to the Ecological Crisis: Recent Publications on Buddhism and Ecology

Reviewed by Christopher Ives

Stonehill College
cives@stonehill.edu

Copyright Notice: Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no change is made and no alteration is made to the content. Reproduction in any other format, with the exception of a single copy for private study, requires the written permission of the author. All enquiries to: vforte@albright.edu

Buddhist Responses to the Ecological Crisis: Recent Publications on Buddhism and Ecology

Christopher Ives¹

Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis. By David R. Loy. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2018, 218 pp., ISBN 978-1-61429-382-8 (Paperback), \$17.95.

Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence: The Dalai Lama in Conversation with Leading Thinkers on Climate Change. Edited by John Dunne and Daniel Goleman. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2018, 333 pp., ISBN 978-1-61429-494-8 (Paperback), \$18.95.

Green Buddhism: Practice and Compassionate Action in Uncertain Times. By Stephanie Kaza. Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2019, 251 pp., ISBN 978-1-61180-674-8 (Paperback), \$18.95.

Mountains, Rivers, and the Great Earth: Reading Gary Snyder and Dōgen in an Ecological Crisis. By Jason W. Wirth. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017, 147 pp., ISBN 978-1-4384-6542-5 (Paperback), \$20.95.

At this historical moment of catastrophic climate disruption, we are fortunate that four strong books on Buddhism and environmental issues have been published over the past two years. These works offer an illuminating window on how Buddhists have been responding and *can respond* to the challenges humanity is facing. With their divergent foci and styles,

¹ Religious Studies Department, Stonehill College. Email: cives@stonehill.edu.

they complement each other, and I could imagine an instructor using them as foundational texts for a course on Buddhism and ecology. At the same time, environmental activists and readers with a primary interest in Buddhist ethics may find these books underdeveloped in certain respects.

In *Ecodharma*, David Loy offers a systematic treatment of the topic he flags in the subtitle, “Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis.” Early on he outlines the main ecological crises humanity is facing (20ff) and the historical process that led to our predicament (38). From there he makes several preliminary arguments. He argues that we must be cognizant of pitfalls that have appeared in certain Buddhist teachings (or certain interpretations of Buddhism): a focus on individual soteriology divorced from social relationships and social transformation, and the cosmological dualism between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Loy also highlights pitfalls in both “other-worldly” and “this-worldly” Buddhism, with the former focused on “ending physical rebirth into this unsatisfactory world” and the latter emphasizing “harmonizing with this world by transforming one’s mind, because one’s mind is the problem, not the world,” and hence neither approach is “much concerned about addressing the problems of the world” (59). Loy also argues that the climate crisis should be seen “as symptomatic of a more fundamental problem: the predicament of a now-global civilization that has lost its way and, despite its amazing technological achievements, seems to be self-destructing” (30). In particular, Loy singles out the growth paradigm in economics as a main case of that problem (32-33).

This exposition provides a backdrop to Loy’s presentation of “ecodharma,” consisting of three components: “practicing in the natural world, exploring the implications of Buddhist teachings, and embodying that understanding in the eco-activism that is needed today” (5).

One of the many highlights of Loy’s book is his call for structural analysis and activism in response to ecologically destructive political and economic structures. Much of the literature on Buddhism and ecology has focused on Buddhist resources for individual lifestyle change—especially

values and practices that can help people live greener and more fulfilling lives free from the snares of consumerism—and, according to Loy, much of Engaged Buddhism has focused on helping others, and consequently that literature and this form of Buddhism have paid little attention to the need for structural change. In contrast, Loy’s ecodharma calls for “not only social engagement as individuals helping other individuals, but finding ways to address the problematic economic and political structures that are deeply implicated in the eco-crisis . . .” (73). Loy also argues that ecodharma must attend to “the ‘intersection’ of . . . environmental challenges with social justice concerns, especially racism, ethnicity, gender, neocolonialism, and class” (28). To date, writings on green and Engaged Buddhism have not adequately considered this intersectionality either.

Overall, Loy’s book is the most systematic and substantial monograph on Buddhism and ecology to date, and it has much to offer to engaged Buddhists and environmental thinkers alike. As a colleague who, like Loy, reflects on how Buddhists might address structural issues more fully, I would have relished hearing more from him about what, exactly, he sees as the economic and political structures he deems problematical. While he does mention the institutionalization of the three poisons (153–154), I wanted him to identify and analyze those institutions and offer ideas about how, exactly, a Buddhist might transform them or reject them and come up with different structures that are more ecological. Loy does discuss envisioning an alternative to the growth paradigm in economics, divesting from fossil fuel stocks, and protesting pipelines (153), and in “The Time to Act is Now,” the appended Buddhist declaration that he co-wrote with Bhikkhu Bodhi, he touches upon decarbonizing the economy, adopting sufficiency as the governing principle of economic activity, and challenging political leaders and the fossil fuel industry. I simply wish he had elaborated on these and related points in a systematic manner in the body of the book, perhaps in dialogue with the more focused structural analysis in another appendix: Bhikkhu Bodhi’s “Getting Real about Climate Change: Simple and Practical Steps” (151ff). I might add that I also

found myself wanting Loy to discuss in detail the intersectionality he flagged. Perhaps he will do so in his next monograph.

As I read chapter five, “What If It Is Too Late?,” I started wondering whether Loy was running the risk of subverting his impassioned call for an ecodharma that includes “the eco-activism that is needed today” (5). In this chapter he presents some of the more dire predictions about the future and introduces his readers to apocalyptic visions in world religions, including Buddhist visions in texts like the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (132) and constructs like the “great kalpa fire” (145ff). Looking into the long future, Loy writes, “What we know about the nature of the universe implies, that, sooner or later, our extinction is inevitable” (133). In a discussion of the Zen doctrine of the unborn, he writes, “It is not only that you and I are unborn, for everything is unborn, including every species that has ever evolved and all the ecosystems of the biosphere. From this perspective, nothing is lost when species (including our own) become extinct, and nothing is gained if our species survives and thrives” (144-145). Toward the end of the chapter Loy also writes, “Just as the universe is not something that is evolving but is the ‘empty’ evolutionary process itself, so destruction is not something that dualistically happens to the universe but another ‘empty’ process. That is why the destruction too is nothing other than *It*” (147). He ends the chapter with the comment that the spiritual path is living the paradox that the universe “is destroyed, it is not destroyed—the two sides of one coin, back and palm of the same hand. Within that paradox, questions about too late or not too late lose their sting” (147).

Arguably, eco-activism has been motivated much more by the sting of such questions than by Buddhist discourse about how extinction and destruction are inevitable or nothing is lost when species become extinct. Granted, in this chapter Loy discusses Joanna Macy’s despairwork and argues that feeling such emotions as despair and grief deeply is a key part of responding to “the horrific things we are doing to the earth” (140), and Loy made several of the above comments in relation to Zen koans, so

perhaps in his one-on-one work with his Zen students or in his programs at the Rocky Mountain Ecodharma Retreat Center he offers a path that can lead us out of these seemingly de-motivating facets of Buddhism and into sustained, committed activism. Even allowing for that possibility, I would have liked to hear more from Loy in this book about how, exactly, ecodharma, while in dialogue with the seemingly pessimistic, resigned, and de-motivating elements of Buddhism, motivates the eco-activism for which he calls.

Needless to say, given that Loy is setting forth an introductory overview of his ecodharma, he should not be expected to expound on all facets of his standpoint in depth, so my comments here about wanting more structural analysis and a more developed discussion of eco-activism should be seen not as a criticism of the book but as a reflection of the current interests of this reviewer. Again, I hope that Loy will pursue that elaboration in his future writings.

John Dunne's and Daniel Goleman's edited volume, *Ecology, Ethics, and Interdependence*, is largely a transcription of a 2011 Mind and Life conference in Dharamsala with the Dalai Lama, other prominent Buddhists, natural scientists, conservationists, public health experts, ethicists, theologians, psychologists, and Buddhologists. Dunne and Goleman have skillfully edited the transcription in a way that left this reader feeling like he was in the room, tracking a rich and far-ranging conversation focused mainly on the climate crisis.

Being a transcription of a conference, the volume does not offer a systematic, finely wrought treatment of "ecology, ethics, and interdependence." Rather, readers need to follow the conversation and gather nuggets as it unfolds. And those nuggets abound: key elements in the science of the climate crisis and the "Great Acceleration" of human impacts (chapter two); planetary boundaries (27); life-cycle assessment as a way to calculate one's ecological footprint (87); positive ecological "handprints" (91); "mindprint" (101); the role of default offerings (188); Claire Palmer's

overview of environmental ethics (chapter five); Sallie McFague's discussion of consumerism (138-141) and her fourfold process of change (246ff);² the importance and challenge of overcoming "our own tendencies and our denial, our desire to have the comfortable lives that we have" (39); and the repeated point that "[t]o cultivate attention to longer-term goals, we need to frame things positively" (188), that is to say, "not frame the message as one of deprivation, not doing things, and restraint, but rather one about green jobs and the ways in which environmentalism could create a more flourishing economy" (197).

Though the title and subtitle accurately reflect what is in the book, I imagine readers who are primarily interested in Buddhist ethics would have appreciated a final analytical piece by the editors, ideally about Buddhist elements in the discussion, the implications of the conference for Buddhist ethics, especially environmental ethics, or what, exactly, the conference might have to offer Buddhists who are grappling with the climate crisis. Buddhist ethical doctrines and concrete suggestions do appear here and there in the book, but the book will likely best serve those who are interested in learning about facets of the climate crisis rather than looking for a specifically Buddhist angle on the climate crisis or a sustained treatment of Buddhist environmental ethics.

Insofar as the volume does deal with ethics, including the assumed moral imperative to take action, the conference participants' treatment of ethics left me scratching my head at several points. I was struck by the number of times the Dalai Lama made arguments about rights and what he argued about them: "As far as the right to a peaceful life, all sentient beings have equal rights" (129); "Out of our commitment and respect for the right of animals and insects to exist, we have to take care of plants" (158); ". . . from a moral consideration for sentient beings, they all have the same rights" (249). As I write this review here in the late summer in

² This process is focused on voluntary poverty, the needs of others, cultivating the universal self, and bringing it to the world (246ff).

Massachusetts, the local news is full of stories about Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and Lyme Disease being transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks, and hence I find the Dalai Lama's rights argument unconvincing, unless he wants to argue that the sentient beings here who are mosquitoes and ticks have the same (and equal) rights as the several humans in this state who have recently died from EEE and the tens of thousands who are suffering the debilitating effects of chronic Lyme Disease. (And it is unclear which exact rights beyond "the right to a peaceful life" he has in mind when he argues that "sentient beings all have the same rights" [plural]: the right to speak freely? the right to vote?) Any viable environmental ethic has to make distinctions between species when addressing certain concrete scenarios, whether we ascribe rights to them or not. Perhaps the Dalai Lama has thought these issues through elsewhere and has made a convincing *Buddhist* argument for animal rights (or human rights, even though making rigorous arguments for rights on a Buddhist foundation is challenging), but his arguments in this book are unpersuasive.

Also, despite evidence of how awareness of issues like the climate crisis does not immediately translate into action, the Dalai Lama seems to think that it does when he makes statements about how "more awareness [of environmental problems] needs to be created" in global leaders and the United Nations so "they can take these issues more seriously and perhaps act upon them effectively" (33).³ Interestingly, several participants in the conversation gently push back (or at least seem to, albeit indirectly). For example, Daniel Goleman questions "the assumption that awareness alone will be enough to cause leaders to act, or cause anybody to act" (35). Seemingly in response to this statement, the Dalai Lama sticks to his position by saying, "I think once awareness and conviction develop, people will change. It is in their best interest, in humanity's best interest. I think we still need to make greater efforts to create awareness, including

³ He later adds, "I think generating awareness is critical. We need to get more convincing information out about the roles and impacts of individuals, the community, the economy, the environment, and all of the factors" (107).

working with the media” (35). Elke Weber responds with the comment, “Unfortunately, people are not so easily convinced by this environmental data” (35).

Buddhists and scholars of Buddhist ethics may find this exchange interesting, and not because the Dalai Lama seems naïve or people are publically disagreeing with him, but rather because the Dalai Lama appears to be setting forth a claim that is often made about ethics in Buddhism: when one wakes up and sees reality clearly (that is to say, attains wisdom), what will immediately follow is compassion and skillful action. Looking across Buddhist history, I find it difficult to proffer substantial empirical evidence to support this idealistic claim, and it stands in tension with ethically dubious actions by ostensibly enlightened—or simply highly aware—Buddhist teachers. More broadly for Buddhist ethics, this historical record prompts the question of the degree to which certain types of awareness carry moral significance to the extent the Dalai Lama and other Buddhists have claimed.

Scholars of Buddhist ethics will gain much from Stephanie Kaza’s *Green Buddhism*. Though it consists mainly of previously published essays, unlike other such collections it does not read like a hodge-podge assemblage, for Kaza has organized them skillfully in three parts: Intimate Relations, Envisioning Green Buddhism, and Acting with Compassion. The book also benefits from Kaza’s clear and elegant writing, and in this respect several sections of the book stand out as the best of nature writing.

As with the other books under review here, highlights abound. Kaza sets forth a substantial history of Green Buddhism (chapter seven) and offers detailed and engaging introductions to four of its founders: Gary Snyder (chapter five), John Daido Looi (chapter eight), Joanna Macy (chapter thirteen), and Sulak Sivaraksa (chapter sixteen). She sets forth what she terms the Green Practice Path (chapter twelve) and the contours of a “climate ethic” (165ff). Readers will also appreciate Kaza’s discussion, in numerous spots, of Buddhist ecological actions, whether “speaking out

on behalf of those whose voices are not included in human decision-making” (31), planting trees (36), ordaining trees (67), protesting a pipeline and the destruction for forests in Burma (67), offering leadership programs that lead to protesting environmental problems (85), practicing restraint (165), simplifying one’s lifestyle (32), reducing harm (125), following the precautionary principle (167), or engaging in Joanna Macy’s nuclear guardianship (140).

Similar to my reading of Loy’s *Ecodharma*, I found myself wanting Kaza, a longtime activist herself, to expand her discussion of “Buddhist contributions to climate response” (chapter fifteen) to include more exposition of the forms of Buddhist activism—and the goals thereof—that she deems necessary at this point. Here and there she does offer suggestions, advocating such steps as grounding activism in Buddhist practice (80-81), practicing non-harming (112), “launching a Buddhist consumer-activism movement” (115), building community (81), and building capacity for resilience (168). And at one point she does enter into a discussion of mitigation and adaptation, though she touches upon the former only in passing and then focuses on adaptation (in terms of resilience). I found myself wanting her to write more about mitigation, but not necessarily in the way she portrays it: “efforts to dampen the inevitable impacts of sea level rise and storm flooding, often through mechanic means such as barriers, channels and dams” (168). These efforts strike me as falling within the parameters of adaptation insofar as they *mitigate the effects* of global warming, but they are not mitigation in the sense of mitigating or reducing *the warming itself* by reducing the amount of greenhouse gasses being emitted. I know that she is eminently qualified to discuss mitigation in this latter sense (and other concrete measures in response to the climate crisis), and I would have liked to have heard more from her about this. Granted, her monograph is more descriptive than prescriptive, and in it she is not attempting to set forth a systematic Buddhist environmental ethic covering theory and praxis, but knowing her and her expertise I would have relished further treatment of “climate response” by her.

Though different from the other three volumes with its narrower focus on Dōgen and Gary Snyder, Jason Wirth's monograph complements them well. In his preface Wirth writes, "This is . . . a meditation and philosophical engagement that seeks to read, think, and practice *along with* both of them in a manner that is mindful of the place from where one reads them today. It seeks to express something of the place from which Snyder and Dōgen practice, think, and write. In this sense, this is also a book from and about the Dharma" (xiii). As I, in turn, read along with Wirth, I found his reflections rich and thought-provoking. By the end of the book I was thinking about how his book is what the Japanese term a *zuihitsu*, usually translated as "essay" but literally meaning "following the writing brush," in the sense of seeing where your thinking and writing take you.

Wirth's three main foci are (1) Dōgen's notion of the Great Earth and Snyder's construct of the Wild, (2) "the place where this book was written, namely the West Coast of Turtle Island," and (3) "earth democracy, a place-based sense of communion where all beings are interconnected and all beings matter" (xxiii). As with the other volumes, Wirth's book offers rich material for scholars of Buddhist ethics. I appreciate his discussion of pernicious dualisms (5-6); the posthuman (64); the lack of unmediated access to nature (15); Vandana Shiva's thought as a way to flesh out the concept of earth democracy (107); Pope Francis in relation to Dōgen and Snyder (xxii, 113); how, contrary to those who construe "nature" as a social construct or text, "The Wild is not subsumed to our processes but rather our processes belong to its processes" (28); the point that "the question is not whether we have a relationship with the Wild, but rather *what kind of relationship is it*" (16); and how, à la Snyder, "The Wild is not something outside of or beyond or wholly otherwise than us. That we think so is part of the nub of the ecological crisis" (20). Wirth also skillfully lifts up Zen resources not simply for appreciating nature but for realizing oneself in relation to natural processes and other beings and, by extension, formulating earth democracy.

A rich theme in this monograph is practice, whether Dōgen’s unity of practice and realization (39), the practice of a place (57), or Snyder’s “practice of the wild” as a matter of, in Wirth’s words, “*how we practice where we are right now: how we eat, how we otherwise consume, how we build, how we teach, how we write, how we speak to each other, how we make politics, how we plant gardens*” (69). This focus on practice works well as a way to juxtapose Wirth’s thinking with that of Dōgen and Snyder. Like the other books under review here, however, Wirth does not extend his exposition of practice to any sustained or systematic discussion of praxis, including eco-activism that can bring about the new form of democracy—earth democracy—that he is describing and advocating.

This question of activism, as indicated by my comments above, surfaces in my reading of all four books under review here. Granted, not all of the voices in these books are engaged in constructive Buddhist ethics in the sense of laying out and prescribing what Buddhists need to do (as opposed to describing what they are already doing), and as I mentioned above we do encounter some structural analysis and discussions of activism (especially in Loy’s appendices and across Kaza’s book), as well as general suggestions about lifestyle changes, establishing planetary house rules, urban planning, and changing institutions by going to meetings (in the group discussion that constitutes “Solutions for a Sustainable World,” the 12th chapter of the Dunne and Goleman volume). By the time I finished reading these four books, however, I started longing for a discussion of the kind of activism that is needed to take on what is arguably our main ecological challenge: the power of the fossil fuel industry, which has played an active role in spreading disinformation about climate change and hindering attempts to develop clean and renewable sources of energy and to bring about regulatory change in the world’s greatest polluter, the United States. Perhaps what I’m looking for is a fifth book, by Bhikkhu Bodhi, in which he would expand upon his “Getting Real About Climate Change: Simple and Practical Steps,” for this short appendix in Loy’s *Eco-dharma* gets specific about eco-activism and structural change in a way

that the four books do not. For example, Bhikkhu Bodhi advocates imposing a moratorium on fossil fuel extraction, rescinding subsidies to fossil fuel corporations, imposing a carbon tax, rejecting trade agreements that privilege the interests of transnational corporations, and providing subsidies to renewable energy projects. And to help bring these policy changes about, he advocates voting for candidates who support them (I might add that campaign-finance reform seems to be the necessary first step in all of this), lobbying elected officials, divesting from fossil fuel corporations, participating in demonstrations, joining movements, and taking direct action by doing things like blocking “climate destroying projects” (Loy 192-194; Loy touches upon several of these actions as well). Such specificity seems crucial to any meaningful Buddhist (or other) response to the climate crisis, and, given the magnitude of that crisis, I hope the writers and editors of these books will treat this systematically in more detail, and soon, for as flagged in the declaration crafted by Loy and Bhikkhu Bodhi, “the time to act is now” (Loy 181-185).

Of course, scholars of Buddhist ethics might argue that the overall dearth of sustained, systematic Buddhist attention to activism directed toward structural change is not surprising. Historically, as Loy points out, Buddhism has focused much more on individual transformation than on social transformation. And Buddhist institutions have traditionally maintained a symbiotic relationship with political and economic elites and, by extension, the sorts of power structures that eco-activism might seek to transform if not replace.

The Buddhists and scholars in these four books are not, of course, traditional Buddhists, for they are savvy thinkers steeped in modern liberal thought and contemporary formulations of social ethics (as seen, for example, in Kaza’s chapter on Buddhism and feminism). And insofar as these thinkers are in effect exploring what Buddhism might bring to the table as humans grapple with environmental issues, what they emphasize are the distinct resources that Buddhism offers, not the areas in which Buddhism has historically been weak (like speaking truth to power). Along

these lines, the most promising resource in Buddhism for environmental ethics is not models of activism but values or virtues for ecological living. Loy gets at this in a chapter, “What Shall We Do?,” where he lifts up the precepts, the four divine abodes, and the six perfections. The other writers flag values and virtues, too, as seen in comments the Dalai Lama makes about compassion and responsibility, Kaza’s recurring comments about non-harming, and Wirth’s discussion of gratitude, generosity, and etiquette.

One other point worth considering here is use of the term “interdependence” across these four books. Loy at one point writes, “The most fundamental principle of ecology—the interdependence of living beings and systems—is a subset of the most fundamental principle of Buddhist philosophy, that nothing has ‘self-existence’ because everything is dependent on other things” (7), and expands this when he later writes that “everything is dependent on everything else” (55). The term appears in the subtitle of the Dunne and Goleman volume and here and there in the comments recorded therein, such as in a statement by the Karmapa: “I realized we are part of an interdependent system” (224). Kaza refers to “the web of interdependence” (22), and Wirth writes about our species’ “interdependence with the complex dynamic of its bioregional home” (32) and to our consumption’s “ecological interdependence” (67).

This recurrent appearance of “interdependence” is not surprising, for the term is an oft-used translation of the Pali term *paṭicca-samuppāda* (in Sanskrit, *pratītya-samutpāda*). A more direct translation is dependent arising, or conditioned arising, and it refers in part to the fact that things arise through various inputs and influences and now exist interconnected with other “things” (or, better yet, events) in the ever-changing process we call reality. Conditioned arising pertains to inputs and influences that Buddhism might deem wholesome (such as meditating, giving, extending loving-kindness, or having healthy food, a place to practice, and a good teacher) and inputs and influences that are detrimental (such as certain chains of causation, or people and societies that promote greed, ill will,

and ignorance). That is to say, we are affected both positively and negatively by other things. This perspective is evident when we say things like “It all depends.” Or, when wondering whether we will have a joyous day or a miserable day at the beach, we say, “It depends on the weather.” Or, when wondering what sort of world our grandchildren might live in, we say, “It depends on how global warming will affect natural systems and on how leaders respond to the crisis.”

When we translate *paṭicca-samuppāda* as “interdependence,” however, we run the risk of implying that all other things and situations are beneficial and we depend on them for our well-being. This seems to be what Loy is arguing with his statement that “everything depends on everything else.” If by this he is arguing that everything is affected by everything else, his argument is sound, but his wording implies that everything needs *everything else* in order to flourish. As I once wrote,

Insofar as being “dependent on x” connotes “needing x for one’s existence or sustained well-being,” for the sake of precision and rigor Buddhist thinkers should make it clear that being dependent on something is a subset of the larger category of *pratītya-samutpāda*. That is to say, while a person is indeed dependent upon countless things, she may be harmed by other things with which she interacts in *pratītya-samutpāda*. And in some situations, the continuation of her existence—i.e., her survival—is dependent upon reducing her relationship with those harmful things as much as possible, on being independent of them. Aware of this fact, the Soviets isolated the Chernobyl reactor within thick walls of concrete.⁴

⁴“In Search of a Green Dharma: Philosophical Issues in Buddhist Environmental Ethics,” in *Destroying Mara Forever: Buddhist Ethics Essays in Honor of Damien Keown*, ed. Charles Prebish and John Powers (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2009), 166-167.

Also, “interdependence” implies that nature depends on us. But does nature or certain parts thereof depend on me and on humans more generally? Nature is certainly influenced and partially shaped by our actions, but does the flourishing of an ecosystem depend on us? How so, exactly? Most would agree that it flourishes to the extent that we leave it alone and it is *not* affected by us. Hence, we might be inclined to ask, “Might not nature—or at least biodiversity and current configurations of flourishing—be better off without us?”

In short, to avoid coming across as arguing that from a Buddhist perspective there are no negative relationships or influences, we should avoid usage of “interdependence,” especially when engaging in environmental ethics. To their credit, several of the voices in these books also use terms like “interconnectedness” that do not imply any dependence on *all* things for our well-being.

In closing, what we don’t have here with any of the books is a systematic Buddhist environmental ethic.⁵ This is not a criticism, for the writers and editors of these volumes are in no way obliged to formulate such an ethic. But insofar as they are not engaged in a systemic constructive process, some of the material they are lifting up does not get fully developed or worked out, as we have seen here with such topics as “interdependence,” rights, and specific programs of activism. Though Loy’s *Eco-dharma* moves in the direction of being a systematic Buddhist environmental ethic, as do publications by Simon James and David E. Cooper,⁶ that book has yet to be written. I sense that Loy, Dunne, Goleman, Kaza, and

⁵ In an article for this journal I laid out the elements that usually constitute a systematic environmental ethic and some resources in Buddhism for formulating such an ethic. “Resources for Buddhist Environmental Ethics,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013).

⁶ See Simon P. James, *Zen Buddhism and Environmental Ethics* (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004) and David E. Cooper and Simon P. James, *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment* (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005).

Wirth all have the necessary expertise to do so, and I hope that one of them will write it.