



University  
of Glasgow

Hutton, Kenneth (2009) *Ethics in Schopenhauer and Buddhism*.  
PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/912/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

# UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Thesis Title: **Ethics in Schopenhauer and Buddhism**

Author: **Kenneth Hutton**

For the Degree: **PhD in Philosophy**

Faculty: **Arts**

Research Departments: **Philosophy and Theology and Religious Studies**

Submission Date: **30<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

Word Count: **87,075**

©Kenneth Hutton 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008

## **Abstract**

In the following thesis I outline Schopenhauer's ethics in its metaphysical context and in contrast to ethics based on egoism. I look at criticisms of Schopenhauer's philosophy which have emerged quite recently, and some of which (if valid) would undermine Schopenhauer's compassion-based moral theory. I have explained these criticisms and offered a defence of Schopenhauer. In order to take up Schopenhauer's claim of affinity with Buddhist philosophy, I outline first of all early Buddhist then Mahāyāna ethics focusing on the latter's central idea of compassion.

It has been suggested by some scholars that there are specific problems in Buddhist ethics which undermine the idea of compassion and I explain, then attempt to counter, these claims with specific reference to Śāntideva and his rejection of egoism as a means of acting in a moral way or of finding liberation from suffering. I then address recent criticisms of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, especially the idea that the specific role of compassion in his ethics and its soteriological role are illogical – an idea which I argue against.

Finally I compare the core ideas of Schopenhauer's solution to the problem of suffering with what seems similar in Śāntideva. In doing this, I examine whether or not Schopenhauer is right in claiming convergence between Buddhism and his own philosophy, especially in the area of soteriology as it relates to ethics.

# Contents

<b>Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Conventions .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Why Compare Schopenhauer and Buddhism?.....	7
What is Comparative Philosophy?.....	8
The Genesis of Comparative Philosophy.....	10
Does Comparative Philosophy Make Sense?.....	11
How Should we Conduct Comparisons? .....	12
Outline of the Argument .....	13
<b>Chapter 1: An Outline of Schopenhauer's Ethics.....</b>	<b>16</b>
1.1 Incentives to Action .....	20
1.2 Death .....	27
1.3 Redemption .....	29
<b>Chapter 2: Contrasts and Comparisons to Schopenhauer's Ethics .....</b>	<b>33</b>
2.1 Hobbes .....	33
2.2 Hume .....	38
2.2.1 The Origins of Sympathy and Selfishness .....	40
2.3 Reason, Mysticism and Indian Philosophy .....	42
<b>Chapter 3: Contemporary Criticisms of Schopenhauer's Ethics.....</b>	<b>46</b>
3.1 The Knowability of the Will .....	46
3.2 Metaphysical Egoism .....	51
<b>Chapter 4: Compassion in Buddhist Ethics.....</b>	<b>57</b>
4.1. A Discussion of the Nature of Buddhist Ethics .....	58
4.1.1 The Role of Buddhist Ethics in Relation to the Path of Liberation .....	60
4.1.2 Comparisons to Western Systems of Ethics .....	61
4.1.3 Buddhist Ethics as Deontological .....	62
4.1.4 Buddhist Ethics as Utilitarian.....	63
4.1.5 Buddhist Ethics as Aristotelian Virtue Ethics.....	66
4.1.6 Useful Comparisons? .....	68
4.2 The Place of Compassion in Buddhist Ethics .....	70
4.2.1 Compassion as a <i>Brahma-vihāra</i> .....	71
4.2.2 The Soteriological Role of Compassion .....	72
4.2.3 Compassion and the Buddha.....	73
4.3 Special Problems with Buddhist Ethics .....	75
4.3.1 Buddhist Ethics as Passive, Quietist Avoidance.....	75
4.3.2 Compassion and Self-Interest .....	78
4.3.3 Compassion and Emptiness .....	79
4.3.4 Compassion and the Not-self Teaching .....	81
<b>Chapter 5: Śāntideva's Account of the Bodhisattva Ideal .....</b>	<b>84</b>
5.1 Mahāyāna Buddhism.....	84
5.1.1 Mādhyamaka .....	86
5.1.2 Yogācāra .....	86
5.1.3 Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika .....	86
5.1.4 Following the Bodhisattva Path .....	87
5.1.5 Historical Background to Śāntideva .....	87
5.2 The Bodhicaryāvatāra in Translation.....	89
5.2.1 Structural Outline of the <i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i> .....	89

5.2.2 The Route to Compassion in the <i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i> .....	92
5.2.3 Equality of Self and Others (BCA 8:90- 119).....	92
5.2.4 Exchanging Self and Others (BCA 8:120-173) .....	97
5.2.5 The Route to Wisdom in the <i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i> .....	100
5.2.6 The Perfection of Wisdom: An Outline of <i>Prajña</i> .....	101
5.2.7 The Arguments for <i>Śūnyatā</i> .....	102
5.2.8 Debate with the Pre-Mahāyāna .....	103
5.2.9 Debate with the Yogācāra .....	106
5.2.10 Reconciling <i>Śūnyatā</i> with <i>Karuṇā</i> .....	112
5.3 The Śikṣāsamuccaya .....	114
5.3.1 Structural Outline of the <i>Śikṣāsamuccaya</i> .....	114
5.3.2 Protecting .....	115
5.3.3 Purifying.....	116
5.3.4 Developing .....	116
<b>Chapter 6: Criticisms of Śāntideva .....</b>	<b>119</b>
6.1 Paul Williams' Initial Criticisms of Śāntideva.....	119
6.1.1 Alternative Interpretations .....	120
6.1.2 The Wider Context: The <i>Śikṣāsamuccaya</i> .....	125
6.1.3 The Wider Context and Meditation .....	127
6.2 Support for Williams? .....	130
6.2.1 Minds or Nothing? .....	132
6.3 Williams' Further Criticisms of Śāntideva .....	133
6.3.1 Mystical Conclusions .....	134
6.4 Williams' 'Concession' .....	136
6.4.1 Reply to Cabezón .....	136
6.5 Conclusion .....	137
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>139</b>
7.1 Schopenhauer's Dismissal of other Forms of Ethics .....	139
7.2 Schopenhauer's Acquaintance with Indian Thought .....	141
7.3 General Comparisons .....	142
7.3.1 The Principle of Sufficient Reason and Dependent Origination.....	145
7.3.2 Dependent Origination .....	147
7.3.3 Rebirth.....	148
7.4 Schopenhauer and Mādhyamaka Buddhism .....	154
7.4.1 Morality and the World as Idea.....	155
7.4.2 Summary of Schopenhauer's Metaphysics .....	156
7.4.3 Schopenhauer's Minor Solution to Suffering .....	157
7.4.4 Schopenhauer's Major Solution to Suffering.....	157
<b>Appendix 1:.....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Appendix 2:.....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>164</b>
Primary Sources .....	164
Secondary Sources .....	166

## Abbreviations

### **Buddhist Texts:**

AN	<i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i>
AP	<i>Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāparamita Sūtra</i>
BCA	<i>Bodhicaryāvatāra</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
Jat	<i>Jātaka</i>
Mhp	<i>Milindapañha (The Questions of King Milinda)</i>
MMK	<i>Mūlamadhyamakakārikā</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
NP	<i>Netti-Pakaranam</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
SS	<i>Śikṣāsamuccaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

### **Schopenhauer Texts:**

FR	<i>On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason</i>
FW	<i>On the Freedom of the Will</i>
OBM	<i>On the Basis of Morality</i>
PP2	<i>Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol. II</i>
WWR1	<i>The World as Will and Representation Vol. I</i>
WWR2	<i>The World as Will and Representation Vol. II</i>

## Conventions

I have not used the term ‘Hīnayāna’ when referring to non-Mahāyāna Buddhism (for simplicity, I take Mahāyāna to include Tantric Buddhism) due to its perceived derogatory nature and have mostly used the term ‘pre-Mahāyāna’. Although this is not strictly accurate, ‘pre-Mahāyāna’ very broadly covers the school(s) which are not Mahāyānin. I have also used Yogācāra rather than Cittamātra or Vijñānavāda in an attempt to avoid the possibility of confusion.

I have mostly used Sanskrit terminology, but have used Pāli where I thought it more appropriate to the discussion, for example when the discussion is more focussed on Pāli canonical material. Where appropriate I have given both Sanskrit and Pāli, indicated by ‘Skt.’ and ‘P.’ respectively. I have italicised all Sanskrit and Pāli words with the exceptions of those which refer to practitioners of Buddhism (such as a Bodhisattva, Arhat, Pratyekabuddha etc.) and the names of the various Buddhist schools to which I refer.

## Introduction

What is presented in this study is an examination of two systems of philosophy in an attempt to elucidate their similarities as well as differences; the systems in question are Schopenhauer's and Buddhist ethics. In a subject as complex as Buddhism, with its many schools and 2500 years of uninterrupted development, any examination of its central tenets has to be regarded as preliminary. As far as Schopenhauer is concerned, it would not be possible to give any detailed treatment of his work *in total* here and I have therefore restricted myself, where possible, to his ethics. To do this exclusively would render Schopenhauer's system defective and at times senseless and in order to avoid this I have had to, on occasion, broaden out from ethics into some of his wider metaphysical and epistemological ideas as I have done with Buddhism. For the sake of clarity I will not give any detailed analysis of the history of German Idealism and instead devote most of this work to the centrality of the idea of compassion in Schopenhauer's and in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, as found especially in Śāntideva. The scope of this thesis does not include other forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism – for example there is little mention of Yogācāra, of Tantrism and, geographically, there is no treatment of any of the forms of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian or Tibetan Buddhism. I have restricted the enquiry as far as possible to Indian Mādhyamaka Buddhism which had an impact on a number of later Buddhist schools.

### *Why Compare Schopenhauer and Buddhism?*

When Schopenhauer moved from the study of medicine to philosophy at the University of Göttingen between 1809 and 1811, he first became acquainted with the works of Plato and Kant before moving to the University of Berlin which he attended between 1811 and 1813. At the end of his period of study and at his mother's literary salon, he was introduced to the Orientalist Friedrich Maier where we may assume his interest in Asian philosophy and religion arose.

It seems certain that he knew almost nothing of Buddhism at this time – at any rate he makes no claims about its confluence with his own philosophy - but his sparse acquaintance with Hinduism was augmented when he acquired some time between 1815 and 1817 a copy of the *Oupnekat*.<sup>1</sup> It seems that by the publication of *The World as Will and Representation* in 1819 (WWR1) he had only a rudimentary understanding of Buddhism and a better, if still flawed, understanding of what he calls Brahmanism. By the time the larger supplementary volume of *The World as Will and Representation* was published in 1844 (WWR2), Schopenhauer was much more confident in his understanding of Buddhism and makes greater claims for its similarity to his own work.

Schopenhauer's approach to philosophy is to start by gathering empirical evidence then trying to understand why what is the case is so, then to offer a solution to the problem(s) he sees. Specifically, he notices that existence involves suffering, and he tries to find out *why* this is the case then offers an escape from it. This seems to me to be *practical* philosophy (although there is a great deal of abstract

---

<sup>1</sup> A Latin translation of a Persian translation of the *Upaniṣads*. The Latin translator was Abraham Anquetil-Duperron and the book was published in 1804.

philosophy in Schopenhauer too, especially as he tries to find the reasons why things are the way they are). Since Schopenhauer seems to be dealing with the immediate practical problems of life and thinks his treatment is very similar to approaches in Buddhism, it makes sense to compare the two in order to see not only if Schopenhauer was right in making this comparison, but also to see if he offers something more than Buddhism or if it is the other way round.

In comparing Schopenhauer to Buddhism, we must first decide what in Buddhism we can compare him to. General comparisons have been done before<sup>2</sup> and do not, in my view, offer more than general conclusions. Comparisons can be made in more detail between Idealism (and Schopenhauer was an Idealist) and the Yogācāra school of Buddhism. However, I believe that comparisons can be made also with Mādhyamaka Buddhism and I would specifically like to address the role of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) in Mādhyamaka Buddhism together with the path to liberation from suffering. One prominent Mādhyamaka philosopher who offers a full explanation of this path is Śāntideva and I have attempted to offer a comparison of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and *Śikṣāsamuccaya* with Schopenhauer's ethical writings. Both believe that compassion is central to ethics and neither follows a system of strictly prescriptive ethics. I think this is a much more realistic approach to ethics than what has been offered hitherto (in Western philosophy at any rate).

### ***What is Comparative Philosophy?***

In a comparative study like this, one of the first questions concerns what exactly we are dealing with. In other words, what is comparative philosophy?

Comparative philosophy is, as the name suggests, philosophy which involves comparisons, but it also involves contrasts. It is 'philosophy, and qua philosophy is not better off than any philosophy. It is simply another philosophy with the limitations of all the rest.' (Panikkar in Larson and Deutsch, 1988, p. 120.) The comparisons it makes can be between traditions of philosophy which involve different cultures, languages and/or periods of time. (See Balslev, 1997, p. 361.) It may involve, for example, a comparison of two or more thinkers, texts or ideas which appear to share common features. Very broad comparisons aimed at the production of a world system of philosophy cannot be considered to be comparative philosophy since the remit is much wider; comparative philosophy must involve a more specific and detailed comparison than world philosophy can treat. I agree with Heim that:

Advances in comparative work will come from more finely grained studies than those of the preceding generation of comparativists; they will seek not to compare Buddhist ethics as a unified whole, but rather more circumscribed thinkers, discourses, or texts from within particular traditions.

(Heim, 2007, p. 110)

Critics have forwarded the objection that comparative philosophy is pointless, or not even philosophy at all, because different traditions are incommensurable and that any attempt to compare involves false interpretations of a culture in which

---

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 162.

one has no background. This view assumes that each tradition sees things in its own specific way, which precludes relevant and valid comparison:

Many scholars and philosophers would argue that comparative philosophy (especially a comparison of Eastern and Western philosophical ideas, theories, systems, traditions) is just another pointless comparison of apples and oranges – Eastern and Western philosophies are simply too different to bear fruitful comparison.  
(Fleming, 2003, p. 259)<sup>3</sup>

Of those who think a limited comparison is possible, there is a view that what is being studied is ‘tainted’ by the broader background of the person making the comparison:

Can we really translate and interpret Sanskrit, classical Chinese, or other non-western texts without imposing our own linguistic, cultural, historical, ontological, and other categories thereon?  
(Rosemont in Larson and Deutsch, 1988, p. 38)

The answer to this is, I think, no, but that does not mean we cannot understand non-Western texts at all. Taking the above argument to its extreme conclusion means we ought not to be able to understand *Western* texts if they are in another language, culture and time.<sup>4</sup> For example, it should be impossible, then, to make sense of Descartes, Duns Scotus or Kant if your first language is modern English. This is clearly not the case and cannot be the case for non-Western philosophy either. It is true that language and culture may be *barriers* to understanding but these are not insurmountable. If they were then Buddhism would have been unable to spread through much of India and to then travel through the whole of North, South, East and parts of Western Asia. In fact one could argue that Buddhism encountered a more alien culture when it travelled from India to China than it encounters in Europe today. What is certain is that many European languages are related to Sanskrit/Pāli but not to Chinese, yet Buddhism still took root in China. Clearly there must be something in some systems of thought which are comprehensible to all human beings, and if that is the case then comparisons can be made. In its strongest form, the incompatibility argument is self-defeating because if the incommensurability is so strong then even a mutual understanding would be an impossibility. The relativist, in this case, would have to say that s/he is unable to understand *any* other culture, but cannot then say anything *about* another culture, including saying other cultures are incommensurate with their own. In its weaker form, if they admit understanding is possible, then they admit some form of translation is possible (understanding is an act of translating) and this allows us access to another culture. They do not, then, have a strong argument against comparing philosophies from different cultures.

---

<sup>3</sup> Also see Rosemont, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-70.

<sup>4</sup> I take it as obvious that the culture in, for example, Schopenhauer’s time is very unlike the culture in the United Kingdom now; I think it would be wrong to argue that they are commensurate simply because they are ‘Western’. I would go as far as to say that culture, broadly speaking, in the United Kingdom now is significantly different to the way it was twenty years ago, never mind in Schopenhauer’s time which was before the zenith of the nation state, the existence of Germany, communism or European unity and peace to take some completely random yet significant examples.

Another possible problem for comparative philosophy is that, in comparing, an assumption could be made that one's own tradition is progressing whilst an alien tradition is something static and historical. The comparative philosopher has to see that any tradition of thought undergoes permanent reinterpretation and inner conflict and it might therefore be difficult to exactly pin down what the other culture means in its philosophy. All philosophy, East, West, North and South changes and can only be seen from the viewpoint of the present (which will be at the period of writing) and in that regard *all* philosophy is in a state of flux. The comparative philosopher needs to be aware of this and not attribute something simpler to the lesser known philosophy, culture or tradition, but neither should they attribute something superior to another philosophy unless they can argue for so doing.

### **The Genesis of Comparative Philosophy**

Comparative philosophy is normally regarded as a fairly new area of philosophy with its roots going back especially to the point in history when Western thinkers became aware of developed systems of thought in other countries and cultures. One view is that it has an 'illustrious forerunner' in comparative philology (see Panikkar *op. cit.*, p. 117). Most relevant in this regard is the West's encounters with Indian, Chinese and Japanese philosophy and religion at the point when knowledge of these cultures filtered back in sufficient detail to Western thinkers in the eighteenth century for them to be able to interpret a system at work. As more information became available in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, more in-depth comparisons became possible. It must be said, though, that many commentaries and studies of non-European philosophy for much of this time treated Asian philosophy as inferior and cannot properly be regarded as comparative philosophy, but, nevertheless, contributed to the development of the field. I would argue that these Western attitudes are far from extinct and this is evidenced by the fact that Asian philosophy is almost entirely ignored in most Western university philosophy departments:

It is regrettable that...philosophers like Śankara, Nāgārjuna, Dignāga or Uddyatokara – to mention a few great names at random from the Indian thought traditions – are not taught in the same department where Hegel, Husserl or Hume, etc. are venerated.

(Balslev *op. cit.*, p. 366, also see Smart, 1999, p. 372)

Although 'venerated' is a bit strong, what is clear is that even now Asian philosophy is only regarded as something to engage with by a minority of Western thinkers. As far as comparative philosophy is concerned, it is easy to imagine that it is often a case of whether or not Eastern philosophy 'measures up' to a 'superior' Western way of thinking. Comparative philosophy is not, however, mono-directional: in Asian countries comparisons have also been made between traditions both there and with those of the West, although it is not clear that those engaged in such comparisons would have seen themselves as *doing* comparative philosophy.

## Does Comparative Philosophy Make Sense?

The reason it makes sense to do comparative philosophy is that doing *comparative* philosophy is *doing* philosophy: any philosophy which involves an examination of more than one thinker or text is comparative. Almost no Western philosopher would question the fact that a fuller understanding of some of the problems of deontological ethics can be gained by examining utilitarian objections to them and vice versa. Again, very few such philosophers would question the validity of a comparison of Plato's political philosophy as written in *The Republic vis-à-vis* that written in *The Laws*. If this is regarded as unproblematic then it ought not to be regarded as an obstacle if the comparison is between, say, a Western and an Eastern text or between two Asian texts or systems of philosophy. (Also see Fleming *op. cit.*, p. 262). Any argument that we cannot make comparisons with traditions which are alien to us ought also to exclude making any real sense of Ancient Greek culture and philosophy, which is pre-Christian, written in a now dead language and in a tradition which we can only interpret. This is broadly MacIntyre's view in *After Virtue* and MacIntyre is not alone:

We are dealing here with that part of Western self-understanding which views philosophy as a unique creation of the Greeks and consequently the exclusive enterprise of those who are the [supposed] direct inheritors of that culture. Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, for example, have all denied that there is any such project of thinking like Greek 'philosophia' in the East.

(Balslev *op. cit.*, p. 360)

In fact it could be argued that some of the traditions of Asian Buddhism and Hinduism (and others) are *easier* to be genuinely aware of since they are still living and evolving.

Dilworth believes that all major worldviews are related, which I accept since the world has produced philosophies which have features in common without being influenced by one another. I would regard this as a simple, straightforward and common fact. The reason for this is that humans may think slightly differently as a result of differing cultures and traditions, but *philosophically* humans *must* explore questions in basically the same way, otherwise humanity consists of more than one species. The commensurability of thought can be illustrated by the following example: the reason there are pyramids in Egypt and in South America is not that the South Americans were influenced by the Egyptians (they never met), but simply that, if your aim is to reach the gods, then a pyramid is the optimal geometric shape which affords both height and strength to structures designed by those lacking in advanced building techniques. In other words civilizations with very different cultures can reach similar conclusions. That means that in some areas they think the same way - and I have no doubt that that must apply to philosophical thought.

Any idea that Eastern philosophy is not commensurable with Western philosophy is an assumption that is usually made in ignorance. I would be very surprised if any Western philosopher who actually knew something substantial about Eastern philosophy regarded it as 'not philosophy' or as inferior to Western philosophy. I would even reject the whole idea of 'Eastern' and 'Western' philosophy. If we

take 'Western' philosophy on its own, there was a time in very recent history when 'modern continental philosophy' was regarded in Britain as 'not philosophy' (with one or two exceptions) but as more was found out about it, the less that view prevailed. (Also see Smart, 1999, pp. 368-70.) I think 'Eastern' philosophy is being treated the same way and for the same reason (ignorance) and will be more respected as more about it is learned. It is astonishing to believe that philosophy in Ancient Greece is considered by some in the West to be 'mainstream' philosophy whilst Indian philosophy is regarded as alien. This view partly rests on the assumptions that there is an unbroken link from modern Western philosophy to Ancient Greece and that Western philosophy has been more productive or substantially 'better' than other philosophies. Both erroneous in my view.

let us note that Western domination of the subject is not necessarily healthy, even when it may be felt that modern Western philosophy has been remarkably dynamic and productive.

(Smart *op. cit.*, p. 364)

'What is philosophy' is in itself a philosophical question (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 121). It does not make sense to say that some cultures are 'doing' philosophy and others are not if the subject matter is the same: for example 'how should we behave', 'who or what am I' and 'how do I know?'.

One tangible benefit of conducting a project in comparative philosophy is that views - even subconsciously inherited from one's own tradition - are challenged and clarified as well as an appreciation for another tradition developed. (See Balslev *op. cit.*, p. 363.) This is enriching and demands a rigorous approach to what one thinks one knows about philosophy in the West. By exposing Schopenhauer's work to a rigorous comparison with Indian Buddhism, a richer and newer understanding is hopefully explicated.

### **How Should we Conduct Comparisons?**

Comparative philosophy involves discussion on the commensurability of philosophical traditions and in this particular case the comparison is between the philosophy of Schopenhauer and that of some Indian Buddhism. A question addressed here is how comparisons between different philosophical traditions, in this case Indian and European, should be conducted. As long as at its base, in both systems, any claims maintain the principle of non-contradiction then I feel comparisons can be made. (See Balslev *ibid.* p. 368f.)

Philosophies share in common with all texts the property of conceiving of, or interpreting, the world. Their special function is to interpret the world fundamentally. Philosophies conceive of the world comprehensively. But while each worldview does this individually, on its own terms, they still belong to a common realm of discourse.

(Dilworth, 1989, p. 17)

Although I believe it is possible to compare philosophies from different cultural traditions, what I am engaged in is nevertheless an interpretation from my own perspective. This is not something negative though: it is a fact for everyone no

matter what they examine. We cannot transcend our own background, but do need to decide when conducting a comparative enquiry what tools we want to use for the job.

In my view, if we can employ rational thinking to any philosophical problem we will reach rational conclusions regardless of the culture compared or examined. We can still disagree as to the exact meaning of, for example, *nirvāṇa*, *eudaimonia*, or even *mind*, but it would be extreme to believe that we can have *no* conception of Buddhist, Greek or modern English-speaking philosophy *at all* unless we are brought up in that culture and speak that language. Reason is the connection which overrides the genuine differences in culture, language and history and if there was a philosophy which did not use reason then its weaknesses would surely be illuminated quite easily. In the case at least of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, rational thinking is a *requirement* in understanding it as is the case for understanding Schopenhauer.

No special tools are therefore needed in this comparison and the same tool, reason, will be applied equally to the two areas to be compared.

I am confident that by applying a rational analysis of Schopenhauer and Buddhist philosophy we will find a valid set of conclusions regarding compassion in Schopenhauer's and Buddhist ethics.

### ***Outline of the Argument***

Schopenhauer advises us that in order to understand his philosophy we must understand Plato, Kant and Indian philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Most Western commentators on Schopenhauer have hitherto focussed on his relationship to Kant and his influence on later philosophers (primarily Nietzsche and Wittgenstein), but I want to follow Schopenhauer's request as best as I am able and that means examining his relationship to Buddhism, if there is any. In order to do this I intend to explain the two main schools of Buddhism, a little of its history and then to focus on Buddhist ethics then address recent controversies. Any coherent explanation and analysis of Buddhism, with its near two and a half millennia of development and its wide geographical spread, is a large undertaking which will naturally result in the thesis *appearing* more concerned with Buddhism than with Schopenhauer but this is only superficially true; in order to understand Schopenhauer, Buddhism must be explained at some level of detail.

In conducting this enquiry, I have had the following questions in mind:

1. What is Schopenhauer's moral philosophy and how does it differ from that of the other Western philosophers who preceded him?
2. How does Schopenhauer argue against other forms of moral philosophy?
3. Have there been criticisms of Schopenhauer's philosophy as it relates to ethics?
4. Can Schopenhauer be defended against these criticisms?

---

<sup>5</sup> At least the two major ones, Hinduism and Buddhism. In WWR1 he mentions the *Upaniṣads* in this respect, but later (in WWR2) it seems clear that he thinks we need to know about Buddhism.

5. What is Buddhist Ethics?
6. Are there differences in approach to ethics within Buddhism?
7. What are the criticisms of Buddhist philosophy as it relates to ethics?
8. Can Buddhist ethics be defended against these criticisms?
9. Is Schopenhauer correct to claim that his philosophy is similar to Buddhist philosophy?
10. Can Schopenhauer's claims for concurrence between Buddhist ethics and his own be validated?
11. Is the soteriological role of compassion the same, similar or different in the philosophy of Buddhism and that of Schopenhauer?
12. What is the significance of these findings?

I approach these questions as follows: in my first chapter I outline Schopenhauer's ethics in its metaphysical context. Schopenhauer takes compassion to be central to ethics and this chapter explains his ethical system, which relies on a metaphysical framework which Schopenhauer inherits from Kant and modifies. What is explored, then, is Schopenhauer's specific form of idealism as it relates to his ethics.

In Chapter 2, I explain how compassion forms the nucleus of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy and how he compares with philosophy which denies the place of compassion; that is any egoism-based philosophy. I have taken Thomas Hobbes to be the chief exponent of such a philosophy and examined Schopenhauer's ethics in contrast to Hobbes'. Hume is also important in this regard since Hume, who does not follow Hobbes in saying that egoism is the *primary* motivation in our dealings with others, does nevertheless afford a place to egoism in his ethics. Schopenhauer can be seen as overlapping with Hume in that both regard compassion as the cornerstone of ethics, yet Schopenhauer differs from Hume. The reasons are explained here. Schopenhauer also rejects Kant's ethics and his system does not accord with either Aristotle or with Utilitarianism. These last three are examined in Chapter 4 where they are also contrasted with Buddhist ethics.

The third chapter looks at criticisms of Schopenhauer's philosophy which have emerged quite recently, and some of which (if valid) would undermine Schopenhauer's compassion-based ethics perhaps even fatally. I have explained them here and offered a defence of Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer's claim of affinity with Buddhist philosophy is taken up here too.

Chapter 4 gives an outline of Buddhist ethics in general, looking first at early Buddhism then explaining how compassion developed to become the central theme of ethics in Mahāyāna Buddhism. There is a particular emphasis on the role of compassion in the ethics and ethics within the epistemological and metaphysical framework of both pre-Mahāyāna and Indian Mahāyāna thought. There are also specific problems in Buddhist ethics which are explained and an attempt made to counter them. The problems include the aims of the Bodhisattva who has to reconcile emptiness (*śūnyatā*) with compassion (*karuṇā*).

In Chapter 5 I have given some background to Śāntideva in order to contextualise his contribution to Mahāyāna thought. What arises, according to some claims, are

metaphysical and epistemological problems as well as negative philosophical implications for the central role of compassion, and these claims are examined, some responses explained and my own conclusions given. In conducting this, I outline the structure of Śāntideva's works (the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*), and examine the way he deals with egoism and self-interest as well as how self-interest becomes interest in others then the *exchange* of self with others. The problems identified in the previous chapter involving the aims of the Bodhisattva who has to reconcile emptiness (*sūnyatā*) with compassion (*karuṇā*) are addressed here.

In Chapter 6 I explain and address recent criticisms of Śāntideva, especially the idea that the specific role of compassion in his ethics and its soteriological role are illogical. I will explain what is pertinent in this discussion and offer a defence of Śāntideva against these criticisms.

In the final chapter (Chapter 7) I compare the core ideas of Schopenhauer's soteriology especially as it relates to ethics and compare this to Śāntideva's. I will revisit Schopenhauer's dismissal of other forms of ethics, examine whether or not Schopenhauer's work was influenced by Buddhism and examine whether or not Schopenhauer is right in claiming convergence between Buddhism and his own philosophy.

## Chapter 1: An Outline of Schopenhauer's Ethics

Schopenhauer's main ideas on ethics are to be found in the fourth book of WWR1, in FW, OBM, in some essays in WWR2 and in PP2 where they are less systemised and take the form of short essays and aphorisms. His views are wide ranging and span a period of over thirty years yet still retain a level of coherence when placed in the context of his wider philosophical system. That system, at least as far as the first three parts of the four-part *The World as Will and Representation* is concerned, has been leading up to a discussion of ethics – which he regards as the most important: 'The last part of our discussion [book four of WWR1] proclaims itself as the most serious, for it concerns the actions of men, the subject of direct interest to everyone, and one which can be foreign or indifferent to none.' (WWR1 §53, Payne, 1969, p. 271.) He goes on to say that the previous three books have been purely theoretical whereas this book deals with practical philosophy, insofar as it deals with the actions of humans,<sup>6</sup> yet remains essentially theoretical since he does not accept that theoretical philosophy can transform character:

In my opinion...all philosophy is always theoretical, since it is essential to it always to maintain a purely contemplative attitude...to enquire, not to prescribe. But to become practical, to guide conduct, to transform character, are old claims which with mature insight it ought finally to abandon.

(WWR1 §53, Payne, 1969, p. 271)

One problem this immediately raises is what is the point of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy if character cannot be transformed? Furthermore how can one be morally responsible if one's character is not amenable to change? These questions are not fully answered in the fourth book of *The World as Will and Representation*, and we must look elsewhere to find a more extended treatment of ethics and his answers to the above questions and he treats this most thoroughly in the two essays submitted for the Scandinavian prizes.<sup>7</sup>

Schopenhauer's ethics is descriptive in that it relies on an examination of what he thinks is reality and it is virtue ethics in terms of its commendation of what he takes to be 'right' behaviour and condemnation of what he takes to be its opposite.

Schopenhauer is the first Western philosopher to examine Eastern philosophy and to claim that it is closely linked with his own. The most distilled incidence of this is in his adoption of the Sanskrit phrase *tat tvam asi* or *this art thou* (OBM §22, Payne, 1995, p. 211) which is intended to convey his agreement with what he takes to be the *Upaniṣadic* idea that we are all, under the illusory surface, one and

---

<sup>6</sup> 'Men' is the translation.

<sup>7</sup> In 1838 Schopenhauer submitted his essay *On the Freedom of the Will* to the prize competition set by the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences which asked 'Can the freedom of the will be proven from self-consciousness?' and in 1839 he submitted his essay *On the Basis of Morality* to the Royal Danish Society of Scientific Studies which asked 'Are the source and foundation of morals to be looked for in an idea of morality lying immediately in consciousness (or conscience) and in the analysis of the other fundamental moral concepts springing from that idea, or are they to be looked for in a different ground of knowledge?' The former won first prize, the latter did not despite being the only entry.

the same.<sup>8</sup> A further distillation of what he calls the ‘genuine substance of all morality’ is to be found in his maxim ‘Injure no one; on the contrary, help everyone as much as you can’.<sup>9</sup> Although it may seem that he is being prescriptive, he is merely stating what he takes to be a founding principle of any serious system of morality – whether or not we are prepared to *adhere* to this principle is another matter and this again raises the question of why bother to postulate a system of morality if few, or any, would adhere to it?

Although Schopenhauer draws much from Kant, he does not accept Kant’s ethics since he thinks reason cannot be helpful if you cannot change your fundamental nature, which he believes is the case. You just either are or are not morally good, do or do not understand what it is to behave well. He still wants to see moral rules in society and you can see moral rules as something pragmatic in Schopenhauer, although they are not geared at creating good consequences: more to create less bad consequences which emanate especially from those naturally incapable of being good since such people cannot be *made* good.

Schopenhauer thinks that people will at a deep and non-conscious level either know how to behave morally or they will lack this knowledge. If they lack this knowledge then nothing can be done to make it available to them. They are stuck with what they already have. So society has to set up strictures to contain such people as those who lack moral knowledge, or an ability to act with compassion, but it cannot fundamentally change the way they are. This begins to sound like Schopenhauer believes there is no free-will, which once again raises the question of how responsible someone is for their actions, but this is not the whole picture and continued explanation of Schopenhauer’s ethical system is necessary before this is addressed in full.

Whatever ‘good’ or ‘moral’ behaviour is for Schopenhauer it must take account of what he sees as the empirical evidence of individual self-interestedness or egoism. He gives many examples of egoism in action and says this is the real way that people are and the world is and that since man is self-interested, he is also, on

---

<sup>8</sup> This is a debateable interpretation of the metaphysics of the *Upaniṣads*: other Vedānta schools have rejected it. However Schopenhauer appears to have taken it as I have suggested above: ‘all plurality is only apparent...in all the individuals of this world, however infinite the number in which they exhibit themselves successively and simultaneously, there is yet manifested only one and the same truly existing essence, present and identical in all of them. Such a doctrine, of course, existed long before Kant; indeed it might be said to have existed from time immemorial. In the first place, it is the main and fundamental teaching of the oldest book in the world, the sacred Vedas, whose dogmatic part or rather esoteric teaching is to be found in the Upanishads. There we find that great teaching on almost every page. It is tirelessly repeated in countless adaptations and elucidated by many different similes and parables.’ (OBM, §22, Payne, 1995, pp. 207-8) and ‘Individuation is mere phenomenon or appearance and originates through space and time. These are nothing but the forms of all the objects of my cerebral cognitive faculty and are conditioned by them. And so even plurality and diversity of individuals are mere phenomenon, that is, exist only in *my representation*. My true inner being exists in every living thing as directly as it makes itself known in my self-consciousness only to me...In Sanskrit *tat tvam asi* (this art thou) is the formula, the standing expression, for this knowledge.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 210.)

<sup>9</sup> Which he gives in Latin as *Neminem laede, imo omnes quantum potes, juva* in OBM §7, p. 92. This is similar to Socrates’ response to Polemarchus in *Republic* 332d – 336a where the conclusion is that it can never be morally right to harm anyone – even your enemies.

occasion, barbaric:<sup>10</sup> ‘At bottom, man is a hideous wild beast. We know him only as bridled and tamed, a state that is called civilization; and so we are shocked by the occasional outbursts of his nature’ (PP2, §114, Payne, 1974, p. 211). He tells us of the existence of reports ‘which will suffice to convince you that man is in no way inferior to the tiger or the hyena in pitilessness and cruelty’ and of atrocities visited upon American slaves which are ‘one of the heaviest of all indictments against mankind’ (*Ibid.*, p. 212). In another such example, this time from *The Times* (20, 22 and 23 September 1848) he tells us of a husband and wife in England who systematically poisoned their children in order to claim insurance money. His intention with such horror stories is to show that, in life, injustice, suffering and acts committed in the name of self-interest are the natural and inevitable order of the day. He tells us that:

Reports of this kind, of course, belong to the blackest pages of the criminal record of the human race; yet the source of this and of everything like it is the inner and innate nature of man [where] there is established in everyone a colossal egoism that leaps with the greatest of ease beyond the bounds of justice, as is taught by daily life on a small scale and by every page of history on a large.

(*Ibid.*, p. 212)

No previous moral theories will do since any moral theory which can lead to a justification of any of the horrors of existence, is of no use to Schopenhauer - for example any consequentialist theory which allows something we are likely to regard as unpleasant to happen for the greater good is not going to furnish us with an adequate or acceptable moral theory. Rationality will not necessarily lead us to moral behaviour either and can in fact lead us to *immoral* behaviour when it is tied in with egoism.<sup>11</sup>

Schopenhauer’s judgment on the human race is that we are primarily egoistic or self-interested and this leads us to strive after things and this self-interestedness and attempted fulfilment of self-interested aims is what causes the sufferings of the world of existence. The remedy to this (although it seems on a superficial reading to be contradictory to suggest there *is* a remedy when he has previously said our character is unchangeable) is an ethic of compassion and if we were compassionate this would alleviate the sufferings of the world enormously although not completely since some people will always be living on the edge of

---

<sup>10</sup> This is one area where Schopenhauer and Buddhism do not concur. In the Yogācāra School (with which Schopenhauer’s form of Idealism can be most closely compared) and in subsequent Mahāyāna thought, even the most pessimistic Buddhist would not agree with Schopenhauer about human nature being so negative. In fact Buddhists who accept the idea of Buddha-nature would say that even wild beasts have it. (See Conze (1962), pp. 198, 229, Prebish and Keown (2007), pp. 99, 218, Williams (1989) p. 98 and his references to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*.)

<sup>11</sup> I am reminded here of Aristotle’s virtues in ‘clusters’ (*Nicomachean Ethics*) where the ability to practice one virtue but not another may compound your moral weaknesses which would be the case if you were, say, industriously dishonest. Aristotle requires that you have *all* the virtues together. There is a parallel with having a limited ‘virtue’ in Schopenhauer (reason) but it is not exactly the same thing as Schopenhauer has in mind, which is that reason can be employed as a tool to *satisfy* our self-interest *at the expense* of others. Although reason is useful it can cause compassion to be overridden if it is not fully employed in the same way as the employment of an incomplete set of Aristotelian *aretēs* will preclude you from *eudaimonia*.

existence and we have such things as illness and death to contend with which no amount of compassion can extinguish.

So much for his empirical observations, he has to explain what comes before these observations i.e. why compassion is good and egoism is not good and although he has dismissed Kantian ethics and gives extended treatment of this in *The World as Will and Representation* and *On the Basis of Morality*, he still relies on Kant's metaphysics, as he acknowledges, for some of the background to his own ethics and this involves especially the phenomenon/noumenon distinction. In understanding what Schopenhauer means by this, we should briefly examine the terminology he uses: noumenon/noumenal; world as Will and *thing-in-itself*. Schopenhauer inherits the word noumenon from Kant and for Kant, the noumenal world is simply a postulate: it is what there needs to be for us to have any knowledge, but we have no knowledge of *things-in-themselves* – things as they *actually* are and not as we take them to be after elements of them have been scanned by our imperfect senses and cognised by our limited intellect operating within a framework of three dimensional space and linear time.<sup>12</sup> Schopenhauer differs in some important respects from Kant in that the noumenal for Schopenhauer is *not plural*, it objectifies itself in conscious creatures and the phenomenal world is not *apart* from it – it is rather the same thing seen from a different angle.<sup>13</sup> The reason Schopenhauer changes Kant's *things-in-themselves* to *thing-in-itself* is that he does not believe space and time – and therefore subject/object duality – exist in the noumenal world: the noumenal world and the world of *thing-in-itself* are the same thing for Schopenhauer. He gives the rather misleading name Will to the *thing-in-itself* and thinks he has corrected Kant with this slight modification. This means that for Schopenhauer the noumenal world, the *thing-in-itself* and the world as Will are essentially all the same thing which manifests itself in self-aware creatures as a motivating force.

We are, for Schopenhauer, phenomenally different from one another, individuated and self-interested, but noumenally we are the same. He thinks that this phenomenal difference leads us to be wary of others and at times jealous of one another and that this separation between us is false and can be overcome by some sort of fellow-feeling: 'envy more firmly builds up the wall between You and I: for sympathy it becomes thin and transparent; in fact it is sometimes completely demolished by this quality then the distinction between I and not-I vanishes.' (PP2, §110, Payne, 1974, p. 204). Several times he points out that we are

---

<sup>12</sup> We *do* have knowledge of the noumenal world, for Kant, insofar as we have knowledge of our capacity to rationally determine the moral law - *that* is our noumenon and it is something we are aware of. When we are conscious of our own freedom we have experience of the noumenal world and our freedom consists in our ability to legislate rules of conduct. With Schopenhauer it is not clear if the noumenon is knowable or not since he argues that it is inferable and is a blind, purposeless, malevolent force yet at other times states that it is unknowable. (I shall give a detailed explanation of this disputed area of interpretation later.) Schopenhauer does not agree with Kant's attempts to use the supposed self-knowledge of the noumenon to justify a deontological ethic and, instead, uses it to attempt to justify his compassion-based ethical theory.

<sup>13</sup> In a similar way to that in which *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are (for the Mahāyāna) the same thing viewed from a different perspective. Also, in this interpretation, the animal realm is seen through animal eyes but inhabits the same physical space as the human realm. In short, the cat sitting beside me is in the same world but views it as a cat world whereas I view it as a human one – we have no choice since I am not a cat and it is not a human and I am a human and it is a cat.

fundamentally unchangeable then suggests that we *can* create changes in our behaviour.<sup>14</sup> This means either that he simply contradicts himself or that he has two lines of thinking, one of which takes the former view and the other the latter and that he is able to tie these seemingly incompatible views together. This needs extended treatment which I will give later.

If our phenomenal differences are illusory then acts of egoism and malice, directed against others, are based on false motivations unlike compassion which reflects the world as it is – since the world is one and unindividuated and compassion breaks down the artificial barriers between us. If I insist on retaining the false barriers between myself and others and I harm them then I also harm my metaphysical self.

### ***1.1 Incentives to Action***

What are the parts that would make up a moral human for Schopenhauer?<sup>15</sup> The three underlying motives with ethical significance are egoism, malice, and compassion.<sup>16</sup> This outlook can be described as virtue ethics since he regards moral (compassionate) behaviour as containing certain virtues<sup>17</sup> and the other two broad types of behaviour (egoism and malice) to be constituting vice.

A reference to the special vices that spring from the above mentioned two fundamental forces [egoism and malice] would find its place only in a detailed system of ethics. Such a system would perhaps derive from egoism, greed, intemperance, lust, selfishness, avarice, covetousness, injustice, hardness of heart, pride, arrogance, and so on. From spite, however, it would derive envy, disaffection, ill will, malice, malicious joy at another's misfortune, prying curiosity, slander, insolence, petulance, hatred, anger, treachery, perfidy, thirst for

---

<sup>14</sup> These are too numerous to mention but are found all through his relevant works from FW and OBM to WWR1 and 2 and in mostly aphoristic form in PP1 and 2.

<sup>15</sup> A moral human, for Schopenhauer, can only exist in the phenomenal world since morality requires plurality – if the noumenal is non-plural then there is no possibility of morality there as there are no doers and no beings having things done to them. In the phenomenal world there *is* plurality and therefore a need for morality: i.e. compassion.

<sup>16</sup> In Buddhism there are three roots of evil: greed, hatred and delusion. The first of these involves a strong identification with self and can be compared to Schopenhauer's egoism element. The second, hatred, could be compared to Schopenhauer's malice element and the third, delusion, although not a root of moral behaviour for Schopenhauer, has a part to play in reinforcing ideas of self and other – which can lead to selfishness. It does so by not taking account of the idea that the world as we normally perceive it, with 'you' and 'I' is the 'deluded' phenomenal world. Schopenhauer mentions a fourth constituent (in WWR2 XLVIII, Payne, 1969, p. 607) which is the desire for *your own* woe which he ties to certain ascetic practices. He says 'I mention this here incidentally merely in the interests of systematic consistency' and tells us that he had deliberately omitted to mention it in his essay *On the Basis of Morality* since it would not have, he felt, satisfied the criteria of the prize-question which the essay was intended to answer. Nevertheless this idea of self-woe is not mentioned again and does not play a central part in his ethics. Interestingly he recognises correctly that Buddhism does not advocate extreme asceticism of the kind which can be found in some Indian sects, such as self-torture, and elsewhere in, for example, the wearing of 'the hairy garment', but he is incorrect in saying that Buddhist asceticism requires celibacy and abstinence from animal foods. *Traditionally* celibacy was encouraged but monks were not forbidden from eating meat – as one of the Five Moral Precepts monks would try to refrain from *killing* sentient beings and as a consequence vegetarianism became widespread, but there was no proscription of the eating of meat.

<sup>17</sup> Voluntary justice, pure philanthropy and real magnanimity.

revenge, cruelty, and so on. The first root is more brutal, the second more devilish...No one is entirely without something of all three.  
(PP2, §85, Payne, 1974, p. 136)

He believes that we all have a mixture of egoism, malice and compassion and that some people have a great deal of compassion, some have practically none and the rest of us sit somewhere in between; the same permutation applies for egoism and malice. Schopenhauer accepts that we will be egoistic, malicious and to some extent compassionate but that compassion is the only incentive which is of *moral worth*. He then has to tell us why he rejects acting in an egoistic and a malicious way respectively and explains that egoism is present in humans and animals and has helped us secure our survival and so it would be difficult to say it is evil or morally wrong to have self-interest. Self-interest should not be regarded as always necessarily bad but is the motive for morally *indifferent* actions – for example, eating is an action of self-interest but it is not regarded as morally bad.<sup>18</sup> It is not productive, however, of actions of *moral worth* but in a sense cannot be condemned since there is nothing wrong with something which assists self-preservation. Nevertheless, to *focus* on acting in a self-interested way can cause suffering for others *and* for yourself (since it will lead you to desire things which give no lasting satisfaction) and self-interest can be judged then as a hindrance to morality rather than as something immoral – morality being tied to acts of compassion which self-interest precludes. Indeed it is possible to *gain* from an egoist's behaviour provided the egoist helping you helps themselves more than they would have been able to had they not helped you,<sup>19</sup> so the egoist may on occasion perform seemingly altruistic actions but these actions are not of moral worth for Schopenhauer because their aim is the self-interest of the agent rather than compassion for the person they have helped. They do not have compassion for another but *appear* to from the sheer coincidence of their actions mirroring those of a compassionate person – their motivation is quite different. Malice on the other hand *is* morally reprehensible and blameworthy since it has no benefit to the person who indulges in it or the person it is used against, unlike self-interest, and this is the major distinction between the two. Unlike egoistic thoughts or actions, there is nothing to be *gained* from malice and malicious thoughts are seen as futile to Schopenhauer, except to satisfy some psychological lust for the misfortune of others, and, materially at least, are quite pointless.<sup>20</sup> They are a

---

<sup>18</sup> This is Julian Young's example in *Schopenhauer*, Routledge (from the series 'The Routledge Philosophers'), Abingdon, 2005, p. 175.

<sup>19</sup> For example, imagine I learn bushcraft in order to protect *myself* on my next trip to the jungle and I, once there, stumble upon you who have no knowledge of how to survive. I may benefit by helping you since you will provide another pair of eyes and ears and a possible food-source for me if things do not work out. My helping you is, in this case, nothing but a by-product of my wish to preserve myself, and if I do not have to eat you then you may mistakenly think that I am an altruist. You have benefited from my acts of self-interest.

<sup>20</sup> Schopenhauer might be wrong about this; perhaps malice is psychologically necessary to inflict punishment and affect justice. It could be argued that malice motivates us in finding retribution and therefore has a valid purpose outside of psychology. For what it is worth, Hobbes did not think malice was possible: 'that any man should take pleasure in other mens [*sic*] great harmes, without other end of his own, I do not conceive it possible.' (Hobbes, §28, Rogers and Schuhmann, 2005, Chapter 6, p. 49.) Hobbes was clearly wrong about this unless 'other end of his own' is taken to mean something like even psychological 'gain'. Again it can be argued that malice is either important for a *practical* outcome (justice) or simply for a feeling of superiority – which practically all human beings appear to enjoy experiencing.

negative indulgence unlike the positive indulgence of self-interested actions – positive in this sense not necessarily meaning something to be approved of.<sup>21</sup>

It is only with the concrete or phenomenal manifestations of the three ‘moral’ incentives that we are best acquainted, and although he thinks egoistically motivated actions are not morally blameworthy – malicious ones are – he does spend some considerable time discussing ego-driven actions. Compassion is the moral incentive of which Schopenhauer approves and compassion for Schopenhauer is made up of three elements: voluntary justice, pure philanthropy and real magnanimity. As far as practical examples of them go, he warns us that it may be easy to find examples of just, philanthropic and magnanimous deeds but difficult to find out if the *motive* which gave rise to them was genuine or self-interested. (See OBM §15.)

Examples of the three constituent elements of compassion are short on the ground in Schopenhauer and the reason for this is that he feels he has covered them by a general principle which is that:

*egoism* and the *moral worth* of an action absolutely exclude each other. If an action has as its motive an egoistic aim, it cannot have any moral worth. If it is to have moral worth, its motive cannot be an egoistic aim, direct or indirect, near or remote.

(OBM §16, Payne, 1995, p. 141)

For Kant, of course, you *can* follow an action with an egoistic aim and still be moral. It is in your interests to behave in certain ways and egoism and moral worth are not mutually exclusive since at the end of the day there must be some benefit to you or you would not be motivated to behave in moral ways.<sup>22</sup> If you would have so behaved anyway then morality would be nothing worth talking about and we would all be moral as a matter of course.

Since it is clear enough what an egoistic aim is, it follows that what is left is of moral worth. Schopenhauer is aware of the possible objection that malicious

---

<sup>21</sup> A Buddhist would recommend that you act morally (compassionately) since it is part of the eightfold path which leads to enlightenment. A criticism of this is that it is nothing but self-interest: *you* want to be enlightened so that *you* no longer experience *duḥkha* (unsatisfactoriness) and the cultivation of compassion is for *your own* benefit. This may be more applicable to the Arhat in the Theravāda tradition than the *Bodhisattva* in the Mahāyāna. For the Mahāyāna we cannot *maintain* self-interest into enlightenment and it is necessary to have it only as an initial step. Your enlightenment will help other sentient creatures escape the rounds of rebecoming in *samsāra* and it is therefore ultimately a selfless act or an act of compassion even if it was initially motivated by self-interest. Śāntideva, at least, is aware of the criticism that a quest for enlightenment could be seen as selfish and explains why someone who tries to maintain such an attitude could not become properly enlightened. (See BCA 8:129-31.)

<sup>22</sup> For Aristotle too, self-interest is important for ethics and although part of living the *eudaimon*, flourishing or ‘good’ life involves making great effort (such as keeping physically fit as well as cultivating the various *arêtes* (virtues) until they become *hexes* (habits or entrenched dispositions)) the end result is ultimately a self-interested one since happiness (a workable definition of *eudaimonia*) is the *telos* (end) and can be achieved if this effort is made. As a by-product the society will flourish and this also has an appeal to self-interest. Self-interested actions, on the Aristotelian model, then, have a direct relationship to moral behaviour and ultimately contribute to the happiness of the individual and the good of the society. Schopenhauer is briefly critical of this view on p. 25 here.

actions, even malicious thoughts such as *Schadenfreude* (which he feels is particularly vile and repugnant), do not necessarily result in the self-interest of the agent, but he claims that:

such actions cannot be meant for they are the very opposite of those we are considering. But anyone who insists on the strictness of the definition may expressly exclude those actions because their essential characteristic is that they aim at the suffering of others.

(OBM §15, Payne, 1995, p. 140)

Schopenhauer is not able to fully explain everything about compassion: why we have it, exactly what it is other than a set of 'virtues' or a recognition of and fellow-feeling for someone else's pain - he does not feel that we take the person's pain on ourselves but we do recognise pain in another. There is, of course, an argument that all actions are egoism in a mask including those of compassion and that the volunteer working in the charity shop is ultimately satisfying their own desire to feel valued or useful. This argument is, I think, flawed but difficult to dismiss completely even if we were to cite common objections to it such as its failure to adequately explain the existence of friendship, the institution of the family and generally benevolent actions which do not appear to be selfishly motivated. Schopenhauer is aware of the problem of this extreme egoistic point of view and handles it in OBM (§13) and says that continued belief in scepticism regarding compassion as an independent incentive is 'quibbling and an obstinate refusal to accept the facts' (*Ibid.*, §15, Payne, 1995, p. 139). Since he cannot find a way to dismiss it, he decides that he will address himself 'to those who admit the reality of the matter.' (*Ibid.*) This is basically an appeal to those he would consider to be reasonable and there is much of this in Schopenhauer.

Obviously it is a weakness in Schopenhauer's argument, if he wants to be taken seriously, to simply say that those who disagree with him are quibbling and refusing to accept the facts (both sides in any argument could make that claim), but he fortifies his position with examples of actions which are carried out without a view to self-interest:

it is...certain that there are actions of disinterested philanthropy and of entirely voluntary justice. To appeal not to the facts of consciousness, but simply to experience, I refer to isolated, yet indubitable cases as proofs of such actions. Not only was the danger of legal prosecution entirely excluded here, but that of discovery and even of suspicion, and yet the rich man was given his property by the poor: for instance, something is lost, found, and returned to the owner; a deposit made by a third party, who has since died, is restored to the rightful owner; a sum of money is privately entrusted to a poor man by a fugitive for whom it is faithfully kept and to whom it is returned.... Indeed there are really honest people just as there are actually four-leaved clover... It may be objected that ultimately religious dogmas, and thus regard for punishment and reward in another world, underlie the above-mentioned actions; but against this, cases could perhaps be indicated wherein the performers of such actions belonged to no religious faith at all. This is by no means as rare as people profess.

(OBM §13, Payne, 1995, p. 126)

He believes that although certain actions are motivated by egoism, there are actions which are motivated without it and are not carried out for any personal gain – in fact sometimes people act to their detriment and surely Schopenhauer is right in saying that this can hardly be seen to be motivated by egoism unless you take the rather torturous view that the gain is masochistic and therein lies the reason for its motivation: a view which I would regard as rather far-fetched if we were to claim that it applies to all or even most people.

He also uses the example of Arnold von Winkelried who, at the battle of Sempach between the Old Swiss Confederacy and Leopold III of Austria in 1386, saved the day for the Swiss by sacrificing himself against the Austrian lances in order to open their lines to attack, and says: ‘some may imagine that he had a selfish intention, but I cannot.’ (*Ibid.*, §15, Payne, 1995, p. 139.)

He also points out that if that extreme egoist is right and all actions are motivated by egoism alone, then there is no such thing as morality since we would all be acting without regard to others, and this view is difficult to sustain.<sup>23</sup>

if anyone should persist in telling me that such actions [selfless ones, or ones of ‘voluntary justice’ as he puts it] do not occur, then, according to him, morals would be a science without any real object, like astrology and alchemy, and it would be a waste of time to continue to discuss its foundation. All argument with such a man would, therefore, be at an end...<sup>24</sup>

(*Ibid.*, p. 139)

Compassion is naturally occurring whereas egoism, although the incentive is natural enough, *does* require our judgement and decision on what actions to undertake. Compassion may tell you that you do feel sympathy for, for example, the people being led into the gas chamber but a self-interested judgement may tell you that you will not try to help them yet your sympathy remains. The fact that you feel sympathy prior to deciding what to actually do or not do leads Schopenhauer to think that sympathy or compassion is an independent faculty and not a sub-branch of egoism.

Schopenhauer asks the question why people differ in their moral behaviour and why some people are influenced by compassion and some are not and he asks if ethics can transform a bad man into a compassionate man (see OBM §20). He thinks it cannot and that ‘the difference in characters is innate and ineradicable.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 187.) He then goes on to quote Plato and Socrates in support of this idea and the gist of what he says from *The Meno*, is that we cannot learn virtue<sup>25</sup> and what Schopenhauer has in mind here is the Platonic notion that we are born with innate ideas and the process of learning is nothing but the rediscovery of these

---

<sup>23</sup> Others may benefit *coincidentally* by our egoistic actions but no-one, except the most extreme optimist, would want to live in the hope that such coincidences befall them all the time.

<sup>24</sup> This also clearly puts him at odds with Hobbes.

<sup>25</sup> When he talks about Socrates, he quotes from Aristotle - obviously Aristotle could not concur with the Platonic view that virtue cannot be learned since the *Nicomachean Ethics* is largely concerned with the cultivation of the habits of virtue.

ideas which are actually in us all the time.<sup>26</sup> When you ‘learn’ you are not actually *changing* what is fundamentally you and virtue is not, for Schopenhauer, learnable. With regard to the metaphysical foundations of the ethics, the interplay between noumenon and phenomenon, the reality of the world is noumenal, undifferentiated, unindividuated: phenomenal differences are illusory and adherence to the notion of phenomenal difference is ignorance of the true nature of reality. Apart from the fact that it leads to the sufferings of the world it is also a failure to acknowledge the way things really are: one undifferentiated whole. It simply *seems* that we are different from one another and all the objects of space and time are different to one another. In their essence they are all noumenally the same. This has implications for Schopenhauer’s ethics since if we are ultimately the same we should not, he thinks, act against one another since this is like acting against one’s ultimate ‘self’. This is problematic for at least two reasons: firstly why should the ultimate nature of things influence us if we perceive ourselves as not inhabiting that ultimate world and secondly surely if I (influenced by the ultimate oneness of the world) want to act with compassion, I must be able to change or at least adapt my character?

Schopenhauer is disparaging about those who claim that normal human beings can be changed in this way or ‘morally improved’ and says:

Ethical writers who promise to produce a system of ethics that will morally improve man and who speak of a progress in virtue are always triumphantly refuted by reality and experience, which have demonstrated that virtue is inborn and cannot result from sermons. As something original, character is unchangeable...

(OBM §20, Payne, 1995, p. 190)

He says further in the same section that it is possible to *force* someone to behave in a way coincident with morality and compassion simply by deceit or varying levels of compulsion but that *at their core* that person is not a compassionate person despite their outward appearances guided by social strictures, legal sanctions or false ideas of gain:

The motives of loving kindness which are for the good character such powerful incentives can as such have no influence on a man who is susceptible only to egoistical motives. If, however, we wish to induce the egoist to perform actions of loving-kindness, we can do it only by deluding him...In this way his will is merely misled, not improved...This, [improvement] however, is certainly much more impossible than changing lead into gold.

(*Ibid.*, p. 193)

---

<sup>26</sup> The obvious example here is from the *Meno* 81e – 85c, when Socrates ‘demonstrates’ that the slave has innate knowledge of mathematics, although you could argue that, by Socrates’ process of elimination and guidance in the conversation, the slave could have been led to ‘know’ the route from Glasgow to London provided his interlocutor knows in the first place, but that is a different matter, my point being that Schopenhauer’s argument is well connected to Platonic thinking in that for Plato virtue is impossible without *knowledge* and Schopenhauerian virtue (compassion) can also be found from *knowledge* of your noumenal oneness with others.

What is not changeable about them is their ‘real’ nature beyond the mere appearance of their actions or what we or they take to be their knowledge of themselves. Here we find a glimpse of his solution to the problem he has created in saying we cannot change yet we can: there appears to be two parts to us and one is an unchangeable core with the other being a superficial and influencable façade. This ‘self’, if it has a strong measure of self-interest, seeks to avoid what is detrimental to its well-being and to avail itself of what is beneficial.<sup>27</sup> This glimpse will be magnified in the next chapter but it is not the only method he uses in an attempt to overcome what Julian Young describes as his ‘self-undermining position’ (Young, 2005, p. 159).<sup>28</sup>

Non-compassionate actions can only have a justification in the world where there appear to be phenomenal differences between us. Since this is illusory in fact such actions, such failures of knowledge, are in error when seen against the backdrop of the reality of our noumenal sameness. To be compassionate, to have no barriers between yourself and others is more in keeping with the world as it really is and not with the world as, say, Thrasymachus, Callicles or Machiavelli take it to be.<sup>29</sup>

When you sympathise, for Schopenhauer this means you are obliterating the distinctions between yourself and another person. This means you are doing away with your egoism on this particular occasion. This notion of the oneness of life, of the illusoriness of our current fleeting existence is in keeping with the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism (respectively) and Schopenhauer discovered that the Indian conclusions paralleled his own although this discovery came after he had written WWR1. It is important to note though that Schopenhauer did not accept the idea of God or gods, souls, or reincarnation<sup>30</sup> or any continued recognisable existence of the phenomenal manifestation of the self after death. He was a celebrated atheist.

What actually constitutes a human being for Schopenhauer is not merely their phenomenal physical appearance, it is also the fundamental will plus their knowledge. There are some philosophers who have wanted our knowledge, our

---

<sup>27</sup> This is not Hobbesian since Schopenhauer wants to go beyond what the dictates of self-interest compel us to do and not do: he involves the element of compassion and places it centre stage and this makes him differ markedly from Hobbes. Furthermore, as we shall see, there is a close metaphysical connection for Schopenhauer between our moral behaviour and the idea of self which connects to Indian philosophy and again marks it out as different from Hobbes’ happiness-seeking man.

<sup>28</sup> In context Young thinks it *is* worth pursuing this seeming paradox.

<sup>29</sup> Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias* argues that might is right and that the weak espouse ‘morality’ in order to undermine the strong. With Machiavelli I am, of course, referring to *The Prince* where *pretending* to be moral but *not* being so is advised for effective rulership: ‘A prince...need not necessarily have all the good [moral] qualities...but he should certainly appear to have them. I would even go so far as to say that if he has these qualities and always behaves accordingly he will find them harmful; if he only appears to have them they will render him service. He should appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, kind, guileless, and devout a prince...cannot observe all those things which give a man a reputation for virtue, because in order to maintain his state he is often forced to act in defiance of good faith, of charity, of kindness, of religion...he should not deviate from what is good, if that is possible, but he should know how to do evil, if that is necessary.’ (*The Prince*, Machiavelli, tr. Bull, G. (1985), p. 100).

<sup>30</sup> It is also important to note that Buddhism does not accept God or a permanent ‘self’. I will return to Schopenhauer’s ideas on reincarnation or rebirth later.

intellect, to play a central part in directing our moral lives (Plato for example), and although we can bow to our knowledge and allow it to affect our behaviour, Schopenhauer thinks that lurking beneath this are the egoistically driven desires which we all have and which lie behind the masks of knowledge, civilization, manners, etiquette and so on which we impose upon them. Any time an occasion arises where, say, our life is threatened, our fundamental existence is in danger, these masks slip and we reveal ourselves as we are: ego-driven manifestations of the noumenal Will, and this Will, it must be remembered, is a bad thing. Although it is not *purposely* bad (it does not have any aim in mind or even a mind in which an aim could exist), it is blind, purposeless and ultimately negative in its manifestations in the phenomenal world.

He thinks the self-consciously knowledgeable part of us is capable of being kept in the dark by our underlying will,<sup>31</sup> that we may think we know ourselves, we may think we know how we will act in certain situations, but we may be surprised at how we *do* act. We may be surprised at how brutal, for example, we could become but we make our way in life thinking that we have some kind of measure of ourselves when in fact we do not.<sup>32</sup> The reality of us lies in the Will and not in the knowing subject as we often believe – the knowing subject being us; the individual.

## **1.2 Death**

Since Schopenhauer obviously did not think much of human existence, at least in so far as it is suffering and we cause suffering to other sentient beings, the question inevitably arose in his mind as to why we should continue with it. One of the reasons he gives is that many people continue to live despite hating their existence simply because they are more terrified of death than life. He thinks this fear of death is ill-founded for two reasons. The first is that since the phenomenal you, the self-conscious you, did not exist in self-conscious form for immeasurable aeons of time prior to your birth and you do not have any remnants of fear from this period, then it does not make any sense to fear the same non-existence after you are dead. It may be wise to fear the *process* of dying since this may be unpleasant or even painful, but not to fear the annihilation which comes after.<sup>33</sup> You are merely returning to the normal state and it is the state of self-conscious phenomenal existence as a human which is the aberration, the accident and our short existence torn away from the reality of the noumenon should actually surprise us: ‘To his astonishment, a man all of a sudden exists after countless

---

<sup>31</sup> This is not done deliberately, the *thing-in-itself* is Will and this inhabits and makes up the noumenal realm. It manifests itself in the phenomenal realm as will (with a small ‘w’) in self-aware creatures (similar to the way a tree is manifested in several wooden doors) and moves us to action, bypassing the intellect and knowledge of all but the wisest or most ‘saintly’.

<sup>32</sup> Some war veterans have claimed their experiences show that there are levels and depths to our character of which we are entirely ignorant until tested at the extremity of existence and then we may be surprised at ourselves and our actions and those of others whom we thought we knew.

<sup>33</sup> Although, he thinks it is rational to fear the process of dying (the transition from phenomenal being to non-phenomenality) since it may be unpleasant, he, as a student of Plato would undoubtedly have been aware of Socrates’ suggestion that death might actually be something good and that we simply cannot know either way: ‘no one knows whether death, which men in their fear apprehend to be the greatest evil, may not be the greatest good.’ (*Apology*, Plato and Jowett, 1938, 29a-b.)

thousands of years of non-existence and, after a short time, must again pass into a non-existence just as long.’ (PP2, §143, Payne, 1974, p. 282). The other argument is that since ‘you’ will no longer exist in any recognisable form after your death, it cannot make sense to fear something which does not exist. These views, of course, rely on acceptance of the idea that there is no ‘soul’ or afterlife for the ‘I’ which currently takes phenomenal form.

For those who decide that they cannot take any more of life and wish to commit suicide, he feels that their wish to die is actually a perversion of their strong wish to live, of their strong wish to satisfy their phenomenal will. In other words a hatred of life so strong that one is prepared to end it is an *identification* with the striving, wanting, egoistic, phenomenal self and that because of the (inevitable) disappointments of life, the lack of satisfaction of the ego-driven desires, the terrors of life, as he puts it, outweigh the terrors of death and at that point suicide takes place. Perhaps this is best illustrated by its opposite: if you have overcome or transcended the phenomenal self then you cannot wish to extinguish it; if you do not have egoistic, will-driven desires then you do not have desires which can be disappointed. ‘I am happy to be phenomenally negated’ is more what Schopenhauer is saying. What happens after that does not and cannot matter to me since there will be no ‘me’ anymore. It is not a phenomenal desire, it is an identification with the noumenal reality of ‘my’ (temporary) situation. At its crudest, and putting a more modern spin on it, everything is a force, I recognise this current manifestation of it as ‘me’ and I recognise another manifestation of it as ‘you’. Before we were recognisably me and you, we were part of the great force of existence and after we die we will go back to it. In fact we are still it – the only thing which has changed is that we are beings with perception and I perceive ‘me’ and ‘you’, who are really a bunch of phenomenal chemicals which are part of a greater unexplainable reality. Transcendence of the phenomenal self is simply identification with this truth. Ideally, the phenomenal entity which is me should be regarded as a temporary illusion and all Schopenhauer is asking in his wish to transcend the individual will is that we recognise that we are illusions and that reality is a noumenal unity. He is simply saying that he wishes that will which is manifested in the phenomenal entity ‘me’ to be negated, to be overcome, to be transcended and mixed back in with the noumenal world. What this means, at this stage, in practice is hard to judge since the mechanism by which we transcend is not clear apart from his argument that in moments of aesthetic contemplation we transcend self and are in touch with the noumenal world where self as we know it is impossible.<sup>34</sup> A problem here is that it does not seem to be a mechanism which allows us to *permanently* fuse with the noumenal world and if we cannot permanently transcend then Schopenhauer does not offer a permanent solution to what he sees as the sufferings of existence.<sup>35</sup> That, however, is not the terminus in Schopenhauer’s soteriology and I shall offer his further ideas on this later.

---

<sup>34</sup> Not every commentator agrees that Schopenhauer is saying this: Bryan Magee is the most prominent of those who take the view that Schopenhauer does not think the noumenal is directly knowable. His comments on this can be found in the 1989 Blithell Memorial Lecture, *Misunderstanding Schopenhauer*, at the Institute of Germanic Studies at the University of London, ISBN 0 85457 1485; ISSN 0144-9850.

<sup>35</sup> In *A History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell could not see why someone in Schopenhauer’s world should not go around drunk all the time since they would be in some sense escaping ‘self’ whilst inebriated. The answer is that permanent drunkenness (assuming it achieves as much as aesthetic contemplation) is not sustainable and therefore does not offer a permanent

### ***1.3 Redemption***

The only way to overcome the inevitable sufferings of life is to overcome the phenomenal will and this involves a recognition that the custody of an individual will is a wasted and pointless possession since its destiny, like our own, is annihilation:

The most perfect phenomenon of the will-to-live, which manifests itself in the exceedingly ingenious and complex mechanism of the human organism, must crumble to dust, and thus its whole essence and efforts are in the end obviously given over to annihilation. All this is the naïve utterance of nature, always true and sincere, that the whole striving of that will is essentially empty and vain. If we were something valuable in itself, something which could be unconditioned and absolute, it would not have non-existence as its goal.

(PP2, §147, Payne, 1974, p. 288)

Not only does existence have non-being as its goal, for Schopenhauer, he also feels that for the brief period we do exist we will suffer continual torments and disillusionments. Amongst these periods of strife there are, however some peaceful moments he thinks, and he draws an analogy between the peaceful periods of human life and the peaceful periods between nations: he tells us that history demonstrates that nations are constantly at war and that peaceful years are nothing but brief interludes in this process of continual strife. For humans too, life is a constant struggle against want, boredom and other individuals:

*Work, worry, toil and trouble* are certainly the lot of almost all throughout their lives. But if all desires were fulfilled as soon as they arose, how then would people occupy their lives and spend their time? Suppose the human race were removed to Utopia where everything grew automatically and pigeons flew about ready roasted; where everyone at once found his sweetheart and had no difficulty in keeping her; then, people would die of boredom or hang themselves; or else they would fight, throttle, and murder one another, and so cause themselves more suffering than is now laid upon them by nature.

(*Ibid.*, §152, p. 293)

This leads him to conclude that pain and dissatisfaction are the natural order of things and as such constitute the normal and positive state. Since each individual is also self-interested, there will be constant conflicts of interests among all human beings, and he sees what he takes to be the injustices and suffering which are produced from such conflicts as coming about as a result of our identification with an *individual* or phenomenal will rather than identifying our existence with the *universal* will which is a singular and non-plural will and which effectively makes us all the same behind the veil of phenomenal illusion.

The gulf between noumenon and phenomenon is colossal for Schopenhauer and the noumenal will which lies behind everything that is and everything which

---

transcendence. Russell was not serious in any of his written comments on Schopenhauer and is reputed to have admitted he had never read a word of Schopenhauer when he wrote critically about him in the above book.

cannot be perceived by human beings just *is*. It has no purpose, no aim, is no form of consciousness and on a tiny speck of the phenomenal universe life has appeared and some of that life is self-aware. This is completely subsidiary to the world as noumenon and in this world there are phenomenal objects and creatures which perceive these phenomenal objects. This is a phenomenal drop in the noumenal ocean yet we humans, on the whole, consider that this drop is the reality of the situation and go about our short lives driven by the phenomenal egoistic will to satisfy our impulses regardless of how that puts us at variance with others whilst taking no account of the fact that this entire perceived existence is a delusion. It seems real enough to us here and now.

The wish to transcend could be seen as some kind of greater egoism and attempts to be compassionate as self-motivated since if you harm others you are actually harming your noumenal self and it is therefore self-injury. It may look like Schopenhauer is saying that we ought to be phenomenally compassionate and noumenally egoistic, but that is the wrong conclusion to draw because noumenally there is no ego, there is no 'I', there is no individuation, and individuation is a feature of the phenomenal world and is in reality an illusion.

Transcendence of the individual will to live by the overcoming of our natural egoistic and malicious dispositions and the adoption of compassion for others is the path, he feels, to overcoming the sufferings of the world – although how this is achievable when he thinks the character is fundamentally unalterable is something which will have to be explained in more detail later.

Again this brings back the thought of why we should *not* kill ourselves since we will then return to the noumenal world and the bad dream of life would be over together with suffering – suicide seems not only attractive in terms of avoiding suffering but also philosophically sensible since you return to the Truth all the quicker and are no longer taking part in the folly of the phenomenal and illusory world. His answer is that people generally do not commit suicide because most of them do not dwell on philosophical questions and are busy their whole lives chasing one desire after another, unaware that they will never find anything but dissatisfaction this way, and the small number who do philosophise have *reason* to fear the process of *dying* since this may be unpleasant or even painful. Those who are able to overcome this fear actually *do* commit suicide and he gives us an outline of such a person and their motivation to ending their phenomenal existence:

this tendency [to gloomy thoughts] may reach such a height that permanent discomfort produces a weariness of life. So arises an inclination to suicide, which even the most trivial unpleasantness may actually bring about; nay, when the tendency attains its worst form, it may be occasioned by nothing in particular, but a man may resolve to put an end to his existence, simply because he is permanently unhappy, and then coolly and firmly carry out his determination; as may be seen by the way in which the sufferer, when placed under supervision, as he usually is, eagerly waits to seize the first unguarded moment, when, without a shudder, without a struggle or recoil, he may use the now natural and welcome means of effecting his release. Even the healthiest, perhaps even the most cheerful man, may resolve upon death under certain

circumstances; when, for instance, his sufferings, or his fears of some inevitable misfortune, reach such a pitch as to outweigh the terrors of death. The only difference lies in the degree of suffering necessary to bring about the fatal act, a degree which will be high in the case of a cheerful, and low in that of a gloomy man. The greater the melancholy, the lower need the degree be; in the end, it may even sink to zero. But if a man is cheerful, and his spirits are supported by good health, it requires a high degree of suffering to make him lay hands upon himself. There are countless steps in the scale between the two extremes of suicide, the suicide which springs merely from a morbid intensification of innate gloom, and the suicide of the healthy and cheerful man, who has entirely objective grounds for putting an end to his existence.<sup>36</sup>

(Schopenhauer and Bailey Saunders, tr., 1995, p. 25)

An opposed viewpoint could be taken with regard to suicide as a liberation if we ask, remembering that the noumenal Will is a blind and malevolent force, *why* it could possibly be a good thing to return to this state? I think Schopenhauer is saying something quite different here: he is *not* claiming that death is a blissful reunification with the long lost Will, simply that it is escape from *phenomenal* suffering or suffering in the world of duality. This disintegration of phenomenal self will come to everyone – guaranteed – since we all die. When we are dead there is no morality and neither can there be morality in the noumenal world since it is undifferentiated and there are no doers and no-one having anything done to them. Morality is something which is possible only in the phenomenal world and to be moral is the highest goal of man for Schopenhauer, therefore to commit suicide is to return to the noumenal world and bypass the chance of becoming a moral person as you rush to escape suffering. Your escape from suffering has not helped those left in the phenomenal world of which ‘you’ (as a dead or *ex* person) are no longer a part, therefore you have done nothing to alleviate the sufferings of others and have not reached the pinnacle of moral behaviour – your suicide was selfish and you have not understood that selfishness is not conducive to moral behaviour, which is defined by compassion. To transcend the phenomenal world yet not be physically annihilated (i.e. to have residual remains in the phenomenal world) provides at least an opportunity for understanding what moral behaviour consists in (a recognition that we are not, in reality, differentiated and that we should therefore feel compassion for others since they are in fact *not* others) and suicide precludes this whilst seeming to offer a pretence of peace when the physical entity is extinguished: ‘The only moral argument against suicide is that it is opposed to the achievement of the highest moral goal, inasmuch as it substitutes for a true redemption from this world of misery a merely apparent one.’ (Schopenhauer and Hollingdale, tr., 1970, §157, p. 78.)

It is true that the sufferings of *your* world should be cured once you are finally dead, but the process of dying makes this unattractive for almost all of us whether we philosophise or not:

It will generally be found that where the terrors of life come to outweigh the terrors of death a man will put an end to his life. But the terrors of death offer considerable resistance: they stand like a sentinel at the exit

---

<sup>36</sup> This volume consists of selected extracts from *Parerga and Paralipomena* and Bailey Saunders’ translation is clearer than Payne’s.

gate. Perhaps there is no one alive who would not already have put an end to his life if this end were something purely negative, a sudden cessation of existence.

(*Ibid.*, §157, pp. 78-9)

In Buddhism and in Schopenhauer, any form of violence whether self-violence or violence from without is a source of fear for all (see Dhp 10:129-30), and is therefore something which is very difficult to overcome. Overcoming the fear of violence in the form of the self-harm of suicide, is still seen in Buddhism as an act of killing, and creates bad karma which leads to a bad rebirth. Monks *sacrificing* their lives is actually seen as good but suicide for *self-interested* or *ego-driven* reasons is not good since the motivation is wrong. This is very similar in Schopenhauer.

Since he rejects suicide, Schopenhauer has, then, to find other ways to escape the sufferings of the world and this is achieved through abstraction during the contemplation of art and philosophy.

## Chapter 2: Contrasts and Comparisons to Schopenhauer's Ethics

We can best understand Schopenhauer's position by exercising comparison and contrast, first of all with those people who recognise a very strong human propensity towards self-interest, the main exponents being Thomas Hobbes, and in a less extreme way, on a standard reading, Hume, and second, Kant who distinguishes sharply between actions of moral worth and actions which are self-interested. The main elements of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy consist of an emphasis upon the centrality of self-interest and an account of moral worth as being distinct from that. I would firstly like to examine the relationship of Schopenhauer to Hobbes and to find where they are similar and, more importantly, as part of an assessment of Schopenhauer's ethics, where they differ, before moving on to Hume. Schopenhauer's relationship to Kant will be examined later.

### 2.1 Hobbes

For Hobbes, morality begins with the supposed entry of humankind into Civil Society from the State of Nature from which we originally, if hypothetically, came. Hobbes's view of this State of Nature is well known and can be generally summed up as being violent, insecure and without peace or the chance of mental development. (See *Leviathan*, Hobbes and Oakeshott (ed.), 1946, p. 82.) Hobbes thinks that people would struggle against one another in order to secure their lives as best they are able, and, especially if there is scarcity, there will be conflicts of interest which will mean that not everyone can get what they need in order to guard their existence. Hobbes tells us this results in a permanent state of war between individuals in the State of Nature, which makes life arduous and unpleasant as well as dangerous.

Hobbes believes that we would be driven to behave in ways which result in this unpleasant state by a motivation of self-interest, and *that* in turn is regulated by our appetites and aversions. The influence of appetites and aversions upon us individually is the guiding force of action, and any action thus guided must be, for Hobbes, in our own interest. Therefore individuals will act only in accordance with what they think will satisfy their desires unless they are hindered from so doing by a greater force. Such desires, he tells us, 'are in themselves no sin. No more are the actions, that proceed from those passions, till they know a law that forbids them.' (*Ibid*, p. 83.)

There is a controversy about the degree of egoism in Hobbes' work where the interpretation of Hobbes as an extreme egoist has been challenged by Gregory Kavka (c1986), who takes the line that Hobbes was egoistic to a lesser degree than has normally been attributed to him, and, separately, by Bernard Gert (1967) who argues that Hobbes *does* allow for compassion and is much more sophisticated than the blunt egoist he is traditionally portrayed as being. However I go along with the traditional interpretation that he is a thoroughgoing egoist since he argues himself that the only motive anybody ever has is self-interest – 'good to oneself':

of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some *Good to himselfe*. [Hobbes' italics.]

(*Leviathan*, Hobbes and MacPherson (ed.) 1985, p. 192 [66])

And:

all the voluntary actions of men tend to the benefit of themselves; and those actions are most Reasonable, that conduce most to their ends.

(*Ibid.*, p. 204 [72-3])

And:

For no man giveth, but with intention of Good to himselfe; because Gift is Voluntary; and of all Voluntary Acts, the Object is to every man his own Good; of which if men see they shall be frustrated, there will be no beginning of benevolence, or trust; nor consequently of mutual help...

(*Ibid.*, p. 209 [75])

And:

COMMAND is, where a man saith, *Doe this*, or *Doe not this*, without expecting other reason than the Will of him that sayes it. From this it followeth manifestly, that he that Commandeth, pretendeth thereby his own Benefit: For the reason of his Command is his own Will onely, and the proper object of every mans Will, is some Good to himselfe.

(*Ibid.*, p. 303 [131-2])

According to traditional readings, in Hobbes's State of Nature you are not obliged to consider the best interests of others where these come into conflict with your own interests. Moral obligations, for Hobbes, are bound up with self-interest and do not go beyond it. Since there is no requirement to consider the best interests of others, *any* action, including fraud and force, is legitimate provided it serves your interests: 'To this war of every man, against every man, this also is consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place.' (*Leviathan*, Hobbes, Wilson and MacCallum (eds.), 1946, p. 83.)

Coming into Civil Society does not extinguish this self-interest; you do not lose your sense of being an individual because you have associated with others, and although you can do anything you like in a State of Nature which is conducive to your preservation and well-being, it is not clear that this is ever given up in Civil Society because as soon as the Sovereign threatens your life, you can challenge them – you do not commit to a lessening of your self-interested aims but, rather, *benefit* from Civil Society until and unless it threatens you then you have the right to reject the Leviathan figure. It is in our interest to participate in society and to

benefit from it but it is not in our interest to be subordinated to it if this is detrimental to us.<sup>37</sup>

The primary purpose of the Sovereign, or Leviathan, is to ensure that there is *not* a war of all against all, driven by this egoistic propensity people intrinsically have. The Sovereign, exercising power over everyone in society, can curtail the activities of those ‘masterless men’ (*Ibid.*, p. 238) who wish to behave as though still in a State of Nature.

Schopenhauer is like Hobbes in emphasising the pervasiveness and the natural motivation of self-interest, but unlike Hobbes in that he does not place the motivational emphasis for our actions on egoism *alone*. Although accepting that Hobbes is correct in saying egoism is a fundamental source of what drives most people, Schopenhauer nevertheless considers actions caused by egoism to be devoid of moral worth. He does not say egoism is immoral, but, rather, that it cannot lead to moral behaviour since the motivation is self-interested.

Schopenhauer shares a similar view to Hobbes in that, although most of us are egoistically driven, we do modify our behaviour and are kept in check, to some extent, by the law and also, Schopenhauer thinks, social customs and spurious, invented codes of behaviour.<sup>38</sup>

The thousands who throng before our eyes in peaceful intercourse are to be regarded as just so many tigers and wolves whose teeth are secured by a strong muzzle. Therefore, if one imagines the power of the State as abolished, in other words, the muzzle as cast off, every thinking man will recoil at the expected scene, and in this way, he will show us what little confidence he really has in the efficacy of religion, conscience, or the natural foundation of morals, whatever this may be.  
(OBM §13, Payne, 1995, p. 129)

He, again, sounds Hobbesian when he tells us that:

where egoism is not opposed either by external force, which must also include all fear whether of human or supernatural powers, or by a genuine moral incentive [compassion], it pursues its purpose without reserve. Therefore without such checks and in view of the infinite number of egoistic individuals, the *bellum omnium contra omnes* [Hobbes’ war of all against all] would be the order of the day, to the undoing of all. And so reflecting reason very soon invented the machinery of the State which, springing from the mutual fear of mutual violence, obviates the disastrous consequences of universal egoism...On the other hand, where those two forces opposing egoism [external force and internal compassion] fail to be effective, it will at

---

<sup>37</sup> There is also a social dimension in the evolution myth from the *Aggañña Sutta* where although the beings have developed greedy and self-centred tendencies they are still in a way socially programmed and some wish to overcome this greed through the appointment of the Leviathan-like figure and later through their own self-improvement.

<sup>38</sup> He cites the example of the code of honour amongst the wealthy classes (as with, say, Victorian gentlemen) and what he describes as ‘the fool’s code called knightly honor.’ OBM §13, Payne, 1995, p.127.

once show itself in all its fearful dimensions, and the spectacle will not be attractive.

(*Ibid.*)

Schopenhauer agrees that *some* thing or *things* are needed to curb the subjects' egoistic motivations otherwise there would be nothing to stop them acting on this egoistic impulse with impunity.

In itself right is powerless; by nature might rules. The problem of statesmanship is to associate might with right so that, by means of the former, the latter may rule...This, of course, is brought about solely by the State machine. For only physical force can always have an immediate effect, since only this impresses and instils respect in people, constituted as they normally are. If, to convince ourselves of this through experience, we once tried to remove all compulsion and to urge people most clearly and emphatically to be reasonable, just, and fair-minded, but to act contrary to their interests, then the impotence of merely moral force would be obvious, and in most cases only a mocking laugh would be the answer to our attempt.

(PP2, §127, Payne, 1974, pp. 249-50)

He continues, in contrast to Hobbes this time, by telling us that he does not regard egoism as moral and speaks of it as some kind of enemy of justice:

*Egoism* is...the first and principal, although not the only force with which the *moral incentive* [sympathy/compassion] has to contend. Already we see that to stand up to such an opponent, the moral incentive must be something more real than a hair-splitting sophism or an a priori soap bubble. Meanwhile, in war we must first recognize the enemy; in the impending struggle, *egoism*, as the chief force on its own side, will be the principal opponent of the virtue of *justice*, which, in my opinion, is the first and really cardinal virtue.

(OBM §14, Payne, 1995, pp. 133-4)

His comment about a 'hair-splitting sophism' relates to the argument that egoism is the *sole* motivation for our actions and that we do nothing without consideration of our own advancement. This Hobbesian view is rejected by Schopenhauer and he is aware that contained in such a view is the idea that since all actions are ego-driven then apparent acts of altruism must be too. Schopenhauer regards this as hair-splitting and believes that there are other things which motivate us besides egoism and this is where he thinks we will find what he refers to above as the 'moral incentive' and the 'virtue of justice'. He is, of course, talking about compassion and this is where he has his major disagreement with Hobbes (see p. 24 above) and Schopenhauer again explains this disagreement with a view traditionally attributed to Hobbes:

I believe there will be very few who question the matter, and are not convinced from their own experience that a man often acts justly [compassionately], simply and solely that no wrong or injustice may be done to another. In fact I believe there are those who have, as it were, an *inborn* principle of giving others their due, who therefore do not intentionally hurt anyone's feelings, who do not unconditionally seek their own advantage, but who in this connection also consider the

rights of others...Similarly, it will be admitted, I think, that many a man helps and gives, carries out services and denies himself, with no other intention in his heart than that of helping another whose distress he sees.

(*Ibid.*, §15, Payne, 1995, p. 139)

As we have seen, Schopenhauer does not deny the importance of egoism as a motivating factor and indeed accepts almost all of what Hobbes says with regard to a State of Nature being a war of all against all and individuals coming into society, relinquishing many of their natural freedoms and being kept in check by the law since this is *beneficial* to them and therefore satisfies their ego-driven desires to some extent. Schopenhauer would criticise Hobbes, though, as having a pessimistic view of human nature and assuming that we will only display altruism if it appeals to our self-interest. The difference here between Hobbes and Schopenhauer is that Schopenhauer claims that compassion is *not* a sub-branch of egoism and that actions of *genuine* moral worth cannot spring from state commandments or restrictions but must be voluntarily carried out without a thought to any necessary advantage. He may be pessimistic (or realistic, depending on your view) as to the chances of this actually taking root in the majority of people and in lieu of this *does* propose strong executive powers of government, but nevertheless does believe that acts of genuine moral worth must be based on compassion and do occur quite often. It is unrealistic, Schopenhauer feels, to think of humans as some kind of Felicity Machines which attempt to calculate how much they can benefit from others within a framework of law. There are examples of people laying down their lives for a complete stranger and this is evidence enough that some form of fellow-feeling, compassion or call it what you will, but something which can even act *to your detriment* exists within human beings to varying degrees. This I take to be Schopenhauer's main defence against strict egoists and moral sceptics of the Hobbesian kind.

There is also a Buddhist mythical explanation of the move from a State of Nature to a Civil Society which is found in the *Aggañña Sutta*. Not only is there a world foundation myth and explanation of human evolution, but also an account of the development of human greed and the need for a 'Leviathan' figure to keep order and stop people stealing from one another. This comes in the form of the *Mahā Sammata* (the Great Elect) and it seems that some sort of contract is instigated whereby he will be given certain rewards if he keeps law and order or stops people from acting immorally. Going beyond Hobbes, though, once people identify that the problem of greed is within *themselves*, they become ascetics.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> I have abridged this extract and removed footnotes. The full text can be found in the reference at the end of this footnote: 'Then those beings [which feasted on hoarded rice], Vāsetṭa, gathered themselves and bewailed this, saying: Evil customs, sirs, have appeared among men. For in the past, we were made of mind, we fed on rapture, self-luminous, we traversed the air in abiding loveliness; long long the period we so remained. When...rice appeared...we plucked and took away for the evening meal every evening, there next morning it had grown ripe again. Where we plucked and took away for the morning meal, there in the evening it had grown ripe again. There was no break visible. Enjoying this rice, feeding on it, nourished by it, we have so continued a long long while. But from evil and immoral customs becoming manifest among us, powder has enveloped the clean grain, husk too has enveloped the clean grain, and where we have reaped is no regrowth; a break has come, and the rice-stubble stands in clumps. Come now, let us divide off the rice field and set boundaries thereto! And so they divided off the rice and set up boundaries round

## 2.2 Hume

Neither Hume nor Schopenhauer have any difficulty in agreeing with Hobbes that there must be some executive power of state to maintain the basic conveniences of society. Their *true* comparisons lie elsewhere – firstly in their rejection of self-interest as the sole motive for acts of seeming altruism and, in a closely connected second point, in their view of sympathy as a mark of virtue and selfishness as a mark of vice. The final comparison I wish to draw is in their view of reason as *inadequate* in guiding or discovering moral behaviour. Their major points of contrast concern the genesis of sympathy and selfishness, where Hume sees no point in chasing explanations all the way back to remote (and what he sees as increasingly irrelevant) first principles whereas Schopenhauer does just that. This causes him to expand his theory into a grand ethical-metaphysical system which, I will argue in the next chapter, leaves Schopenhauer's moral theory vulnerable to attack. Other contrasts concern mysticism and Indian philosophy – both of which are important for Schopenhauer but not for Hume. I shall give a brief outline of the above points to elucidate the comparisons and contrasts therein.

### The Rejection of Self-Interest as Sole Motivation

As we have seen (p. 35), Schopenhauer accepts much of the pessimism Hobbes has for people's behaviour were we to live without the powers of state as does Hume who shares Hobbes' view that life without executive powers of government would be very unpleasant since people would act, most likely, in selfish ways:

After men have found by experience that their selfishness and confined generosity, acting at their liberty, totally incapacitate them for society, and at the same time have observed that society is necessary to the satisfaction of those very passions, they are naturally induced to lay themselves under the restraint of such rules as may render their commerce more safe and commodious.

(Hume, in Aitken, 1972, p. 67)

---

it. 19. Now some being, Vāseṭṭa, of greedy disposition, watching over his own plot, stole another plot and made use of it. They took him and holding him fast, said: Truly, good being, thou hast wrought evil in that, while watching thine own plot, thou hast stolen another plot and made use of it. See, good being, that thou do not such a thing again! Ay, sirs, he replied. And a second time he did so. And yet a third. And again they took him and admonished him. Some smote him with the hand, some with clods, some with sticks. With such a beginning, Vāseṭṭa, did stealing appear, and censure and lying and punishment became known. 20. Now those beings, Vāseṭṭa, gathered themselves together, and bewailed these things, saying: From our evil deeds, sirs becoming manifest, inasmuch as stealing, censure, lying, punishment have become known, what if we were to select a certain being, who should be wrathful when indignation is right, who should censure that which rightly be censured and should banish him who deserves to be banished? But we will give him in return a proportion of the rice. Then, Vāseṭṭa, those beings went to the being among them who was handsomest, the best favoured, the most attractive, the most capable and said to him: Come now, good being, be indignant at that whereat one should rightly be censured, banish him who deserves to be banished. And we will contribute to thee a proportion of our rice. And he consented, and did so, and they gave him a proportion of their rice. 21. Chosen by the whole people, Vāseṭṭa, is what is meant by Mahā Sammata... (the Great Elect)...’ (*Aggañña Sutta*, in DN 27:18-21, tr. Rhys Davids, T.W. and C.A.F., pp. 86-8).

And:

in contriving any system of government, and fixing the several checks and controls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a *knave*, and to have no other end, in all his actions, than private interest...It is therefore, a just *political* maxim, *that every man must be supposed a knave*. [Hume's italics throughout.]  
(Hume, 1903, Essay VI, 'Of the Independency of Parliament', pp. 40-2)

So far Hobbes, Hume and Schopenhauer are in agreement. However, Hume does not think (and Schopenhauer agrees with him) that, having exchanged the State of Nature for Civil Society, we would act on self-interest alone:

I am sensible that, generally speaking, the representations of this quality [selfishness] have been carried much too far; and that the descriptions which certain philosophers [chiefly Hobbes, I assume<sup>40</sup>] delight so much to form of mankind in this particular are as wide of nature as any accounts of monsters which we meet with in fables and romances.

(Hume, in Aitken, 1972, p. 56)

There are also, he believes, natural virtues which do not require the man-made institutions civil society throws up in order to protect us from selfish people, for example benevolence, generosity and charity. These natural virtues are important for Hume because he believes that things such as justice are unnatural and are merely conventions set up by humankind in order to promote and maintain (for example) the stability of property ownership. But the important difference between Hume and Hobbes is that Hume does not accept that we are driven solely by egoism, and Schopenhauer again agrees with him. Hume says:

The most obvious objection to the selfish hypothesis is that, as it is contrary to common feeling and our most unprejudiced notions, there is required the highest stretch of philosophy to establish so extraordinary a paradox. To the most careless observer there appear to be such dispositions as benevolence and generosity, such affections as love, friendship, compassion, gratitude.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 272-3)

In fact Hume goes so far as to say:

I shall not here enter into any detail on the present subject. Many able philosophers have shown the insufficiency of these [self-interest-based] systems. And I shall take for granted what, I believe, the smallest reflection will make evident to every impartial enquirer.<sup>41</sup>

(*Ibid.*)

---

<sup>40</sup> Although Hume notes on p. 190 that 'This fiction of a state of nature, as a state of war, was not first started by Mr. Hobbes, as is commonly imagined. Plato endeavours to refute an hypothesis very like it in the second, third, and fourth books *De Republica*.' *Hume's Moral and Political Philosophy*.

<sup>41</sup> Compare Schopenhauer on the same subject: '[It is] quibbling and an obstinate refusal to accept the facts...and I address myself to those who admit the reality of the matter.' (OBM §15, Payne, tr., 1995, p. 139.)

Hume thinks sympathy is a naturally occurring phenomenon and that people would naturally feel compassion for those in distress without obvious benefit to themselves, as in the following example:

I must think on the miserable condition of those who are at sea in a storm, and must endeavour to render this idea as strong and lively as possible, in order to make me more sensible of my own happiness... But suppose this idea to become still more lively. Suppose the ship to be driven so near me, that I can perceive distinctly the horror, painted on the countenance of the seamen and passengers, hear their lamentable cries, see the dearest friends give their last adieu, or embrace with a resolution to perish in each others arms: No man has so savage a heart as to reap any pleasure from such a spectacle, or withstand the motions of the tenderest compassion and sympathy.

(Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, 'Of Morals', p. 594)

Hume and Schopenhauer share this in common: acting out of self-interest alone is unnatural; acts of self-interest *and* sympathy are witnessed daily.

When it comes to sympathy as a mark of virtue and selfishness as a mark of vice, Schopenhauer shares Hume's position that this is generally obvious. Hume says that:

[we]...must pronounce the impression arising from virtue to be agreeable, and that proceeding from vice to be uneasy. Every moment's experience must convince us of this. There is no spectacle so fair and beautiful as a noble and generous action; nor any which gives us more abhorrence than one that is cruel and treacherous.

(Hume, in Aitken, 1972, p. 44)

Schopenhauer agrees:

A man who by virtue of his character is reluctant to thwart the aspirations of others, but rather favours and promotes them as far as he reasonably can, and who thus does not injure others but helps and supports them where he can, is called *good* by others in regard to themselves...

(OBM §22, Payne, 1995, p. 204)

### 2.2.1 The Origins of Sympathy and Selfishness

One major contrast between Hume and Schopenhauer is found in their views on the origins of sympathy and selfishness, where Hume takes the position that there is no point in digging further than what is immediately apparent:

An action, or sentiment, or character, is virtuous or vicious; why? Because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. In giving a reason, therefore, for the pleasure or uneasiness, we sufficiently explain the vice or virtue. To have the sense of virtue is nothing but to *feel* a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very *feeling* constitutes our praise or

admiration. We go no further; nor do we inquire into the cause of the satisfaction.

(Hume, in Aitken, 1972, p. 44)

Hume sees no point in searching for the source of this since he thinks it is a self-evident truth to be found in observation:

It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or fellow-feeling with others. It is sufficient that this is experienced to be a principle of human nature. We must stop somewhere in our examination of causes.

(Hume and Selby-Bigge, 1963, pp. 219-20)

And:

it is absurd to imagine that, in every particular instance, these sentiments [which distinguish between virtue and vice] are produced by an *original* quality and *primary* constitution. For as the number of our duties is in a manner infinite, it is impossible that our original instincts should extend to each of them, and from our very first infancy impress on the human mind all that multitude of precepts which are contained in the completest system of ethics.

(Hume, in Aitken, 1972, p. 46)

Schopenhauer, on the other hand, whilst agreeing that there must be *some* point at which one stops asking 'why', feels it is necessary to travel much further down the line of enquiry than Hume and ends up with something quite different to him:

Just as at the end of every investigation and of every exact science the human mind stands before a primary phenomenon, so too does it in the case of ethics. It is true that this primary phenomenon explains everything that is comprehended under it and follows from it, but it itself remains unexplained, and lies before us like a riddle. And so here too we see a demand for a system of *metaphysics*, in other words, for a final explanation of primary phenomena as such, and, when these are taken collectively, of the world. Here also this demand raises the question of why that which exists, and is understood, is as it is, and not otherwise; and the question of how the exhibited character of the phenomenon results from the essence-in-itself of things. In fact, with ethics, the need for a metaphysical basis is the more urgent, since philosophical as well as religious systems agree that the ethical significance of actions must at the same time be metaphysical.

(OBM §21, Payne, 1995, pp. 199-200)

And:

I have never professed to propound a philosophy that would leave no questions unanswered. In this sense, philosophy is actually impossible; it would be the science of omniscience. But *est quadam prodire tenus, si non datur ultra*,<sup>42</sup> there is a limit up to which reflection can penetrate, and *so far* illuminate the night of our existence, although the horizon always remains dark. This limit is

---

<sup>42</sup> 'There is a limit up to which one can go, even if one cannot go beyond it.' Payne.

reached by my doctrine of the will-to-live that affirms or denies itself in its own phenomenon. To want to go beyond this is, in my view, like wanting to fly beyond the atmosphere. We must stop here, although new problems arise from those that are solved.

(WWR2, Ch. XLVII, Payne, 1969, p. 602)

Where Hume is content to accept that there is no detectable first principle from which moral behaviour can be derived, Schopenhauer thinks he has found the source from which compassion springs, but, as he concedes, this 'discovery' raises more questions than it 'solves'.

A distillation of Schopenhauer's view of sympathy *in contrast* to Hume comes in the following dense quote from Schopenhauer himself:

*sympathy* is to be defined as the empirical appearance of the will's metaphysical identity, through the physical multiplicity of its phenomena.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 591-2)

Or, to offer a clearer interpretation: sympathy originates in the noumenal world and manifests itself in the world of phenomena; the phenomenal world is one of plurality and if it were not then egoism would be impossible since there would be no 'I' and 'you'. This is at odds with Hume's definition of sympathy which is that it is a naturally occurring and obvious disposition the appearance of which gives us pleasure.

### ***2.3 Reason, Mysticism and Indian Philosophy***

#### ***Reason***

Hume's arguments for objecting to reason-based morality (which, unlike Schopenhauer's, are not direct criticisms of Kant for obvious reasons of chronology) can be briefly summarised as follows: there are natural inclinations such as feelings of sympathy and there are social conventions which are learnable and which change through time. Our particular notion of morality is informed by these two influences and reason plays no part in this framework:

the course of the argument leads us to conclude that since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them.

(Hume, in Aitken, 1972, p. 43)

Hume also says 'Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.' (Hume in MacIntyre (ed.) 1965, p. 185.). Or, even more succinctly 'Morality...is more properly felt than judged of...' (Hume, in Aitken, 1972, p. 43).

Schopenhauer's position here is, I believe, ambiguous. Firstly, in agreement with Hume, he is critical of the idea of reason *alone* as the arbiter of morality; that is an

*abstract* form of *reason-as-such* in Schopenhauer's case. Secondly he agrees with Hume that reason is a slave of the passions and lastly he introduces mysticism and Indian philosophy to the discussion of morality, claiming that the mystical and the True are contained in both Brahmanism and Buddhism – views which have nothing at all in common with Hume.

Schopenhauer uses alternative terminology to Hume but basically expresses the same view that reason is the slave of the passions when he tells us that 'Reason, like the cognitive faculty in general, is something conditioned by the organism...' (OBM §6, Payne, 1995, p. 64), and that the will *directs* reason rather than the other way round 'the *intellect*...[is]...*in the service of the will*...' (PP2, §1, Payne, 1974, p. 4) and 'the intellect...is originally destined to serve the *will* alone...' (*Ibid.*, p. 9) or, putting the same thing another way 'knowledge is serviceable to the aims of the will, and in this way *reflects* the will...[my italics]' (WWR2, XLVII, Payne, 1969, p. 610), or in more detail but expressing the same idea:

the *outwardly* directed intellect, as mere organon for the purposes of the *will* and consequently something merely secondary, is nevertheless only a *part* of our entire human nature. It belongs to the *phenomenon* and its knowledge merely corresponds thereto, since it exists solely for the purpose of the phenomenon.

(PP2, §1, Payne, 1974, p. 11)

### ***Mysticism and Indian Philosophy***

Although Schopenhauer accepts Hume's line that reason is a slave of the passions he is left with only a part-Humean account. He wants to go on and explain, as much as he feels able, how morality comes to be and this takes him to mysticism and Indian philosophy. I shall say more on this later, but for now I would like to provide a very brief overview of Schopenhauer and mysticism. On this subject Schopenhauer says:

The readers of my *Ethics* know that with me the foundation of morality rests ultimately on the truth that has its expression in the *Veda* and *Vedanta* in the established mystical formula *tat tvam asi* (This art thou) which is stated with reference to every living thing, whether man or animal, and is then called the *Mahavakya* or Great World.

In fact, we can regard the actions that occur in accordance with it, for example those of benevolence, as the beginning of mysticism. Every good or kind action that is done with a pure and genuine intention proclaims that, whoever practises it, stands forth in absolute contradiction to the world of phenomena in which other individuals exist entirely separate from himself, and that he recognizes himself as being identical with them.

(*Ibid.*, §115, p. 219)

What Schopenhauer ends up with is something which he accepts cannot entirely satisfy us: 'The ultimate basis on which all our knowledge and science rests is the inexplicable.' (*Ibid.*, §1, p. 3) or, expanding on this:

[the intellect]...is a mere superficial force, clinging to the surface of things, and grasping mere *species transitivae*, not their true being. The result is that we cannot understand and grasp a single thing, even the simplest and smallest, through and through, but in everything there is something left over that remains entirely inexplicable to us.

(*Ibid.*, p. 3)

I do not believe this is as strange as it may seem since the subject matter – unknowable noumenal Will manifested as knowable phenomenal representations – is part observable and part metaphysical. Schopenhauer may simply be constrained by what is available to the limited human mind in the same way that the realm of the *samsāric* world is all you can explain to another in the same realm and neither of you can explain what it is to live in an animal realm or to experience *nirvāṇa even if you have done so*.<sup>43</sup> Schopenhauer has a similar problem and a superficial reading may give the impression that he is confused whereas a more detailed reading should give the impression that he *cannot help* but seem that way. Schopenhauer is well aware of this problem:

In all the centuries, poor truth has had to blush at being paradoxical; and yet it is not her fault...I too am well aware of the paradox which this metaphysical explanation of the primary ethical phenomenon must have for western scholars, accustomed as they are to ethical foundations of quite a different kind; yet I cannot do violence to truth.

(OBM §22, Payne, 1995, p. 213)

He returns again to Indian philosophy and says:

On the contrary all I can bring myself to do in this circumstance is to show by quotation how that metaphysics of ethics was the fundamental view of Indian wisdom already thousands of years ago.

(*Ibid.*)

And, having established that our explanations of the foundations of ethics cannot be without flaws, Schopenhauer returns to the mystical and to Indian philosophy:

Now it is precisely here that the mystic proceeds positively, and therefore, from this point, nothing is left but mysticism. Anyone, however, who desires this kind of supplement to the negative knowledge to which alone philosophy can guide him, will find it in its most beautiful and richest form in the *Oupnekhat* [Schopenhauer's version of the *Upaniṣads*].

(WWR2, Ch. XVII, Payne, 1969, p. 612)

We can see how Schopenhauer's thought developed then diverged significantly from points of agreement with Hume until it could in no way be regarded as Humean despite having the common thread of compassion running throughout.

---

<sup>43</sup> In a Western example, the prisoner from Plato's cave is incapable of explaining what he experienced outside to the remaining prisoners when he returns (*Republic* 514a – 518b). In fact when Socrates is directly asked by Glaucon to explain the Good, which exists beyond the world of change and delusion, he cannot do so except by analogy (*Republic* 506d-e; beginning of Book VI in older translations).

This is an admittedly brief sketch of Hume and Schopenhauer on virtue and vice but it is enough to expose the point of departure for Schopenhauer who insists that there *is* a root source of compassion which transcends not only the individual, the society and fashions of character, but also the entire phenomenal realm altogether and is to be found in the noumenal oneness of the world as Will. This is very unlike Hume's account of sympathy.

## Chapter 3: Contemporary Criticisms of Schopenhauer's Ethics

What I intend to do now is to examine some contemporary criticisms of Schopenhauer's ethics and to offer a defence against them which, I will argue, ties Schopenhauer to Buddhist explanations of ethics and the underlying metaphysical (supposed) validation for such ethics. The main criticisms against Schopenhauer, as I see them, are twofold: firstly that what he says leads to confusion as to whether or not the noumenal is knowable and, secondly, that Schopenhauer's form of compassion is nothing but a form of metaphysical egoism.<sup>44</sup> This latter criticism, I believe, rests on a mistake and I shall address that towards the end of this chapter, but the former point has many implications for the stability and credibility of Schopenhauer's system. The implications, as I see them, are as follows: if the Will is *unknowable* then why (and how) does Schopenhauer make claims for it? If it is *knowable* then in what way is it distinct from the phenomenal world? If it is *indistinct* from the phenomenal world then this is a massive contradiction to his whole system which relies on this distinction. If it is *distinct* from the phenomenal world and we can know nothing about it then Schopenhauer cannot make any claims about it, including the claim that the noumenal world is one from which compassions springs; this is a claim he *does* make. This undoes the main justification Schopenhauer has for saying that we ought to act compassionately. My defence of Schopenhauer tackles these joint criticisms, the most serious of these being by Julian Young.

### 3.1 The Knowability of the Will

In order to unravel the first point above, I will briefly explain why Schopenhauer has been criticised for creating confusion with regard to the knowability of the Will. The confusion comes about since there are two positions as to whether the Will is knowable or not. In what follows it is important to note the distinction I make between Will and will. As I see it, 'Will' for Schopenhauer is the undifferentiated noumenon: the *thing-in-itself*, whereas 'will' refers to *manifestations* of Will in the phenomenal entity, object or world.<sup>45</sup> The argument can be summarized as follows: firstly Schopenhauer *seems* to say that the Will is knowable when he claims that it is a blind, purposeless and malevolent force: 'The [W]ill, considered purely in itself, is devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind, irresistible urge...' (WWR1 § 54, Payne, 1969, p. 275).

And:

absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the [W]ill in itself, which is an endless striving...although a final goal for it is obviously impossible.

(*Ibid.*, §29, p. 164)

---

<sup>44</sup> 'Metaphysical egoist' is Julian Young's phrase, (Young, 2005, p. 183).

<sup>45</sup> Schopenhauer believes there is as much will in a stone as there is in a human being; the difference is that a human being *perceives* will whereas, to the best of our knowledge, stones do not: 'Spinoza says that if a stone projected through the air had consciousness, it would imagine it was flying of its own will. I add merely that the stone would be right.' (WWR1 §25, Payne, 1969, p. 126.)

And:

The [W]ill as the thing-in-itself, constitutes the inner, true, and indestructible nature of man; yet in itself it is without consciousness.  
(WWR2, Ch. XIX, Payne, 1969, p. 201)

He also suggests a knowability of the Will/noumenon/thing-in-itself which is in some way discoverable through aesthetic contemplation: when a person is abstracted from 'self' and no longer sees a distinction between subject and object. We see a *glimpse* of this world as it is and are released from our blinkered human-centric viewpoint even if for a fleeting moment, where the world appears as an undifferentiated whole, where there is no distinction between the entity doing the thinking and the things being thought about, where we are taken out of and beyond ourselves, obliterating the distinction between subject and object and conveying something of the noumenal to us:

the transition from the common knowledge of particular things to knowledge of the Idea takes place suddenly, since knowledge tears itself free from the service of the will precisely by the subject's ceasing to be merely individual, and being now a pure will-less subject of knowledge...we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein, and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether it be a landscape, a tree, a rock, a crag, a building, or anything else. We *lose* ourselves entirely in this object...we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object...and thus we are no longer able to separate the perceiver from the perception, but the two have become one...

(WWR1 §34, Payne, 1974, pp. 178-9)

Prominent scholars and commentators who see this strand of thought in Schopenhauer as evidence that he believes the Will *is knowable* include Frederick Copleston, Patrick Gardiner, David W. Hamlyn and Christopher Janaway.

Secondly there is the claim by other scholars and commentators that the noumenal is *not* knowable, such as John E. Atwell, Julian Young and Bryan Magee amongst others.<sup>46</sup> Magee makes, I think, the strongest case for this in *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* where he says that:

[Several]... passages rule out any interpretation of Schopenhauer to the effect that he taught that we have direct knowledge of the noumenon. He says over and over again that we do not, and I do not see how he could have been more explicit on the point..

(Magee, 1997, p. 447)

---

<sup>46</sup> See Janaway, (1998), pp. 258-65; Copleston, (1946), pp. 63-69; Gardiner, (1980), pp. 92-94; and Janaway, (1989), pp. 192-93. Those on the latter side of the debate include: Simmel, (1986), pp.33-34; Hübscher, (1989), pp. 382-85; Magee, (1983), pp. 141-45, and 1990; Atwell, (1995), pp. 120-28; Neeley, (1996): 85-112; Young, (1987), pp. 27-35. Also see Cartwright (2001), p. 50 and n.2 and 3.

And:

The will is in us only because it is in everything. It *constitutes* us as it constitutes everything. But it is not directly accessible to our knowledge.

(*Ibid.*, p. 447)

One scholar who has recently attempted a synthesis of the opposing views is David Cartwright (2001, pp. 31-54) who points out the main areas of Schopenhauer's writings where he (Schopenhauer) seems to give ammunition to each side. (Also see Ch. 2 'Text and Counter-text'.) There is no need to give any more than a summary of the argument as above but my point in raising it is twofold: firstly to point out that my uses of some Schopenhauerian terminology – specifically noumenon/noumenal, Will/will and *thing-in-itself* are debateable; and secondly because it has implications for my interpretation of Schopenhauerian compassion: to understand the undifferentiatedness of Schopenhauerian Will is to understand compassion and to have the possibility of 'salvation' from a world which Schopenhauer sees as wretched. If the Will is *unknowable* then this has implications for compassion and compassion is central to this work.

Both sides of the debate quote Schopenhauer directly to validate their claims and this leaves us with either a straight contradiction in Schopenhauer or a more straightforward answer. I believe the answer lies in Schopenhauer's restrictions on exactly who is *capable* of losing themselves in the aesthetic or transcending the self. My contention is that Schopenhauer would take it that 'normal' people can know the 'will' but not the 'Will' – remembering that 'Will' is noumenal and 'will' constitutes its phenomenal mirror images.<sup>47</sup> That means they can know only as much of the 'Will' as is manifest in the phenomenal world – the world of 'will'.<sup>48</sup> A very special entity (Schopenhauer calls this person a saint) can know something of the 'Will':

such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature has at last completely conquered, is then left only as pure knowing being, as the unclouded mirror of the world. Nothing can alarm or distress him any more; nothing can any longer move him; for he has cut all the thousand threads of willing which hold us bound to the world...

(WWR1 §68, Payne, 1969, p. 390)

This 'saint', however, cannot communicate what they have experienced to the rest of us:

the actual, positive solution to the riddle of the world must be something that the human intellect is wholly incapable of grasping and conceiving; so that if a being of a higher order came and took all the trouble to impart it to us, we should be quite unable to understand any part of his disclosures.

(WWR2, Ch. XVII, Payne, 1969, p. 185)

---

<sup>47</sup> This unusual grammar is quite deliberate since the 'Will' is singular but 'will' exists in multiple forms in the phenomenal world like leaves from a single stem. They are different and not different to the stem at the same time.

<sup>48</sup> This is the world as *Representation* as in the title of his main work: the 'will' is a *representation* of the 'Will'.

Anyone who claims to know the ‘Will’ or *thing-in-itself* in any greater detail is dismissed as a fraudster:

Accordingly, those who profess to know the ultimate, i.e., the first grounds of things, thus a primordial being, an Absolute, or whatever else they choose to call it...are playing the fool, are vain boasters, if indeed they are not charlatans.

(*Ibid.*)

Those of us who are not saints or enlightened people – i.e. the vast majority of us - cannot know the ‘Will’ unless we have the ability to transcend everyday life through contemplative activity.<sup>49</sup> Therefore it is correct for Janaway *et al* to claim the noumenal is knowable (since it is for special enlightened people) and it is right for Magee *et al* to say that it is unknowable (since it is unknowable for the rest of us).<sup>50</sup> To state this simply: we can all know the ‘will’ but only the enlightened can know something of the ‘Will’ but we must suspect that even they cannot know it completely nor be able to communicate it to the rest of us. It must be remembered that Schopenhauer only speaks of two worlds (noumenon and phenomenon; thing-in-itself and representation) by way of explanation. There is really only *one* world which is perceived in different ways depending on your level of metaphysical understanding or compassion. This one world *is* us yet what we do not understand of it *seems* to be (and might as well be) another world when in fact the two are one. A parallel in Buddhism is between the six realms of *saṃsāra* and another is in *saṃsāra/nirvana*.

In my view there is a misunderstanding of Will/will and that is why I have some sympathy with Cartwright’s attempt to reconcile the debate; there is a problem in even talking about the things we are talking about as Schopenhauer was aware and this concurs to some considerable extent with Indian Mādhyamaka which I will examine later.

We are left with two problems: firstly what part does aesthetic contemplation play – do you have to be a saint to contemplate? If not then the saint is no more special than the contemplative person or is there a barrier to aesthetic contemplation for the normal people? Secondly how can anyone know something of the ‘Will’ which is noumenal when they themselves are phenomenal?

The first problem is best explained by looking at what Schopenhauer says about aesthetic contemplation and some kind of redemption or salvation through it:

when we enter the state of pure contemplation, we are raised for the moment above all willing, above all desires and cares; we are, so to speak, rid of ourselves. We are no longer the individual that knows in the interest of its constant willing, the correlative of the particular thing to which objects become motives, but the eternal subject of knowing purified of the will, the correlative of the idea. And we know that these moments, when, delivered from the fierce pressure of the

---

<sup>49</sup> This point is debated too.

<sup>50</sup> Magee argues we cannot know the ‘Will’ *directly* which is not the same as saying we cannot know the ‘Will’ *at all*.

will, we emerge, as it were, from the heavy atmosphere of the earth, are the most blissful that we experience. From this we can infer how blessed must be the life of a man whose will is silenced not for a few moments, as in the enjoyment of the beautiful, but forever, indeed completely extinguished, except for the last glimmering spark that maintains the body and is extinguished with it. Such a man who, after many bitter struggles with his own nature, has at last completely conquered, is then left only as pure knowing being, as the undimmed mirror of the world.

(WWR1 §68, Payne, 1969, p. 390)

The second point, I would suggest, requires someone who is able to straddle both worlds much like the Bodhisattva straddles the worlds of Conventional and Ultimate Truth. Such a person, if they exist, would be unable to explain what they have encountered or experienced since what is beyond our understanding must remain ineffable.

The transcended state experienced during aesthetic contemplation is not to be confused with happiness; it is a state which is neither happy nor unhappy. Even the word ‘contentment’ will not do since the state cannot really be described except as a detachment from a describable positive or negative. Although this is difficult if not impossible to explain, Wilhelm Halbfass gives an elegant portrayal:

Schopenhauer’s invocation of Vedanta and Buddhism is most genuine and significant in connection with his doctrine of the negation of the will, which even his devoted follower J. Frauenstädt called the “Achilles heel” of the system...<sup>51</sup> More than other traditions the Indian tradition provides him with documents of an “immediate experience” (“unmittelbare Erfahrung”) of true resignation and “releasement” (“Gelassenheit”) to which he does not and cannot add any attempts of theoretical explanation...Those who understand its true and concrete meaning are the practitioners of detachment and self-liberation, i.e., the yogins and sannyāsins who forget the entire world “and themselves with it.” What remains in their state of awareness or being is the “primal essence” (“Urwesen”) itself.<sup>52</sup>

(Halbfass, 1988, pp. 119-120)

This will-less state is important for understanding Schopenhauerian salvation and the above debate regarding the possibility or not of apprehending the noumenon will affect the discussion of whether or not salvation is possible in Schopenhauer’s system. The view that in moments of contemplation some contact or even harmony with the noumenon is possible also creates the problem of how there can be peace with a negative and purely blind, destructive and insatiable force. Another view, that there can be no direct knowledge of the noumenal

---

<sup>51</sup> Halbfass refers us to *Metaphysik der Sitten*, (ed.) Spierling. München, 1985, 39 (introduction).

<sup>52</sup> Halbfass refers us to the following: Schopenhauer’s *Parerga und Paralipomena* §189 (Deussen V, Hübscher VI, 426f.). On ‘quietism’ in its connection with mysticism and asceticism, see also WWR2, Ch. 48 (Deussen II, pp. 702ff.; Hübscher III, pp. 704ff.)

whatsoever, would claim that detached contemplation cannot provide much of an insight into something ultimately unknowable.<sup>53</sup>

In answer to the point raised by the first view above, as to why we ought to connect with the noumenal Will since this Will is something negative and in its manifestation in us causes the sufferings of the world, Schopenhauer says that we are not actually trying to *be* that Will (although it is at the foundation of our essence) we are simply to be conscious of it. What you are effectively doing by having this knowledge of what the will-driven ego is up to is recognising the world for the dreadful thing that it is and your existence for the dreadful thing that *it* is. The point in transcending our ego-driven will is twofold: firstly it is to *temporarily* escape this supposedly wretched existence (WWR1, p. 390 and p. 411) and secondly it is to *permanently* escape it. The former is done through aesthetic contemplation and the latter is undertaken by a kind of saint who becomes an ascetic and turns his back on life entirely. Schopenhauer does not exactly provide a *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to guide us towards transcendence and it is doubtful that he really believed there would be many ‘saints’ produced from the multitudes of human beings anyway. This leads to what some scholars class as a pessimistic conclusion and what Schopenhauer, I am sure, would class as a *realistic* one.

### 3.2 *Metaphysical Egoism*

Returning to the second contemporary criticism of Schopenhauer – that his form of compassion is nothing but a metaphysical egoism - Christopher Janaway says that:

At first sight this idea [that we ought to be phenomenally compassionate to be in tune with our noumenal oneness] seems so extreme as to expunge the possibility of compassion altogether. If I really believed that you were not distinct from me, the attitude with which I regarded you could only be a strange kind of egoism. Genuine compassion, on the other hand, surely presupposes belief in distinctness as a minimum condition.<sup>[54]</sup> An even more graphic objection is that, if the world in itself is without individuation, it does not even contain *me*...it is hard to see how the belief in the illusoriness of all individuals, including the individual which I am, could support a compassionate attitude between the individual that I am and the individual beggar to whom I give money.

(Janaway, 1994, pp. 83-4)

Janaway then concedes that the situation might not be as easily dismissed as that if we consider the psychology of the motivation to be compassionate seen in the light of Schopenhauer’s ethical-metaphysical system:

---

<sup>53</sup> This is Bryan Magee’s view in *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. Magee admits that his argument is *ad hominem*, and although he is correct when he quotes many instances of where Schopenhauer *claims* that the noumenon cannot be known, there are other instances where Schopenhauer makes claims *about it* despite this: most obviously that it is undifferentiated, malevolent and destructive.

<sup>54</sup> This is relevant to the Williams debate below in Ch. 6, where a similar objection is raised against Śāntideva. I will explain this in more detail in that chapter.

But perhaps this is too simplistic a response. What Schopenhauer has recognized is the possibility of an attitude to the world which does not take one's existence as a particular individual to be of paramount significance: a 'universal standpoint' as opposed to a particular one [*The World as Will and Representation Volume II*, pp. 599-600]. In order to adopt this standpoint, one need not abandon the belief in separate individuals altogether. Compassion is supposed to motivate actions which one must carry out as an individual, towards other individuals. What might ground such actions is the idea that, though individuals are separate, there is nothing of any fundamental importance about the individual which I am. If the beggar and I are both equal portions of the same underlying reality, equal manifestations of the same will to life, then from the point of view of the world as a whole, it is a matter of indifference whether my ends are promoted and the beggar's thwarted, or vice versa. This thought seems genuinely capable of grounding a compassionate outlook. The belief that I simply am not an individual separate from the rest of reality is not what does the work here; rather it is that, though being an individual (and naturally egoistic) thing in the world, my perspective does not always have to be one of identification with the individual that I am. As in Schopenhauer's account of aesthetic experience, I need not accept the natural standpoint of individuality as the one from which I must always regard things.

(Janaway, 1994, p. 84)

One of the most interesting commentaries and criticisms of Schopenhauer's ethical-metaphysical system is by Julian Young who interprets Schopenhauer's argument as follows: there is no plurality without space and time since phenomena exist in space and time such as sentient beings which postulate themselves as subjects and whatever things they perceive as objects. If we do away with space and time (by, say, transcending or overcoming the world as Representation) there would be no plurality since there would be no beings which regarded themselves as subjects perceiving objects, therefore we are left with undifferentiatedness (the world as Will). Young is unconvinced that space and time are limited to this plural world we inhabit – he feels we may find them elsewhere too - secondly, even if Schopenhauer is right and the phenomenal world *is* mere representation, then there may be more than one way of 'making sense of plurality' (Young, 2005, p. 182) and claims 'numbers, for example, are a plurality but are not in space and time.' (*Ibid.*)

Thirdly, Young argues that if we give Schopenhauer the benefit of the doubt and accept that space and time are embodied as necessary parts of the framework of the world of phenomena 'and are the only way we can make sense of plurality' (*Ibid*) then it is still not evident that the *thing-in-itself*, the noumenon, is singular since 'that treats what is supposed to be beyond the realm of objects as itself an object.' (*Ibid.*) Fourthly, and finally, 'even if reality in itself were to be 'one' it doesn't follow that it is any kind of a *self*.'

I think Young is right about the last point here but the other three need closer inspection. The most obvious thing to say about the first point is that we will never know if we assume that the 'real' world is beyond the knowledge of the

ordinary human being. This means that the ‘real’ world – call it what you will: the noumenal, the realm of *thing-in-itself*, *nirvāṇa*, God, Brahma, or any scientific term – cannot really be spoken about if it is beyond our knowledge and is therefore always going to involve a certain amount of speculation. I do not accept that Young has managed to prove anything contrary to what Schopenhauer himself thought about the world as representation by claiming that we might find space and time outside the phenomenal world. If Young could *prove* that time and space exist outside the world of representation (and no-one could reasonably expect him to try) then he would have successfully pulverised Schopenhauer’s reasoning on this area of metaphysics which is crucial to his (Schopenhauer’s) ethics. But this would be quite a task since it would involve explaining at least part of the nature of something which is supposed to be beyond our knowledge.<sup>55</sup> If Young is right and space and time exist beyond our phenomenal world then there would be elements of the world beyond, which we could *apprehend* since we could exist there as subjects perceiving objects – a situation made possible by the existence of space and time. That raises the obvious point that Young’s *other* world which also contains space and time is in fact *the same as this world* as far as space and time coincide but has extra unfathomables tacked on. If this is the case then the elements of that world which are the same as the elements of the world as our representation are, or could be, one and the same and the extras are nothing but the noumenal world!<sup>56</sup> This argument leads us back to Schopenhauer’s position. What it does not do is prove anything about the nature of the noumenal world save that space and time *as we know them*<sup>57</sup> do not exist there. I also believe a Buddhist interpretation of the world as representation/phenomenal world – the world of Conventional Truth/Ultimate Truth in Buddhist terminology – would be completely at odds with Young’s idea that space and time might exist in a place beyond our knowledge. If we can *know* then they are not *beyond* our knowledge and what is beyond our knowledge is only available to those who have been able to transcend human knowledge. That is surely a requirement for knowing what it is not possible for humans to know. It can be objected that the resultant ‘person’ is no longer human. But this is not an objection to a Buddhist – it is a stark fact that the enlightened are beyond human and this was the case also for Schopenhauer, whose moral man was ‘saintly’ rather than normal.

Young’s second point – that even if Schopenhauer is right and the phenomenal world *is* mere representation, then numbers, since they are not in space and time but are plural, may give us another way of ‘making sense of plurality’ – is confusing rather than making any headway against Schopenhauer. It is confusing

---

<sup>55</sup> Whether or not Schopenhauer does this himself is open to interpretation and the answer rests on whether or not you accept he says we can have direct knowledge of the noumenon. Even if Schopenhauer *does* make this mistake, Young’s following him does not defeat Schopenhauer’s argument for the phenomenal world encompassing space and time – it simply means that Young is mistaken here and Schopenhauer elsewhere.

<sup>56</sup> Again a parallel in Buddhism is the six realms – the world is merely experienced in different ways depending on how you look at it. A hell being looks at it one way, an animal another and a human yet another.

<sup>57</sup> i.e. as three dimensions of space: length, breadth and depth, and one of linear time where an object *cannot* be in two spaces at the same time nor can two objects be in the same space at the same time otherwise it would make no sense in human reasoning and would be one and the same as the phenomenal world.

since it can be argued that the very concept of numbers requires the existence of space and time in order that they are perceived. Numbers at least require sequence and *that* requires time, true geometrical shapes (and even their two-dimensional representations on paper) require space.<sup>58</sup> That at least puts numbers into the realm of the knowable whether or not their reliance on space and time validates Young's argument, which *at least* makes them different from the unknowable world beyond the phenomenal. We *do* know numbers and *can* replicate relations between them by means of calculations. This *cannot* be the same thing as the unknowable, which is *just that: unknowable*.

Young's third point – that it is not evident that the thing in itself is singular – appears glued to human reasoning of the phenomenal world; what else is available to us? However this reasoning is missing a step: just because something is not plural it does not mean it is singular. Our reasoning tells us it is either one or the other, but it could quite simply be that it is unexplainably 'whole'. Although this initially seems counter-intuitive, this way of thinking has been in existence from at least Plato's time. Plato questions the idea of opposites as absolutes and tells us in *The Symposium* that just because *Eros* is neither good nor beautiful it does not mean she is bad and ugly. He also questions, through Socrates, whether it makes sense to say that one plus one equals two:

I will not even allow myself to say that where one is added to one, either the one to which it is added or the one that is added becomes two, or that the one added and the one to which it is added become two because of the addition of the one to the other. I wonder that, when each of them is separate from the other, each of them is one, but when they are come near to one another, this is the cause of their becoming two, the coming together. Nor can I any longer be persuaded that when one thing is divided, this division is the cause of its becoming two, for just now the cause of becoming two was the opposite. At that time it was their joining, and one was added to the other, but now it is because they are separated from each other.

(*Phaedo*: 96e-97b, Plato and Grube (tr.), 1977, pp. 47-8)

I think Socrates is quite justified in questioning this since any sense made of things in the phenomenal realm (the place our knowledge is limited to) does not necessarily translate beyond it. That means there is not much we can say about the mathematics of the world beyond the knowable since it involves, as I have already said, nothing but speculation.<sup>59</sup>

As I have mentioned above, Young is right, in my view, in saying that it is difficult to see how this supposedly 'singular' noumenon is in any way a 'self'. I do not believe, however that Schopenhauer says or means this. Young says:

---

<sup>58</sup> It would be too much of a tangent to take this further but I generally agree with Magee (1997, p. 480) on this.

<sup>59</sup> Socrates continues in the same vein in a very interesting quote not least because of his questioning of the basic 'rules' of arithmetic but also his postulation (borrowed, as he says, from Anaxagoras) of the world existing as Mind: 'I do not any longer persuade myself that I know why a unit or anything else comes to be, or perishes or exists by the old method of investigation, and I do not accept it...it is Mind that directs and is the cause of everything.' *Phaedo*, 97b-c, Plato and Grube, 1977, p. 48.

Though most commentators have accepted [Schopenhauer's claim about the] ...'blindness' of the will without demur, it seems to me important to take note of the fact that it is, fairly clearly, a mistake. For at least two reasons. First Schopenhauer treats it as a suitable object of moral evaluation and condemnation which a blind, 'knowledge-less' being could not possibly be. And second, at least in the central passages we have been examining, the world-will is very clearly a *designer* of things, a being equipped with the full range of the human faculties, with reason as well as will.

(Young, 2005, p. 83)

As we have seen (above p. 46), Schopenhauer does make claims for the Will such as that it is 'devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind, irresistible urge...' (WWR1 §54, Payne, 1969, p. 275) which is the 'absence of all aim, of all limits...' (WWR1 §29, Payne, 1969, p. 164) and, most importantly *contra* Young: 'The [W]ill as the thing-in-itself, constitutes the inner, true, and indestructible nature of man; *yet in itself it is without consciousness* [my italics].' (WWR2, Ch. XIX, Payne, 1969, p. 201.)

It does not have reason and it does not design anything – this is why Schopenhauer rejected the word 'Force' since he thought it had some sort of direction which he explicitly denies the Will has. I do not see that Schopenhauer is claiming the noumenon is either a self or singular or both. I take it that it is *not* a self and has *no* consciousness and that although it is not plural, this does not mean it is singular for reasons I have given above (p. 52). I believe the majority of commentators with whom Young disputes are right on this particular issue.

Schopenhauer also believes that although he has spent most of his time explaining his metaphysical doctrine, the important thing he wants to impart concerns *ethics* and that everything he has said so far has been a preamble for this:

The last part of our discussion [book four The World as Will and Representation I] proclaims itself as the most serious, for it concerns the actions of men, the subject of direct interest to everyone, and one which can be foreign or indifferent to none. In my opinion...all philosophy is always theoretical, since it is essential to it always to maintain a purely contemplative attitude...to enquire, not to prescribe. But to become practical, to guide conduct, to transform character, are old claims which with mature insight it ought finally to abandon.

(WWR1 §53, Payne, 1969, p. 271)

What he proposes in this final section is that we embrace compassion and attempt transcendence of the 'will': both of which he takes to be things which *alleviate* the supposed misery and suffering of existence. This might seem to be more commonsensical than philosophical just as the Parable of the Arrow is in Buddhism. (See the *Cūlamālunkya Sutta* in MN 63.)

This does not let Schopenhauer off the hook though in that he *does* make metaphysical claims which have been regarded as unsubstantiated or problematic by many scholars of his work. Schopenhauer seems to be aware of the problem to a certain extent and tells us that at the end of the day no-one can really answer

these issues philosophically and that the closest person to an understanding is the mystic. In the last book of WWR1 he attempts to complete the circle he started when he asserted that suffering is a precondition for living, that it is caused by ego-driven desires and by an acceptance of the phenomenal world as real (when it is a *representation*, a *Vorstellung*) and that the overcoming of desires through negation of self and adoption of compassion (which complement one another – the less you are a self the less selfish you are and the more you cultivate compassion the less you can have an idea of a strictly independent self) and that this saintly self-overcoming brings the circle of thought to a close. This cannot be regarded as a complete circle since large parts of it (the metaphysical) have to be left unproven.

This is definitely a problem for Schopenhauer but he did not cause it – he *discovered* it. It will be a problem for *any* moral theories of any hue if we assume that they must postulate a self and others in the first place. No philosopher's account of self hitherto has proven ultimately tenable.

The relationship between ethics and its metaphysical justification in Schopenhauer sees us pressing up against the window to the noumenon where we cannot describe what we see inside. We are not in the 'room' we can see and therefore do not have direct experience of it, yet it would be invalid to say there is *no* experience of it possible.

## Chapter 4: Compassion in Buddhist Ethics

### *Introduction*

In this chapter I intend to cover three main areas: (1) to give a brief account of the debate surrounding the nature of Buddhist ethics, (2) to explain the place of compassion in Buddhist ethics and (3) to examine special problems with Buddhist ethics.

Before we can begin to examine these areas it may be helpful to give a brief outline of Buddhist ethics. In doing so it is important to ground that outline in one of the fundamental teachings (perhaps *the* fundamental teaching) which is at the root of all schools of Buddhism: that of the Four Noble Truths (*catvāri āryasatyāni*). The Four Noble Truths are concerned primarily in dealing with the idea of *duḥkha* which has commonly been translated as ‘suffering’ but might be better characterised as ‘unsatisfactoriness’, ‘frustration’ or ‘not to get what one wants’ (see Harvey, 2000, p. 31 and Schmidt-Leukel, 2006b, p. 32) and I will leave it untranslated from here on. The first truth concerns the existence and nature of *duḥkha* which permeates many aspects of life such as birth, aging, illness and death, the second truth explains the origin of *duḥkha*, which is a kind of craving or thirst (*trṣṇā*), the third truth claims that there is a way to end *duḥkha* and the fourth and final truth points to the Noble Eightfold Path as the means to that end.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of (1) right view, (2) right intention, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness and (8) right concentration and these eight features have traditionally been divided into three concomitant sections. The first section concerns Wisdom (*prajñā*) and it contains (1) right view and (2) right intention; the second section concerns Morality (*śīla*) and contains (3) right speech, (4) right action and (5) right livelihood and the final section concerns Meditation (*samādhi*) and contains (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness and (8) right concentration. The path as a whole leads not only to the cessation of *duḥkha* but to wisdom and moral perfection through the eradication of the ‘defilements’ (*kleśa*), which are greed, hatred and delusion. Correctly following the Path leads to salvation or liberation from *duḥkha* ultimately through *not* being reborn.

In traditional Indian Buddhism the relationship of ethics (*śīla*) to elements of the Noble Eightfold Path can be seen when looking, firstly, at right intention. Right intention connects wisdom (*prajñā*) with the moral principle since *acts* stem from intention, or thought, and the right kind of act can only be committed with the right thoughts or intentions behind it. This means that right intention is connected to wisdom *and* morality. Next on the path are right speech, right deeds and right livelihood which are connected to morality in the narrower sense since speech and deeds come from intention and livelihood also involves deeds. Next comes right effort, which has a moral dimension in that it takes the right kind of effort to cultivate what is good and get rid of what is evil. Gaining the right attitude which leads to right effort comes through meditation, which requires right concentration.

So ethics appears in Buddhism firstly as part of the Noble Eightfold Path and is part and parcel of the Buddhist path to salvation and, secondly, ethical issues are

addressed in classical Buddhism as part of the *karma* doctrine since the ten tracts of *karma*<sup>60</sup> in classical Buddhism cover thought, word and deed and will be explained in more detail later. These, then, are the two major realms we encounter in classical Buddhism in which we can locate ethics. One further component which is central to my enquiry is the role of *compassion* in ethics, especially in its soteriological context.

#### ***4.1. A Discussion of the Nature of Buddhist Ethics***

There has been disagreement amongst scholars regarding the relationship between Buddhist ethics and soteriology, with the basic issue at heart being what Buddhism has to say about *karma* and whether or not it is related to the Buddhist understanding of the mechanism that leads to salvation. There are scholars who believe that the teaching of *karma* has nothing to do with the path of salvation and on the basis of their studies of Burmese Theravāda Buddhism, King (1964) and Spiro (1970) have adopted this view whereas other scholars (such as Aronson, 1980, Katz, 1982, Dharmasiri, 1989, Keown, 1992 and Harvey, 2000) do not accept it. King and Spiro have concluded that there are basically two forms of Buddhism, *nibbanic* and *kammatic* - the former aiming at ultimate salvation in *nibbana* (Skt. *nirvāṇa*) and the other at improving one's *kamma* (Skt. *karma*) to achieve a better rebirth. If these two are unconnected, as King and Spiro claim, then the implications for ethics are that for the lay person, who strives for a better rebirth, it involves practical morally good deeds while, according to their claims, the monastics are only concerned with abstaining from negative deeds and not necessarily performing good ones because that would create good *karma* which would not lead to their goal (being *karmaless* and therefore not reborn).

In opposition to this interpretation is the view that the Buddhist understanding of *karma* has a precise connection to the understanding of the path of salvation and the major reason for this is that the roots of all evil (greed, hatred and delusion) are responsible for the production of negative *karma* and getting rid of these roots is also essential for achieving salvation. That is, in a sense, the connecting link and therefore every improvement of your *karma* involves at least a softening or reduction of greed, hatred and delusion and therefore by implication improving your *karmic* tendencies gets you nearer to the goal of salvation even if that might not be intended. Therefore, of course, a Buddhist monk or nun is always expected to do positive good as did the Buddha himself.

King's and Spiro's challenge is important because of the question 'what is the place of ethics in Buddhism at all?' One way of answering this question is to look at the causes of immoral behaviour, and in Buddhism immoral behaviour occurs as a result of the influence of greed, hatred and delusion (the defilements) which are manifestations of attachment. Attachment itself (according to the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda*, or Dependent Origination), has its root in *trṣṇā* (which the Four Noble Truths identify as the cause of *duḥkha*) and more needs to be said about the nature of *trṣṇā* in order to clarify the relationship to attachment, the defilements and non-moral behaviour.

---

<sup>60</sup> There is a list of ten karmically wholesome actions in thought, word and deed and a list of ten karmically *unwholesome* or negative actions in thought, word and deed. (See Harvey, 2000, p. 48.)

*Trṣṇā* (P. *taṇhā*), as we have seen, has been translated as ‘thirst’, ‘craving’ or ‘desire’, and with this understanding it has been taken that desires are to be extinguished completely in order to be free from this thirst which causes *duḥkha*. A problem which might result from this is that if we have absolutely no desire then we have no desire for *nirvāṇa* and no desire to be morally good. If one accepts this scenario then it seems that the Buddhist path involves a paradox and the enlightened cannot exhibit moral behaviour.<sup>61</sup> Schmidt-Leukel (2006b) argues that the problem can be solved if we look more closely at the meaning of *trṣṇā* which, he explains, might be better described as a longing or striving for something in a *misguided* way rather than longing or striving *per se*. Striving is of two kinds: the noble and the ignoble where the former is a striving for *nirvāṇa* and the latter is a striving for the things of this world (see Schmidt-Leukel, 2006b, pp. 33-6):

Bhikkhus, there are these two kinds of search: the noble search and the ignoble search. And what is the ignoble search? Here someone...seeks what is...subject to birth...ageing...sickness...[and]...death...And what is the noble search? Here someone...seeks the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbāna...

(MN 26: 5-12; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 2001, pp. 254-6, cf. Schmidt-Leukel, 2006b, p. 33)

*Trṣṇā* might be better interpreted as the *ignoble* striving for worldly things which, we mistakenly assume, will give us lasting satisfaction but they never do. In this sense *trṣṇā* is a misguided striving which lies at the root of *duḥkha* and involves a form of delusion (one of the three defilements) which leads to attachment. Attachment can be interpreted as grasping or holding fast to whatever we deludedly expect can give us lasting satisfaction but it does not involve attachment to *nirvāṇa* itself. Later, according to Mahāyāna Buddhism, our *concept* of *nirvāṇa* can be an object of possession and grasping and in order to achieve *true nirvāṇa* we should also get rid of our *conceptual* objects of grasping as well as material ones, however, this view is not found in Theravāda Buddhism. From this perspective greed and hatred are just modalities of attachment where greed is a deluded attitude to pleasurable things and hatred is a deluded attitude to unpleasurable things. No-one is attached to greed, hatred or delusion but attachment *materialises* itself as greed, hatred and delusion which are of course relevant in a moral sense since unwholesome or negative moral actions can spring from them.

If we uproot the defilements then this removes the causes of non-moral behaviour. However, this is not easy to achieve since we are driven to attachment by craving or thirst (*trṣṇā*) – this proclivity is explained as the Second Noble Truth. The Third Noble Truth informs us that we can get rid of *trṣṇā* and the Fourth Noble Truth points us toward the Noble Eightfold Path where we might find a means of achieving this and eroding the defilements altogether. (See SN 56:11.) The person who achieves this, the enlightened person, will be a morally *perfectly* person – not

---

<sup>61</sup> This precise objection is raised in the Pāli Canon itself (SN 5:51:15) and this latter view was shared by King and Spiro.

someone who has left morality behind and is beyond good and evil,<sup>62</sup> but someone who has become good by nature. *Not* someone behaving morally because s/he is, say, following some dictum which may be productive of the best consequences or is obedient to what some take to be a moral law; the moral Buddhist is behaving morally because the root of evil has been eradicated. Ethics is therefore entirely integrated in the Buddhist path of salvation. Any notion that monks and nuns were *beyond* morality would mean that ethics is *not* integral to the Buddhist path of salvation nor to a perfect(ed) existence.

Probably the most contentious part of King's and Spiro's account is that the so-called *nibbanic/kammatic* distinction guides the ethical behaviour of monks and the laity, with the former immersed in an exclusive journey of self-liberation while the latter, 'kammatic Buddhists' adhere to prescribed behaviour in an attempt to gain the improved rebirth they supposedly seek. This view rests largely on confusion with regard to the Eightfold Path and the understanding of *progress* through the path. This can be illustrated by reference to the three structuring principles of the Eightfold Path which, as we have seen, divides it into: (1) Insight/Wisdom (*prajñā*) which consists of the two elements: right view and right intention;<sup>63</sup> (2) Morality/Ethics (*śīla*) which consists of the three elements: right speech, right livelihood and right action, and (3) Meditation/Concentration (*samādhi*) which consists of the three elements: right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The second path member (right intention, or thought) links Wisdom with Morality<sup>64</sup> and the sixth path member (right effort) links Morality with Meditation.<sup>65</sup>

The three areas of the path, known as the Threefold Training, are inseparably linked in that the first two are concerned with good action (*karma*) - mentally as well as in deeds - which allows the conditions to arise whereby a correct understanding of reality (3) *Wisdom* can be achieved. Stages (1) and (2) should not be seen as passing an examination and leaving one level behind before going on to another - what is in the first stage is ongoing and is *still* needed for (2) as both (1) and (2) are for (3). The distinction between *nibbanic* and *kammatic* Buddhism rests partly on dividing the Eightfold Path into one level for those who seek a better rebirth (lay Buddhists) and another for those who seek complete escape from rebirth (monks and advanced practitioners).

#### **4.1.1 The Role of Buddhist Ethics in Relation to the Path of Liberation**

In a sense King and Spiro presented us with a compartmentalised way of looking at Buddhist soteriology which misses the overall picture and its holistic nature where it is not possible to isolate anything from the realisation of the Four Noble

---

<sup>62</sup> Keown, for example, specifically rejects the claim that a state of *nirvāṇa* necessitates or results in leaving ethics behind, as argued especially by Spiro and King and in countering this argument examines the Raft Parable which has been taken by many commentators to support the claim that not only ethics but much else which has been gathered on the path to *nirvāṇa* can be discarded once the 'other side' has been reached. (See Keown, 1992, pp. 92-6.)

<sup>63</sup> Wisdom also encompasses 'enlightenment' and 'liberation'. The Noble Eightfold Path starts with wisdom (right view) and since the whole path leads to enlightenment and liberation, we can say that it ends with it as well. So liberation and enlightenment are sometimes enumerated as path members 9 and 10.

<sup>64</sup> Since 'thought' is the first of the three karmic activities: thought, word and deed.

<sup>65</sup> Morality requires effort as does meditating.

Truths or the Eightfold Path. The *brahma-vihāras* (divine dwellings/abidings)<sup>66</sup> are also treated in a compartmentalised way by King and Spiro and are dissected leaving the constituent parts discordant. The *brahma-vihāras* are four mental states which can be developed in meditational practice, and in early Buddhism they could be interpreted quite widely as a subject of meditative exercise where the four form a unity.<sup>67</sup> These are the kinds of mental qualities that a Buddha displays and therefore one who strives for enlightenment should aim at developing and strengthening these mental qualities. Under meditative training you can *train* your moral motivation and in this respect meditation is connected to morality. This idea that you can educate and train yourself to morality can also be found in Ancient Greek philosophy but is a much more remote concept in the West nowadays.

King and Spiro, in my view, both place too much emphasis on identifying what I suspect they see as the most ‘useful’ parts of Buddhist teachings if the aim is to reach *nirvāṇa*, leaving the rest somewhat downgraded – with the implication, of course, that this ‘residue’ is followed by self-seeking lay Buddhists. The idea that those in search of *nirvāṇa* are fundamentally *distinct* from those seeking simply a better rebirth and that they aim *as an ethical goal* to be emotionless and detached from others is not borne out by examination of even the general activities of Theravādin monastics, the activities of the Buddha (as Aronson has pointed out, 1980, pp. 3-7, 14, 71-3) and would make no sense when it is recalled that the motivation for the monastic and part of her/his training requires compassion for other sentient beings. They may be initially motivated to attain *self*-enlightenment but part of the paradox of this in Buddhism is that enlightenment requires the wisdom to know that there is ultimately no self to *be* enlightened. In Theravāda Buddhism, striving for your own enlightenment is not regarded as selfish or egotistical – indeed it is your main priority – however in Mahāyāna Buddhism the monk, even though they may have been *initially* motivated by a wish for self-enlightenment, understands by the last part of the Threefold Training that any wish for self-enlightenment can be seen as a form of attachment; attachment *ensures* rebirth, which is precisely what the practitioner is trying to avoid. However, the opinion that it is selfish to aim only for *self*-enlightenment is a particular Mahāyānin point of view and is not shared by Theravādin Buddhists.

The debate initiated by King and Spiro has been important in Buddhist scholarship, however it has now largely been laid to rest and it is useful to examine whether or not Buddhist soteriological ethics can be assumed to be unique or if it has any real affinity with Western systems of ethics.

#### 4.1.2 Comparisons to Western Systems of Ethics

The rationale for comparing Buddhist ethics to Western systems of ethics is for clarification and elucidation as well as finding where they are not similar and where areas of possible weakness lie. (And this works both ways.) It is possible to compare Buddhist ethics with, at least, three systems of ethics in the West:

---

<sup>66</sup> Loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Collectively they are also known as the *appamaññā* ‘Immeasurables’ or ‘Unlimiteds’ as Conze has it, also see Harvey, 2000, pp. 203-5.

<sup>67</sup> King and Spiro regard equanimity as a *climax* rather than an equal constituent.

deontology, utilitarianism and Aristotelian virtue ethics.

### 4.1.3 Buddhist Ethics as Deontological

For Kant, a person's moral actions must be in accordance with what he sees as their moral duty, and not in accordance with what may be seen as the best outcome, or productive of the best consequences. There is an *a priori* foundation for ethics, and a 'moral' human being uses *reason* to comprehend and act on that *a priori* foundation.

For Kant, actions performed through a motive of duty have moral worth – others do not. Actions performed through a motive of self-interest have no moral worth because we are *caused* to act when we act that way and are therefore not free. A consequence of this thesis is that acts of compassion are also of no moral worth since they are likewise not freely chosen. Although Kant does not say we are not compassionate creatures, he does not think morality can be found in compassion on account of it being *caused* and also because nature is 'step-motherly' – she doles out compassion to her favourites (*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* §1:7, tr. Hill T.E. and Zweig, A. 2002, p. 196) and therefore some people have lots of compassion and others do not, so you cannot *require* compassion as a moral basis or you exclude large numbers of people from the possibility of acting 'rightly'. Since the *motivation* for compassion is *caused* it is not attended with a moral value judgement.

In Buddhism compassion *is* regarded not only as of moral worth, but as a very important element of ethics in pre-Mahāyāna and as completely central to ethics in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The crossover from Buddhism to Kantian deontology is therefore very limited and suffers from important differences in intention and motivation and I do not take deontology to be the best comparison with Buddhist ethics.

However, there are those who think, to a greater or lesser extent, that a comparison can be made: for example Dharmasiri argues that deontologically-driven deeds give prominence to the other and place less emphasis on self (1989, p. 27) and that Buddhist ethics also contains these two characteristics. Furthermore, following the Eightfold Path, he claims, is motivated by a feeling of duty, which he takes to be evidence of a valid comparison with deontology. However, having made a comparison, Dharmasiri goes on to make a stronger case for incompatibility by undermining deontology altogether. In an attempt to do so he asserts that deontology has moral perfection as an aim, which, he thinks, renders it teleological (in order to tie it to consequentialism and ultimately utilitarianism – a comparison he favours) since moral perfection is an end goal:

it is interesting to speculate whether there can ever be completely deontological actions, because a subtle teleology is necessarily presupposed in any deontological action, in the sense that one performs deontological imperatives because one needs to perfect oneself, and here one has ethical perfection as the goal.

(*Ibid.*, p. 28)

I would argue that deontology of the Kantian variety (in the *Groundwork*) is *not* concerned with ethical perfection and is not teleological since all the Kantian

wants to do is conform to reason partly by testing maxims through the Categorical Imperative. There is no goal as such and no eye on consequences: all that is important is following the moral law as understood through reason motivated by duty.<sup>68</sup>

Dharmasiri points out further contrasts between deontology and Buddhist ethics and the main thrust of his argument, which concerns only a Mahāyānin interpretation of Buddhism, is that Buddhist ethics has another, higher, level which is absent in deontological theories: ‘besides the deontological doctrine, it also has a separate doctrine about the nature of reality’ (*ibid.* p. 29). The Bodhisattva’s actions, he argues, have two stages: in the first ‘the worldly actions he does are clearly deontological because they are done for the sake of others’ (*ibid.* p. 30) and in the second there is a higher understanding needed whereby the Bodhisattva transcends the idea of self, other and objects of giving altogether. At this point we see the main area of contrast with deontology and Dharmasiri seems to me to be arguing a general and ultimately minor area of compatibility between a weak form of deontology (i.e. not an entirely Kantian one) and elements of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics and that this compatibility is ultimately undone by the many contrasts. (*Ibid.*, pp. 27-32.)

Buddhist ethics as a deontological theory was rejected by Jayatilleke who I think argues rightly that deontological theories rely much more on duty than Buddhist ethics would allow and that Buddhists, although not unaffected by feelings of duty, place greater importance on motives and consequences and in that sense Buddhist ethics cannot be regarded as significantly deontological. (See Jayatilleke, 1970, pp. 194 and 196-7.)

This is echoed by Harvey who argues that a person’s *own* good is important in Buddhist ethics but this is not always the case in Kant’s ethics.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, Buddhist ethics does not have duty as its backbone and as such the practitioner is engaged in a journey in which they themselves can develop morally rather than following the blind strictures of reason (see Harvey, 2000, pp. 50-1).

Kant also considered anyone who is rational to be able to follow a deontological ethic and thinks that they *ought* to do so. In that sense there is a cold obedience<sup>70</sup> involved in Kant’s system which does not appear evident in Buddhist ethics.

#### **4.1.4 Buddhist Ethics as Utilitarian**

It is not difficult to demonstrate that utilitarianism is a sub-species of egoism (in that the common good can be seen as promoting individual well-being) and this is contrary to Buddhist ethics which denies egoism and strives for genuine

---

<sup>68</sup> However, this is only one aspect of Kant. There is also the promise of the highest good in the *Critique of Practical Reason* where Kant argues that only if there is a god will there be a guarantee that those who have lived morally will arrive at ultimate happiness. In this, my striving for my own happiness and my obligation to live morally in the end go together. This is, of course, totally different to what is in the *Groundwork* and Kant has been criticised (by, for example, Mackie) for saying on the one hand that morality depends entirely on complying with your moral duty and then on the other hand that you will be rewarded by God if you *adhere* to your moral duty.

<sup>69</sup> Although this is exactly where the *Critique of Practical Reason* is different. (See the above note.)

<sup>70</sup> To duty, the ‘moral law’, the Categorical Imperative and to reason.

compassion (both in Theravāda and Mahāyāna although in a more pronounced way in the latter). The production of the best consequences is not the sole criterion for Buddhists – there must be correct motivation as well, and although this crosses over to deontology, we have seen that that model does not compare well with Buddhist ethics either.

Initially utilitarianism does appear to have certain features in common with Buddhist ethics in that they are both teleological (they have a ‘goal’ in mind), they aim at the reduction of ‘pain’ (suffering/*duḥkha*) and in Buddhism reaching *nirvāṇa* is considered to be reaching ultimate bliss which begins to sound like something a utilitarian would be interested in. However the main difference is in the motivation for action which, in Buddhism, is informed at least partly by compassion: in Theravāda Buddhism compassion is just *one* motivating factor as a constituent part of the four *brahma-vihāras*, and in Mahāyāna Buddhism compassion is *the* central moral virtue. Utilitarian theory considers the *consequences* of an action to be of primary importance and in that respect is incompatible with either Theravāda or Mahāyāna ethics. This is not to say that utilitarians are uncompassionate (or that Buddhists are disinterested in consequences); just that compassion is not a motivating factor in utilitarian theory.

One major Buddhist aim is to be free from unwholesome attachment and that includes attachment to pleasurable things – even ultimate bliss is something not to be clung to. This idea is not shared by utilitarians who seek to *satisfy* urges for pleasure and assume that happiness is *defined* by attainment of pleasure and the minimisation of pain:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.

(Mill Ch. II, 1986, p. 257)

In Buddhism the aim is quite different: pleasure and satisfaction are regarded as temporary and the escape from pain (*duḥkha*) is achieved by not being reborn. This is not an aim of utilitarianism.

Harvey, whilst pointing out similarities such as the increase of happiness and/or decrease of unhappiness as a common goal, nevertheless takes the view that the comparison is limited since in Buddhism the production of good consequences alone does not dictate that the action is ‘right’: there are ‘right actions’ in Buddhism which can lead to ‘karmic fruits’ but the production of karmic fruits does not lead to the conclusion that an action was ‘right’ or even ‘good’. (See Harvey, 2000, pp. 49-50 and 1990a, p. 196 and cf. Keown, 1992, p. 177.)

Harvey also comments on motivation and intention when drawing a distinction between Buddhist ethics and utilitarianism, and says that in utilitarianism the motivation is simple: the production of aggregate pleasure or reduction of aggregate pain (Act Utilitarianism) or adherence to moral rules which can be seen to produce a net ‘good’ (Rule Utilitarianism). Harvey points out that both forms of utilitarianism, especially the former, ‘tends to a perspective of ‘the end justifies

the means’’ (2000, p. 49) and that this might lead to something dangerous being passed off as being morally right. Theravāda (and possibly Mahāyāna<sup>71</sup>) Buddhism has a safeguard against this which is that a wholesome end can only be reached through wholesome acts, which debars the possibility of harming others on the way to some blissful end. On Harvey’s comparison, with which I concur, it is difficult to see how the individual’s pleasure and pain could be subordinated to that of the many in Buddhism but this could be the case in utilitarianism.<sup>72</sup>

Dharmasiri argues that Buddhist ethics is an ‘ideal’ rather than a ‘hedonistic’ utilitarianism and what he means by this is that it is not concerned with mere pleasures and pains but with ‘the utility of the act’ (*op. cit.*, p. 27). His claim is that Buddhist morality ‘has a hypothetical nature’ since if what it is possible to do were to be altered then morality would be likewise altered. His argument focuses on the fact that following guidelines to the letter ‘was criticized as ‘clinging to precepts and vows’ (*śīlabbta parāmāsa*)’ (*ibid.*, p. 26) and that we should not adhere to them without taking account of practicalities – i.e. whether or not we are actually *capable* of acting in certain ways. Moral values are not static, in this interpretation of Buddhist ethics,<sup>73</sup> and are concerned primarily with what it is possible to achieve with the aim being spiritual rather than following prescriptive rules intended to reach a goal. He therefore takes Buddhist ethics to be a fluid form of non-hedonistic Act Utilitarianism (cf. Whitehill, 1994, n.21; Clayton, 2006 p. 4).<sup>74</sup> I think it is important to point out that he takes care to say that his comparison is based on an idea of utilitarianism as an *ideal* utilitarianism, which is not like the kind we are used to dealing with which is very *practical*, but unfortunately he does not, in my opinion, say enough about this new sub-species to convincingly demonstrate a strong and clear confluence between it and Buddhist ethics.

Keown considers Buddhist ethics to be compatible to a certain degree with utilitarian ethics in that they both aim at the reduction of suffering (1992, pp. 175-6) but ultimately rejects the comparison since utilitarianism does not share the concept of rebirth and this means that suffering, for the utilitarian, ends with the cessation of an individual life whereas it is a continuum for a Buddhist. Another reason he gives is that in Buddhism one cannot look at the end product and retrospectively decide whether the acts leading to it were right or wrong. But this *is* the case with utilitarian ethics:

---

<sup>71</sup> See Harvey, 2000, Ch. 3, pp. 134-5.

<sup>72</sup> However, there are cases where harming in order to help is not proscribed. For example in early Buddhism there is an awareness that a doctor may have to cause pain in surgery in order to make a patient well. In Mahāyāna, compassionate killing is, in certain circumstances, allowed. For example Śāntideva, in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, says that if the Bodhisattva, motivated by compassion, has to do something which will lead him to the hottest of all hells, then he must do it provided it ultimately helps others. Also see below, p. 75.

<sup>73</sup> Also see Jayatilleke, 1970, p. 195: ‘in the Aggañña Sutta...it is pointed out that society undergoes change from time to time and as a result “what is reckoned immoral at one time...may be reckoned to be moral at another time” (D[N]. III. 89)’.

<sup>74</sup> Whitehill remarks: “Dharmasiri, interestingly, argues that Buddhist ethics is best understood as a peculiar, non-hedonic form of act utilitarianism” and Clayton defines it as “non-hedonistic utilitarianism”.

Wrong (*akusala*) acts cannot turn out...to have been right by virtue of their proximate or remote effects; nor can right (*kusala*) acts turn out to have been wrong in view of their consequences. For a utilitarian theory of ethics, however, both of these are real possibilities since rightness and goodness are separately defined.

(Keown, 1992, p. 177)

In reaching the Buddhist goal of *nirvāṇa* and freedom from *duḥkha*, *karma* is crucial and utilitarianism does not share the Buddhist notion of *karma*. On further analysis Keown takes *karma* to be what he calls ‘internal and external consequences’ of moral action since the former concerns the person performing the act and the latter concerns ‘the world at large’ (*ibid.*, p. 181). He argues that some Western commentators have mistakenly compared just the *former* with utilitarianism, which renders Buddhist ethics ‘a form of ethical egoism...[where]...moral action becomes a means to further the private interests of the individual.’<sup>75</sup>

As we have seen earlier,<sup>76</sup> it is incorrect to claim that the enlightened *Arhat* is beyond morality simply because s/he has transcended *duḥkha*. However, if a utilitarian were in a similar position of experiencing ultimate bliss whilst at the same time being free from suffering, then morality would be of no further use since the teleological aim would have been achieved. In other words the enlightened *Arhat* is *not* beyond morality whereas the *telos*-achieving utilitarian is, or as Keown puts it: ‘why should he [the utilitarian] continue to follow rules which are fashioned on the basis of utility in which he no longer has any interest?’ (*ibid.*, p. 181). Since the enlightened Buddhist is *not* beyond morality and the abstracted utilitarian is, it is at this point the comparison between Utilitarianism and pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism breaks down.

Another reason for Keown’s rejection of the comparison is that, like other commentators, he sees *motivation* as a hindrance to an effective convergence between the two systems and, instead, favours a comparison between Buddhist ethics and Aristotelian virtue ethics.

#### 4.1.5 Buddhist Ethics as Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

There are plainly parallels between Buddhist ethics and Aristotelian ethics (at least in the *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>77</sup>) where an end (*telos*) is reached through the mental and practical (*praxis*) cultivation of new habits (*hexes*) until they become entrenched dispositions or norms of behaviour if enough time and effort are invested. The end in mind for Aristotle is *eudaimonia* and for Buddhism *nirvāṇa*.<sup>78</sup> It is also important for Aristotle that this path is *not* open to all: those whose seed has fallen on stony ground (for example those not born into an economically developed democracy, slaves, the simply unlucky and even the ugly) are not capable of reaching it:

---

<sup>75</sup> He specifically mentions King and Spiro in this respect, *ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>76</sup> In the King and Spiro discussion above, pp. 58-61.

<sup>77</sup> Other main references for ethics in Aristotle’s writings are the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Magna Moralia*.

<sup>78</sup> Both terms are notoriously problematic in meaning and translation and I do not think it would be fruitful to go into that discussion here.

a man is scarcely happy [*eudaimon*] if he is very ugly to look at, or of low birth, or solitary and childless...[s]o, as we said, happiness seems to require...[a]...sort of prosperity...

(*Nicomachean Ethics* Bk1: viii, Thomson, 1953, p. 80)

Likewise for non-human animals:

we do not speak of an ox or a horse nor any other animal as being happy, because none of them can take part in...[virtuous]...activity.

(*Ibid.*: ix, p. 81)

There is a parallel in Buddhism in that it takes a certain rebirth, as a human, to be able to follow the path to enlightenment but even then there are some who are precluded from entering the path for various reasons:

many carry [the] burden of a *karma* which lead[s] to immediate retribution in the hells, others have acquired unfortunate rebirths [which keep them away from the Buddha and his teachings], others are doomed to be killed, or they are enveloped in the net of false views, or fail to find the path, which others who had gained a fortunate rebirth have lost.

(AP 22:403, tr. Conze, 1958 (1970), p. 161)

There are general comparisons too whereby a person is cultivating or modifying their behaviour (thoughts, words and deeds - *karma* - in the case of Buddhists, and habits or dispositions - *hexes* - for Aristotle) in order to reach their *telos*.

However, the *centrality* of compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism or even its mere prominence in Theravāda Buddhism is totally lacking in Aristotle's scheme. I would also interpret Aristotle as being quite far removed from the idea that the soteriology of ethics involves ultimate extinction of *trṣṇā* or thirst; Aristotle wants to *tame* this craving and make it appropriate to certain circumstances rather than eliminate it altogether.<sup>79</sup>

One scholar who takes the view that a favourable comparison can be made between Buddhist and Aristotelian ethics is Damien Keown, who argues that there are many analogous areas (1992, p. 193) and gives the examples that both have a form of happiness as a goal, reaching that goal requires moral self-development which consists of both intellectual and practical development and that the *telos* they seek arrives when the agent acts in fully virtuous ways which require an overcoming of unwholesome or unvirtuous acts. (*Ibid.*, 1992, pp. 193-227.)

Although Keown claims affinity between the two systems, he in no way claims they are the same or even nearly so:

I am not suggesting that we will find anything approaching complete agreement between the Buddha and Aristotle...although there are many

---

<sup>79</sup> Although I appreciate one can only be *eudaimon* when one is at the end of life, Aristotle nevertheless has a strong practical, empirical and political streak which seeks solutions for the practical problems of life whilst *accommodating* desire and attachment rather than transcending them altogether. I see his ethics as quite different to Buddhist ethics in that respect.

similarities and interesting points of contact.

(*Ibid.*, p. 196)

I think he is right to be wary of claiming an overly strong comparison because comparisons always involve interpretation and interpretations change over time as the culture and perspective from which one makes the interpretation changes. This means interpretations cannot always be objective, if at all, especially when dealing with other cultures and texts which were written in historically distant times and were, in some cases, based on a previous oral tradition.<sup>80</sup> That does not mean, though, that we should go to the opposite extreme and say that no useful comparisons can ever be made, but, rationally speaking, the conclusion is always going to be that there are some things which can be compared well, some things which can be compared with qualifications and some things which can only be contrasted unfavourably. That has to be the conclusion for anyone comparing anything but the same thing with two different names, and Keown follows this in his comparison between Buddhist and Aristotelian ethics.

Harvey also draws a favourable but qualified comparison between Buddhist ethics and Aristotelian ethics where the similarities are illustrated by virtuous (wholesome) self-development with perfection as the aim. The goal of this perfection is *eudaimonia/nirvāṇa* and is therefore teleological in both cases, with the Buddhist trying to remove both spiritual ignorance and craving 'by cultivating intellectual, emotional and moral virtues sharing something of the qualities of the goal towards which they move' (Harvey 2000, p. 50, cf. Keown, 1992, p. 194) and the Aristotelian trying to remove excess in whatever is not conducive to virtue; strictly speaking, an Aristotelian virtue consists of two opposed vices and the seeker of *eudaimonia* must find the mean between these two extremes wherein lies the correct virtue.

Harvey goes on to say that, for both, the rightness of an action is not judged simply by its utility (nor, for that matter, its adherence to reason or duty) but that its rightness 'embodies a virtue which conduces to and 'participates' in the goal of human perfection' (2000, p. 50). There are, Harvey notes, features of Kantian, Aristotelian *and* Utilitarian ethics which can find some convergence in Buddhist ethics, but there are also areas where this is not the case and this renders comparisons less concrete than some commentators would take them to be (*ibid.*, p. 51).

#### **4.1.6 Useful Comparisons?**

Harvey rightly cautions us against identifying Buddhist ethics too closely with Aristotelianism or other major systems of ethics in the West:

Overall, the rich field of Buddhist ethics would be narrowed by wholly

---

<sup>80</sup> In relation to understanding Ancient Greek ethics from the perspective of modernity, MacIntyre says: 'What we possess...are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, part [of] which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have - very largely, if not entirely - lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical...' (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 2). Also see MacIntyre 1988 and c1990. I have broad sympathy for MacIntyre's views here.

collapsing it into any single one of the Kantian, Aristotelian or Utilitarian models, though Buddhism agrees with each in respectively acknowledging the importance of (1) a good motivating will, (2) cultivation of character, and (3) the reduction of suffering in others and oneself.<sup>81</sup>

(*Ibid.*, p. 51)

Harvey further suggests reasons why differences must remain yet how contrasts can still be drawn:

A key aspect of Western ethical systems is that moral prescriptions should be universally applicable to all people who can understand them. Buddhism, though, is generally gradualist in approach, so while it has ethical norms which all should follow from a sense of sympathy with fellow beings (such as not killing living beings), others only apply to those who are ready for them, as their commitment to moral and spiritual training deepens.

(*Ibid.*)

Although Harvey is right to say that most major Western systems of ethics favour a universalised approach where everyone ought to behave in certain ways, this was not always the case. Philosophy and spiritual practice were closely connected in Ancient Greece, for example in Pythagoras and Plato as well as Aristotle, and although Pythagoras and Plato are not, in my view, good examples to compare with Buddhist ethics,<sup>82</sup> the point is that in the West we seem to have largely lost the ‘gradualist approach’ Harvey identifies in Buddhism.<sup>83</sup>

There is no noteworthy literature at all on comparisons with Schopenhauer’s ethics. Schopenhauer is certainly not a utilitarian or a Kantian (in ethics at least, he *is* a Kantian in other areas of thought) and it is difficult to categorise this area of his philosophy. He *does* consider compassion to be the centrepiece of his ethical system and also claims that it cannot be untangled from the rest of his philosophy – which one can find at least superficially similar to Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics and I will expand on this later. However, Schopenhauer’s ethics can in no way be regarded as Aristotelian – most especially because of the Schopenhauerian view that our character is set and cannot be improved. This also seems to put him, on that issue at least, at odds with the whole notion of a

---

<sup>81</sup> For further details and for comparisons of Buddhist ethics with Kantian deontology and with Utilitarianism, see Harvey “Comparisons with Western Ethical Systems”, Ch. 1, pp. 49-51 in *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Also see Clayton, *Moral Theory in Śāntideva’s Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Routledge, London, 2006, Ch. 6 for what she calls “a kind of utilitarian hybrid of virtue ethics”.

<sup>82</sup> Mainly since both Pythagoras and Plato believe in a permanent soul which transmigrates into new bodies (vegetables were included in Pythagoras’ case) and both elevated mathematics to a mystical if not religious level. The similarities come in forming a community – Pythagoras’ ‘monastery’ at Croton and Plato’s Academy in Athens – dedicated to the realisation of Truth, which involved study and self development.

<sup>83</sup> Although, of course, some Western ethical systems introduce the distinction between ordinary moral requirements and supererogatory works (morally good works which go beyond that which can normally be expected). There is a debate in this area as to how much (if at all) deontology or utilitarianism would accommodate supererogation. For supererogation in deontology see Baron, 1987, pp. 237-262, Guevara, 1999, pp. 593-624, Haydar, 2002, pp.445-454, Heyd, 1980, pp. 308-24, Hill, 1971, pp. 55-76, Timmermann, 2005, pp. 9-27 and for supererogation in utilitarianism see New, 1974 pp. 179-89 and Portmore, 2003, pp. 303-332.

*Bodhisattva Path.*<sup>84</sup> (I will explain this observation in more detail in Chapter 7.)

Regardless of how it is categorised in the West, what is clear about Buddhist ethics is that to be a practitioner requires that you are somewhere on the path to its understanding, and I have alluded to differences in emphasis placed on compassion between Theravāda and Mahāyāna teachings. I would now like to examine the place of compassion in Buddhist ethics in more detail.

#### **4.2 The Place of Compassion in Buddhist Ethics**

Compassion features very prominently in Mahāyāna but less heavily in pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, that is not to suggest that it is of little relevance or importance in pre-Mahāyāna ethics, just that it is used differently.

In pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism there is no *one* important motive in ethics but several, and this comes out most clearly when one looks at the *brahma-vihāras*. There is no one ‘super *brahma-vihāra*’ but, rather, the four are connected and have a function in meditative training which contributes to morality since one’s deeds spring from what is in one’s mind. It is therefore, in a sense, a training of the kind of mental virtues that we would need to perfect moral behaviour and we can see the ultimate expression of this in the actions of the Buddha after his enlightenment. The aim of the meditative practices is to bring into being a mind which is conducive to the production of wholesome thoughts and by extension wholesome deeds.

The four *brahma-vihāras* already in existence in early Buddhism contain both compassion (*karuṇā*) and empathetic joy (*muditā*)<sup>85</sup> and the two have sometimes been taken as meaning the same thing, whilst *muditā* has also been taken at times to be the same as sympathy, but there are important differences between the three. *Muditā* is better expressed as empathetic or appreciative joy (after Harvey, 2000, p. 104) or as a kind of genuine delight in the good fortune of others rather than as ‘*sympathetic joy*’ since this helps remove the possibility of its being confused with sympathy (*anukampā*). *Anukampā* and *karuṇā* are both used to refer to the motivation of the Buddha and the monks to teach the *Dharma*.

*Karuṇā* (compassion) should not be confused with *muditā* (empathetic joy) since the former requires cultivation through meditation whereas the latter does not: ‘Sympathy is the fraternal concern that is present in an individual and does not require cultivation or meditative development [unlike compassion]’ (Aronson, *op. cit.*, p. 16). Furthermore, *karuṇā* is of primary importance to Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics and using it interchangeably with empathetic joy (*muditā*) could give a distorted picture of its place as a *brahma-vihāra*. However, there are instances when it is acceptable to use it interchangeably with sympathy, as Aronson notes:

The term “simple compassion” is so similar to the term “sympathy” in both meaning and usage that in two discourses [the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* and the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*] the two are used synonymously.

(*Ibid.*, p. 22)

---

<sup>84</sup> Not to mention the paths which lead to becoming a *Śravaka* or a *Pratyekabuddha*.

<sup>85</sup> The other two are loving kindness (*mettā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

The point is that compassion has a different emphasis in Theravāda Buddhism to that which it has in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and how and why it went from being an important *brahma-vihāra* to the central principle of Mahāyāna ethics needs explanation.

According to both Theravāda and Mahāyāna the whole life of the Buddha is marked by compassion. The bridge from the pre-Mahāyāna to the Mahāyāna position is that when it comes to the Buddha, compassion is his sole motivation. This is borne out by the fact that once he had achieved *nirvāṇa* he could have left *samsāra*<sup>86</sup> but chose not to, and the only reason given as to why he did not leave *samsāra* was that out of compassion he would remain in order to teach the *Dharma*. This becomes central for the Mahāyāna because the goal is to aim for complete Buddhahood and to lead a *completely* altruistic life. The Buddha, having reached enlightenment, had achieved everything he could for himself and his actions thereafter are associated with the liberation of others. From that point on everything he did was motivated by the purest altruism and this is why Mahāyāna Buddhists take compassion to be the pivotal element of ethics.

#### **4.2.1 Compassion as a *Brahma-vihāra***

In early Buddhism it is important to cultivate compassion equally with the other three *brahma-vihāras* so that it becomes neutrally applied and therefore a *non-attached* form of compassion. That requires cultivating *upekkhā* (equanimity) as well as compassion in order to get the unattached balance right (Vism 9:88, Ñāṇamoli, p. 309). The equanimity in question ‘is characterized as promoting the aspect of neutrality towards beings. Its function is to see equality in beings’ (Vism 9:96, Ñāṇamoli, p. 311). Not only is it recommended that the practitioner maintains neutrality towards living beings and formations, but they should also avoid ‘persons who show favouritism towards beings and formations’ (*Ibid.*, 4:62, p.132) - assuming this takes them away from bad influences - and they should cultivate the acquaintance of people who already display neutrality (*Ibid.*, 9:47, p. 301 and SN 5:45:49, Bodhi, 2000, p. 1543).

Meditation is used as a way of cultivating these qualities so that the practitioner ‘develops the tranquillity enlightenment factor, as well as the others. This is how he restrains the mind on occasion when it should be restrained’ (Vism 4:62, Ñāṇamoli, p. 132). Meditation and mind-training are fundamentally important in creating the conditions for right behaviour to flourish and should not be seen (as has erroneously been supposed by some) solely as an exercise in mind-training since it is intended to have positive consequences in *action* whereby the practitioner will show genuine compassion to all sentient beings without demonstrating any form of favouritism.

The neutrality required for this should not be confused with not caring or unconcernedness for others (see Harris 1997, Aronson *op. cit.*, and the previous discussion on King and Spiro, above, pp. 58-61) or some kind of aloofness and should be seen as the groundwork for something more active. It has a direct connection to the Golden Rule of not causing suffering and of removing the

---

<sup>86</sup> As Māra suggested (SN.i.111).

causes of suffering (see *Vism* 9:94, Ñāṇamoli, p. 310 and SN 55:7) and this includes to oneself. Attachment to the sufferings of others can cause suffering to oneself and this is not what is intended in the meditation nor is it useful in the quest for enlightenment.

Having compassion for, and practically helping, others is connected to helping yourself in that genuine compassion shows genuine wisdom (part of the Eightfold Path and its division into the Threefold Training) and acts of genuine compassion show that the practitioner is far along the path to enlightenment; so the practitioner helps themselves by getting nearer to enlightenment and this is achieved, partly, by being genuinely compassionate. This is beneficial to the practitioner in that they have a chance of escaping *samsāric* rebirth and is obviously good for those who have been helped by the practitioner's compassionate activities. Cultivating one's mind is therefore helpful to oneself and to others (see SN 5:169 and AN 7:64).

An important part of the meditative technique used to achieve neutrality is a form of *mettā* meditation (*Vism* 9:8-13) where the development of love requires that the practitioner can love those to whom s/he normally feels anger or dislike. The mechanism works by focusing on the fact that since there is ultimately no self then there is ultimately nothing to be angry *at* nor is there anything, ultimately, which is angry. This renders the meditative focus on the not-self teaching as *assistive* to the development of love for those whom one does not like rather than to be detached from them. (See *Vism* 9:1-2, Ñāṇamoli, p. 288, Harvey, 2000, pp. 107-9, Schmidt-Leukel 2006b pp. 53-4 and 68-9). Also the not-self teaching contributes to this in that you cannot hate someone who, ultimately, does not exist:

in the ultimate sense...there is no being as a basis for the assumption 'I am' or 'I'; in the ultimate sense there is only mentality-materiality. The vision of one who sees in this way is called correct vision.

(*Vism* 18:28, Ñāṇamoli, p. 612, also see *Vism* 9:38, p. 298)<sup>87</sup>

Compassion, then, is treated as equal (in Theravāda Buddhism) to the other three *brahma-vihāras* and is to be cultivated in an impartial way. Thus cultivated it helps in attaining liberation.

#### **4.2.2 The Soteriological Role of Compassion**

Compassion is inextricably linked with salvation (or liberation) from *duḥkha*. The compassionate attitude cultivated initially in meditation promotes morally good thought processes or 'right intention'. Since *karma* is constituted not just of deeds but also of speech and thought, good actions can only emanate from a good mind and a good mind comes as a result of right thinking:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought : it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that

---

<sup>87</sup> What Buddhaghosa says in *Vism*. Chapter 9 is that the not-self teaching fits into the development of love by *not* discriminating between self and others. That may well be a Mahāyāna influence because he writes this at a time when the Mahāyāna is already in existence.

draws the carriage...[i]f a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

(Dhp 1-2, Müller, 1881)

There is consequently a causal connection between right mindfulness and right intention to right action (with right speech between) and therefore there is a relationship between wisdom and morality in that morality is based on actions or deeds and good deeds can only come from a good or wise mind,<sup>88</sup> or put another way, morality comes from wisdom. For the Mahāyāna, morality consists in compassion, and compassion and wisdom are bound together whereas for the Theravāda compassion is but one of the four *brahma-vihāras* and is to be cultivated together with loving kindness, empathetic joy and equanimity and correct cultivation is only possible with the right mind. For both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda then, compassion and wisdom are inextricably linked. As we have seen, it is not possible to have genuine compassion if one is egoistic,<sup>89</sup> and genuine compassion requires an understanding of the not-self teaching which is, again, part of mind-training. The person who acts with genuine compassion has to have the various other parts of the Noble Eightfold Path in place and, this being so, is adhering to what is taught as the fourth Noble Truth which offers escape from what is communicated in the first Noble Truth. Correct compassion is therefore linked to escape from *duḥkha* and thus has a soteriological role.

#### 4.2.3 Compassion and the Buddha

We can expect that the Buddha, as ‘the enlightened one’ would not only have cultivated perfect wisdom but would also have *practised* acts of compassion. In fact compassion can be seen as a justification for his activity after his enlightenment. The Buddha, according to scripture, taught the *Dharma* for forty years after his enlightenment and he had had to accumulate virtue for many lifetimes without guidance until, through his own efforts, he was able to become awakened. During his own post-enlightened life he gave to those in need (he had no possessions to give, but gave the best thing he could, which was the *Dharma*) and was motivated by compassion for all sentient beings.

The teaching of the *Dharma* to others<sup>90</sup> was an act of compassion and the founding of the *saṅgha* was one mechanism through which the *Dharma* was to be passed on in order that others may benefit from the Buddha’s awakening. Compassion is linked directly to wisdom in that through the Buddha’s compassion the *Dharma* was taught that others may become enlightened and through their compassion still others may become enlightened. If the Buddha had not been compassionate *as well as* enlightened then he could have kept his enlightenment to himself and the *Dharma* would never have been passed on. His compassion for other sentient beings is what led him to pass the *Dharma* on. The Buddha’s compassionate motivation to teaching the *Dharma* to those without it becomes the

---

<sup>88</sup> Unless we suppose they occur accidentally or as a way of manipulating others but with a non-compassionate intention.

<sup>89</sup> If one has not escaped attachment to the illusion of self and the pull of the defilements greed, anger and delusion.

<sup>90</sup> The Buddha taught after initially wishing to remain silent (and being encouraged to do so by Māra (SN.i.111) and discouraged from doing so by Brahmā Sahampati (MN 26)) since he believed the *Dharma* may be too difficult for the non-awakened to understand. See MN 26.

foundation for the *Bodhisattva Ideal* which the Mahāyānins take as an example to emulate. It is not enough for one to strive for enlightenment but instead they believe one should strive for complete Buddhahood through enlightenment *and* compassion. The Bodhisattva Ideal is where compassion becomes the central feature, which I will deal with in the next chapter.

### 4.3 Special Problems with Buddhist Ethics

Buddhist ethics has been seen by some Western commentators as a kind of benign, unreactive doctrine which equips the practitioner with the means of *putting up* with problems rather than dealing with them. This is an unfair characterisation and it can be argued that Buddhist ethics is much more positive and engaged whilst still allowing for non-attachment. I will explain this position in what follows. Another charge against Buddhist ethics is that it is nothing but a form of self-interest since the primary goal is self-enlightenment. I will argue that this is not the case in Mahāyāna Buddhism and is a misrepresentation of the situation in Theravāda Buddhism where it is important to realise that attachment to *self only* precludes full enlightenment altogether. The whole notion of self and specifically the not-self (*anātman*) teaching in Buddhism has generated much discussion, especially in connection to the idea of rebirth; a general criticism which has been levelled at Buddhism is that if there is no self then there is nothing to be reborn. I intend to offer an answer to this alleged problem below.

Finally, the Mādhyamaka school of Nāgārjuna and, later, Śāntideva argue that nothing has essence (*svabhāva*) and that all apparent things are consequently ultimately empty (*sūnya*). Since the school (as a major branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism) also teaches that the cultivation of compassion (*karuṇā*) is central to morality and wisdom, it might seem that this is in conflict with the emptiness teaching; in other words why cultivate compassion if it is ultimately empty? Again I shall offer a possible solution to this apparent paradox.

#### 4.3.1 Buddhist Ethics as Passive, Quietist Avoidance

It has been suggested by critics of Buddhist ethics that it is passive and seeks to avoid moral problems rather than address them.<sup>91</sup> However there are instances in Buddhist texts where positive actions are advocated or encouraged, such as those contained in the Eightfold Path (for example right speech and action), engaging with community by initiating, carrying out or helping carry out public works, assisting the poor and protecting animals. Furthermore, there are clear guidelines on what is expected of lay Buddhists as well as what is expected of members of the *saṅgha*. (See DN 5 and 26:5, SN 1:1:47 and the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.) In Mahāyāna Buddhism there is also provision made for positively *deciding* to harm others and *actually* doing so in order to prevent greater wrong (such as killing a ‘bad’ ruler), provided the intention is moral.<sup>92</sup> Harming another is more ambivalent in Theravāda Buddhism although it is allowable in the case of a king having to punish evil-doers (see Schmidt-Leukel, 2004, pp. 33-56).

It is important to again mention detachment (or non-attachment) in the overall scheme of Buddhist ethics since this more than anything has been seen as a way in which Buddhists are supposedly disengaged from others and therefore passively avoiding moral problems. This view is countered by pointing out that non-attachment still allows for active loving-kindness, empathetic joy and compassion:

---

<sup>91</sup> For example King assumes that a typical Burmese Theravādin attitude is ‘Let the world go by; it is not worth saving’ (King, 1964, p. 271) and he also typifies Theravada Buddhism as ‘a world-view that gives only negative approval or neutral consent to the promotion of social welfare...’ (King, 1964, p. 272.). Also see Weber, 1958 and Spiro, 1972, Ch. 18.

<sup>92</sup> This is not done lightly nor universally espoused in Mahāyāna texts, see Harvey, 2000, pp. 134-6. Also see Mph 4:1:33 and Conze, 1968, p. 74 for an example of a monk killing a Tibetan king.

it is not some kind of aloof state and it does not have negative connotations; negative connotations *do* pertain to ‘clinging’, ‘grasping’ and ‘attachment’ (translations of the word *upādāna*). Theravāda Buddhism distinguishes between attached and detached forms of love and love is not always seen as a form of attachment. Love is only a form of attachment to the extent that you are seeking *your own* pleasure in the act of love. Attachment would only come if you sought the well-being of the other for some sort of selfish reason too. This creates another problem in whether or not it is possible to have an altruistic ethic within the overall goal of reaching your own salvation. In Theravāda Buddhism altruism is for *yourself* and others, not *just* others; excluding yourself would not be morally good because you yourself are as much a sentient being as others and you should not prioritise against yourself *or* others – the love must be neutral, non-partisan, non-discerning and non-attached. This is unlike Śāntideva’s later Mahāyāna argument that you need to *exchange* self and others, you need to see the other as yourself as a way of avoiding selfishness but this view would not be acceptable for a Theravādin where self and other should be considered equally. Śāntideva is more radical in the idea that in giving priority to others you will become happy (see BCA 8:129). This might seem to contain a contradiction in that if you start to work for the happiness of others in order to *become* happy yourself then your actions are really a form of egoism since the end product seems to be your own happiness. However, Śāntideva is quite clear that the normal idea of self is to be radically altered to the point where it is entirely exchanged with the idea of others and there is then no personal ego-self left. Working for the happiness of others and making no distinction between other and self overcomes the idea of acting in self-interest. So for Śāntideva the detached form of love involves realising that there is no distinction between self and other, and for Buddhaghosa the more non-differentiating it is then the closer you are to a non-selfishly motivated form of love which is a non-clinging commitment and is to be cultivated.

Action in Buddhism is not just engaged action (or deeds) but also involves speech and thought. It is primarily connected to cultivating a state of mind which leads to beneficial *karma* and also an attempt to free oneself from the three defilements (*kleśa*) which keep the wheel of rebecoming turning: greed, hatred and delusion. These defilements have three opposites, which are often given as non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion and they can act as a kind of antidote to the *kleśa*. Seen in this way, it is clear that *action* motivated or influenced by greed, hatred and/or delusion can be changed by the cultivation of their opposites regardless of the fact that these opposites appear, at least superficially, to be passive; in reality they are positive and active and it is clear in this interpretation that their cultivation leads to positive action. Rather than giving them as purely the opposites of something negative, they might be better expressed more positively as giving, loving kindness and wisdom. (See Harvey, 2000, p. 47 and p. 60.) Another reason for doing this is that confusion has been caused by some interpreters who have been misled by the way that positive predicates are sometimes expressed by negating their opposites (a widespread feature in Sanskrit) and some have concluded that elements of action in Buddhism are driven by negative features. This would be redressed by expressing action in positive terms: the opposite of greed is generosity (*dāna*), the opposite of hatred is love (*maitrī*) and the opposite of non-delusion is wisdom (*prajñā*). The important point is that Buddhist ethics is not only the avoidance of negative themes or states but also develops through a

positive state of mind and positive feelings. It is therefore incorrect to characterise Buddhism as practicing an ethic of avoidance.

In terms of purely practical deeds, Buddhists practice giving and there are also examples of Buddhists being involved with helping the poor and needy<sup>93</sup> as well as those with problems which often lead to anti-social behaviour such as drug addiction (*ibid.*, p. 109).<sup>94</sup> The cultivation of the four *brahma-vihārās* is also central to Buddhist ethics as we have seen before.

In addition to this we have the life of the Buddha to draw from for examples of active involvement as we may also do from the life of King Aśoka. This can also be seen as an example of ‘active’ Buddhism which might assist in countering the view that Buddhism is passive, quietist or involves an ethic of avoidance. Aśoka promoted the well-being of sentient creatures through public works, the promotion of justice and animal welfare measures amongst other things.<sup>95</sup>

In Mahāyāna Buddhism the aim is complete Buddhahood. The path to this end begins with the cultivation of thoughts which are conducive to eventual enlightenment, and this is called the Awakening Mind or Enlightenment Mind (*bodhicitta*). Having adopted *bodhicitta*, the Bodhisattva works on cultivating the common six perfections, or *pāramitās*, (there are ten in total) as the major aspects of the path to the realisation of Buddhahood. The six *pāramitās* are another way of interpreting the Threefold Training which groups the constituent parts of the Noble Eightfold Path into (1) Wisdom (*prajñā*), (2) Morality (*śīla*) and (3) Concentration (*samādhi*), where the Perfection of Wisdom corresponds to right view and right intention, the Perfection of Morality corresponds to right speech, right action and right livelihood and the Perfection of Concentration corresponds to right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. What is apparently added in Mahāyāna is giving/generosity (*dāna*), patience (*kṣānti*) and vigour (*vīrya*). The Bodhisattva vow is to strive for the salvation of all other beings - which is a form of generosity - and infinite patience and infinite vigour will be needed in order to achieve this since it will take countless periods of time. (See Schmidt-Leukel 2006b, pp. 99-100.) I think we can assume that these six *pāramitās* are included in the idea of *mahākaruṇā* (great compassion) and in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* Śāntideva says:

---

<sup>93</sup> Harvey notes that ‘Engaged Buddhism’ has been promoted by some Buddhists in recent times and its aim is to be more active than Buddhism has been perceived to be in an attempt to ‘improve society’ – see Harvey 2000, p. 112. It must also be remembered that positive action in the form of practical assistance and protection is offered to other sentient creatures besides humans and their societies.

<sup>94</sup> For a contemporary example of Theravādins founding orphanages for the child victims of the 2004 tsunami see *Scotland’s Buddhist Vihara*: URL: <http://www.tsbv.org.uk/project.htm> [04 May 2008].

<sup>95</sup> However, King, 1964, claims that Aśoka would not have seen his government as Buddhist but was acting ‘in the bounds of the general Indian pattern of social morality’, p. 207, and Spiro, 1971, regards ‘Aśokan Buddhism’ as delineable into *nibbanic* and *kammatic* forms and of Aśokan *nibbanic* Buddhism he says it is ‘impossible to defend the thesis that Aśokan [*nibbanic*] Buddhism is a bridge to the world’ (p. 431) although he seems to soften on *kammatic* Buddhism on the same page, he does not tie this specifically with Aśoka. I take it from the general context of both King and Spiro, as well as what they say more specifically on Aśoka, that they would not regard him as a model of an ‘active’ Buddhist or an exemplar of positive, engaged, affirmative Buddhism. I find this view, if my interpretation is accurate, difficult to comprehend.

the Bodhisattva should not be taught too many things. One virtue should be fully mastered and learnt, by him, in which are included all the virtues of the Buddha. And what is that ? It is great compassion.’  
(SS 16:286; Bendall and Rouse, 1971, p. 261)

Compassion is *not* one of the six *pāramitās*, but it seems clear that he is saying *all* the virtues of the Buddha are included in compassion. Since *prajña* (wisdom) is one of the *pāramitās*, this means that wisdom is connected to compassion. From this it is clear that wisdom cannot *undermine* compassion (as, for example, King and Spiro argued when they claimed that the enlightened are beyond morality) and the two cannot be seen as contradictory. The Bodhisattva understands that compassion, then, is central to the Mahāyānin moral life. This is not something passive since the *Bodhisattva* must strive to show compassion for all sentient beings.

Compassion, of course, is not exclusive to the Mahāyāna, although it is more developed there, but it is still strong in earlier forms of Buddhism. Practical action in connection to compassion is found in the first, second and fourth of the Five Moral Precepts: refrain from harming living things, refrain from taking what is not given and refrain from false speech. Compassion is the motivation for these courses of action or, more accurately, fetters on courses of action (see Harris, 1997) and bearing this in mind it would be difficult to make the claim that Buddhist ethics is not something active.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the *Bodhisattva* stays in *samsāra* in order to help relieve sentient creatures from *duḥkha* and this should be seen as something positive and active.<sup>96</sup> For the *Bodhisattva* at least, this is a call to positive action and is neither passive, quietist or based on avoidance. The only avoidance sought is avoidance of *duḥkha* in this life and the avoidance of rebirth.

The assumption that Buddhist ethics avoids moral problems through being quietist and passive is based on a misunderstanding of what many Buddhists (including the Buddha and Aśoka as well as monks, nuns and lay Buddhists) *actually* do (as discussed above, p. 75); many of their activities have demonstrated that it is active and engaged. There is a further misunderstanding of the role of ‘mind training’ in Buddhism which *does* involve elements of the negative in terms of *not* thinking in certain ways but this is directed at making sure whatever *is* done (in thought, word and deed) is good and directed, ultimately, at escaping *samsāra* altogether. In this one’s actions are extremely important and therefore the ‘negative’ training should be seen as an impediment to ‘bad’ or immoral behaviour rather than as an indication of passivity or avoidance.

#### 4.3.2 Compassion and Self-Interest

It has been suggested that compassion is nothing but a form of indirect self-interest (as we have seen earlier in the examination of Hobbes) and some regard this as applicable to Buddhist compassion. However this view is based on a misunderstanding of *genuine* compassion (see Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of*

---

<sup>96</sup> As Dharmasiri notes, the question for the *Bodhisattva* is not “Why should I do anything at all?...but...Why am I not doing everything possible to help others?” (Dharmasiri, 1989, p. 23).

*Morality*, §13); in other words compassion with egoism at its root is not compassion proper and what Mahāyāna Buddhism takes to be compassion is devoid *completely* of egoism and exists in a pure form where the motivation for compassionate thoughts and acts is rooted in concern for *others* and not for self. It is a little more intricate in Theravāda Buddhism where compassion and love (two of the four *brahma-vihāras*) are to be directed not just exclusively to others but also to oneself. There is no preclusion of self-interest provided it is not directed at unwholesome states and it is better if it is directed at wholesome ones:

such bodily conduct as causes unwholesome states to increase and wholesome states to diminish in one who cultivates it should not be cultivated. But such bodily conduct as causes unwholesome states to diminish and wholesome states to increase in one who cultivates it should be cultivated.

(MN 114:5; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 2001, p. 914)<sup>97</sup>

The kind of bodily conduct which is regarded as unwholesome includes killing living beings or other forms of violence, stealing and sexual misconduct (see *ibid.*, 114:5, p. 914). The kind of verbal conduct which is regarded as unwholesome includes various forms of lying (*ibid.*, 114:5, p. 915) and the kind of mental conduct which is regarded as unwholesome includes greed and hate (*ibid.*, 114:5, p. 917). Cultivating compassion, empathetic joy and loving kindness means not just abstaining from unwholesome states but cultivating the *opposite*, wholesome ones, which is positive and active.

A critic (especially a Western one) may argue that compassion in Buddhism is not objectively *testable* in order to check if the practitioner is acting *truly* compassionately. This may be so, however, a Buddhist who deliberately attempts to fool others that they are acting compassionately when they are not will not reach enlightenment in this lifetime and will be reborn in one of the *samsāric* realms which we must assume, if they are a serious practitioner, they seek to avoid. Such a person would be clearly wasting their time and they themselves would know this, which means it is unlikely that such behaviour would be widespread. This leaves a dimension of morality in Buddhism as something personal and this is not without precedent in Western philosophy – Aristotelian ethics involves moral self-evaluation and a personal journey in cultivating moral behaviour.<sup>98</sup>

### 4.3.3 Compassion and Emptiness

A specific problem for the Mahāyāna is the relationship of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) to *karuṇā* (compassion). There has been an assumption that emptiness must be in

---

<sup>97</sup> It is the same for verbal and mental conduct, see MN 114:3; Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 2001, pp. 913ff.

<sup>98</sup> The self-evaluation comes in deciding, through *phronesis* (practical wisdom which can only come through experience), where your behaviour lies on the line between the two vices which constitute a virtue (*arête*); Aristotle gives the example of the virtue of courage as the mean between the two opposed vices of cowardliness and rashness. It is important that *all* the virtues are cultivated and this means knowing how excessive or deficient you are in the practice (*praxis*) of the virtues which leads on to doing something to change your attitude and behaviour until the correct mean is struck and becomes an entrenched disposition (*hexis*). This will vary for everyone and in that respect is an objectively untestable personal journey.

conflict with the Bodhisattva's attempt to develop universal compassion since at the heart of the teaching is the claim that nothing has essence; if nothing has essence then compassion has no essence and is ultimately empty. If that is the case then it seems strange that the Bodhisattva would want to cultivate something which is ultimately void. In examining this problem it is worth giving a brief outline of the background to the emptiness teaching.

One aim of the Bodhisattva is to cultivate wisdom and compassion together. Wisdom is encountered as the sixth perfection, the *prajñāpāramitā* or perfection of wisdom in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* where the main teaching is that of emptiness. Emptiness is connected to wisdom which comes together with compassion, so a true understanding of emptiness, it is argued, is needed in order to be compassionate and enlightened.

Emptiness existed as a concept in Buddhism before it was systemised by Nāgārjuna and became the defining concept of the Mādhyamaka school.<sup>99</sup> However one important distinction between the Mādhyamaka and pre-Mahāyāna schools is that in the earlier schools all apparent phenomena were considered as *dharmas* (constituent factors rather than *the Dharma*) apparently following one another and giving the impression of a flowing reality. Nāgārjuna, however, argued that even these *dharmas* were lacking in *svabhāva* or essence and therefore were not as they might seem. In fact Nāgārjuna goes much further than that and argues that *every* apparent thing is lacking in essence and he includes the assumed relations between these empty *dharmas*, so that what seem to be causal conditions (dependent origination) are void as are the supposed phenomena the relationships are supposed to link. This means that the causal chains of dependence which supposedly give rise to phenomena are empty: 'Origination and disappearance does not obtain for that which is empty' (MMK 21:9, Streng, 1967, p. 208) and the supposed phenomena themselves are ultimately empty: 'Since there is no *dharma* whatever originating independently, No *dharma* whatever exists which is not empty' (*ibid.*, 24:19, p. 213). Nāgārjuna thinks the chains *and* the phenomena are empty, which makes the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) empty. That is not to say that Nagarjuna does not accept the theory of dependent origination – quite the contrary - but, rather, it is useful as a means of explanation although it is ultimately empty. In this way the theory of dependent origination carries out a task before it is discarded and the task is to explain emptiness.<sup>100</sup> However Nāgārjuna cautions against holding on to emptiness as an explanation and says: 'emptiness is the relinquishing of all views. [But] For whomever emptiness is a view, That one will accomplish nothing.' (MMK 13:8, Garfield, p. 36.)<sup>101</sup>

In seeing the ultimate voidness of all things, the Bodhisattva breaks the bonds of attachment to the world and no longer sees him or herself or others as distinct entities *or* as flows of discernable *dharmas*. What they *are* is unexplainable but

---

<sup>99</sup> For example in Sn 1119, SN 22:95; Bodhi, 2000, pp. 951f, MN 121 and 122 cited in Schmidt-Leukel 2006 p. 116.

<sup>100</sup> Also see Schmidt-Leukel, 2006a, p. 173 and n.137.

<sup>101</sup> Compare Streng's more ambiguous: "Emptiness is proclaimed ... as the refutation of all view-points; But those who hold "emptiness" as a viewpoint... have called those "incurable" (*asādhya*)." (MKK 13:8, Streng, p. 198.)

what they are *not* is concrete entities constituted by many smaller *dharmas* existing even incredibly briefly. Nevertheless, others continue to see themselves as existing individual entities and are attached to this view and therefore experience *duḥkha*. The Bodhisattva has taken a vow to help relieve all sentient creatures of *duḥkha* and must consequently stay in this world to help those still experiencing the painful illusion.

On account of the destruction of the pains (*kleśa*) of action there is release;  
For pains of action exist for him who constructs them. These pains result  
from phenomenal extension (*prapañca*); but this phenomenal extension  
comes to a stop by emptiness.

(MMK 18:5; tr. Streng, 1967, p. 204)

Alternatively:

Action and misery having ceased, there is *nirvāṇa*.  
Action and misery come from conceptual thought.  
This comes from mental fabrication.  
Fabrication ceases through emptiness.

(MMK 18:5, tr. Garfield, 1995, p. 48)

The Bodhisattva has to operate at two levels of understanding: one where s/he wants to save all sentient beings and another where s/he is clear that there are *no* sentient beings to save or be saved. The idea that ultimately there are no beings is an expression of *śūnyatā* and therefore a form of wisdom (the perfection of wisdom) and the idea that the multitudes of beings need to be saved is an expression of compassion. The task of the Bodhisattva is to hold these two ideas together. *Śūnyatā*, wisdom and compassion are thus inseparably linked. The connection to the not-self teaching is easy to see in the light of the emptiness teaching: if everything is empty then ultimately so is the idea of self and of others – although conventionally they seem real enough.

#### 4.3.4 Compassion and the Not-self Teaching

In Mahāyāna ethics by the time of Śāntideva there is a striving to recognise that not only is there no difference between self and others (BCA 8:136) but there is an exchange between the two to the point where they become indistinguishable. If the insight of the interchangeability of self and others (*ibid.*, 8:120) is achieved then the idea of self-interest motivated by egoism becomes impossible. Egoism is, then, transcended completely as a result of the teaching that an individual self is illusory and as such is not to be clung to but to be let go of in the light of the greater truth of the inseparability of ‘self’ and others.

However, it is difficult to give a convincing explanation of the not-self teaching whilst at the same time believing in rebirth, if the assumption is that not-self is equal to some kind of non-existence which would result in there being nothing to be reborn. There are some who take this view and argue that a belief in rebirth is not necessary in order to consider oneself a Buddhist (see Schmidt-Leukel 2006a, p. 150 and n.25). However, there is only a point to their objection if we take the term ‘self’ as referring to any sort of *individual* continuity and this is not what the not-self teaching says. It says we should not consider anything as our possession nor identify ourselves with the eternal *ātman* of the Brahmanists. (See MN 22 –

especially 22:15 and 22:22-29.) The Buddha explains that nothing is permanent, whether it be possessions or the possessor, and in that sense it is only those who are misled or do not understand the Buddha's teachings who identify with concepts such as 'mine', 'my', 'I' and to 'their' possessions. The concept 'I' or 'me' refers to a collection of five aggregates (*skandhas*)<sup>102</sup> and he explains that even they are not to be clung to if one wishes to be enlightened:

a well-taught noble disciple becomes disenchanted with material form, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with formations, disenchanted with consciousness...Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion [his mind<sup>103</sup>] is liberated. When it is liberated...He understands: 'Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.'

(MN 22:29, Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, pp. 232-3)

Elsewhere, when directly asked by the wanderer Vacchagotta if there was a self, the Buddha was silent and remained so when directly asked if there was *no* self. He says he did this since he did not want to give the impression that he agreed with either eternalists or nihilists (SN 44:10). His refusal to give an answer either way is confirmed by Nāgārjuna: 'neither 'individual self' nor 'non-individual self' whatever has been taught by the Buddhas.' (MMK 18:6; Streng, 1967, p. 204).

The Buddha was not only silent about the concept of self, but also about the concept of existence after enlightenment which refers to the 'selfhood' of a Tathāgata<sup>104</sup> (MN 63). This (and his silence on the im/permanence of the world) is revisited by King Milinda in his conversation with the monk Nāgasena.<sup>105</sup> In this conversation Nāgasena explains that the reason the Buddha did not answer the question was because 'there is no reason or object for answering such questions' (Mhp 4:2:4-5, Rhys Davids vol. I, pp. 204-6) and that such questions should be 'laid to one side' – i.e. not answered: an idea Wittgenstein was later to employ. Earlier in the discussion he had explained that 'Nāgasena' was nothing but a label or 'designation in common use' which stood for the five *skandhas* but that no permanent core of his being could be found (*ibid.*, 2:1:1, pp. 40-5). However, the Buddha appears to have been less forthcoming about the nature of self.

As we have seen, in Theravāda Buddhism what *appears* as phenomena (and what we might then take to be a 'self') is nothing but consecutive *dharmas*. However, this is precisely where the Mādhyamika radicalises not-self into *śūnyatā* (emptiness or voidness) by arguing that a *dharma* cannot be analysed since it cannot be reduced or dissected into any final essence. In fact, they argue, even if it had an identifiable beginning middle and end and we took one section of it to examine, we would find yet another beginning middle and end to examine *ad infinitum*. The Mādhyamika conclusion is that there is no way of explaining continuity if all we find in ever smaller moments are *more* sub-moments which never lead us to *the* shortest moment. This renders the so-called shortest moment

---

<sup>102</sup> Which are (1) material form (*rūpa*), (2) feeling (*vedanā*), (3) perception (*sañña*), (4) mental volitions or formations, (*saṅkhāra*) and (5) consciousness (*viññāna*).

<sup>103</sup> Translator's square brackets.

<sup>104</sup> A fully liberated or enlightened one.

<sup>105</sup> Although not originally a Mahāyāna text it is accepted by the Mahāyāna.

empty; there is no origination or decay, no object and in fact nothing descriptably concrete whatever. Not only is there no stable self in this example but *nothing* has a stable self, not a single *dharma* exists with *svabhāva* (essence), as a mental or bodily *dharma* according to this theory. *Śūnyatā*, therefore, is the radicalisation of the not-self doctrine into the theory that no *dharma* whatsoever has any sort of self-nature and if that is the case then there are no processes, since they cannot exist, and there is nothing to be processed.

This leaves us with a *kind* of answer to the question of *anātman* and rebirth, which is that the Buddha was not talking about self as complete non-existence, and for the Mādhyamaka he was not talking about it as existence either, nor as both nor neither. The problem only arises if the assumption is that the Buddha had taught that not-self means *nothing* (which he expressly refused to say) and it is not at all clear that this is what is meant by the *anātman* doctrine.

There is more to be said on Śāntideva's specific treatment of the not-self teaching in relation to the *śūnyatā* teaching and this will be covered in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Śāntideva's Account of the Bodhisattva Ideal

### Introduction

In this chapter I would like to look at the structure of Śāntideva's works (the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*), and to examine the way he deals with egoism and self-interest as well as how self-interest becomes interest in others then the exchange of self with others. Following on from the previous chapter, I also intend to examine how he reconciles emptiness (*śūnyatā*) with compassion (*karuṇā*) as the aims of the Bodhisattva. In quoting from translations of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* I have specifically cited those which seemed to me to offer the greatest clarity and contextual consistency.

Before beginning an examination of what Śāntideva thought, it would be useful to describe a little about his background to help locate him in the broader Mahāyāna philosophy. To that end it would be helpful to, firstly, give a brief outline of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the particular school Śāntideva followed.

### 5.1 Mahāyāna Buddhism

Before what we now call Mahāyāna Buddhism could be identified, there were several schools of Buddhism in existence, only one of which now remains: Theravāda or the 'Old Wisdom' School, sometimes known as 'Southern Buddhism'. The pre-Mahāyāna schools came to be considered by the Mahāyāna as inferior vehicles to enlightenment (needless to say this view was not shared by the schools in question) and inevitably contrasts between them and the Mahāyāna need to be drawn to illustrate the important differences. Before doing so, it should be noted that all forms of Buddhism do share certain features – otherwise they would be unclassifiable collectively as 'Buddhist'. Shared features include the Four Noble Truths, The Eightfold Path as a means to escape from *duḥkha*, the Five Moral Precepts and the not-self or *anātman* doctrine are all generally agreed upon, perhaps with different emphases, by all Buddhists. (See Conze, 1974, p. 122.)

Despite these shared concepts, differences do exist and I hope to bring some of the more important ones out in what follows. This is not an exact science, however, and there are areas where some ideas and doctrines which we normally associate with Mahāyāna Buddhism have their roots elsewhere.<sup>106</sup> This makes exact lines of demarcation between Mahāyāna and other forms of Buddhism impossible, and rather than seeing this as a hindrance to having a coherent overview of Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is, I feel, more in keeping with what I understand the Buddha to have taught: the teaching of the *Dharma* is not set in stone and should not result in any kind of inflexible viewpoint. There will always be a certain level of personal interpretation involved in understanding Buddhism, and there is no clear delineation between the various strands of thought which constitute Buddhism on the whole. Be this as it may, there are several kinds of Buddhism which share enough collectively to be described as 'pre-Mahāyāna' and those who would share the description 'Mahāyāna' and I would like to briefly outline what I think is salient for our discussion, beginning with the Mahāyāna's

---

<sup>106</sup> For example in the Mahāsāṃghika.

unclear origins.

It is difficult to find solid evidence of the genesis of the Mahāyāna: when it began, exactly at what point Buddhists regarded themselves as adherents of its doctrines and, in fact, when those doctrines first appeared. (See Williams, 1989, pp. 1-40 and in Crosby and Skilton, 1998, p. xiii as well as Harvey, 2000, p. 123.) It seems that there was no revolution or division in pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism leading to the birth of the Mahāyāna. It appears more likely that its evolution was gradual, coming from strands of thought already in existence amongst some pre-Mahāyāna Buddhists.

It is possible, to a limited extent, to trace its development through scriptural texts but this is highly problematic in terms of chronology since the original Sanskrit texts are undated, some have been translated *back* into Sanskrit from other languages at a later time, some originals are lost and many texts are still untranslated. It would not be appropriate here to go into that discussion since I am less concerned with its overall historical development than with what it seems to have embodied specifically for one particular Mahāyāna thinker: Śāntideva.

The Mahāyāna believe that one crucial difference between themselves and pre-Mahāyāna Buddhists is that the latter aim for Arhatship whilst the Mahāyāna aim for complete Buddhahood through following the Bodhisattva path. The Arhat seeks self-enlightenment while the Bodhisattva seeks the emancipation of all beings from *duḥkha* and *saṃsāra*. They aim to become enlightened themselves simply as a stepping-stone to alleviating the *duḥkha* of others (AP 15:2, Conze, 1970, p. 108 and 1974, p. 128). The Arhat and Pratyekabuddha<sup>107</sup> are seen by the Mahāyāna as less able to assist in alleviating the sufferings of others than the Bodhisattva, who regards the self-liberation of the Arhat as limited and that of the Pratyekabuddha as lacking in compassion since he does not pass it on. In fact, even in early Buddhism the Bodhisattva, although not yet treating compassion and wisdom as equal, was regarded as more refined than the Arhat (see Harvey, 2000, p. 123.)

This interpretation of the Bodhisattva is, however, a Mahāyānin one. Some pre-Mahāyānins differ as to the nature of the Bodhisattva, and their view of him is based around the idea that he is an historical incarnation of the Buddha, is more of an idealisation than a real person and that there is only *one* Buddha per world system (AN 1:15).<sup>108</sup> A Mahāyāna interpretation sees the Bodhisattva as one amongst countless numbers of wise and compassionate beings motivated by a wish to benefit all sentient creatures and that everyone has it in them to be a Buddha.

Another feature of what we now call the Mahāyāna is that they accept(ed) the existing scriptures of the pre-Mahāyāna Pāli Canon, but felt that their own writings would supplement this.

---

<sup>107</sup> One who reaches enlightenment alone, without teachers, and does so for the benefit of him/herself.

<sup>108</sup> See AN 1:15:10, DN 19:13-14, Mhp II, IV:6:4-9, pp. 47-51. Not all pre-Mahāyāna schools accepted this though – for example the Mahāsāṃghikas disputed this idea.

### 5.1.1 Mādhyamaka

As mentioned earlier (p. 82) the Buddha, when questioned, had sometimes remained silent since he did not want to appear to side with either eternalists or nihilists (SN 44:10 and Mhp 4:2:4-5). This refusal influenced a later Indian Mahāyāna development, somewhere around the second century CE, which also avoided extremes by taking the ‘Middle Way’ between them. This middle way, or Mādhyamaka,<sup>109</sup> lent its name to a school within Mahāyāna Buddhism which Śāntideva followed. This school utilised literature which can be described as specifically Mahāyānin (in that it does not belong to the Pāli Canon), primarily those early *sūtras* concerned with *prajñāpāramitā* (the Perfection of Wisdom), one of the oldest probably being the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* or ‘Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines (or Verses)’.

The first Mādhyamika philosopher of profound importance was the school’s co-founder<sup>110</sup> Nāgārjuna, who has become probably the most significant Mahāyānin philosopher and whose work was of great influence on Śāntideva.<sup>111</sup> In the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way) Nāgārjuna adopts a style of argument which aims at refuting the opponent’s position through logical inference, which at times causes an infinite regression and renders the interlocutor’s argument absurd or meaningless. Whilst doing so he is careful to maintain a non-position himself (although this interpretation is not universally accepted, see Williams, 1989, p. 63).<sup>112</sup> Śāntideva later adopts this style as well as the other central tenets of Mādhyamaka philosophy, which I will explain shortly and offer an analysis of how they fit into Śāntideva’s overall scheme of thought.

### 5.1.2 Yogācāra

Besides the Mādhyamaka there have been several other schools within Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the main alternative which emerged was the Yogācāra School.<sup>113</sup> I do not intend to give an outline of the central philosophies of this school since it would be surplus to our central enquiry, however, it should not be seen as a static entity which comes chronologically after a static and easily definable Mādhyamaka school. Although the Mādhyamaka existed *prior* to the Yogācāra they both developed over time, side by side and sometimes as a result of opposition and perhaps even confluence. Within the Mādhyamaka there developed different methods of philosophical engagement such as the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika.

### 5.1.3 Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika

Śāntideva’s philosophical method follows that of what later Tibetan Buddhists referred to as the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamaka school in that he uses the same

---

<sup>109</sup> Also known as the *Śūnyavada* (‘Emptiness’ or ‘Voidness’) School. Conze (1974) depicts the School as adopting the middle way between ‘affirming and denying’, p. 124.

<sup>110</sup> Tradition has it that the school was founded by Nagarjuna and one of his students, Aryadeva.

<sup>111</sup> Nāgārjuna as an historical person is defined usually by his authorship of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.

<sup>112</sup> There is also a method of expressing *śūnyatā* which is positive. See *Ratnagotravibhāga Mahāyānaottaratantra Śāstra*.

<sup>113</sup> Also known as Cittamātra or Vijñānavāda since it saw reality as ‘Mind (citta)’ or as ‘Consciousness (vijña)’ and has been linked to some of the much later German Idealist philosophies in the West.

*reductio ad absurdum* method as the earlier Nāgārjuna.<sup>114</sup> When it comes to philosophical discussion, the *reductio* is favoured since we cannot demonstrate anything positively. The Svātantrika might be seen as slightly more moderate: they did not reject the *reductio* - it was an important tool for them - but they allowed for some more positive intermediary stages.<sup>115</sup> However, these terms were not used until later, when Mahāyāna Buddhism made its way into Tibet.

#### 5.1.4 Following the Bodhisattva Path

Mahāyāna thinkers and practitioners tried to explain, in some detail, *how* to become a Bodhisattva and these ‘instructions’ developed as did the philosophy. If we can regard compassion in early Buddhism as merely *one* of the four *brahma-vihāras*, by the time of the Mādhyamaka (at least in Śāntideva) compassion plays a much more significant role.<sup>116</sup>

With the Bodhisattva rather than the Arhat becoming the role model for early Mahāyāna Buddhists, it is clear that the training and understanding required to be a Bodhisattva would have to supplement that already in existence. The training follows what becomes known as the Bodhisattva path.

The Bodhisattva concept was in existence from early times and should not be seen as coming about *only* with the rise of the Mahāyāna. The Bodhisattva path becomes, for the Mahāyāna, a crucial means to eventual complete Buddhahood and going well beyond the aims of the Arhat. It should also be remembered that compassion, which later becomes the central feature of Mahāyāna Buddhism, was not unimportant for early Buddhists – recall its place as a *brahma-vihāra* in pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism and the fact that it does feature in numerous important ways in pre-Mahāyāna texts (see, for example, SN (as *karuṇā*) 6:1:1:560, p. 233, 16:3, p. 665, 46:54:4 p. 1610; (as *anukampā*) 4:11:471, pp. 203-4, 16:3, pp. 665-6; MN 4:21, p. 104, 4:34, p. 107, 12:63, p. 177 and 31:22, pp. 305-6).

Even within the Mahāyāna, the idea of compassion is not that developed early on, but out of the Bodhisattva ideal it develops to become the central, one, principal virtue which the Bodhisattva needs in order to also have wisdom. But in the classical list of the six perfections (*pāramitās*), compassion is not there.<sup>117</sup> An explanation is needed as to how and why compassion came to occupy such a prominent place in the thinking of the Mahāyāna and I intend to explain this through the works of the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika poet, monk and philosopher Śāntideva.

#### 5.1.5 Historical Background to Śāntideva

Little of Śāntideva’s life is known with certainty, and there is a lack of concrete evidence as to exactly where he was born or the dates he lived. The general

---

<sup>114</sup> Although Nāgārjuna is not credited with identifying that method as distinct. The later Buddhapaṇḍita, in his commentaries on Nāgārjuna, is normally given this status and the still later Candrakīrti’s support of him (against Bhavaviveka’s criticisms) is seen as a source of the delineation between the Prāsaṅgika and Svatantrika.

<sup>115</sup> See Conze, 1974, pp. 124-5 and for a more detailed treatment see Lopez, 1987, pp. 55-81.

<sup>116</sup> Conze (p. 100) regards the *brahma-vihāras* as ‘one of the seeds of the early Mahayana’.

<sup>117</sup> *The Lotus Sutra (Saddharmapundarika)*, lists the Six Perfections as *dāna* (generosity), *śīla* (morality), *kṣānti* (patience), *vīrya* (vigour), *dhyāna* (concentration) and *prajñā* (wisdom).

consensus at the moment is that he was born with a different name somewhere in what we now call Northern India,<sup>118</sup> and died in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.<sup>119</sup> Legend has it that he was the son of a king and renounced the life of a prince (a recurring feature in Buddhist hagiographies), to become a student of the teacher Mañjuvajra. After a vision of the Tathāgata Mañjuśrī (who embodies wisdom (*prajña*) – the other major element of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics besides compassion), he went to work for a king in Madhyadeśa, taking the name Acalaseṇa. After some unverifiable adventures he became a monk at the Nālandā monastery<sup>120</sup> and assumed the name ‘Śāntideva’. (See, Obermiller, 1986, from which this historical account largely comes. Also see Clayton, 2006, pp. 33-44 for other sources.)

How long Śāntideva spent in Nālandā as a monk is not known, and the story goes that he was always deep in meditation which caused some of the other monks to suspect that he might be lazy and inattentive to his studies. They decided to test his knowledge and asked him for a recitation whereupon he offered them three of his own compositions from which to choose: the *Sūtrasamuccaya* the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.<sup>121</sup> They chose, on his recommendation, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and when he reached Chapter 9 (The Perfection of Wisdom or Understanding), he disappeared<sup>122</sup> and no-one is sure what happened to him next or when he died – again, accounts vary.<sup>123</sup>

There are, however, some features of Śāntideva’s life which find broad agreement amongst scholars. For example, there is agreement that he was a monk and philosopher of the Mādhyamaka school, although this is not entirely without dispute (see Clayton, *op. cit.*, p. 33 for suggestions of Tantrism) and that he was a follower of the Prāsaṅgika method used in debate to refute opposed views through a process of *reductio ad absurdum* previously employed by both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti – two other major names of the Mādhyamaka school.<sup>124</sup>

Even if there is dispute surrounding the authorship of the *Sūtrasamuccaya*, there appears to be none of any note with regard to Śāntideva’s composition of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and his authorship of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* although the authenticity of parts of the latter have been questioned. (See Crosby and Skilton, 1995, pp. xxx-xxxiv.)

<sup>118</sup> Clayton (*op. cit.*, p. 34 n.5, after Obermiller, 1996) has it at Gujarat in North West India.

<sup>119</sup> There are various possibilities of his birth being anywhere from c.650 to c.725 CE. See Clayton, *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>120</sup> This university/monastery was situated in today’s Indian state of Bihar, south east of its capital city Patna.

<sup>121</sup> For a discussion on Śāntideva or Nāgārjuna as possible authors of the *Sūtrasamuccaya* see Clayton, 2006, pp. 36-7. Some, for example Ruegg, 1981, p. 84 are quite unequivocal that Śāntideva was not the author of the *Sūtrasamuccaya*, which, in any case, has not survived. It has also been suggested (by Williams, Clayton amongst others) that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* might have been known as the *Bodhissattvacaryāvatāra* and see Clayton, 2006, pp. 38 and Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. xxxii for a discussion on the chronology of these compositions.

<sup>122</sup> Williams has it at BCA 9:34 and Clayton at BCA 9:3.

<sup>123</sup> For example, Batchelor believes he was tracked down and asked to return to Nālandā but refused, renounced his monastic vows and continued his life as a lay person.

<sup>124</sup> Although Aryadeva is considered co-founder with Nagarjuna of the Mādhyamaka school and Buddhapālita has been mooted as a possible founder of the Prāsaṅgika method. (See Williams, 1989, pp. 57-8.)

## 5.2 The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* in Translation

Before making any claims about the structure of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, it must be noted that recent scholarship has raised doubts about the work originally existing in its present form. If this is the case then the current structure may not be what Śāntideva had intended: ‘we can...look at the present Sanskrit text with the understanding that its original structure may well have been obscured by later editorial activity.’ (Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. xxxiii.)<sup>125</sup>

Despite this, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* does have a certain structure whether Śāntideva intended it in its current form or whether it has been made that way by subsequent editing. What can be said with certainty about the structure is that it is arranged in chapters which are intended to help the practitioner develop the ‘Awakening Mind’ (*bodhicitta*),<sup>126</sup> and that it closely follows the six Bodhisattva perfections or *pāramitās* which are covered in five of the ten chapters of the book.<sup>127</sup> The first two *pāramitās*, giving (*dāna*) and morality (*śīla*) are covered in Chapter 5 ‘The Guarding of Awareness’; the third *pāramitā*, patience or forbearance (*kṣānti*) is covered in Chapter 6 ‘The Perfection of Forbearance’; vigour (*virya*) is covered in Chapter 8 ‘The Perfection of Vigour’; concentration (*dhyāna*) is found in Chapter 8 ‘The Perfection of Meditative Absorption,’ and the last *pāramitā*, wisdom (*prajñā*) is covered in Chapter 9 ‘The Perfection of Understanding’. The other five chapters can be outlined as covering: (Chapter 1) ‘Praise of the Awakening Mind’, (Chapter 2) ‘Confession of Evil’, (Chapter 3) ‘Adopting the Awakening Mind’, (Chapter 4) ‘Vigilance Regarding the Awakening Mind’ and (Chapter 10) ‘Dedication’.

In Appendix 1 (p. 162) I have provided a table with various translations of the chapter titles, which give an overview of the modern structure which I intend to use in what follows.

### 5.2.1 Structural Outline of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a guide to the path of awakening for a Bodhisattva. The journey to Bodhisattvahood has to begin somewhere and the starting point could be seen as just an embryonic wish to be enlightened out of compassion for other creatures (BCA 1:6-8, 11, 18, 22). Having such a wish can be seen as the very beginnings of the conditions which are necessary to develop a full and proper attitude which will end, ultimately in complete Buddhahood. Having the kind of attitude which is conducive to becoming a Bodhisattva is *bodhicitta* and the first chapter is concerned with *adopting* the awakening mind (*bodhicitta-parigraha*). *Bodhicitta* comes in two forms: firstly as an initial intention to work for the welfare of others (all the way to complete Buddhahood) and secondly to actually do so (*ibid.*, 1:15, 24, 26-7, 29, 35). Awakening *bodhicitta* is the birth of altruism, and in explaining this, Śāntideva asks the question (at the beginning of the

---

<sup>125</sup> Crosby and Skilton also point out that the work we have ended up with is symmetrical in having ten chapters but asymmetrical in not allocating one chapter to each *pāramitā* since the first two *pāramitās* have to share a chapter. (See Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. xxxiv.)

<sup>126</sup> Crosby and Skilton caution the reader against over-reliance on this literal translation and suggest in some cases s/he should consider ‘Enlightenment Thought’, ‘Enlightenment Attitude’ or ‘the will to attain Awakening’ (1995, p. xxxvi). Batchelor, 1979, renders *bodhicitta* ‘the Awakening Mind’ and both Kelsang, 2002, and Berzin, 2004, leave it untranslated.

<sup>127</sup> The Tun-huang recension has nine chapters.

*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) how do people become altruistic?

Such a being, unprecedented, an excellent jewel, in whom there is born a concern for the welfare of others such as others have not even for themselves, how is he born?

(BCA 1:25, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 7)

The person he is talking about is the Bodhisattva who is on her/his way to becoming a Buddha. This person, in whom there is a primary concern for the welfare of others rather than for themselves, comes about with the realisation that concern only for *their own* liberation from suffering produces only more suffering (*ibid.*, 1:28) and if such a person realises that their own liberation is tied up with that of others, then they will want to become truly concerned with the welfare of others. This is connected to what he says later in Chapter 8:129:

All those who suffer in the world do so because of their desire for their own happiness. All those happy in the world are so because of their desire for the happiness of others.

Why say more? Observe this distinction: between the fool who longs for his own advantage and the sage who acts for the advantage of others.

For one who fails to exchange his own happiness for the suffering of others, Buddhahood is certainly impossible – how could there even be happiness in cyclic existence?

(BCA 8:129-31, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, pp. 7-8)

So the Bodhisattva is one who, at some point, recognises that attempts to find happiness for *oneself* only will result in more suffering. This occurrence is the generation of the seed of *bodhicitta*. Generating *bodhicitta* is fundamental to the path of the Bodhisattva, and Śāntideva talks about the discovery of *bodhicitta* (*ibid.*, 1:5, 6) reflecting on how, previous to its discovery, his life had been attended with unwholesome behaviour (*ibid.*, 2:28) which he now renounces. The Bodhisattva determines to leave negative or unwholesome thoughts and deeds behind (*ibid.*, 2:29-31, 34, 37, 38, 42, 47, 49, 53, 63-5) and vows to devote all his energy to the protection and assistance of all sentient beings as others have before him (*ibid.*, 2:49, 54). He then explains what this practice will entail (*ibid.*, 3:7-15, 17-24), how to become a Bodhisattva through generating *bodhicitta* (*ibid.*, 3: 23-28) and then how to begin doing so (*ibid.*, 4:1-6, 12, 17, 23, 38-44, 47, 48).

In Chapter 5 he briefly outlines the perfections (*pāramitās*) of generosity (*ibid.*, 5:9-10, 42, 83, 85) and morality (*ibid.*, 5:11, 42, 47),<sup>128</sup> and their importance to the Bodhisattva training (*ibid.*, 5:1-8) before turning to the actual Guarding of Awareness (*samprajanya-rakṣaṇa*) where he reminds himself of the vow taken earlier (*ibid.*, 5:84, 97, 102) and warns that the clarity of mind needed to be a Bodhisattva is under threat principally from anything which causes distraction (*ibid.*, 5:16). In fact any distracting thoughts at all are to be guarded against if the

---

<sup>128</sup> Although it does not seem apparent in v. 47 in Crosby and Skilton (1995, p. 38) it seems clear that this is connected to morality in other translations, viz Berzin, 2004, Kelsang, 2002 and Batchelor 1979.

Bodhisattva is to maintain the resolve needed to act in the right way (BCA 5:16, 35). Propelled by a resolve to fulfil the Bodhisattva vows while maintaining mindfulness (*smṛti*) and constant vigilance, is conducive to perfecting giving (*dāna*) and morality (*śīla*).

He says that we should consider ourselves as a block of wood (*ibid.*, 5:34, 48, 50-3) when confronted with anything which might distract us, and in this way we can avoid responding to such distractions. This has to result in *practical* behaviour which will help oneself and others; there is little point in just reading words (*ibid.*, 5:109).

Everything which has been thus far achieved in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* can be easily undone by the defilement of hatred or anger. Śāntideva thinks that the way to avoid the damage anger can do is to cultivate its opposite, which he takes to be patience (*kṣānti*). Chapter 6, then, deals mostly with anger (*dosa*) and its avoidance through the cultivation of patience or forbearance (*kṣānti*). The defilements are not the only trap lying in wait for the trainee Bodhisattva; there is also the possibility that he might find the path so challenging that it becomes unenjoyable and that leads to a kind of deflation or disheartenment which would obviously be detrimental to the practice of *bodhicitta* (Chapter 7). A remedy for this is for the practitioner to remember they should try to *enjoy* the path and to try to keep sight of the kinds of things which often follow disheartenment or weariness such as the self-loathing that comes with making less progress than you had intended and general feelings of laziness and defeatism. Chapter 7 can be seen as dealing with maintaining your morale, which might dip through losing sight of why you undertook the Bodhisattva vow and/or the drudgery of repeatedly striving. Śāntideva suggests you counter this by remembering your vow, by inspiring confidence in yourself, by *enjoying* working for the benefit of others and by knowing when to back off and relax rather than pushing yourself so hard that you undermine your efforts through exhaustion.

Śāntideva returns to *bodhicitta* in Chapter 8 which is primarily concerned with meditation or getting the mind right for the activities of the Bodhisattva. I will deal in some detail with this chapter below but, in brief, the first half of the chapter is concerned with the rejection of habits of thinking which lock one into identification with a personal ‘self’ and with ‘others’ as separate and substantially existing entities (*ibid.*, 8:1-89). Most of the second half is concerned with cultivating *bodhicitta* through meditating on the *equality* of self and others, then through *exchanging* self and others (*ibid.*, 8:90-173). This has a connection to Chapter 9 in that not only is there no substantially existing ‘self’, there is no substantiality at all in anything. This is the *śūnyatā* or emptiness teaching which is the pinnacle of the *prajñāpāramitā* or perfection of wisdom which aims at permanent liberation through the understanding of emptiness tied to the cultivation of full and genuine compassion. This is the vision of the Bodhisattva and the aim of the path which begins with *bodhicitta*.

Finally, Chapter 10 comes in the form of a dedication, which might be interpreted as a form of giving or generosity (*dāna*) since the Bodhisattva hands over his learning to others free of charge and for their benefit as well as for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Chapters 8 and 9 are most important to my enquiry since the former deals with the reasons for the cultivation of *compassion* and the latter deals with the cultivation of *wisdom* – the two central virtues of the Bodhisattva.

### 5.2.2 The Route to Compassion in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*

There are many ways in which one could analyse the structure of the main chapter dealing with meditation (Chapter 8) in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* depending on what you are looking for in the Chapter. For example one might be trying to find the structure which Śāntideva intended,<sup>129</sup> one might be looking for a clear delineation of Mahāyāna and pre-Mahāyāna meditation techniques, one might be searching for examples of skilful poetry or any number of other reasons. For my purposes I see it as consisting of six distinct stages: (1) vv. 1-8 set the scene by advising us that both body and mind will be distracted if they are not prepared properly for meditation; (2) vv. 9-38 concentrate mostly on preparing the *body* for effective meditation; (3) vv. 39-89 concentrate mostly on preparing the *mind* for effective meditation; (4) vv. 90- 119 deal with the first part of the actual meditation, which consists of considering the *equality* of oneself and others; (5) vv. 120-73 deal with the second part of the meditation which consists of reflecting on the *exchange* of self and others and (6) vv. 174-86 is a recap on the need to overcome distracting desires and make the effort required to focus on the appropriate meditation.

It seems to me that there are two main points to the meditations: the first is aimed at seeing the *equality* between oneself and others and the second at *exchanging* self and others. The most important part, therefore, for my enquiry concerns BCA 8:90-119 and 120-173, since it is at these two points that Śāntideva tries to explain why we should develop compassion to the extent that we work solely for others, and how we should do so. The purpose of meditating on the sameness of yourself and others is to show that other sentient beings are just like you when it comes to their wish to avoid *duḥkha* and to experience happiness.

### 5.2.3 Equality of Self and Others (BCA 8:90- 119)

As we have seen (above, p. 62) compassion is something which does not come naturally to everyone and also varies in intensity from person to person. It is something which, if it is considered important, has to be cultivated and, since it plays such an important part in Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is given special attention. Two major reasons as to why it occupies this position of importance for Śāntideva, is that it is done in emulation of the Buddha, who was the purest expression of compassion, and that it is not possible to be a fully enlightened Bodhisattva without developing and understanding compassion proper. With regard to the second point, it is possible to be enlightened but not compassionate enough to teach others the *Dharma* as in the example of the *Pratyekabuddha* (cf. Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 86) who has achieved a form of solitary enlightenment. This is unlike Śākyamuni Buddha who was enlightened *and* compassionate in that he taught the *Dharma* instead of keeping it to himself and it is this that the Bodhisattva wants to follow. There is a third reason we need to

---

<sup>129</sup> Which is probably pointless since this chapter, above all others, appears to have been modified through subsequent editing - see Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 77.

*cultivate* compassion and that is because, for the Mādhyamaka, the realisation of true compassion does not occur automatically when one realises that there is no metaphysical difference between self and other.<sup>130</sup> Since it does not occur automatically on this realisation it has to be cultivated and its cultivation is central to Chapter 8.

The guidance on training oneself in true compassion comes in the form of techniques for, firstly, calming the mind and, secondly, developing *bodhicitta* which makes the mind conducive to the aims of the meditation. The calming of the mind is a very important preparation for what is to come and the first part of Chapter 8 is devoted to achieving this. To begin the process which will hopefully lead to generating *bodhicitta*, Śāntideva exhorts the reader to find solitude in order to be able to concentrate properly without the distractions of other people. If you are distracted then you will be unable to develop meditative concentration properly and will not achieve your goal (BCA 8:1-4). Association with others causes more than simple distraction, it can cause thoughts of comparison and competition which lead to feelings of superiority and inferiority, which strengthen attachment to unwholesome and useless things and take one far away from the behaviour sought (*ibid.*, 8:9-24). Śāntideva continues his advice on achieving bodily solitude (up to BCA 8:38) then turns his attention to the solitude of the mind (*ibid.*, 8:38-89) in preparation for the meditations to come.

Evidently there are external and internal distractions: the physical presence of other people who might make noise, for example, is an external distraction and the desire for the opposite sex is an example of an internal distraction.<sup>131</sup> Going to an isolated place such as a forest cures the former but the latter requires meditation.

To give a brief summary of this section, Śāntideva concentrates on our strong attachment to the physical form in various ways and in an attempt to break this form of attachment, he focuses on how disgusting this object of desire can be; whether as a dead and rotting corpse (*ibid.*, 8:30) or in some of the natural bodily functions which are commonly held to be repellent:

If you do not want to touch something such as soil because it is smeared with excrement, how can you long to touch the body which excreted it?

(BCA 8:58, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 93)

If you have no attachment for what is foul, Why do you sexually embrace another (body):

The seed of which grew from a field (full) of excrement  
And was nourished by it.

(BCA 8:59, Berzin, 2004)

He does not focus *solely* on the others, but turns the focus inward to show that all the disgusting things which he has just identified also apply to *our own* bodies.

---

<sup>130</sup> This is not the case for the other major branch of mainstream Mahāyāna – the Yogācārins.

<sup>131</sup> Śāntideva talks explicitly about a man's desire for a woman but we could equally regard this as 'bodily desire' of any kind.

This is one point where a comparison of *equality* is made with others and he wants us to see that there is no difference between ourselves and another creature which, like us, is temporal (BCA 8:30, 31, 45, 63, 70, 82), comes from ‘filth’ (*ibid.*, 8:56, 57, 59, 60, 63), generates excreta (*ibid.*, 8:49, 58), and is essentially an animated bag of skin-covered bones (*ibid.*, 8:30, 31, 32, 43, 48, 51, 52, 57, 63, 70), only briefly separated from death and the various stages of decomposition and which is nothing but putrefying meat on its way to being turned into more excrement by vultures! (*ibid.*, 8:45, 47, 53, 54, 56).

When shall I go to the local charnel ground and compare my own rotting body with other corpses?

For this body of mine will also turn putrid in that way, its stench so vile even the jackals will not slink near.

Even the bits of bone born together in this single body will be scattered apart; how much more so other people one holds dear?

You have plenty of filth of your own...

That you do not understand your own body to be formed from filth is astonishing!

(BCA 8:30, 31, 32, 53, 56; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, pp. 90-2)

The comparisons between self and others are not *only* in terms of how much living people share a wish to experience happiness and avoid suffering – we also share the fact that we decay and rot and that we come from ‘filth’ and will return to it.

The deconstruction of the desired one into a temporal body and a mind which cannot be properly apprehended (BCA 8:55), serves to illustrate that the strong carnal desires most humans experience are really for something idealised rather than ultimately real. The object of our desire is a temporary physical form which, when analysed, turns out to be disgusting when alive, repulsive when dead and not substantially existing. Meditating on this is intended to turn our thoughts away from this strong urge and remove this distraction in order to allow the mind to concentrate with greater purity.

One more way Śāntideva tries to neutralise desire is by showing that a man (the perceived audience is male) is prepared to put himself in danger (*ibid.*, 8:40, 42, 77, 78), risk appearing foolish (*ibid.*, 8:77), waste money (*ibid.*, 8:71, 72, 79) and effort (*ibid.*, 8:72, 73, 74, 80, 82) in order to satisfy this desire for what turns out to be something at best temporary<sup>132</sup> and at worst disguised foulness. In fact, even if the man manages to satisfy these desires, he will be disappointed to find that the enjoyment is nothing but a small moment in his life which itself is temporary:

---

<sup>132</sup> Pausanias’ speech from Plato’s *Symposium* comes to mind here when he explains that there is a basic and coarse kind of love which is for the body only. Plato’s intention here was to show that this is a *temporary* love since one guarantee is that the body will decay and good looks will be lost. For Plato, attachment to *anything* physical is ultimately pointless since it will decay. (*Symposium*, 180e-182a.)

For those prey to passion such misery is abundant, whereas enjoyment is paltry, like snatches at bits of grass made by a beast as it draws a cart.

(BCA 8:80; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 95)

For the sake of that paltry taste of pleasure...

This hard-to-find splendor of respites and endowments

Is destroyed by those who waste their (good) karma.<sup>133</sup>

(BCA 8:81; Berzin 2004)

In the end, following such desires is simply not worth the effort as far as Śāntideva is concerned and it would make more sense to concentrate on something more productive:

This exhausting effort is made for all time for the sake of a puny body which inevitably dies, which falls into hells and other low realms.

With a fraction even one hundredth of a billionth of that effort one attains Buddhahood. For those who follow their passions the suffering involved is greater than the suffering on the Path, and there is no Awakening.

(BCA 8:82-3; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 95)

Schopenhauer is of a very similar opinion when he says that men<sup>134</sup> are prepared to undergo all manner of avoidable dangers simply in order to follow their animalistic urges, thus satisfying the will of Nature and burdening their own existence with even more problems than they had previously and all for temporary pleasure. (PP2, §153, Payne, 1974, pp. 293-5.)<sup>135</sup>

After this intensely emotionally charged passage, Śāntideva returns to the tranquillity and calmness of the forest, where the trainee Bodhisattva can be alone and unvexed by internal or external considerations and can begin the meditation 'proper' on equality of self and others (BCA 8:89-119).

He begins this meditation by asking the now calm and undistracted practitioner to consider the fact that suffering and happiness are experienced by *all* (and we can include animals as well as humans) and that others should be looked after as you would look after yourself (*ibid.*, 8:90). He explains that if part of your own body is in pain then you will automatically, and without thinking, cover it and protect it with your hand. If we consider all sentient creatures collectively to be one vast organism then it would seem strange if the 'hand' did not protect another part of

---

<sup>133</sup> Compare Crosby's and Skilton's, I think, slightly less clear 'For the sake of that snatch of enjoyment...this momentary good fortune which is extremely hard to find [being reborn as a human] is lost by one lost to their destiny.' (BCA 8:81; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 95.)

<sup>134</sup> This passage is wrongly taken by some to be misogynistic – Schopenhauer blames nature *not* women.

<sup>135</sup> Schopenhauer considers our will to continue through sexual intercourse as the strongest primal drive in us. What essentially happens is that the will dupes the intellect which gives rise to a man being prepared to undergo all manner of avoidable problems to satisfy the sexual impulse which they would hardly do were they to think rationally. According to Plato, Sophocles, in old age and no longer having sexual desire, said 'To my great delight, I have broken free of that, like a slave who has got away from a rabid and savage master.' (*Republic* 329c, tr. Waterfield, 1994, p. 5). Plato puts this into the mouth of Cephalus.

the organism which was suffering. The reason this does not happen, of course, is that we tend to individualise rather than collectivise our bodies and mental activities. But Śāntideva wants to say that another's suffering is just like yours and you should help them as you would yourself (BCA 8:93-96). At this point it seems that an imaginary objection is made in that others are in fact *not* you so their suffering does not need to affect you therefore there is no need to care about their suffering (*ibid.*, 8:97-8). Śāntideva responds that the hand protects the foot even though the hand is not in pain (*ibid.*, 8:99), and if we remember his previous analogy of all beings as one organism (*ibid.*, 8:91) then it would seem strange if one part did not protect another part from suffering and the only reason not to see it this way is because of the mistaken idea of an existent self. Furthermore, suffering should be removed simply because it is there regardless of who it affects (*ibid.*, 8:102) and no one would question its removal and applicability to every sentient being: 'If one asks why suffering should be prevented, no one disputes that! If it must be prevented, then all of it must be.' (BCA 8:103, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 97).

There then follows the argument that if one person's suffering can hamper the suffering of the many then they should take that suffering on (BCA 8:104-5). He gives the example of Supuṣpacandra who was tortured and killed by King Śūradatta but accepted this fate, leaving the King so full of remorse that he completely stopped such behaviour and worked towards a better life which eventually saw him reborn as the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama (*ibid.*, 8:106).<sup>136</sup> In the long term Supuṣpacandra's suffering was one of the catalysts which resulted in the spreading of the *Dharma* through the activities of Śākyamuni Buddha. Such people as Supuṣpacandra who are prepared to suffer agonies that others may not, even to the point of having to endure existence in the lowest realm of rebirth, are happy to take on the misery of others since they do not see them as any different to themselves:

Those who have developed the continuum of their mind in this way, to whom the suffering of others is as important as the things they themselves hold dear, plunge down into the Avīci hell as geese into a cluster of lotus blossoms.

Those who become oceans of sympathetic joy when living beings are released, surely it is they who achieve fulfilment. What would be the point in a liberation without sweetness?

(BCA 8:107-8; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 97)

Śāntideva warns that people like Supuṣpacandra should be neither smug about contributing to the liberation of others nor sad about their suffering. They should not be looking for a personal reward either and their actions should be driven purely by concern for the welfare of others (BCA 8:109, 116). The point here is that it would *miss* the point to think that 'I' liberated 'them' or 'I' am deserved of praise, since the focus is not on 'I' or even 'they' since all are an equal collective whole. He has not got to the point, yet, of saying that self and other are exchangeable, only that they are equal and one should not be motivated by a self-

---

<sup>136</sup> The story of Supuṣpacandra is taken from the 35<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Samādhirāja Sūtra*. See Crosby and Skilton, 1995, n.8.106, p. 177.

interest which ignores the plight of others or which assists them in order to attain glory or to cynically generate good *karma* for oneself. In fact he is moved to remind us at this point that others should be as accepted as self (BCA 8:110-15).

Finally, he explains that if you accept the equality of self and others then you should extend your wish for your own freedom from *duḥkha* to others and that ‘compassion should be practised towards the world’ (*ibid.*, 8:117; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 98). One can cultivate the disposition to think in this way through practice until it becomes a normal way to think rather than something strange or to be feared (BCA 8:119).

#### **5.2.4 Exchanging Self and Others (BCA 8:120-173)**

Now Śāntideva moves from *equalising* self and others to *exchanging* self and others. Near the start of this section he explains that some people are so obsessed with themselves and their own welfare that they *use* other beings for their own selfish ends by killing them (animals, 8:122, close relatives, 8:123), robbing them (8:122) and/or stealing from the *saṅgha*.<sup>137</sup> Such people, he says, are destined to burn in the lowest realm of *samsāra* and it would be unwise to cultivate such a personality, never mind protect and guard it. At this point he moves from considerations of the short-sightedness of selfishness to the rewards<sup>138</sup> of working for the welfare of others (BCA 8:125) regardless of the consequences:

By oppressing another for one’s own sake, one is roasted in hells, but  
by oppressing oneself for the sake of another, one meets with success  
in everything.

A bad rebirth, inferiority, and stupidity result from the mere desire for  
self-advancement. By transferring that same desire to others, one  
achieves a good rebirth, honour, and intelligence.

(BCA 8:126-7; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 99)

Transposing oneself in place of another guarantees personal success; failure to do so guarantees failure (BCA 8:128). Success and happiness come through working for the benefit of others; failure, servitude (BCA 8:128) and unhappiness come from working only for your own happiness:

All whosoever who are happy in the world  
Are (so) through the wish for the happiness of others;  
While all whosoever who are miserable in the world  
Are (so) through the wish for the happiness of themselves.

(BCA 8:129, Berzin, 2004)

Although we are not to be motivated by rewards when acting in an altruistic fashion, it seems there are many rewards to come for so doing!

So far it has been nothing but assertion on Śāntideva’s part and he moves to the

---

<sup>137</sup> And more figuratively, from the Buddha or the Dharma – Batchelor’s translation is the ‘Triple Gem’, BCA 8:123, p. 119, Crosby’s and Skilton’s is the ‘Three Jewels’, p. 99, and Kelsang’s is ‘a spiritual community’, p. 133.

<sup>138</sup> Although rewards should not be the *motivation* for selfless acts: see BCA 8:109.

level of argument now<sup>139</sup> where he considers this ‘self’ that the selfish person is so attached to. He sees a strong identification with the idea of self as the source of the recurring *duḥkha* of the world and it is not difficult to see that the person who kills animals<sup>140</sup> causes *duḥkha* for animals; the person who kills humans causes *duḥkha* for humans; the person who steals and lies for self advancement causes *duḥkha* for those he has stolen from and lied to. All such suffering is caused because the selfish person clings strongly to the idea of their own *separate* self and the separate selves of *others*. If they did not think this way then they would not act in ways which cause the kinds of *duḥkha* Śāntideva identifies.

The calamities which happen in the world, the sufferings and fears,  
many as they are, they all result from clinging onto the notion of self,  
so what good is this clinging of mine?

If one does not let go of self one cannot let go of suffering, as one who  
does not let go of fire cannot let go of burning.  
(BCA 8:134-5; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 100)

It is at precisely this point that Śāntideva takes his position a step further and says that the way to relieve *all* suffering - that of myself *and* of other sentient beings – is to recognise that there is no difference between the two:

Therefore, in order to allay my own suffering and to allay the  
suffering of others, I devote myself to others and accept them as  
myself.  
(*Ibid.*, 8:136, p. 100)

Returning to the theme of the Bodhisattva vow (see p. 77) he declares that since the relationship to others is so strong and unbreakable, from now on he will only be concerned with the welfare of others (BCA 8:137).<sup>141</sup>

We are then invited to meditate on the way the world appears to someone who has a strong identification with a ‘self’ which they pit against ‘others’ (*ibid.*, 8:138-9). There are several perspectives from which to do this and Śāntideva suggests we start from that of an ‘inferior’ person (*ibid.*, 8:140) who is inferior because of their lack of virtue (*ibid.*, 8:42-6), their lower rebirth, their social standing or material wealth (*ibid.*, 8:147). The imagined person is consumed with jealousy as he compares himself to a ‘superior’, and dreams of the superior’s downfall and mockery (*ibid.*, 8:148-50). He even goes as far as thinking that after such a

---

<sup>139</sup> After some further descriptions of the difficulties in store for the selfish person, BCA 8:130-3.

<sup>140</sup> Including using them for food or medicine, v. 122. This is clearest in Kelsang’s translation, p. 133 and Batchelor’s translation, p. 119.

<sup>141</sup> At least this is the sense I make of the various translations of this verse and I take Crosby’s and Skilton’s translation to be the most appropriate since the link to the Bodhisattva vow seems clearest there. Compare Crosby’s and Skilton’s ‘Hey Mind, make the resolve, ‘I am bound to others’! From now on you must have no other concern than the welfare of all beings’, (BCA 8:137, 1995, p. 100) to Berzin’s ‘O mind, decide for sure, “I’m under the governance of others.” Except for the welfare of all limited beings, You’re not going to have other intentions now.’ (BCA 8:137, 2004). I take the last half of Kelsang’s to be in the same spirit as Crosby’s and Skilton’s: ‘From now on, mind, you must understand this clearly And not think of anything Other than benefitting all living beings.’ (BCA 8:137, 2002, p. 136.) Similarly Batchelor’s is in the same vein: ‘Now, except for benefitting every creature, You must not think of anything else.’ 1979, p. 122.

person's comeuppance, any food he is given (we may assume he is comparing himself to another monk) should be stolen, leaving him with just enough to survive (BCA 8:153). The superior person obviously has a strong sense of self identity since he seems to enjoy being fêted (*ibid.*, 8:141-2) and feeling superior to others (*ibid.*, 8:145-6) but he is castigated for this self-identification, an attitude which is at the root of suffering for all:

O mind, because you wish to benefit yourself,  
All the hard work you have done  
For countless aeons in samsara  
Has resulted only in suffering.

(BCA 8:155; Kelsang, 2002, p. 138)

Comparing oneself to others, as either an inferior, superior or both, is a result of self-thinking and self-striving, which leads to *duḥkha* and rebirth. It is short-sighted and ultimately pointless. If the imaginary person had understood in a previous life that self and other should be *exchanged* so that there were no longer feelings of 'self' and 'others', then the current suffering he imagines would not exist. (BCA 8:157). When someone is attached strongly to a notion of self, they forget that they did not spontaneously appear in this world but came into being as a product of the union of their parents. There is no *independent* origination and to imagine you are an autonomous self is illusory and goes against the facts. To be more in tune with reality, you might want to acknowledge, as a first step, that you are born of two others and are not entirely and independently distinct from them. Just one more leap of the imagination could lead you to accept that you have a connection to other beings too. Śāntideva puts this in a slightly different way (although the outcome is the same) when he says (*ibid.*, 8:158) that you have no problem identifying with yourself *despite* the fact that it took the semen and blood<sup>142</sup> of others to create you, so you should not find it too difficult to imagine that others are you. It follows that if others are you then anything you do should be for others and not this imaginary isolated 'self' (*ibid.*, 8:159):

Therefore, just as you've placed the sense of a "me"  
Onto drops of the semen and blood of others,  
Likewise, make it a habit (of placing it)  
Onto those of others as well.

(BCA 8:158; Berzin, 2004)

Acting as the other person, take away from this body every useful thing you see in it, and use that to benefit others.

(BCA 8:159; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 102)

If it seems that others are unhappy but that I am happy, then I should pass my happiness to them and take on their unhappiness. In this way I can show that I am prepared to exchange myself with others (BCA 8:161). If other people make mistakes or transgress in some way then exchanging self for others means I should take the blame for what they have done, whereas if I have done something praiseworthy I should pass the credit to others and by such actions show that I have no attachment to self (*ibid.*, 8:162-4). I would also want the negative consequences of any of my previously selfish acts to be applicable only to me and

---

<sup>142</sup> Blood refers to the mother.

in that way reroute the pain I caused back to myself and away from others (*ibid.*, 8:165). Recognising others as oneself is possible because the idea of ‘self’ is *itself* a construct. Śāntideva explains that a construct which is restricted to *self* has no more foundation than one which includes others as oneself.

The next phase of the meditation involves an undertaking to keep the mind in check lest it return to its old habit of assuming there is a self, which we have already seen is the cause of all *duḥkha* (*ibid.*, 8:167-173). There then follows a reminder or summary (BCA 8:174-86 in Crosby and Skilton, vv. 174-87 in Batchelor, Kelsang and in Berzin) that bodily desires are an ultimately disappointing distraction (BCA 8:174), that the ‘self-cherishing mind’ is always dissatisfied (BCA 8:176), that being non-attached is fruitful (*ibid.*, 8:177), that there is good reason to be non-attached since the body is disgusting (*ibid.*, 8:178) and temporary (*ibid.*, 8:179) and ultimately the cause of personal suffering (*ibid.*, 8:180) and that those who want to look after the interests of their bodies because they are attached to them ought to realise that they are also attached to others and so we should look after *their* interests:

Those who are fond of this body are said to be my friends. Why are  
those who are fond of their own body not also dear to me?  
(BCA 8:183; Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 104)

The unattached person has no compunction about giving their body away (in terms of its use) to others since it will be used to work for their well-being (BCA 8:184).

Finally there is a revisiting of the Bodhisattva vow to work tirelessly for the well-being of other sentient creatures and never to give in to distractions or weakness of any kind (BCA 8:185-6) and to meditate on what will give the highest level of clarity (*ibid.*, 8: 186/7).<sup>143</sup>

A very simplified encapsulation of this chapter is that we start with physical and mental preparation for the meditation, we meditate on the transitory and unappealing nature of our bodies and the distracting desires of our minds, then we realise that we are equal to, not better than, others and that attachment to self is the cause of all the problems in the world. Non-attachment to self means not despising self but exchanging anything good about it for the sufferings of others and in that way making the best contribution we can to the ending of existing *duḥkha* and ensuring that you do not contribute to the creation of *duḥkha* in the future.

### **5.2.5 The Route to Wisdom in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra***

Śāntideva’s most concentrated treatment of *prajñā* (wisdom, understanding or insight) is found in Chapter 9 of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. It would not be possible to definitively explain this complicated and much debated chapter, and I merely offer an outline of the route Śāntideva takes to explain the perfection of wisdom and the place of compassion. He explains that *prajñā* is concerned with reality as

---

<sup>143</sup> Kelsang has this as ‘the correct view of emptiness’ (p. 144) while Crosby and Skilton have it as ‘the proper object’ p. 104 and both Berzin and Batchelor have it as ‘the perfect object’ ( p. 130. in Batchelor).

it actually is rather than the way it superficially appears to us. The former is described as Ultimate Truth and the latter Conventional Truth. Śāntideva thinks that many people suffer because they mistake conventional truth for reality and are therefore misguided. If they are misguided then their aims and efforts are mistaken and this produces *duḥkha*. The properties of a misguided notion of reality contain the idea that there are substantially existing entities which do not depend on other entities or factors for the conditions of their apparent existence (thus giving them a form of permanence). Śāntideva wants to refute this idea and his reason for doing so is that he believes any kind of identification with substantial entities or permanence constitutes a falsity which might be the object of unwholesome grasping. Unwholesome grasping causes *duḥkha* and the person who grasps will experience *duḥkha*. The Bodhisattva, then, if he is to fulfil his vow to work for the welfare of all sentient beings, must lead people to ultimate truth. Ultimate truth for the Mādhyamaka consists of the fullest expression of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). In order to be truly compassionate, then, the Bodhisattva must teach that all things are void of essence and ultimately empty. Compassion itself is empty of essence (*svabhāva*), as are *nirvāṇa*, *saṃsāra*, *duḥkha* and *anything* else taught in Buddhism. This is not to say that such things do not exist, but, rather, that they exist at the level of conventional truth only. The perfect understanding of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) illuminates the emptiness of these things, and compassion for the suffering of others motivates the Bodhisattva to explain emptiness to them in order that they be free from *duḥkha*. Wisdom and compassion coalesce in the Bodhisattva who is the insightful and compassionate bridge between the worlds of conventional and ultimate truth. In this way the Bodhisattva embodies *prajña* and *karuṇā*.

As for the structure of this chapter, it seems that, after a brief mention of the topic of *prajña* (BCA 9:1), Śāntideva wants to explain the two truths (*ibid.*, 9:2-8, 106-11) then to refute possible objections on the way to telling the story of perfecting *prajña* (*ibid.*, 9:9-105). He counters non-Buddhist objections (*ibid.*, 9:60-9, 126-37)<sup>144</sup> and objections from alternative Buddhist schools (*ibid.*, 9:11-59, 102-5)<sup>145</sup> on the way to explaining the *prajñāpāramitā*. This chapter is marbled with arguments which reject any positive point of view and instead lead to the conclusion that all things are devoid of essence and are therefore *śūnya* (*ibid.*, 9:31-2, 40, 48, 52-55, 138, 151, 167). He concludes by imploring everyone to understand the meaning of *śūnyatā* (*ibid.*, 9:154-65) and, motivated by compassion, undertakes to teach it to all living beings (*ibid.*, 9:166-7).

### 5.2.6 The Perfection of Wisdom: An Outline of *Prajña*

Śāntideva begins by saying that everything he has written in the preceding chapters is in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, and that it has been necessary to cover the areas concerned in order that the reader be receptive to the perfection of wisdom. The areas covered in preparation for Chapter 9 follow five of the six *pāramitās*: *dāna* (generosity), *śīla* (morality), *kṣānti* (patience), *vīrya* (vigour), *dhyāna* (concentration). Chapter 9 itself concerns the sixth *pāramitā* of *prajñā* (wisdom). Anyone who wishes *duḥkha* to cease entirely should try to gain

<sup>144</sup> The identifiable ones being the Brahmanic schools of Sāṃkhya (BCA 9:60-7, 126-37) and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (BCA 9:68-9).

<sup>145</sup> The identifiable ones being Yogācāra (BCA 9:11-34, 102-5) and unspecified pre-Mahāyāna (BCA 9:9-10, 38-59).

this last perfection (BCA 9:1) having attained the preceding five which pave the way for *prajña*.

In any attempt to attain wisdom it must be noted that it comes in two forms: one conventional (or relative) and the other ultimate. Most people are already acquainted with conventional truth since it is the most common kind of truth and informs us of every day things. Every day things include objects which are commonly held to be perceived by a subject, and in this sense the conventional world is dualistic. A dualistic world is one where perceiver and perceived are *divided* and where it is therefore easy to distinguish between self and others. Strongly distinguishing in this way is more conducive to egoism than altruism and is not in keeping with what has been taught in Chapter 8. Śāntideva here wants to explain that most people have no idea of ultimate truth and are locked into a habit of thinking which is conventional and sees others as relative to, and sometimes in conflict with, oneself.

Breaking away from this habit of thinking is difficult to do and Chapter 8 demonstrated meditational foci which can assist us in overcoming it. Part of the reason it is difficult to overcome this way of thinking is that the alternative, ultimate truth, is impossible to explain and may be impossible to comprehend (BCA 9:2). To stay in the conventional way of thinking is to do nothing to end suffering both for oneself and for others, and to break out of it means not accepting things as they *appear* but using critical analysis of the conventional world to show its falsity. If it can be shown to be false in some areas then attachment to it can be weakened and once so, the subject will be more amenable to an alternative explanation. This explanation cannot be comprehensive since the *śūnya* nature of ultimate truth renders it unexplainable. If we can understand the emptiness teaching then we can see that accepting conventional truth is an erroneous way of thinking and will leave the subject (thinker) always at the mercy of suffering; the product of differentiation and ignorance.<sup>146</sup> Śāntideva says that those who do not follow the emptiness teaching but hold alternative views can be refuted (*ibid.*, 9:3). He sets out to do this in later verses by challenging selected alternative views. I do not intend to give a point by point account of *every* argument in this chapter, however, I would like to examine how Śāntideva argues for *śūnyatā* and how he reconciles *śūnyatā* with *karuṇā*.

### 5.2.7 The Arguments for *Śūnyatā*

Śāntideva says that, on conventional examination, things appear to have certain properties such as permanence and independent existence. These properties exist only as a result of the way we commonly think, and if we thought differently then things would appear differently:

Even the objects of direct perception, such as visible form, are only established by popular consensus and not by a valid means of knowledge. That consensus is wrong...

(BCA 9:6, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 115)

Thinking differently begins by examining the things we commonly take to be true

---

<sup>146</sup> Differentiation can be associated with both greed and anger/hatred and ignorance with delusion: the three defilements.

and finding that they are not the way we had assumed. On close inspection it turns out that they are devoid of essence and that we had imposed properties on them through attachment. It is difficult to let go of attachment to things, especially to the notion of a self, but Śāntideva argues that the self is not real and is essenceless like everything else. Once the self and other things can be let go of and the strong impulse to unwholesome attachment is broken, we can see the voidness of all phenomena and concepts.

Both the Buddha and Śāntideva used conventional means when teaching (indeed, there is no other way) and this afforded unenlightened people a starting point, or something to go on, as they entered the path which leads from rebirth and *duḥkha* towards enlightenment (BCA 9:7-8). There is no contradiction in using conventional language to explain that conventional truth is false and, in fact, using conventional language is the only option available. This becomes an important feature of the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika dialectic, which, at times, takes the opponent's own argument to a logical extreme which fatally challenges the argument, thus showing the emptiness of an opponent's position. Using conventional means is therefore crucial to convincing others that they are in error (and helping to save them from *duḥkha*) as long as they also understand that there is a superior truth to the conventional one (*ibid.*, 9:8).

Having explained the two truths, Śāntideva now embarks on a discussion with opponents which is intended to lead to the conclusion that the *prajñāpāramitā*, the perfection of wisdom, is emptiness. I have omitted details of the discussion between Śāntideva and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (*ibid.*, 9:68-9) and also with the Sāṃkhya school (*ibid.*, 9:60-7, 126-37). I have included details of the supposed rebuttals of the pre-Mahāyāna and Yogācāra schools, but what I offer is not a *comprehensive* analysis of that debate. What I have included is strictly relevant to *sūnyatā* and *karuṇā* only.

### 5.2.8 Debate with the Pre-Mahāyāna

A question is asked by a pre-Mahāyānin Buddhist who wants to know how a person can be reborn if they are only an illusion (*ibid.*, 9:9). Śāntideva's reply is:

Even an illusion persists for as long as the concurrence of its causes.  
How does a being truly exist simply because there is a continuum of  
states that last a long time?

(BCA 9:9, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 116)

Śāntideva's answer, then, is twofold: firstly he means that as long as illusions are produced and believed to be real then they will be seen to be reborn. The second part of his argument is more complex and seems to be an attempt to undermine the position traditionally attributed to the pre-Mahāyānin questioner. This position that 'a person is a continuum of states that lasts a long time' is a reference to the idea that a 'person' is a series of consecutive *dharmas* (see above p. 80) and Śāntideva wants to point out that this has no foundation. All things are empty and in transition for the Mādhyamika and that includes any idea of a 'self' constructed from consecutive *dharmas*. In connection to this he had earlier referred indirectly (*ibid.*, 8:98) to a passage in the pre-Mahāyāna *Milindapañha*, where Nāgasena talks about whether or not the grown man is the same as he was as a child, and it

turns out that he is neither the same nor different. (See Mhp 2:40-41, Rhys Davids, 1925, pp. 63-5). Śāntideva focuses on the idea that they are not different and says:

The notion 'it is the same me...' is a false construction, since it is one person who dies, quite another who is born.

(BCA 8:98, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 96)

In other words any idea that I am a series of consecutive *dharmas* might lead me to act in ways which are intended to help the future (not yet born) 'me' but I do not realise that this idea is mistaken. The future me is a projection in the mind of a being with no essence and in that sense is doubly unreal. In the meantime there are sentient creatures which suffer (since they do not realise that self is empty) and the pre-Mahāyānin should be helping them rather than helping a future self which is as yet unborn. He says:

If I give them [others] no protection because their suffering does not afflict me, why do I protect my [future] body against future suffering when it does not afflict me?

(*Ibid.*, 8:97, p. 96)

He is saying that the suffering of the imaginary future 'me' does not affect the 'me' of now so why should I be so discriminating in making provision for 'him' instead of helping others who suffer at the moment. There is no difference between yourself and other persons, and it is just a matter of habit that people think there is. In this way rebirth is connected to altruism.

Later (*ibid.*, 9:35-9) Śāntideva and the pre-Mahāyānin continue with a different discussion which initially centres on the fact that the Mādhyamika do not accept even the consciousness of the Buddha as ever having had essence. The pre-Mahāyānin asks what good it does to try to emulate something which has no consciousness be it a Bodhisattva or a Buddha. The reply is that it is the act which is important, whether or not there is a consciously existing Bodhisattva or Buddha. Some of our actions are the result of things which were initiated long ago, perhaps before we were born, and by other people. The reason for the action does not therefore have to be connected to a mind or consciousness existing or non-existing now or in the past; as long as a Buddha or Bodhisattva *seems* to have existed, the idea will have influence and serve a purpose.<sup>147</sup>

Both the pre-Mahāyāna and the Mādhyamaka agree on the salvific power of understanding and acting on the Four Noble Truths. The former wants to know what the point of the emptiness teaching is if one can become enlightened without

---

<sup>147</sup> This is the best sense I can make of vv. 35-39. Perhaps an alternative example may help. It is generally accepted that the god Thor is no longer worshipped since the Nordic religions have died out. No one now would seriously believe in Thor and pray to him. Nevertheless, at the time when he was thought to exist, people prayed to him and assumed their prayers were being answered or denied. This influenced their behaviour notwithstanding the fact that there was no Thor all along. They were praying to nothing in reality but they were still praying to *something* even if it was just an *idea* of Thor. It does not make much difference if they were moved to act by an 'empty' idea or a real god since the result would be the same. Although, of course, no Bodhisattva is a god and neither was the Buddha.

it, i.e. liberation can be achieved through the Four Noble Truths *alone* and in that respect the emptiness teaching is superfluous (BCA 9:40). Śāntideva responds by saying that it is written in (Mahāyāna) scripture that we need to understand emptiness *as well* as the Four Noble Truths (*ibid.*, 9:40). The pre-Mahāyānin questions the credibility of the Mahāyāna scriptures by pointing out that since they are new (relative to the pre-Mahāyāna scriptures), they are not firmly established; furthermore, since the pre-Mahāyāna scriptures are *accepted* by the Mahāyāna they might as well do for both schools! (*ibid.*, 9:41). Śāntideva replies that at one time pre-Mahāyāna scripture was *also* new and not firmly established but that did not stop people accepting it as true!

A discussion on scripture, tradition and established and non-established viewpoints ensues (*ibid.*, 9:41-4) but need not detain us here. However, near the end of v. 44, Śāntideva says that anyone who considers themselves to be enlightened but who still shows signs of attachment, cannot be *as* enlightened as one who shows no such signs: ‘Even the Enlightenment of those whose minds grasp onto entities is imperfectly established’ (BCA 9:44, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 119). ‘Those whose minds grasp onto entities’ is a reference to the Arhat<sup>148</sup> and Śāntideva’s position is that following the Four Noble Truths *does* result in a *form* of enlightenment, but that form is not as developed as that of one who understands the ultimate emptiness of everything including the Four Noble Truths. That person is, of course, the Mādhyamika Bodhisattva. Śāntideva thinks if the Arhat meditates on anything less than emptiness then he will not be *completely* letting go. Not completely letting go is a sign of attachment and attachment is manifested in all or some of the defilements, which ensures rebirth.<sup>149</sup>

Without emptiness a mind is fettered and arises again, as in the meditative attainment of non-perception. Therefore one should meditate on emptiness.

(BCA 9:48, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 120)

The Mādhyamaka seek a *permanent* abandonment of ‘manifest illusions’, and pre-Mahāyāna ideas of ‘self’, even at the level of concurrent *dharmas*, is seen as an example of a manifest illusion which the pre-Mahāyāna still hold on to. (Also see BCA 9:51.)

In vv. 56-9, Śāntideva uses the familiar pre-Mahāyāna argument that no self can be found in an examination of any part of the body in order to explain the Mādhyamaka idea that the self is empty.<sup>150</sup> With no self, no being exists because,

<sup>148</sup> It could also include the Yogācāra who believe ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ exists permanently.

<sup>149</sup> For example, being attached to any notion of permanency might be seen as self-interested and therefore linked to the defilement of greed. Any notion of permanency is, as far as Śāntideva is concerned, a sign of delusion – another of the three defilements.

<sup>150</sup> For example, in the pre-Mahāyāna *Milindapañha*, the monk Nāgasena is asked ‘Do you mean to say that the hair is Nāgasena...Or is it the nails, the teeth, the skin, the flesh, the nerves, the bones, the marrow, the kidneys, the heart, the liver, the abdomen, the spleen, the lungs, the larger intestines, the lower intestines, the stomach, the faeces, the bile, the phlegm...[etc.]...the brain, or any or all of these, that is Nāgasena?...Is it the outward form...the sensations...the ideas...the confections...or the consciousness that is Nāgasena? And to each of these also he answered no.’ (Rhys Davids, T.W., (tr.) 1925, London: Oxford University Press, Book II:26, p. 42.)

having analysed the various constituent parts of a person (BCA 9:56-9, 74, 78-82), no changeless thing is discovered.<sup>151</sup> I think the general thrust of this is that since the pre-Mahāyāna do not fear the consequences of meditating on *not*-self, why should they fear the consequences of meditating on *empty*-self and empty phenomena? Their ‘failure’ to do so is the reason Śāntideva thinks they are not entirely letting go of attachment.

### 5.2.9 Debate with the Yogācāra

The Yogācārins agree to a certain extent with the Mādhyamaka regarding emptiness, but one important difference between the two is that the Yogācārins do not agree that *everything* is empty, and say that emptiness cannot be applied successfully to the idea of a mind (*citta*) or consciousness (*vijñā*). If a mind is essenceless, and therefore void, then there is no point to morality since no immoral actions *really* happen except at the level of illusion: ‘If consciousness does not exist, then there is no evil in, for example, murdering an illusory man.’ (BCA 9:11, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 116.). Śāntideva counters this with: ‘good and evil arise when one is endowed with the illusion of consciousness.’ (*ibid.*) In other words, you will still be ‘killing’ an illusion and it is here that morality is seen. Morality exists in the conventional world and the conventional world is real to people who are deluded enough to think it is and that means killing is still an immoral act.<sup>152</sup>

The Yogācārin believes that for the illusions to even *appear*, they must be the objects of a cognising mind therefore that mind cannot be non-existent. If *all* supposed phenomena are not in reality existent then the Buddha and his enlightenment are non-existent and present themselves only at the level of illusion (BCA 9:13-14).<sup>153</sup>

[Cittamātra] If one liberated according to ultimate truth remains subject to cyclic existence according to conventional truth, then, in that case, even a Buddha would be subject to cyclic existence. So what is the point of the path of conduct leading to Awakening?

(BCA 9:13-14, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 116)

Śāntideva’s reaction is that anything still in cyclic existence is there because the conditions which make it so are still existent. These conditions are a result of the

---

<sup>151</sup> ‘Teeth, hair, or nails are not a “me”; Nor am “I” bones or blood...neither mucous nor phlegm; And nor am “I” lymph or pus...“I” am not fat or sweat; Nor am “I” even lungs or a liver. “I” am not any of the other inner organs; Nor am “I” feces or urine...Flesh or skin is not a “me”; Nor am “I” temperature or energy-wind. In no way am “I” ever a bodily hole, Nor are the six types of consciousness a “me.”...A body is neither the feet nor the calves; Nor is a body the thighs or the hips. The belly or the back is not a body; Neither is a body the chest or the arms...The sides of the torso or the hands are not a body; Nor is a body the armpits or the shoulders. The inner organs as well are not it; And neither is a body the head or also the neck. So what (alternative) could a body be here?’ (BCA 9:57-9, 78-9, Berzin, 2004.)

<sup>152</sup> If John was asleep and dreaming that he was being murdered, then DreamJohn would be terrified. Luckily for DreamJohn, John wakes up. Understanding emptiness, according to Śāntideva, is the only way to wake up from the conventional world dream we are all in now, and right now our suffering can seem real enough. This is why morality is crucial even in a world which is illusory.

<sup>153</sup> I think we can assume that the Yogācārin would also include the *teachings* of the Buddha as illusory under the Mādhyamaka scheme.

illusions caused by attachment to conventional truth and the *samsāric* world. If these attachments were cut *completely* then there would be proper enlightenment. The Buddha had cut off any delusional beliefs and therefore attained proper enlightenment:

Even an illusion does not cease if the continuum of its causes is not cut,  
But once the continuum of samsara's causes, delusions, is severed,  
Samsara will not occur, even conventionally.  
Since Buddhas have done this, they have attained nirvana.

(BCA 9:14-15, tr. Keksang, 2002, p. 150)

Again Śāntideva's target is what he sees as the failure of the opponent to meditate on emptiness, which he sees as the only way to be *utterly* non-attached since there is ultimately nothing to be attached to. Anything less than this is seen by the Mādhyamaka as a form of attachment, and no matter how slight, still causes cyclic rebirth and *duḥkha*.

The Yogācārin view is that external objects are illusory but the mind is not. The illusory external objects are really projections of the mind and in that way are *part* of the mind-experience. The problem with this is that if we say that everything depends on mind, then it seems that mind must be self-existent – which does not fit with the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda*. This is avoided if the Yogācārin introduces something else into the equation, (i.e. illusion) but the Mādhyamaka view then would be that this means we can define knowledge only in contradistinction to illusion.<sup>154</sup> This does not lead us to reality if knowledge is in any way dependent on illusion and Śāntideva tries to show that the Yogācārin position here does not make sense and reduces it *ad absurdum*.

If the external objects are illusory, as the Yogācārins claim, then they should not be perceivable: '[Mādhyamaka] When, according to you, illusion itself does not exist, what is perceived?' (BCA 9:16, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 116). Furthermore, if illusions are a product of the mind then the mind is perceiving *itself* and this is not possible:

[Mādhyamaka] If the mind itself and the illusion-like objects are one substance, then, since there would be no beholder and no beheld, what (object) would be beheld by what (mind)?...Just as the blade of a sword cannot cut itself, likewise the mind cannot behold itself.<sup>155</sup>

(BCA 9:17-18, tr. Batchelor, 1979, p. 135)

The Yogācārin view is that a mind *can* exist in its own right, perceiving both itself and other objects just as a lamp *illuminates* both itself and other objects. (BCA 9:18-19). An alternative example the Yogācārin gives is that if we looked at a piece of clear glass and a blue stone, the clear glass can only be made blue if it is held near a blue object, but the blue stone is self-reliantly blue – it is blue in itself and does not need any input from elsewhere.

---

<sup>154</sup> And we can find illusion only in contradistinction to knowledge.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* LXXXVIII:10:2:568 'As a sword cannot cut itself, or as a finger cannot touch its own tip, Mind cannot see itself.' (tr. Suzuki, 1931) [http://lirs.ru/do/lanka\\_eng/lanka-nondiaccritical.htm](http://lirs.ru/do/lanka_eng/lanka-nondiaccritical.htm) Last Accessed 20 July 2008.

Chittamatrin: Take for example two kinds of blueness: blueness that appears in dependence upon another blue coloured object, like the blue reflected in a clear piece of glass, and blueness that does not appear in dependence of something else, like the natural colour of blue in lapis lazuli.  
(BCA 9:19, Batchelor, 1979, p. 136)

Similarly, some awarenesses are related to objects other than themselves,<sup>[156]</sup>  
Whereas others, such as self-cognizers, are not.  
(BCA 9:20, Keksang, 2002, p. 151)

The mind is the blue stone and the blue is a property projected by the mind. I think we could also imagine any other properties of the blue stone to be self-reliantly existing and not dependent on anything external, for example, shade, shape and texture.

The Mādhyamaka response is that this example is of no use since it is not a true analogy. The reason given is that a blue stone is ‘born’ with its properties already existent whereas a mind, or consciousness, must be more flexible than that: ‘When something is not blue it cannot make itself blue by itself.’ (BCA 9:20, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 117). In other words, we can make the clear glass blue by holding it up to the sky, but that means its blueness is dependent on surrogate colour and in that sense it is not self-existing like the blue stone. However the blue stone would not be capable of being green or red and we may suppose that if a mind were like that then it would only be able to think the same thing all the time. This is why Śāntideva does not accept this as a good analogy.

The Yogācārin asks, if there is no independently existing mind at all, as the Mādhyamaka believe, then how do they account for the fact that there are such things as subjective memories; there must be some kind of mental self-sufficiency otherwise nothing could be recalled, remembered or recognised (BCA 9:23). Śāntideva says that the consciousness is ‘remembered’ when an experience associated with it is recalled:

When we remember the object experienced, we remember the consciousness related to it,  
Just as we would recall being poisoned by an animal bite when we experienced the pain that subsequently occurred.  
(BCA 9:23, Kelsang, 2002, p. 152)

So Śāntideva’s counter argument is that memory comes from a connection with another experience (the animal bite), and what we remember is not the mind but our former impression of the object. He does not want to concede any idea of self-perception (such as the Yogācārin thinks exists in a memory) since the Mādhyamaka view is that nothing is self-existent and everything is totally reliant on other things. The actual argument is in v. 9:26:

If illusion is the same as the mind it is false to claim that it is also different. If it exists as a thing in its own right, how is it the same? If it is the same [as the mind] it does not exist in its own right.

---

<sup>156</sup> Which raises the problem of solipsism for the Yogācāra.

(BCA 9:26, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 117)

If illusion is the same as mind then the distinction between knowledge and illusion collapses. If it is different then the Yogācārin is wrong. As long as the Yogācārin admits that there are illusions – things of a mind nature – then ‘if illusion is the same as the mind it is false to claim that it is also different’.

For the Yogācārin the mind *must* exist since were that not the case then the objects of perception would go unperceived. But that is not our experience, so there must be some focus for the perceptions and this is the mind (BCA 9:24). Śāntideva has said in the previous chapter that we need to meditate on exchanging self with others, and perhaps it is this that prompts the Yogācārin to say that doing this requires a connection to the mind of another and if *this* can be done then it must be easier to connect with your own mind:

If people who have attained states such as tranquil abiding can see the  
minds of others far away,  
Surely one can see one’s own mind, which is very close.

(BCA 9:24, Kelsang, 2002, p. 152)

Śāntideva dismisses this in two ways: firstly by saying that the Bionic Man can see clearly very far away but cannot see his own bionic eye which is right in front of him! (Obviously I am taking liberties with Śāntideva’s explanation):

A jar seen by applying sight-restoring lotion would still not be the lotion  
itself.

(BCA 9:24, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 117)

Alternatively:

...a (buried treasure) vase that’s seen from applying actualized magic eye  
lotion  
Still wouldn’t be the eye lotion itself.

(BCA 9:24, Berzin, 2004)

The second way he dismisses it is by returning to the general overview that he denies *substantial existence* as an ultimate truth. As an ultimate truth it is empty so things like consciousness, memory and experience only arise at the level of conventional truth, which means they can only be defined in relation to something else since nothing can self-exist. Any argument in their favour can only be undertaken using conventional language which is biased towards this interpretation. He seems to again take the view that his opponents have not entirely progressed beyond the level of conventional truth and therefore experience a lesser form of enlightenment than those who understand the truth of emptiness.

How something is seen, heard or cognized is not what is contested here, but  
it is refuted here that projection is real, as that is the cause of suffering.

(BCA 9:25, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 117)

Alternatively:

We have no intention of refuting the existence of Eye awareness, ear awareness, or any other awareness.

What needs to be abandoned is the awareness that grasps at truly existent forms and so forth,

Which is the fundamental cause of all suffering.

(BCA 9:25, Kelsang, 2002, p. 152)

The next exchange (vv. 30-4) is still with the Yogācārin idea that a mind or stream of consciousness must exist and cannot be essenceless, which, of course, Śāntideva wants to disprove. Śāntideva wants to say that when we become aware that all things are empty, we also see the cure for attachment. We can only be attached to things which we assume are (conventionally) *real*, so with the realisation that they are not, attachment ceases. The Yogācārin objects as follows:

[Cittamātra] Even if the similarity to illusion is recognized, how does defilement cease, when lust for a woman who is an illusion still arises in the one who created her?

(BCA 9:30, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 118)

The objection here is that even if we recognise that things are more like an illusion, the defilement (greed or attachment for example) does not cease. The example the Yogācārin uses is that you can even lust for a woman who is nothing but a product of your own imagination and you know 'her' to be so; you are aware she is not real yet you still have attachment to her. Śāntideva replies:

[Mādhyamaka] That happens because the influence of the defilements and what is cognized has not been destroyed in her creator, so at the time of seeing her the influence of emptiness is weak.

(*Ibid.*, 9:31, p. 118)

In other words, the person who creates this illusory woman feels lust for her because he still *sees* her as real at one level. When he feels lust for her he is no longer *aware* of her illusory nature and the influence of emptiness on him is weak at that particular moment. The influence of phenomena (the illusory woman) is removed by knowledge *at all times* that they are empty. Even that knowledge is later overcome with the realisation 'nothing really exists'.

The influence of phenomena is removed by employing the influence of emptiness, and even that is later eradicated by inculcating the realization, 'nothing really exists'.

(*Ibid.*, 9:32, p. 118)

If you think that things are empty then you do not think they are (conventionally) real. The emptiness doctrine itself is only useful to a certain extent; it only makes sense when you imagine the world is real, but with greater understanding, you realise that it is not real and at that point (having served its purpose) you no longer need the emptiness teaching, which itself is a relative concept. The Yogācārin responds by asking what is being perceived if nothing exists:

[Cittamātra] If it is concluded that the entity which does not really exist cannot be perceived, then how does a non-entity which is without basis remain before the mind?

(*Ibid.*, 9:33, p. 118)

Śāntideva's reply is:

[Mādhyamaka] When neither entity nor non-entity remains before the mind, since there is no other mode of operation, grasping no objects, it becomes tranquil.

(*Ibid.*, 9:34, p. 118)

When there is nothing before the mind we have gone beyond the state of entity and non-entity and beyond all grasping or attachment and the mind is then tranquil. This is a state in which the Yogācārin question is transcended.

In summary, what Śāntideva seems to want to achieve in these five verses is that the argument for emptiness can overcome the concept of realism, but emptiness itself should not be taken as something concrete and, having done its job, has to be left behind as well. When there is no more idea of being or non-being there are no conditions in which grasping can exist and the mind is at ease.

Śāntideva later returns to the idea of a mind (BCA 9:102-5) and, basically, his previous position is repeated: that any suggestion of mind-permanence is misguided and a symptom of grasping, unwholesome attachment, which is the cause of suffering:

The mind is not positioned in the sense faculties, nor in form or the other aggregates [feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*sañña*), mental volitions (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*)], nor in the space in between. The mind is found neither internally nor externally, nor anywhere else either.

(BCA 9:102, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 125)

If nothing can be found then the object of the search is empty (BCA 9:103). Since the opponent's idea of 'consciousness' is as a *perceiver*, then it relies on objects of perception in order to validate itself. Objects are perceived by the five senses and processed by the mind,<sup>157</sup> and if the mind existed first then it would have nothing to process and therefore be empty. (*Ibid.*, 9:104). If consciousness appears at the same time as the objects of perception then how does this mechanism work – what produces what or what relies on what? (*ibid.*, 9:104). If consciousness comes into being as a *response* to perceivable objects then it has no self-existence since it relies on the objects and we could assume that if we took the objects away then there would be no consciousness (*ibid.*, 9:105).

If a sense awareness exists prior to its object,  
What is it aware of?  
If it arises simultaneously with its object,  
In dependence on what object does it arise?

And if a sense awareness is truly existent,  
How can it arise subsequently in dependence upon an object  
condition?

---

<sup>157</sup> Which is a sixth sense in Buddhism.

In this way, we can understand  
That all six consciousnesses [<sup>158</sup>] lack true existence.  
(BCA 9:104-5, tr. Kelsang, 2002, p. 169)

The discussion with the Yogācāra draws to a close here and Śāntideva thinks he has defeated their objections and established emptiness as the ultimate encapsulation of wisdom. He wants *everyone* to understand the emptiness teaching (BCA 9:154-65) and undertakes to be one of the teachers, in keeping with his earlier Bodhisattva vow (BCA 9:166-7).

### 5.2.10 Reconciling *Śūnyatā* with *Karuṇā*

Any attachment to self, even if it is only a residual attachment to a stream of consciousness (Yogācāra), is still seen as a form of clutching to the Mādhyamaka. Any such residue of ‘self-thinking’ means the practitioner has not entirely let go and therefore cannot have full, deep and genuine compassion since his self-attachment does not allow him to *completely* exchange self with others. Śāntideva sees anything less than a full understanding of *śūnyatā* as an obstacle to full compassion and in that way rejects the Yogācārin idea of a mind or consciousness self-existing.

The understanding of emptiness has a crucial role in ethics for the Mādhyamaka. Realising the emptiness of all phenomena can assist in breaking down egoism since egoism seems false when we understand that self is an illusion which is ultimately void. Thinking this way leaves you less prone to thinking in a self-centred way and less likely to *act* in a self-interested way. Having established such mind habits, it is then easier to take the next step of considering the equality of others with yourself, then *exchanging* them for yourself. The Bodhisattva is not attached to self nor fearful of the consequences of considering self to be empty.<sup>159</sup> Neither are they attached to *nirvāṇa* (since it is empty) nor fearful of *saṃsāra* (since it too is empty).

Remaining in cyclic existence for the benefit of those suffering through delusion is achieved through freedom from the two extremes, attachment and fear. This is the fruit of emptiness.

(BCA 9:52, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 120)

Not being attached to *nirvāṇa* (or their own personal enlightenment) frees the Bodhisattva to stay in *saṃsāra*. He is not fearful of *saṃsāra* but stays there as a result of his compassion-motivated wish to help others. The Bodhisattva can therefore be both enlightened *and* in *saṃsāra* at the same time. All of this is only possible because of his understanding of emptiness, and understanding emptiness creates the conditions under which *duḥkha* cannot exist.<sup>160</sup>

When all things are empty in this way...

From what can there be happiness or misery, what can be liked and what loathed? What craving can there be? For what is that craving,

---

<sup>158</sup> The five senses plus mind, or consciousness.

<sup>159</sup> A consequence being that their supposed individuality evaporates. We can assume that most unenlightened people would be quite uncomfortable with this conclusion.

<sup>160</sup> Nor can happiness since it too is ultimately empty and only *seems* to exist, at times, in *saṃsāra*. (See BCA 9:152, 154, 155.)

when examined as to its true nature?

(*Ibid.*, 9:151-2, p. 131)

It has become clear during his earlier debates with his opponents that Śāntideva regards the understanding of emptiness as *essential* to the practice of compassion. His arguments have been philosophical but now he moves away completely from that style of presentation and adopts a direct approach where he implores us, whoever we are, to understand that if we continue without the perfection of wisdom (the *prajñāpāramitā*), which is understanding emptiness, then there will be no escape from constantly experiencing *duḥkha*:

I beseech you, O reader, who are just like me,  
Please strive to realize that all phenomena are empty, like space.  
Consider that although all people wish for happiness,  
They swing between being troubled by suffering

And being overjoyed by meaningless pleasure.  
Not finding happiness, they suffer; in striving to fulfil their  
wishes  
They quarrel, fight and hurt each other with weapons.  
Thus, they consume their lives in the commission of non-virtue

From time to time, they take a fortunate rebirth  
And briefly enjoy some temporary happiness,  
But soon they die and fall into the lower realms,  
Where they experience unbearable suffering for a very long time.  
(BCA 9:154-6, Kelsang, 2002, p. 180)

If we do not embrace the understanding of emptiness then we are condemned to remain in cyclic existence until we do (BCA 9:157). If we manage to secure another good rebirth (as a human) and we submit to the temptation to regard ourselves as substantially existing entities with all the attendant wants and desires, then our lives will pass quickly as we pointlessly strive to find an impossible and elusive fulfilment. All that wasted effort keeps us away from taking the time to reflect on this and realise that everything we are attached to is void (*ibid.*, 9:157-162). Carrying on without this realisation means that attached thoughts continue (*ibid.*, 9:162), and attached thoughts lead to *duḥkha*.<sup>161</sup> There is therefore a direct link between *duḥkha* and failure to understand emptiness. Emptiness should therefore be taught from the motive of purest compassion in the hope that suffering beings can be rescued from their *duḥkha*-creating thoughts.

May I be able to extinguish the fires of suffering  
That torments all these beings,  
With a vast rain of happiness  
Descending from the clouds of my merit

And, through sincerely accumulating a collection of merit,  
While endowed with the wisdom realizing non-true existence,  
May I [use conventional means to] teach emptiness to all living

---

<sup>161</sup> For example if I am attached to myself then I am deluded and might become greedy and disliking of others. In this way not understanding emptiness allows the defilements (delusion, greed and hatred) to flourish. This guarantees suffering as he has explained in Chapter 8.

beings

Who suffer because of their self-grasping.

(BCA 9:166-7, Kelsang, 2002, p. 182)

The Bodhisattva knows that there are two levels of understanding: one where he tries to compassionately help sentient beings and one where there are no existent beings. The former shows his perfection of compassion and the latter his perfection of wisdom.

### 5.3 *The Śikṣāsamuccaya*

There is no clear evidence as to the chronology of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (see Williams who, like others, likes to imagine the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* was first)<sup>162</sup> but for my purposes it makes most sense to see the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* as the main work of Śāntideva since it consists of his own thoughts, with the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* as a supplement (coming before *or* after) since it is a compendium of works by other authors.

Since I treat the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* as a work which *compliments* Śāntideva's central ideas in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, I do not intend to give a comprehensive commentary of it. There is a certain amount of overlap with the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (especially with regard to the contents of BCA Chs. 8 and 9) and a number of verses are the same. The *Śikṣāsamuccaya* is structurally different to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and contains 27 *karikas* compiled from a range of Mahāyāna texts, many of which are no longer extant. It does not, therefore, contain Śāntideva's original writings except for the various introductory comments before and after citations, but his efforts were in choosing the various texts and compiling them for this book.

#### 5.3.1 Structural Outline of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*

The work concerns the six perfections, or *pāramitās*: giving/generosity (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), vigour (*virya*), concentration (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*)<sup>163</sup> and early on uses the same lines as in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* where Śāntideva professes to have composed the book for himself (SS 1:1).<sup>164</sup> Although the *pāramitās* appear to be less obvious in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* than in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* they are nevertheless identifiable in the overall scheme of training for the Bodhisattva.

Early on, Śāntideva begins to think about the Awakening Mind (*bodhicitta*) and

---

<sup>162</sup> 'Although it is the traditional view, there is no compelling evidence that the *Śikṣā Samuccaya* was written before the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Nevertheless those early writers who considered it was had their reasons and we have no reasons for thinking that it was not. I prefer it on aesthetic grounds. I like to think of Śāntideva composing his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* while trying to practise the life he found in the scriptures through constructing the *Śikṣā Samuccaya*.' (Williams' introduction to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Crosby and Skilton, 1998, p. x, n.4.)

<sup>163</sup> It may be remembered that the six *pāramitās* are another way of interpreting the Threefold Training which structures the constituent elements of the Noble Eightfold Path.

<sup>164</sup> Compare the final line of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* where he says it was done 'for the discipline of Bodhisattvas.' (SS 19:365, Bendall and Rouse, 1922, p. 320).

how such a mind would realise that all beings experience *duḥkha* and do not like it, therefore they have an equality of sorts, and the Bodhisattva should not discriminate between his own *duḥkha* and that of other creatures. This is an example of equalising self and others and of the stirrings of *bodhicitta* (SS 1:2). *Bodhicitta* only comes about when certain factors are in place, for example, an appropriate level of accumulated ‘good’ or fruitful karma which results in rebirth as a human with the added luck of living at a time and place where it is possible to come into contact with the Buddha’s teachings.

As in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the next step after arousing *bodhicitta* is to take the Bodhisattva vow (*ibid.*, 1:29) to work for the benefit of all sentient beings no matter how long it takes or how many rebirths have to be endured.

If the Bodhisattva is going to put himself to good use (i.e. the service of others), he must take care to look after and improve himself, and this is done in a threefold way, to: (1) Protect oneself (2) Purify oneself and (3) Develop what one is and has. (Partly after Clayton, 2006 p. 42.) The sum of this can be used in selfless ways to the benefit of others. Since this is a form of giving or generosity, it follows the first *pāramitā* of *dāna*.

### 5.3.2 Protecting

Protecting the self is covered in chapters 3 to 7,<sup>165</sup> where the *pāramitā* of self-discipline, patience or forbearance (*kṣānti*) is needed in order to weed out and avoid whatever might hinder self-protection such as useless, pointless or dangerous things. Failure to do so might mean that you will be of limited benefit to others since you could be wasting your effort on useless things, distracted by pointless things and endangered to the detriment of passing on any good that you can:

Thus we must duly preserve the self and its belongings, though they are sacrificed to others [eventually]. How so? Because it is “for the enjoyment of living beings that one’s frame and all besides is given.”  
(SS 2:34, Bendall and Rouse, 1922, p. 37)

Śāntideva continues to outline how we can protect the self (Chs. 3-6) and what from (Chs. 3, 4 and 5). A kind of Guarding of Awareness is needed in order to ensure that we identify such things and avoid them, then, having achieved this, we would not want to regress and would therefore want to protect this achievement:

The avoidance of fruitless waste has been described ; the writer now proceeds to describe how this is to be secured ; “this eye complete by mindfulness.”

(*Ibid.*, p. 117)

Having explained how to protect oneself, Śāntideva moves on to explaining how to protect objects of enjoyment (Ch. 7) before moving on to the next section on purifying.

---

<sup>165</sup> 3 to 6 concern the self and 7 concerns whatever external things might give the self pleasure.

### 5.3.3 Purifying

A ‘pure’ Bodhisattva (i.e. one who has completely broken the bonds of unwholesome attachment) would be better placed to fulfil his vows than one who still has elements of attachment to overcome. In this sense some Bodhisattvas might need to ‘purify’ themselves in two ways: (i) by doing away with *pāpa* (actions which create negative *karma*),<sup>166</sup> which is covered in Chapter 8 and (ii) by breaking the bonds of influence found in the defilements (*kleśas*) which come as a result of unwholesome *trṣṇā*, which is covered in Chapters 9 to 14. Obviously it takes the *pāramitā* of effort (*virya*) to carry out this task and in order to achieve the right thinking which such a task needs, the perfection of concentration (*dhyāna*) must be cultivated.

This is most prominent in Chapter 12 where the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion are treated one at a time. Greed is countered in much the same way as in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*: by meditating on the unpleasantness of the body in an attempt to destroy lust for the bodies of others and attachment to one’s own body. Hatred is tackled by employing *mettā* meditation (again like the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*) where the equalisation of self and other precludes the kind of distinctions which hatred relies on. Delusion (in this case believing that permanent projected entities exist) is remedied by coming to the right understanding of the fact that nothing is self-existing and therefore nothing is permanent. This is expanded in Chapter 13 where consciousness (*viññāna*) or mind (*citta*) is seen as ultimately illusory: ‘Thought is like illusion, such is the nature of thought’ (SS 13:236, Bendall and Rouse, 1922, p. 221). He also argues for emptiness in this chapter and in Chapter 14 where he reiterates that a true understanding of emptiness neutralises the defilements so strongly that they do not even arise. Quoting the *Tathāgata-gūhya Sūtra* Śāntideva says:

Just as when a tree is cut at the root, Śāntamati, all the twigs and leaves wither away ; so, Śāntamati, all passions are extinguished by destroying the heresy of individual existence.

(SS 14:242, Bendall and Rouse, 1922, p. 225)

The final chapter of this section (Chapter 15) addresses thinking which is useful for the production of good conduct, which is mostly meditations on being unattached and therefore not jealous, scheming, devious or tainted with feelings of inferiority, superiority or differentiation of others. Understanding the underlying emptiness of all apparent phenomena is useful in this kind of meditation as is compassion: ‘Purification of...action comes from behaviour pervaded by the Void<sup>167</sup> and by Pity.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 247.)

### 5.3.4 Developing

The final section (Chs. 16-19) concerns cultivating karmic fruitfulness, which can be seen in the development of (conventional) self, objects of enjoyment and welfare (cf. Clayton p. 60).<sup>168</sup> Before this cultivation begins, it seems that the

---

<sup>166</sup> *Pāpa* has also been translated as ‘evil’ and ‘sin’, but perhaps these definitions are too strong and judgemental for what, I think, is intended here.

<sup>167</sup> ‘That is, emptiness of lust, hate, and delusion’ – Bendall’s and Rouse’s footnote.

<sup>168</sup> Clayton sometimes prefers ‘Welfare’ to ‘Karmic Fruitfulness’ and identifies Śāntideva’s interchangeable use of the two terms *śubha* and *punya* respectively.

practitioner will already have achieved the six *pāramitās*, so we may wonder what the point of the following section is.<sup>169</sup> It seems to me to *repeat* some *pāramitās* (for example vigour (*vīrya*) and forbearance (*kṣānti*)), as well as reiterate that morality (*śīla*), in the form of compassion, engenders the right kind of motivation to produce the right kind of effort (the sixth constituent of the Eightfold Path) needed to secure the cultivation of karmic fruitfulness (SS 16:273-17:315).

There is a view that accomplishment of the six *pāramitās* can be achieved by the Arhat (Clayton, 2006, p.59) and are not enough by themselves to attain Buddhahood.<sup>170</sup> It is suggested that this is the reason the ‘extra’ stage (in chapters 16-19) is needed to achieve the end which begins with *bodhicitta* i.e. Buddhahood. If this view is correct, then this is a major difference to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* where the six *pāramitās* appear to be enough for the Bodhisattva and elements of the *prajñāpāramitā* require something which is beyond the understanding expected of the Arhat, i.e. the understanding of *śūnyatā*. Furthermore, the *dhyānapāramitā* (perfection of meditative absorption, BCA 8) in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* also explicitly states (as we have seen) that part of perfecting *dhyāna* requires that the practitioner meditate on ‘the perfect object’ which has been taken by at least one translator to mean *śūnyatā*. (See BCA 8: 187, Kelsang, 2002, p. 144.)<sup>171</sup> It also seems strange when the pre-Mahāyāna voice at BCA 9:40 argues that liberation can be achieved through the Four Noble Truths *alone* and the emptiness teaching is not needed, which means s/he would have no interest in achieving the sixth perfection *prajñā*, at least in the way Śāntideva would interpret *prajñā*. (See earlier p. 105. Also see SS 16:273, p. 251 where the purity of the disciple is not enough for Buddhahood).

Even though that particular point is open to debate, I think it would be odd for Śāntideva to make such an effort in BCA 9 to explain that the ultimate object of wisdom is *śūnyatā* and that BCA 8 (as well as the preceding chapters) were a preparation for this truth<sup>172</sup> then to say that this is achievable by the Arhat who, according to their tradition, has no need for the *śūnyatā* teaching at all.

Be that as it may, in this ‘extra’ section we find the main area of similarity with the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*<sup>173</sup> where comparable (or sometimes the same) arguments are made to those in BCA Chapter 8 with regard to the equality of self and others.

One must exercise oneself in making no difference between others and self, if the thought of becoming a Buddha is to become strong. Self

<sup>169</sup> Śāntideva does not appear to expand on the common six *pāramitās* to the ten outlined in the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra* – see Clayton, 2006, pp. 58-9 and n.47.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Since the accomplishment of the perfections is associated with the process of purification, this would suggest that for Śāntideva, the fully developed Śravaka (i.e. Arhat) has realized the six perfections, but that this is not enough, and that the Bodhisattva must take the additional step of developing or cultivating himself, his objects of enjoyment, and most importantly, his karmic fruitfulness.’ Clayton, 2006, p. 59.

<sup>171</sup> This verse is BCA 8:186 for Crosby and Skilton, but v. 187 for Kelsang, Batchelor and Berzin.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Buddha taught all the method practices explained above To enable us to complete the training in wisdom realizing emptiness.’ (BCA 9:1, Kelsang, 2002, p. 147); ‘It is for the sake of understanding [i.e. *prajñā* which is in its highest expression *śūnyatā*] that the Sage taught this entire collection of preparations.’ (BCA 9:1, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 114.)

<sup>173</sup> Which supports the idea that there is repetition and reiteration of the *pāramitās* in chapters 16-19 in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*.

and not-self exist only relatively, just as the hither and further banks of a river, and therefore this is false.

(SS 19:357, Bendall and Rouse, 1922, p. 315)

Through protecting himself (and his wealth), purifying himself so that he is no longer attached to personhood, and having developed himself so that he has something worth passing on, the Bodhisattva is useful and beneficial to other creatures:

Thus having abandoned self [through the understanding of emptiness] let him follow the good of all creatures...not thinking of worldly things. Let him apply his own knowledge to the service of all creatures ; having duly guarded his wealth...let him use it for all creatures.

(*Ibid.*, 19:362, p. 318)

Śāntideva seeks to establish emptiness as the ultimate truth. A consequence of this is that the attachments we feel to ourselves and others would be seen as void and should therefore be severed, resulting in our being unable to distinguish between ourselves and others. In that way compassion becomes a direct result of the understanding of emptiness. This realisation is a reinforcing reminder for the Bodhisattva of his vow to help all sentient beings escape *duḥkha* as he would like to himself.

In the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* as in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva has attempted to establish both emptiness and compassion through the Bodhisattva Ideal using the Bodhisattva path. However, Śāntideva is not without his modern critics and a recent discussion was initiated by Paul Williams who claims that Śāntideva's views have actually *destroyed* the Bodhisattva path. It is to this criticism I now turn.

## Chapter 6: Criticisms of Śāntideva

### Introduction

In this chapter I intend to address five things. To: (1) give an outline of Paul Williams' initial criticisms of Śāntideva's compassion-centred ethics in his book *Altruism and Reality*, (2) offer a defence, (3) suggest support for Williams' view, (4) explain what is pertinent to this argument in Williams' later *The Unexpected Way* and (5) examine what appears to be a concession from Williams.

*The Unexpected Way* concerns a personal story of conversion from Buddhism to Roman Catholicism and I think it would be fair to try to see Williams' comments here as musings or thinking out loud rather than a scholarly work as his other books have been. Having said that, he does make comments which I take to be supportive of his earlier thesis (in *Altruism and Reality*) that there is no room in Buddhism for real compassion ('love' in the case of *The Unexpected Way*) and it is this view that I wish to counter. My arguments are in no way personal comments on Paul Williams or a judgement on his conversion; Williams' conclusions need to be addressed simply because they have been brought up.

### 6.1 Paul Williams' Initial Criticisms of Śāntideva

Williams (1998) challenges Śāntideva's explanation of developing compassion as expressed in BCA 8:101-3 and believes that Śāntideva's argument is logically flawed and ultimately destroys the Bodhisattva path. If Williams is right then there is a serious danger that Buddhist ethics as expressed in Śāntideva becomes vacuous. I intend to offer a defence of Śāntideva since I believe Williams' account is mistaken. I intend to set out and analyse what I take to be Williams' argument and to explain where and why I think it is incorrect. Before looking at the argument itself, it would be useful to look at his translation of the three verses at the centre of it.

A continuant and a collective - such as a (caste) row (*pañkti*) or an army - are fictions (*mṛṣā*)

The one of whom there is a pain (*duḥkha*) does not exist. Therefore of whom will there be ownership of that?

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?

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 is also thus. If not oneself also is like (other) beings.<sup>174</sup>

(BCA 8:101-3, Williams, 1998, pp. 105-6)

Williams' argument, as I understand it, is as follows: Śāntideva wants to remove pain and also claims that self and others are not truly existent. If self and others are not truly existent then there is nothing which experiences pain. If nothing experiences pain then there is no pain to remove. If there is no pain to remove

---

<sup>174</sup> See Appendix 2, p. 163 for alternative translations.

then the Bodhisattva path is redundant. But we know that pain *does* exist and that means there must be identifiable individual persons. If there are identifiable individual persons then Śāntideva is wrong to claim that self and others are not truly existent. Furthermore the Bodhisattva's solution to the removal of pain, seeing others as yourself, is pointless since others need to be *distinct* from you in order to locate their pain, again making the Bodhisattva path redundant. Thus Śāntideva has destroyed the Bodhisattva path.

Williams' argument broadens to include various consequences of this conclusion,<sup>175</sup> but these consequences obviously do not follow if we can find fault with Williams' interpretation of the three verses in question. As I see it we can, and I therefore do not intend to dwell on consequences which, to my mind, do not arise. I think Williams' interpretation of Śāntideva fails for three main reasons: (i) there are alternative interpretations of these three verses which do not result in the conclusions Williams reaches, (ii) the verses are taken out of context in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and can be countered with other parts of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (and *Śikṣāsamuccaya*), and (iii) Williams ignores the precise point of the verses in question, which is to assist in *meditation*.

### 6.1.1 Alternative Interpretations

The three verses are, of course, open to interpretation and have been analysed, I am sure, since they were first read by Śāntideva's contemporaries in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. I find Williams' interpretation to be quite different to what I imagine Śāntideva to be explaining. I like to think that my interpretation is informed by what I take to be the broader Indian (not Tibetan) Mādhyamaka perspective in which some central themes of that school's philosophy were in Śāntideva's mind when he wrote the verses in question. In saying that, I cannot claim (or hope) to understand the verses as Śāntideva intended but only as I see them making sense in that general tradition. There are as many interpretations of the verses as there are interpreters, which must leave every one of them inadequate in some way and this obviously applies to mine. Be that as it may, I think mine is more in keeping with what (I think) Śāntideva was generally trying to achieve and also with the central philosophy of Indian Mādhyamaka than with the abstracted logic-based one Williams posits. In what immediately follows I have deliberately omitted Williams' use of the word 'pain' (an interpretation which suits his argument) and have instead used *duḥkha* which has a different meaning. This is important for understanding that Śāntideva does not aim to relieve a bad back or suchlike but, rather, the conditions which cause us any form of anguish.<sup>176</sup> At other times, later, I have used the word 'pain' where I thought it more appropriate to the discussion.

---

<sup>175</sup> For example conclusions i-vii in Williams, 1998, pp. 165-74.

<sup>176</sup> Streng, 1967, in the context of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* has it as 'sorrow', which is obviously very different to what Williams has in mind. Williams talks later about *physical* pain (headaches and stepping on a drawing pin) but this would not fit with Streng's more mental *duḥkha*. In fairness to Williams, it is *conceivable* that physical pain might be considered *part* of *duḥkha* and Streng says that '*duḥkha* is always found as "sorrow" in the translations, while it is rendered as "pain" or "turmoil" as well in the interpretation' (1967, p. 12). It seems to me that 'pain' in this context suggests something *mental* rather than physical. As far as I can see, 'pain' is (a) not really what is meant overall in the term *duḥkha*, and (b) *duḥkha* is not reducible to physical pain *alone*. Williams, I think, implies that it is. If I am right then Williams and Śāntideva may be talking about different things. Abelson (1993) translates it as 'unrest', which I would not consider to be an allusion to physical pain (p. 255).

My reading of the verses is as follows:

BCA 8:101. The ‘individual’ is like a ‘group’ (of, for example, *skandhas* or Humean bundles<sup>177</sup>) and as such does not exist as a permanently projected entity. This means that since this entity does not exist substantially, there is nowhere to genuinely locate *duḥkha* in that entity. This is not to say that the entity does not experience *duḥkha*, just that the entity is not concrete so *duḥkha* cannot belong to ‘it’ concretely.<sup>178</sup>

BCA 8:102. If *duḥkha* cannot be specifically located, then we should not attempt to differentiate as to ‘whose’ *duḥkha* it is, and should, instead, concentrate on dispelling *all duḥkha*.<sup>179</sup>

BCA 8:103. Having meditated on the equality of self and others at this particular (and not isolated or self-contained) part of the meditation,<sup>180</sup> it is reasonable to think that if ‘I’ do not like to experience *duḥkha* then neither do ‘others’. Therefore the best of all possible worlds would be where none of us experienced *duḥkha*. Śāntideva’s point here is that because suffering is to be removed as such, the suffering of *all* is to be removed. If suffering is something that you do not like then in general it is to be removed without any distinction as to whose suffering it is. If suffering is *not* something that should be generally removed, then there would be no justification in remove *my* suffering only.

Although Śāntideva does not express this here (BCA 8:103) I believe that the outcome of Śāntideva’s elimination of the subject is that there will *be no duḥkha*. In other words, if everyone were able to fully understand the emptiness of self then they would all be *completely* unattached and enlightened and if that were the case then there would be no more *duḥkha*. What Paul Williams’ argument above (unintentionally I think) means is that if I had let go of attachment at the level of a Bodhisattva then pain would be removed, but if I then became *reattached* and made distinctions between myself and others then *duḥkha* would arise again. I do not believe Śāntideva would have any problem with that argument neither does it do Śāntideva’s position any harm.

It is simply not true that Śāntideva’s elimination of the subject, the person, or whatever, is occurring only on the level of the ultimate truth...Śāntideva intends his elimination of the person to issue in

---

<sup>177</sup> What we regard as a ‘self’ is ‘a bundle or collection of different perceptions’, (Hume, 2000, p. 180).

<sup>178</sup> A survey has suggested that the Danes are the happiest people in Europe. ‘The Danes’ as a group are not static since Danes are born and Danes die. The happiness they supposedly experience relative to other national groups might not even be experienced by all Danes. In fact it is highly doubtful it would be since it is reasonable to assume that at the time of the survey some Danes were depressed. What this establishes is that the ‘happiness’ is only attributable to an abstract entity ‘the Danes’ and therefore does not *belong* to anyone *in concreto* in much the same way that in BCA 8:101 suffering is *in a sense* not real. (See What can the Danes teach us about happiness?: URL: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/6563639.stm> [25 July 2008].)

<sup>179</sup> This is not to say that no individual ever thinks they experience *duḥkha*, it simply means that *duḥkha* should be stopped because it is *duḥkha*.

<sup>180</sup> Which goes on for another sixteen verses on the equality of self and others before moving to another *fifty-three verses* on *exchanging* self and others.

altruistic actions. But it is within the everyday transactional conventional realm that actions – and therefore the salvific actions of the bodhisattvas and Buddhas – take place.

(Williams, 1998, p. 164)

I think we need to identify exactly who is carrying out the altruistic actions and for whom. It seems to me that there are four possibilities:

- 1) Altruistic actions from the enlightened to the unenlightened.
- 2) Altruistic actions from the unenlightened to the unenlightened.
- 3) Altruistic actions from the unenlightened to the enlightened.
- 4) Altruistic actions from the enlightened to the enlightened.

In (1) above, this is broadly the position Śāntideva takes: that those who understand that self is empty help those who do not. In (2) this happens since people have compassion to different degrees, but no matter what level of altruism they show, they do not have the full *prajñāpāramitā* which is knowledge that the self is empty. In (3) this is not needed by the enlightened and is not something Śāntideva argues for. In (4) this is not necessary since the enlightened do not experience *duḥkha* since they are unattached to self. Which means that (1) and (2) are the only positions Śāntideva might put forward. The only way that (1) can happen is if the Bodhisattva (the enlightened) stays in the conventional realm where there *are* distinctions between subjects. The point of relieving their *duḥkha* is to relieve beings (who are capable of understanding the Buddha's teachings, i.e. humans) of the false notion that they are substantially existing entities. As long as they think otherwise they will be tied to *samsāra* and will experience *duḥkha*. If they realise the emptiness of self and others then the conventional realm, as it was, no longer exists: perhaps in the same way a person awakes from a nightmare. Williams is quite right to point out that it is 'within the everyday transactional conventional realm that actions – and therefore the salvific actions of the bodhisattvas and Buddhas – take place' but what he does not mention is that as the conventional beings are relieved of their suffering by understanding *śūnyatā*, they no longer recognise the conventional realm.<sup>181</sup> The conventional realm is the abode of those who see differentiation. The only way to relieve them of *duḥkha* is to teach them *in the conventional realm* (an example of skilful means) that they are *in reality*<sup>182</sup> indistinct from one another. This cannot take place in the enlightened realm since the problem does not exist there.

I think Williams sees a contradiction which is not really there, any more than it is a contradiction for a non-smoker to go into the smoking room (thus inhaling smoke) in order to try to pass on the health benefits to the smokers of extinguishing their cigarettes and leaving the room. The room is where the harm is done, if no-one is in the room then no-one is smoking and no harm is being done, but it took someone who knows this to go into the room and explain in the first place.

Williams says he could accept his *non* existence as an 'isolated monadic

---

<sup>181</sup> Except as a place to voluntarily inhabit using skilful means to help those still stuck in ignorance and therefore *duḥkha*.

<sup>182</sup> i.e. in terms of Absolute Truth.

[Cartesian] True Self' but could nevertheless still act selfishly (*ibid.*, p. 164). Again I do not see a problem for Śāntideva here since I think he would argue that although he is pleased that Williams understands that there is no self, he would prefer that Williams understood it thoroughly enough to let go of it completely (see BCA 9:30f). In other words there is still a vestige of attachment and it is this which makes Williams continue to act selfishly. Were he to *completely* understand that self is empty then his selfish behaviour would stop as would his 'delusional' thinking which discriminates against 'others' and in favour of 'himself'.

Much of what follows in Williams' account is based on the conclusion that Śāntideva's explanations above lead to an inability to distinguish between persons and therefore results in an inability to remove their pains. This leads, he argues, to the compassion of the Bodhisattva being impossible.

Williams later reiterates his position that 'Śāntideva has indeed completely destroyed the path to full Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings' (Williams, 1998, p. 174) and the claim here is twofold:

(1) That:

- i) Without conventional persons there are no conventional pains.
- ii) Without pain there is no removal of pain.
- iii) Without removal of pain there is no Buddhahood.

(2) That:

- i) If pain exists then conventional persons must exist.
- ii) If conventional persons exist then there must be differences between them.
- iii) If we recognise differences between persons then (since compassion requires that we do not) we cannot argue that we should show compassion for them.
- iv) If we do not remove pain then we do not remove *duḥkha* completely.
- v) If we do not remove *duḥkha* completely then the Bodhisattva path is not followable to its end.
- vi) Śāntideva's argument has therefore destroyed the Bodhisattva path and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Williams also claims that, the above (supposedly) being the case, the only way to remove pain is by targeting its removal and that means *identifying* an individual and their particular pain rather than denying the individual and seeing pain as general and not belonging to anyone, or 'free floating' as Williams terms it (*op. cit.*, pp. 174-5).

This requires a very vivid awareness of the other as an individual...The pain which we seek to remove is intrinsically embedded in the actual individual in front of us, who is different from other individuals and, of course, different to us.

(*ibid.*, p. 175)

I would like to respond to the points above and that last quotation as follows:

(1)

- i) Agreed.
- ii) Agreed.
- iii) Without removal of pain there is no *need* for Buddhahood - which might or might not destroy the Bodhisattva path. But since there *is* pain, there must be those who mistakenly think they are conventional persons and such persons need to be relieved of pain. Therefore there is a need for Buddhahood. (See BCA 9:75ff: the error of persons is accepted for the sake of liberation. We are free to distinguish between useful illusions and non-useful illusions and Śāntideva says that for the sake of compassion we accept that there are other 'persons'. We work with these illusions and concepts as long as they serve our purpose, which is compassion, provided we are prepared to go beyond them in the end.)

(2)

- i) Agreed.
- ii) If conventional persons exist then *those who do not understand emptiness* would imagine there must be differences between them.
- iii) If we recognise differences between persons then we do not understand emptiness, which means we do not have the *prajñāpāramitā* and cannot therefore fully understand compassion or how to show it to the degree of an advanced Bodhisattva. This is not a problem for Śāntideva; it is only a problem for someone who wants to be compassionate but does not understand the two truths. Śāntideva does.
- iv) Agreed.
- v) Agreed, but the Bodhisattva *does* understand emptiness, has the *prajñāpāramitā*, can remove *duḥkha* completely, meaning the Bodhisattva path *is* followable to its end.
- vi) Williams has misunderstood Śāntideva's argument and both the Bodhisattva path and Mahāyāna Buddhism have sustained no damage.

Williams believes that when it comes to relieving *actual* physical pain, we need to focus on and recognise the individual as a distinct entity and Śāntideva must therefore be able to distinguish between persons in order to compassionately remove the pain. However, this does not necessarily result from what Śāntideva teaches. Perhaps the following example will illustrate this. Let us suppose there was a willing volunteer for a pain experiment: we will call him Archibald (after Williams' example, 2000, p. 438). In the first part of a two-part experiment, Archibald sits in a chair and his hand is taken by a scientist then placed over a naked flame. Archibald winces, draws his hand away and cries out. The scientist then asks Archibald if he experienced pain, to which Archibald replies in the affirmative. In the second part of the experiment Archibald's brain is temporarily removed then his hand is placed over the naked flame again. This time there is no reaction. When Archibald's brain is returned, the scientist asks him if he had experienced pain. Archibald replies that he had not. What this established is that pain exists in the mind or consciousness,<sup>183</sup> and were we able to understand that

---

<sup>183</sup> We need not go so far as a hypothetical example: anyone who has had an operation under general anaesthetic knows that it is possible for the body to undergo massive trauma (say, in a hip

mind or consciousness is empty then we can assume that there would be no further *physical* (or mental) pains. Although Śāntideva is not offering to relieve us from the pain of electric shocks, headaches or stepping on a drawing pin (Williams, 1998, pp. 166, 172-3 and 1999, pp. 145-6 respectively) these pains would be removed by an understanding of emptiness.

When one notices that one's own mind is attracted or repelled [by pain], one should neither act nor speak, but remain like a block of wood.

Noticing in this way that his mind is defiled [attached to self and therefore pain] or engaged in a fruitless activity, the hero should always firmly curb it with the antidote to that condition.

Why, mind, do you protect this carcass, identifying with it? If it is really separate from you, then what loss is its decay to you?

Searching hard like this, you have found no essence here. Now explain why it is that you continue to guard the body [now explain why it is that you feel pain].

(BCA 5:48, 54, 60 and 64, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, pp. 38-9)

In other words, Śāntideva is offering to remove *duḥkha* by removing the conditions which cause it. He *does not* need to be able to differentiate between me and others in order to help; he can help through passing on the specifically Mādhyamaka version of the *Dharma* and therefore avoid the personalisation that Williams finds importance in.

Williams seems to think that Śāntideva claims there is no differentiation in the conventional world (therefore how can I help someone if I cannot identify them?). But Śāntideva *cannot* be arguing this for if there is no differentiation *at all* then there is no conventional world and the world exists only at the level of ultimate truth. We *know* that (at this period in time) this is not the case because we experience *duḥkha*. Śāntideva is merely saying that our perception of projected permanent entities in the conventional world is false.

### 6.1.2 The Wider Context: The *Śikṣāsamuccaya*

Barbara Clayton claims to have found evidence in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* which supports Śāntideva against Williams' interpretation of BCA 8:101-3 which concerns meditation (*dhyāna*):

*Dhyāna* refers to the higher levels of consciousness attained through the 'calming' meditative practices, or *śamathā*. More specifically, the argument at 101-103 is part of a meditation practice concerned with the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, the 'awakening mind' or the aspiration to become a buddha (8:89, 90). Similarly, the parallel argument in the ŚS [*Śikṣāsamuccaya*] is also part of the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, which...is considered the highest virtue and is key to becoming the

---

replacement) but for there to be no pain during the operation. This is simply because the patient is not-conscious of pain.

Mahāyāna ideal, the bodhisattva (ŚŚ 9; BR 10). In order to develop *bodhicitta*, one must understand and practice the “equality of self and others” (*parātma-samatā*). “From the practice of the equality (sameness) of self and other, the thought of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) becomes strong” (ŚŚ Vaidya 191. 25). The idea of this practice is to overcome the tendency to differentiate between one’s own suffering and happiness and that of others. ‘Practising the sameness of self and other’ is based on a recognition of emptiness: that self and other exist only relatively, so any absolute difference between self and other is false. Seeing another’s pain as the same as one’s own is part of this practice, and as we have seen at 101-103, Śāntideva tries to give us a reason to do this, but overall, this is not strictly a rational process.

(Clayton, 2001, pp. 92-3)

Furthermore, Clayton does not believe that Śāntideva is logically defensible; but this is no concession to Williams, it is the nature of moral philosophy as I have said in reference to Hume (above p. 40)<sup>184</sup> and Schopenhauer (above p. 44)<sup>185</sup> and as Clayton does in reference to Hume (*op. cit.*, p. 88). In other words we have no explanation as to why some people show more compassion than others and a solution to this mystery has hitherto never been found in logic.

My own (limited) experience of formal logic is that it can only test the validity of statements (not that I mean to diminish the use and achievements of logic in any way) in an utterly emotionless and detached way. It is therefore a highly problematic methodology to use when doing moral (or for that matter political) philosophy. In other words logic is free from *value* judgements. Moral philosophy is concerned with value judgements. Not, of course that moral philosophy should be a free-for-all devoid of *rational* thinking. On the contrary it *must* be rational and I think Śāntideva’s overall scheme *is*. What makes it seem less so is the isolation of certain verses and their inability to stand up to the logical analysis Williams subjects them to. Clayton thinks Williams is being disingenuous (2001, p. 88) but I think Williams is genuinely trying, as he himself says, to expose Buddhist texts to the kind of rigorous examination that Western philosophy has to go through.<sup>186</sup>

Clayton does not accept Williams’ interpretation of the first half of v. 101<sup>187</sup> which Williams takes as meaning that there are *no* selves of any description whatever. If this were the case then there would be some very unpleasant consequences for Śāntideva’s philosophy. However this interpretation of Williams’, Clayton believes, rests on a mistranslation:

Thus he [Williams] argues that when Śāntideva says, “Continuants and collections are fictions (*mṛṣā*)” (BCA 8: 101a), by fiction (*mṛṣā*)

<sup>184</sup> Who believes it is enough, at times, to point out what *is* the case rather than seeking a cause then seeking the cause of the cause *ad infinitum*.

<sup>185</sup> Who believes that truth is paradoxical.

<sup>186</sup> Although I would have assumed it had already done so in the various debates over a long period of time amongst its adherents in different schools and against its opponents in the varied geographical areas to which its spread. For Williams’ explanation of applying ‘the tools of contemporary analytical philosophy to assessing some of Śāntideva’s arguments’ see Williams, 2000, pp. 424-5. Also see D’Arcy May, 2007, n.4, p. 94.

<sup>187</sup> ‘Continuants and collections are fictions (*mṛṣā*)’ (BCA 8: 101a, (tr.) Williams, 1998, p. 105).

he must mean ‘non-existent’, even though *mṛṣā* is usually taken to mean ‘false’, ‘wrong’, ‘vain’...it would not make sense to read *mṛṣā* here as ‘completely non-existent’, and it does not make sense to say he means that self and other do not exist period. Things, selves, and others don't exist independently, inherently, but they do, nonetheless, exist in some way.

(Clayton, *op. cit.*, p. 90)

Williams’ interpretation makes no sense in the context of what Indian Mādhyamikas believe. Williams’ claim is that no selves exist *at all*, and this is flatly denied by Nāgārjuna (the co-founder of the Mādhyamaka school which Śāntideva followed) who also denies (*in the same context*) that the ‘cause(s)’ of *duḥkha* can be explained in any way:

Sorrow [*duḥkha*] is not self-produced, for that which is produced is certainly not produced by that [personality (tr.)].  
If the “other” (*para*) is not produced by the individual self (*ātma*), how would sorrow be that produced by another?

Sorrow could be made by both [self and the “other” (tr.)] if it could be produced by either one.  
[But (tr.)] not produced by another, and not self-produced – how can sorrow exist without a cause?

Not only are the four [causal (tr.)] interpretations [that *duḥkha* is caused, uncaused, both or neither] not possible in respect to sorrow, [but also (tr.)] none of the four [causal] interpretations is possible even in respect to external things (*bhāva*).

(MMK 12:8-10, Streng, 1969, p. 197)<sup>188</sup>

Emptiness does not entail *non-existence*, in fact it is clear from Nāgārjuna that persons neither exist, do not exist nor both or neither. (Also see MMK 4:1-7.) I take this as applying to Śāntideva’s interpretation of emptiness too.

### 6.1.3 The Wider Context and Meditation

Chapter 8 is concerned with meditation and is not intended, as far as I can see, as putting forth analytical views.<sup>189</sup> I think it is not in the spirit of the chapter to disassemble it in the way Williams does (Chapter 9 yes, but not Chapter 8). Many things appear in the meditation of vv. 90-119 which, if isolated and examined, could lead to strange and wrong conclusions about Śāntideva’s views. For example does Śāntideva advocate stealing and mistreating others in v. 8:153 whilst contradicting this in v. 123?<sup>190</sup> I have no doubt that Śāntideva does not *advocate* stealing and mistreating others, but if 8:153 were the only verse of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* we read then we might draw the conclusion that he has/does.

---

<sup>188</sup> Garfield’s (1995) version is translated from the Tibetan (unlike Streng’s, 1967, Sanskrit translation - see p. 12) yet Garfield’s is no more helpful to what I think Williams wants to establish.

<sup>189</sup> In fact Murti takes the view that the Mādhyamaka offer ‘a critique of all philosophy’ and as such would preclude themselves from offering a view. (See Murti, 1955, p.9. Also see p. 13).

<sup>190</sup> Also contradicting MN 114:5, which, although not a Mahāyāna text, is still considered by the Mahāyāna to be part of the Buddha’s teachings.

The appearance of this verse is intended to communicate an idea, to serve a purpose, *not* as something to be advocated. Isolating verses in the way Williams has done can, I feel, lead to a misinterpretation of what Śāntideva means. I think the only reasonable conclusion that can be reached regarding the methodology of the arguments against Śāntideva is that Williams' perspective is, on this occasion, narrow. (Also see Wetlesen, 2002, p. 35.)

There are thirty verses alone (vv. 90-119) which deal with the equality of self and others and *collectively* this is *one* meditation (cf. Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 80) which, I would say, has to be looked at in the round:

The central thrust of this meditation, *which takes up the next thirty verses* [my italics] (vv. 90 – 119), is that the meditator should reflect upon the equality of oneself and other people, so that one ceases to differentiate between the needs and concerns of either.

(*ibid.*, p. 80)

I do not believe that three verses taken from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* encapsulate Śāntideva's wider explanation of altruistic behaviour. Elsewhere, for example, Śāntideva is much more explicit about individual actions which cause direct *duḥkha* and that desisting from such behaviour results in a cessation of *duḥkha* (BCA 8: 122-5). Williams' selective reading has led to a conclusion which ignores what Śāntideva says elsewhere. Śāntideva does not claim that the Bodhisattva path is there to cure physical pain<sup>191</sup> but that if the Bodhisattva teaches emptiness then *duḥkha* will cease as conventional individuals realise there is no distinction between themselves and others. It must be remembered that the verses at the centre of this debate are a very small part of a chapter which deals with *meditation*: not action. We are asked in that chapter to *imagine* the equality of self and others at a higher level than the conventional and this fact seems to be overlooked in Williams' account.

In his criticisms of Williams, John Pettit (1999) makes claims for a distinction in the central part of Chapter 8 between 'meditative absorption' and 'meditative aftermath'. I take Pettit as meaning here that there are thoughts such as 'no beings have essence and are all therefore empty' which only applies during meditation as a reflection of ultimate truth, and in the aftermath of that meditation we have to deal with the everyday *practice* which is acting compassionately towards beings which suffer as a result of their ignorance of their ultimate indistinctness. Compassionate acts are, then, the 'meditative aftermath' and this is driven by the knowledge of emptiness which comes about as a result of the 'meditative absorption.' 'Meditative absorption' leads to the *prajñāpāramitā śūnyatā* and 'meditative aftermath' leads to *karuṇā*. This is perfectly in keeping with what Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches and with what Śāntideva teaches overall.

when one really meditates effectively on emptiness, no self or other is perceived; this is what is ultimately the case. In meditative aftermath, it is said, one should perceive all things in the manner of...magical illusions, [like] the reflection of the moon in the water, a mirage, and so forth. In other words, though one perceives self and other in

---

<sup>191</sup> Nor does it not, nor both nor neither.

meditative aftermath, one knows they do not exist as they appear, and one acts accordingly.

(Pettit, 1999, p. 133)

Pettit's point is that Williams has made a mistake in presuming that the Bodhisattva sees all things as empty *always*, and that means there are no entities to cognise at all, when in fact the Bodhisattva simply sees them *differently* and does not deny their existence but does deny their existence *as they are commonly taken to be*. The moon on the water does the job, as any German Idealist will tell you, of demonstrating that our senses can be deceived, therefore the world *in reality* (in *itself*) does not necessarily conform to our interpretation or conception of it.<sup>192</sup>

Williams responds to Pettit by mostly sticking to his guns and reiterating that Śāntideva's logic is flawed. He gives the example of stepping on a drawing pin and says that since that would result in pain then the Bodhisattva would want to remove it. This would require that the Bodhisattva recognise the pain of the particular *individual* in question. Recognising the pain of an individual means *distinguishing* between individuals and that logically destroys the Bodhisattva's motivation to be compassionate, *viz* to make *no* distinctions between individuals. (See Williams 1999, pp. 145-6.) So Williams sees the 'problem' as one of logic and is not prepared to consider the context of vv. 101-3, which is in a chapter which deals with *meditation*:

My problem, however, is not psychological, but rather conceptual, logical. I find certain inferences Śāntideva wants to make simply do not follow. Whether psychologically a person as a matter of fact becomes altruistic as a result of the Buddhist arguments against the *ātman* is an empirical matter to which I do not know the answer. *Meditating has nothing to do with what actually interests me here* [my italics].

(Williams, 1999, p. 146)

In my view it is precisely here that Williams has made the error of taking the verses out of context and refusing to allow that they are seen in the way I think they were intended – as preparation for the *prajñāpāramitā* in the next chapter.<sup>193</sup> If Williams had disputed any of the verses in chapter nine on grounds of logic then I may have had more sympathy with what he was attempting to do, but it seems to me that it is unjustified in the context in which the verses appear. I

---

<sup>192</sup> For example we do not see infra red, as a snake does, we do not hear certain sounds, as a dog does, and this means that what eventually gets to our minds or brains is diluted or reduced to something we can make sense of. So when we think about our surroundings we cannot help but have only our own picture. This picture exists at the level of an idea, a representation (or *vorstellung* as Schopenhauer terms it) and it is this series of ideas which constitute human reality. This is an Idealist view but there is a clear crossover to Mahāyāna Buddhism.

<sup>193</sup> Note that it is not strictly necessary in Mahāyāna thinking to have to undertake *any* of the preparations for the perfection of wisdom since it is quite possible to have reached enlightenment through other means – witness the existence of the Arhat and the Pratyekabuddha and even the Samyaksambuddha of which Gautama is representative. However, as we have seen, the Mahāyāna regard the first two above as having a lesser form of enlightenment which they (the Mahāyāna) see as less compassionate than that of the Bodhisattva. See H.H. the Dalai Lama's commentary on the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra – Transcendent Wisdom*, 1988, p. 15.

believe the verses are dependent on other parts of not only the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* but the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and even wider general Mādhyamaka thinking, which precludes such an interpretation as Williams’.

Regardless of the fact that the person is ultimately empty, we do, nevertheless, use conventions to describe them at the level of relative truth (BCA 9:6). Śāntideva is not saying that persons *do not exist* since this would commit him to nihilism. Neither is he saying that the person exists at any more than a conventional level since this would commit him to eternalism. The Mādhyamaka is the *middle way* between the two and it seems that Williams tries to commit Śāntideva to a position which is not a Mādhyamika one. This position:

avoids eternalism because it does not assume that the person is a substantial Self (*ātman*) with an independent own-being (*svabhāva*)...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.

(Wetlesen, 2002, pp. 37-8)

Williams has pressed an alien, reductive Abhidharma position on Śāntideva; a position which Śāntideva himself argues against in Chapter 9. What applies to the person, as far as I can see, also applies to *duḥkha*. Śāntideva does not deny it exists at a conventional level but argues that it is ultimately empty of essence and its conventional ‘existence’ only happens as a result of attachment to self. No perceived self equals no perceived *duḥkha*.

Wetlesen, rightly in my view, thinks Williams has ignored the holistic nature of Śāntideva’s work and the alternative interpretations of vv. 101-3 (Wetlesen, 2002, pp. 50 and 80-1). Bearing in mind that these few verses are dwarfed by the rest of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, it seems highly unlikely that they could be representative of what Śāntideva wants to say as a whole. The Bodhisattva path, therefore, can not only be saved but was never really under serious attack. Again, my own view is that I admire what Williams was *attempting* to do (to use analytical tools on one of Śāntideva’s arguments) but I believe these analytical tools need to take much more into account than Williams was prepared to do on this occasion. There is nothing wrong with the tools but the problem was in their particular application.

## **6.2 Support for Williams?**

Williams appears to have limited support in Mark Siderits who, although not in favour of Williams’ conclusion (that Śāntideva destroyed the Bodhisattva path), does offer one area of agreement.

He argues that pain is *ultimately* real but individuals are not. This means pain exists as an ultimate truth but only affects conventionally existent people: ‘I think Śāntideva is once again reminding us that since persons are ultimately unreal – that ultimately there is suffering but none who suffers’ (2000, p. 416) and that:

At the level of conventional truth, there are pains and there are subjects who experience them. What Śāntideva’s argument does require is that pains also be ultimately real, but that persons are

not...This does commit Śāntideva to the ultimate existence of subjectless pains, however. So, to this extent, Williams is correct.  
(Siderits, 2000, p. 419)

This view is confusing since it appears not to recognise that Śāntideva follows the Mādhyamaka position that *everything* is ultimately empty. That includes *nirvāṇa*, *saṃsāra*, the Buddha and the teachings of Buddhism. If *duḥkha* had *svabhāva* (essence or own nature), then it would be uncaused, unconditioned and would exist eternally and could never be removed. *Nothing* has that property, so I fail to see how pains (strictly speaking *duḥkha*) can exist ultimately. It may then seem that Śāntideva would regard Siderits' view (that pains exist ultimately) as a form of attachment because Śāntideva is quite clear that when you are no longer attached to anything then nothing can arise and that includes *duḥkha*. (See BCA 9:14-15 and especially 25). This is illustrated in the following translations which I have selected on the basis of clarity:

it is refuted here that projection [conventional existence] is real, as that is the cause of suffering.  
(BCA 9:25a, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 117)

What needs to be abandoned is the awareness that grasps at truly [i.e. conventionally] existent forms and so forth,  
Which is the fundamental cause of all suffering.  
(BCA 9:25b, Kelsang, 2002, p. 152)

Alternatively:

Here that which is seen, heard and cognized is not refuted; rather, the conception [of them] as truly existent, which is the cause of suffering, is here to be prevented.  
(BCA 9:25, H. H. the XIV Dalai Lama, Wallace, (tr.) 1988, p. 35)

Śāntideva appears to be saying that suffering is *reliant* on grasping, unwholesome attachment, *not* that it exists ultimately without persons. However, Siderits appears to agree that Chapter 8 must be seen in context, and characterises it as part of the training Śāntideva offers the trainee Bodhisattva in preparation for the emptiness teaching in Chapter 9: 'if we see the arguments of chapter 8 as fitting into the scheme of progressive teachings, then that makes them provisional, with corrections ensuing after the full realization of emptiness (the topic of chapter 9).' (Siderits, *op. cit.*, p. 422.)

It appears, then, that Siderits' support for Williams is limited to what I take to be the rather odd suggestion that there are pains without persons (*ibid.*, p. 419), but he ameliorates this by saying that such a conclusion is in the end unsustainable when the meditative context of BCA 8:101-3 is taken into account. What appears as Siderits' support for Williams comes only in terms of what he perceives the logic of the verses in question to mean (which does not make much sense to me). However, Siderits seems prepared to set this in the wider context and in doing so moves away from Williams in the end. Thus far, there appears to be no-one in favour of Williams' 1998 thesis nor his further comments in support of it in his 2002 work.

### 6.2.1 Minds or Nothing?

Williams' response to Siderits need not detain us here since it largely repeats what he has already argued. There is one section, though, I think to be of profound interest in which he argues that:

The Mādhyamaka (Prasaṅgika) position is that all things, no matter what, are dependent on minds. It seems clear to me that this commits the Mādhyamika to the claim that before there were minds there were no things at all.

(Williams, 2000 p. 441)

This is interesting for at least two reasons and directly pertinent to my immediate enquiry for one. Firstly I suspect Williams thinks this does damage to Śāntideva's position, and secondly because it appears again in his later *The Unexpected Way* as an argument in favour of a theistic explanation of the existence and creation of the universe. I will deal with the first point here.

The position that before there were minds there were no things at all, if read in a certain way, does no damage to Śāntideva because he has anticipated it and has an answer to it. Everything depends on minds but *there are no 'real' minds* ('real' minds is a Yogācārin position). Things depend on the mind in a certain way: for an interpretation which results in their temporary and false unity as conventionally existent entities. However, since, ultimately, there are no solid minds there are, ultimately, no solid entities. That does not mean there is *nothing*, but that the human (and animal) 'join-the-dots' picture could be taken any way by any mind<sup>194</sup> and if there were no minds then there would be no picture. That does not mean there is nothing with the *potential* to form a picture or representation, just that there is nothing cognised and nothing permanent.

Śāntideva argues for the non-existence of permanent minds as follows:

A (truly existent) mental consciousness does not abide in the sense faculties such as the eyes, it does not abide in the objects such as visual-forms, and it does not abide in between the two. Neither does a (truly existent) mind exist either inside or outside the body, and it is not to be found elsewhere.

This (mind) is neither the body nor truly other than it; it is not mixed with it nor entirely separate from it; the mind is not in the slightest bit truly existent. Therefore all sentient beings have from the very beginning been in the natural Nirvana (i.e. their minds have always been devoid of true existence).

(BCA 9:102-3, Batchelor, 1979, p. 153)

In any case it does not matter if Williams believes Śāntideva *is* committed to believing that (1) objects are mind-dependent, (2) minds and objects are mutually

---

<sup>194</sup> When I see what we humans call a newspaper, I see something with coded black shapes which I can decipher and which can inform me of events I am unaware of. When my cat sees what I call a newspaper, she sees a toy to shred to pieces. Neither is wrong.

dependent or (3) minds are object-dependent, since no minds or objects have *svabhāva* or essence:

If consciousness exists prior to what is cognized, on what basis does it come into existence? If you argue that consciousness arises simultaneously with the object perceived, on what basis does it come into existence?

If it arises after the thing to be cognized, then from what does the consciousness arise? In this way, it is demonstrated that no phenomenon comes into existence.

(BCA 9:104-5, Crosby and Skilton, 1995, pp. 125-6)

I think it is quite clear that Śāntideva *does* argue that *duḥkha* is dependent on the (unenlightened) mind but I am not so sure that Śāntideva has stated or that his arguments lead to the conclusion that this applies to inanimate objects too. (Williams uses the example of a mountain, 2002, pp. 441-3 and n.29, 30, 32.) Ultimately, on analysis, there is no essence to be found in objects or minds, but it is clear that *duḥkha* exists conventionally. I think Śāntideva's position only commits him to the conclusion that *interpretations* are mind-dependent<sup>195</sup> but that any analysis of the permanent existence or total non-existence of anything would entail either eternalism or nihilism respectively, and these are positions which the Mādhyamika do not hold (see above p. 82).

### 6.3 Williams' Further Criticisms of Śāntideva

In Williams' 2002 book *The Unexpected Way* he records his 'meditations' (p. xiii) on becoming a Roman Catholic and breaking his tantric vows (p. 138). The book is mostly unconcerned with the above discussion<sup>196</sup> but Williams does briefly return to it when he talks about love. His position, as I understand it, is that the Bodhisattva is *incapable* of love since enlightenment is ultimately nondual and deals with unconceptualisable 'entities'. He thinks love (and by extension altruism and compassion I take it) requires a *strong* distinction between individuals which Buddhism, in his interpretation, seeks to dissolve:

Inasmuch as liberation in Buddhism involves nonduality and nonconceptuality it cannot in itself involve any relationship of love, and inasmuch as it involves mental transformation its primary concern cannot be with the other...

(*Ibid.*, p. 76)

This conclusion (amongst others) is challenged by José Cabezón (in D'Arcy May 2007). Cabezón seeks to establish that it is perfectly possible for a Buddhist to love and to show acts of altruism. He echoes Pettit (1999, above p. 128) in saying that in order to point out where Williams has got this wrong, we need to

---

<sup>195</sup> Including, in the case of humans (and for all I know some animals) *values*, wherein moral thinking - the heart of this matter - lies.

<sup>196</sup> This comment does not do this highly interesting and personal account justice nor does it take notice of some other very important points Williams wants to make about (Catholic) Christianity *vis à vis* Buddhism. However, for my immediate purposes I am interested in only a very small part of the discussion he has on love. (See pp. 75-7.)

distinguish between what happens in meditation (to which Williams has restricted his analysis) and what happens *post*-meditation. He gives the example of giving to charity – it *appears* that ‘he’ is giving ‘something’ to ‘someone’ but that appearance exists at a certain level.<sup>197</sup> The appearance is strong when the act is taking place but when giving is *meditated* upon it is clear that the giver, the object of giving and the recipient are empty.

As the mind focuses on the reality of these three things, it becomes ‘as if one’...with reality...And it is also true that at that moment I can cognise no ‘giving’, ‘giver’ or ‘recipient’, nor therefore can I at that moment be engaging in the act of giving.

(Cabezón, in D’Arcy May 2007, p. 112)

Cabezón’s point comes in quite a different context to Pettit’s (as a response to Williams’ *The Unexpected Way* rather than *Altruism and Reality*), but his treatment addresses the same point: Williams takes what happens in meditation to be the reality of what happens outside of it and this places an artificial and unfair restriction on the activities of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

ordinary beings (non buddhas) cannot have a direct, nonconceptual understanding of the reality of charity and be simultaneously engaged in charity. Ordinary beings have no choice but to alternate between the two. They spend some time in the meditative equipoise on the emptiness of (for example) charity, and then they come out of that equipoise and engage in real (or rather ‘illusory-like’) acts of charity.<sup>198</sup>

(Cabezón, *op. cit.*, p. 112)

In other words, Williams’ restriction can be removed by showing that it *is* compatible to believe that compassion, altruism or love requires no distinction to be made between persons, whilst at the same time *distinguishing* between them and also holding that *there are no persons*.<sup>199</sup> What saves Śāntideva’s thesis is his claim for the existence of the two truths and the fact that compassion, altruism or love is easier to realise if we are not *attached* to differentiation and a way to be unattached is to understand that persons are ultimately empty.<sup>200</sup>

### 6.3.1 Mystical Conclusions

If we cannot rely on logic to answer the questions of existence, and rationality can only take us so far, then we are left with something mysterious. As Schopenhauer

---

<sup>197</sup> This is clearly expressed in BCA 9:75f; the illusion of other people is accepted for the sake of compassion.

<sup>198</sup> Although he points out on the next page that buddhas supposedly have a greater and unexplained ability to act charitably whilst at the same time seeing the emptiness of so acting.

<sup>199</sup> See AP 1:22, Conze, 1995, p. 90, cf. Schmidt-Leukel, 2006b, p. 118.

<sup>200</sup> Cabezón is attempting to establish that it *is* possible for the Buddhist to experience love of another person whilst holding that there is (ultimately) no self and no person. When I am on earth I believe there is gravity. I might experience pain (by falling over) if I do not. However, when I am in my spaceship there is no gravity. Gravity both exists and does not exist at the same time depending on where you are, just as love and no entity capable of giving or receiving love exists depending on whether the Bodhisattva looks from the perspective of conventional or ultimate truth.

has pointed out (above pp. 43ff), this is the only honest way to approach such questions and leaves the philosopher and logician dissatisfied. The Bodhisattva's experience could, then, be described as something mystical and the dissatisfied logician (Williams) would find this problematic:

Paul has a problem with 'experiences'...with 'mystical experiences', and especially 'nondualistic and nonconceptual mystical experiences'...Obviously, then, Paul is going to have a problem with Buddhism.

(*Ibid.*, p. 107)

Compassion for beings which ultimately do not exist in any definable way is possible but goes beyond reason. But claims for something which is, in the end, mystical is not some odd 'anything goes' new-age-windchime, it applies to the most basic questions of ontology such as 'are you the same person now as you were when you were a baby?', 'is the candle flame the same thing throughout the burning of the candle?'. (See Mhp 2:40-41, Rhys Davids, 1925, pp. 63-5).<sup>201</sup> The answer might be both yes and no at the same time. It is similar for the idea of duality and nonduality existing at the same time; it depends on what perspective you see it from:

Mādhyamakas claim that nonduality is an attribute of the *experience* of reality (and not of reality *itself*), so that one *experiences* subject and object vanishing, 'as if object and subject had become one, like milk being poured into water'.

(Cabezón, *op. cit.*, p. 113)

Williams assumes that compassion requires differentiation, but does not appear to take notice of an alternative way of looking at compassion, which is that it requires fellow-feeling. Fellow-feeling is only possible if one breaks down the barriers against others and sees them as equal to yourself – at least in terms of their wish to avoid *duhkha* and to be happy. This is, I think, precisely what Śāntideva is trying to establish in BCA 8:101-3 and it makes sense to imagine that if breaking down the barriers between self and others *encourages* feelings of compassion, then *more* compassion can be engendered by exchanging self and others completely, as Śāntideva suggests in the last half of Chapter 8. I would argue that since there is more than one way to look at compassion, there is more than one way to look at any kind of fellow-feeling, altruism or love, and Cabezón addresses precisely this last point in his response to Williams' *The Unexpected Way*:

Of course, if one *assumes* that there is only one way to love – with real *you's* and real *me's* – then we can see why one might claim that the alternative, mystical versions of love found in the Buddhist (and in some contemplative Christian and Hindu) sources cannot be instances of real love...But that assumption – that there is only one way to love – is precisely what we hope to have challenged.

(*Ibid.*, p. 114)

It does seem that Buddhists are capable of love and compassion even though it

---

<sup>201</sup> This is not a Mahāyāna text but illustrates the point.

might be difficult to understand the reasoning behind it, and, hopefully, the Bodhisattva path has not been destroyed after all. Williams responds one more time to his latest critic with what might appear to be a concession.

#### 6.4 Williams' 'Concession'

##### Reply to Cabezón

Whilst maintaining the view that Buddhism is pessimistic, Williams concedes that in the dGe lugs<sup>202</sup> view of Buddhism it *is* possible to be compassionate.<sup>203</sup>

José [Cabezón] explains at length, and very lucidly, how it is that in the Mahāyāna Buddhism of his own tradition a Buddha is fully capable, indeed supremely capable, of engaging with the world and benefiting sentient beings [in the example of giving to charity]. I am happy to hear it. I agree with José completely that this is indeed the dGe lugs view. And I make it quite clear in my book that I hold and accept that Buddhas, for example, are considered by Buddhists to be eminently compassionate. I am delighted to repeat it here too.

(Williams, in D'Arcy May 2007, p. 149)

So far this is not much of a concession. He is saying that one school's view renders the Buddha capable of love, that criticisms still stand and that he is happy to point out that Buddhists consider Buddhas to be compassionate. Of course Buddhists consider Buddhas to be compassionate; that was never the issue.

Williams goes on to say that he is 'impressed' with what Cabezón says with regard to a Buddha being able to love despite not seeing things 'nondualistically and nonconceptually' (*ibid.* p. 150). This is not quite what Cabezón did say which was that *Buddhists* can love and be compassionate or altruistic - not just Buddhas. Furthermore I have argued, as have others, that Buddhists (whether they be lay, monks, nuns, Bodhisattvas or Buddhas<sup>204</sup>) do not *only* see things nondualistically and nonconceptually as Williams still claims. They *also* see things dualistically when it might be of benefit to sentient beings. Despite being impressed with Cabezón's portrayal of a dGe lugs viewpoint (Cabezón's treatment is much wider in fact and several times he talks about 'Buddhists' and 'Buddhism' rather than a specifically dGe lugs viewpoint), Williams still has 'philosophical doubts about whether even a Buddha could relate to others if he or she were having experiences that were not just nonconceptual but were *intrinsically nonconceptual*.' (*Ibid.*, p. 150.)

Williams repeats that love must entail differences, dualism and conceptuality and I take it from this that he still holds that Buddhists do not. To me this still seems to be a non-acceptance of the existence of the two truths and I cannot see a

---

<sup>202</sup> A Vajrayāna (Diamond Vehicle) or Tantric school of Tibetan Buddhism which adopts ideas from both the Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra.

<sup>203</sup> He is less forthcoming about other forms of Buddhism and still maintains that 'there are those in the past [who] have argued' that since Buddhists aim not to be reborn then that leaves little room for compassion (Williams, in D'Arcy May, 2007, p. 149). This sounds like an unfair criticism of an Arhat rather than a Bodhisattva this time.

<sup>204</sup> Although, of course, none of us can really know since enlightened thoughts are ineffable.

problem for Mahāyāna Buddhism in general or Śāntideva in particular with what Williams says here. He points out that he may, in *The Unexpected Way* have left himself open to misunderstandings since he was in fact, at times, ‘criticising...particular ways of reading the *Christian* final eschatological goal.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 150.)

But looking back at it – yes, I admit that in my book I am not sufficiently clear in this. I now think that generalisation from the context of the Christian *summum bonum* in which I was writing...was inappropriate. It does indeed invite just the response that he has so clearly given. Of course it all depends on what one means by ‘nondual’ and ‘nonconceptual’. I am delighted to hear from José that there are ways of understanding these expressions that render it plausible that this is indeed how Buddhas see and are. I concede to him.

(Williams, 2007, *op. cit.*, p. 112)

The problem as I see it, and as I have explained in chapters two and three, is that there has been no satisfactory rigorously philosophical explanation to date for our ‘im/moral’ actions. Why we behave or do not behave in the variety of ways we do and do not is so far unfathomed (despite many hypotheses, some of which are now hundreds if not thousands of years old) and all we can say about it – at least at this stage in our mental and philosophical development – is that it is mysterious; it is unexplained and thus far unexplainable. That is not to say that we have no need to try to understand nor indeed to *attempt* explanation, but to force logic on something which is by its very nature beyond logical definition is at best pointless and at worst can only lead to false conclusions. Williams, as a *believer* in a God whose existence has not been proven, must know that belief plays a part in accepting certain ideas in Buddhism and in Western philosophy too.<sup>205</sup> That is not to say that anything goes, but I feel there is something you either get or do not get about a nondualistic ‘entity’ feeling compassion for others which it can no longer be distinguished from. I would say that it can and does distinguish at the level of Conventional Truth but not at Ultimate Truth. That may lead to the question ‘Is this ‘entity’ (the Bodhisattva) dual or not dual or both or neither?’ Any attempt to pin it down in order to construct a logical refutation ignores what I take to be the obvious answer a Mādhyamika like Śāntideva might give: it is *śūnya* and there is therefore no way of talking about it.

## 6.5 Conclusion

Williams wants to say that it is acceptable for certain kinds of belief to avoid being subject to rigorous analysis whilst at the same time maintaining they are rational:

What I argue in my book [*Altruism and Reality*] is that it can be shown that *belief* in God is rational, as rational as the Buddhist denial of the existence of God. Belief in God is not the same as knowing that God exists, for it is perfectly compatible with belief in something that such a thing turns out not to be the case. Hence belief in God does not

---

<sup>205</sup> Even if it is belief that ‘I’ am thinking.

necessarily require complete *proof*. Nevertheless I want to argue that believing in God is not irrational, and it is not a matter simply of ‘blind faith’, as some seem to think.

(*Ibid.*, p. 139)

I cannot see a problem with this, having argued that BCA 8:101-3 should not be subject to such analysis but is nevertheless rational. However I do not think Williams would reciprocate. Perhaps Williams’ views here, especially ‘belief in God does not necessarily require complete *proof*’ should be contrasted with ‘My contention here is one of logical implication’ (1999, p. 145) and ‘My problem [with Śāntideva], however, is not psychological, but rather conceptual, logical. I find certain inferences Śāntideva wants to make simply do not follow’ (1999, p. 146) and ‘I argue on logical grounds that the negation of the *ātman* will not eliminate selfishness’ (1999, p. 146). It appears to me that Williams does not allow Śāntideva room to manoeuvre despite the fact that understanding what Śāntideva wants to say about Ultimate Truth must necessarily be conducted using conventional (and therefore incomplete) communications tools, yet does not invite such rigour when explaining his position regarding what he takes to be the existence of God. I think there is something in his criticisms of Śāntideva that Williams does not see (any more?). I have no wish to criticise or comment on Williams’ Christian belief, my point here is that it seems belief in an ultimate does not require logical analysis if it is Christian but it does if it is Buddhist. I hope this is not unfair to Williams but it does seem to me to be a reasonable conclusion to draw given what he has said.

Śāntideva could pull the rug from the whole debate, I feel, by simply stating that we cannot use logical analysis to understand something which defies it. That something, in this specific case, is the mechanism by which the Bodhisattva should feel compassion even as a non-dual ‘something’.<sup>206</sup> I think there are parallels with the criticisms of Schopenhauer made by Young (and others) which miss the point. Schopenhauer explains that this mechanism is unknowable and can only be felt ‘mystically’. As I have indicated, this is not good enough if your business is analytical philosophy, but analytical philosophy is equally handicapped when it comes to explaining compassion. If we look at it the way Schopenhauer does - by taking a *fact* and working backwards - then we can see that compassion *exists* although it cannot be fully explained. That means that both Schopenhauer and the Mahāyāna are quite convinced (to use Williams’ terminology they *believe*) that it is possible to be non-dual yet compassionate and such a belief (cf. Williams above) does not necessarily require complete *proof*, but is nevertheless not irrational and is not a matter simply of blind faith.

---

<sup>206</sup> Compassion is the (conventional) form taken by the highest Buddha body (the *Dharmakāya*) and nothing can be said about the *Dharmakāya* so we are left without a comprehensive explanation as to the workings of compassion.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this final chapter I will compare some key elements of Schopenhauer's philosophy as it relates to Mādhyamaka philosophy, especially as represented in Śāntideva. I intend to cover four main areas: (1) Schopenhauer's dismissal of non-compassion-based forms of ethics, (2) Schopenhauer's acquaintance with Buddhism, (3) general comparisons (including some made by other scholars), and (4) specific comparisons between Schopenhauer and Śāntideva. I would remind the reader of the earlier distinction I make between Will and will: Will is found as noumenon and will is its manifestation in phenomena.

### 7.1 Schopenhauer's Dismissal of other Forms of Ethics

As we have seen (above pp. 16ff) Schopenhauer's approach to ethics is to observe what *is* the case then suggest why that might be so. He does not see himself as a prescriptive moralist and sees moral philosophy as a way of discovering truth rather than attempting to provide reasons as to why people should behave in certain ways. He thinks that producing prescriptive ethics is a mistaken way of *doing* moral philosophy and that any system of ethics which seeks to offer anything practical is flawed since the job of ethics is theoretical only:

In my opinion...all philosophy is always theoretical, since it is essential to it always to maintain a purely contemplative attitude...to enquire, not to prescribe. But to become practical, to guide conduct, to transform character, are old claims which with mature insight it ought finally to abandon.

(WWR1 §53, Payne, 1969, p. 271)

This does not mean that Schopenhauer's ethics is pointless in terms of finding liberation from suffering. On the contrary, discovering the truth that we are only phenomenally different from one another but are in reality an underlying unity, leads to a lessening of the hold Will has upon us. In some sense the power of this negative Will is diluted and that in turn reduces craving, the absence of which leads to freedom from suffering. What Schopenhauer does not offer, indeed what he thinks ethics *should not* offer is a system which tries to make people 'good' or happy or which seeks to satisfy their ego-driven desires. That rules out Aristotle, Kant and utilitarianism and he sees all of them as ignoring the facts on the ground: i.e. that throughout time, geography and the rise and fall of cultures we will find some people acting selfishly, some acting compassionately, some acting maliciously and some (like the ascetic) who are beyond engaged action altogether.

Schopenhauer's reasons as to why he does not offer moral prescriptions are complex and involve an extended discussion on free will and determinism which is not essential to this enquiry. In brief, the Will is what drives us and the Will is beyond the systems of the professors of moral philosophy, so it is pointless to come up with rules which will not be taken notice of. When it comes to people, they are free to *do* as they choose in one sense (and following rules makes them unfree) but are not free to *will* as they choose. This means that they are driven by something predetermined in the Will and only modify their behaviour to satisfy the wants of the Will. For example, their own will (a manifestation of the Will) might direct them to act selfishly but if the law punishes selfish behaviour then it

is in their interests (in the service of their will to protect the self) to adhere, albeit reluctantly, to that law. No matter how much someone beats a dog for stealing the sausages it still *wills* sausage-stealing. Forcing someone to behave in certain ways does not result in a *genuine* change in their behaviour and so Schopenhauer believes moral rules will be ignored when it suits people to do so. He sees university moral philosophy as a kind of odd and ultimately vacuous pursuit which is always contradicted by reality:

Ethical writers who promise to produce a system of ethics that will morally improve man and who speak of a progress in virtue are always triumphantly refuted by reality and experience, which have demonstrated that virtue is inborn and cannot result from sermons.

(OBM §20, Payne, 1995, p. 190)

Attempts to produce happiness<sup>207</sup> in this wretched world are also pointless since we will always strive for more satisfaction, and happiness as a teleological goal will always move away from us as we get nearer to it. He thinks Aristotle is quite wrong to assume there is a terminus for striving and desire.<sup>208</sup> The Will cannot be tamed and comes before moral thinking. That means that any teaching of ethics will at best only apply to a superficial side of an individual and can never make its way down to their core of Will:

The [W]ill was even regarded as an act of thought, and was identified with...judgement, especially by Descartes and Spinoza. According to this, every man would have to become what he is only in consequence of his *knowledge*. He would come into the world as a moral cipher, would know the things in it, and would then determine to be this or that, to act in this or that way...According to the whole of my fundamental view, all this is a reversal of the true relation. The [W]ill is first and original; knowledge is merely added to it as an instrument belonging to the phenomenon of the [W]ill...Therefore he *knows* himself in consequence of, and in accordance with, the nature of his will, instead of *willing* in consequence of, and according to, his knowing, as in the old view. According to this view, he need only consider *how* he would best like to be, and he would be so...I, on the other hand, say that...he cannot decide to be this or that; also he cannot become another person, but he *is* once for all, and subsequently knows *what* he is. With those other thinkers, he *wills* what he knows; with me he *knows* what he wills.

(WWR1 §55, Payne, 1969, pp. 292-3)

It seems then that the egoist is given his ignorance of the Will (the noumenon) by nature and the altruist is likewise given his insight which takes them beyond the

---

<sup>207</sup> I.e. any form of *eudaimonism* or any attempt to minimise pain and to maximise pleasure (utilitarianism). Happiness means something different for Schopenhauer: it is the *absence* of suffering. Suffering is normal and although that does not make it good or desirable, no moral system can magic it away therefore no moral system can deliver happiness. Also see his dismissal of Kant in WWR1 pp. 413-534 and in OBM, §19, pp. 167-70 where he also dismisses Fichte, Adam Smith, Wollaston and Hutcheson.

<sup>208</sup> Aristotle sees all actions as subordinated to happiness, but happiness is an end in itself. (See *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1, Ch. 7.)

*principium individuationis*<sup>209</sup> and results in compassionate behaviour. This is not to say that people cannot change at all, just that moral philosophy cannot change them, however it appears that true knowledge can, although this is only open to the few. Schopenhauer rejects all previous Western moral theories and believes his ethics is more akin to Indian thought. A natural question, then, is what did Schopenhauer know of Indian philosophy at the time of writing his *magnum opus*: *The World as Will and Representation*.

## 7.2 Schopenhauer's Acquaintance with Indian Thought

Schopenhauer first became acquainted with Hinduism<sup>210</sup> and Buddhism in 1813 when he was introduced to the Orientalist Friedrich Maier, probably at his mother's literary salon in Weimar.<sup>211</sup> What exactly he picked up will never be known but it appears that at this early stage he could have gained very little knowledge of Buddhism and probably nothing of any significance. It seems that until 1819 (when he published WWR1)<sup>212</sup> he could only have come across two references to Buddhism in the journal *Asiatic Researches* plus whatever he had picked up from Maier. At this point he was better acquainted, but still in a very limited way, with Hinduism through his 1801 copy of the Oupnek'hat – a Latin retranslation by Anquetil-Duperron of the Persian translation of the *Upaniṣads*. Even with this book, though, it must be doubtful that Schopenhauer had anything but a rudimentary understanding of any central Hindu ideas.<sup>213</sup> He also had access to references to Hinduism in the above journals but it is not clear what he gained from them.<sup>214</sup> He says himself that, in the case of Buddhism, he had reached his conclusions without knowing much about it:

In my philosophizing I have certainly not been under its [Buddhism's] influence. For up till 1818, when my work [WWR1] appeared, there were to be found in Europe only a very few accounts of Buddhism, and those extremely incomplete and inadequate, confined almost entirely to a few essays in the earlier volumes of the *Asiatic Researches*, and principally concerned with the Buddhism of the Burmese [i.e. Theravāda Buddhism]. Only since that time has fuller information about this religion gradually reached us, chiefly through the profound and instructive articles of that meritorious member of the

---

<sup>209</sup> The principle of individuation, which is a form of ignorance that stops a person seeing others as their self.

<sup>210</sup> 'Hinduism' as a description of one religion appears to have been initially used by British colonial administrators in order to group the various Brahmanical sects. I have used it (unless there is reason not to) when referring to what Schopenhauer calls 'Brahmanism' and also because it is a term currently acceptable to the broad religious group Schopenhauer has in mind.

<sup>211</sup> Welbon, 1968, conjectures that it is conceivable that Schopenhauer came into contact with Maier earlier, 1807-9, and that Maier's ideas could have been communicated to Schopenhauer via the latter's association with Goethe and Schlegel who both knew Maier (p. 158, n.6).

<sup>212</sup> Most sources (including Schopenhauer himself) say, wrongly, 1818. The book was *completed* then but was not published until 1819.

<sup>213</sup> This translation of a translation 'was written in so utterly unintelligible a style, that it required the lynx like perspicacity of an intrepid philosopher, such as Schopenhauer, to discover a thread through such a labyrinth' (Müller, 1879, pp. lviii–lix).

<sup>214</sup> Nicholls (in Janaway, 1999) also points out that the *Bhagavadgita* had been translated into English in 1785 and that the *Vedas* appeared in English (tr. Colebrooke) in 1805 (see Nicholls, pp. 177-9 and n.27 and 28, p. 207). Since Schopenhauer could read English (and French) from childhood it is possible that he could have come across these sources before composing WWR1 but there is no evidence that he did.

St. Petersburg Academy, I. J. Schmidt, in the records of his Academy, and then in the course of time through several English and French scholars, so that I have been able to furnish a fairly numerous list of the best works on this religion in my book *On the Will in Nature* [1836].

(WWR2, Ch. XVII, Payne, 1969, p. 169)

And:

On the whole, the harmony [of Buddhism] with my teachings is wonderful, all the more so because I wrote the first volume...[WWR1]... between 1814 and 1818 and did not, nor could not, have known of all that.

(*Briefe*, Deussen XI, p. 470, cited in Halbfass, 1988, p. 107)

There is a suggestion that Schopenhauer modified his concept of the thing-in-itself (the noumenon or world as Will) in his 1844 revision of WWR1 (i.e. WWR2) *possibly* as a result of what he had subsequently understood of Hinduism and Buddhism as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed.<sup>215</sup> However, I agree with Welbon (1975) that Indian influence or no Indian influence, Schopenhauer does not mention Buddhism at all when giving his instructions on how to read WWR1,<sup>216</sup> and ‘I can well imagine Schopenhauer’s work without Indian content (or examples), but there is no Schopenhauer without Kant’ (Welbon, 1975, p. 159). I think Welbon defends Schopenhauer well against what might be seen as an accusation of plagiarism when he offers this summary of his argument:

it would be unreasonable to maintain that Schopenhauer’s system is only a translation of terms and concepts from India into a more or less Kantian framework. Schopenhauer, writing when scientific Indological research was in its infancy, simply did not have access to sufficient Indian materials to have borrowed a system. We must assign independence to his achievement [<sup>217</sup>] [and, furthermore,] Schopenhauer did not know Sanskrit let alone Pali...

(*Ibid.*, p. 166)

What is clear regardless of how much or little he knew of Buddhism, is that it contains some remarkable resemblances to his own philosophy.

### **7.3 General Comparisons**

There have been comparisons made between Indian thought (both Hindu and Buddhist) and Schopenhauer’s philosophy (or vice versa) for some time, but there is an enormous variety of opinion and conclusion in this area which do not help our current enquiry. For example, Schopenhauer’s metaphysics has been seen as sharing only superficial features with Buddhism (Copleston, 1946, Kishan in Fox, 1980) or has been seen as the closest philosophy in the West to that of the Mahāyāna (Muses, 1955, Dauer, 1969). Another view is that Schopenhauer is

---

<sup>215</sup> See Nicholls ‘The Influences of Eastern Thought on Schopenhauer’s Doctrine of the Thing-in-itself’ (in Janaway, 1999), pp. 171-212. This is highly debateable.

<sup>216</sup> He says we need to know Plato and Kant and would benefit from also being acquainted with the *Vedas*, WWR1, pp. xxiii-xxiv. Also see Welbon, p. 157.

<sup>217</sup> Nicholls does not claim that Schopenhauer borrowed a system but that he was influenced in his later work by what became available as time passed. This is, of course, disputable.

comparable *in certain areas* to Theravādin Buddhism and in others to Tibetan Mahāyāna (Nanajivako, 1970). Peter Abelsen seems to suggest that all comparisons are flawed and that Schopenhauer is not compatible with Mahāyāna or non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism (Abelsen, 1993) whereas Nicholls (in Janaway, 1999) specifically disagrees with Abelsen's view and offers a general comparison with the essential teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism. Welbon (1975) concentrates on Schopenhauer's interpretation of *nirvāṇa*, Halbfass broadly finds similarities in Schopenhauer to 'Indian' ideas and Conze believes that Schopenhauer's work bears 'numerous, and almost miraculous, coincidences with the basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy' (Conze, 1968, p. 222). In fact Conze, rather enthusiastically, claims that '[i]t is only on two points that he [Schopenhauer] differs from Buddhism.' (*Ibid.*, p. 223.)<sup>218</sup> We must take this claim in the context of a *general* comparison and Conze seems to rein his comments in again just one page later.

Schopenhauer himself, rather than simply stating that there are comparisons between his system and Buddhism, gives some limited examples of where he thinks the similarities lie. For example, he is aware (by WWR2 in 1844) of the Four Noble Truths, all of which are mirrored in Schopenhauer:

[In Buddhism]...all improvement, conversion, and salvation to be hoped for from this world of suffering, from this Samsara, proceed from the knowledge of the four fundamental truths: (1) *dolor*, (2) *doloris ortus*, (3) *doloris interitus*, (4) *octopartita via ad doloris sedationem*.<sup>219</sup>

(WWR2, Ch. XLVIII, Payne, 1969, p. 623)

These truths, of course, are common to all Buddhist schools and cannot be taken as any more than evidence of Schopenhauer having a general acquaintance with Buddhism. Even by the time he wrote WWR2 it is still highly doubtful, in my view, that he would have known of the subtle differences between the major schools of Buddhism which later scholarship has afforded and it is therefore very difficult to ascertain whether or not he knew there *were* different schools; he, for example, tends to refer to Buddhism as it existed *geographically* (in Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), China, Japan and Tibet) but it is not at all clear that he had a good grasp of what the differences were.<sup>220</sup> He *is* aware of the perfection of wisdom, and although (in this context) he mentions the Mahāyāna, there is no

<sup>218</sup> Conze thinks Schopenhauer does not realise that meditation is important and that he misunderstands the relationship of craving to *nirvāṇa*. I am not so sure Conze is right about a lack of meditation in Schopenhauer. (For example, see WWR1 §39, especially pp. 203-4 in Payne's translation.)

<sup>219</sup> (1) suffering's existence, (2) suffering's cause, (3) suffering's end, (4) the eightfold path to the relief of suffering. (My translation.) There is at least an implicit acknowledgement from Schopenhauer here that *in Buddhism* knowledge has an impact on behaviour and that if knowledge improves, behaviour changes. He does not accommodate that view in his own philosophy but neither is he critical of it in Buddhism. He *does* think that knowledge can help people to transcend suffering but does not accept that our moral character is changeable.

<sup>220</sup> For what it is worth, he does not refer to Christianity by geographical area but talks about Protestant and Catholic. He also talks about 'the Mohammedans' as though it were a collective without differentiation. These do not give any *real* clues, I feel, as to what he understood of the differences between the schools of Islam or of Buddhism or if he was even aware that there were any more than regional variations of *one thing* in the case of the latter.

clear evidence that he knew what made it distinct from non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism or even if he knew that Buddhism was anything *other* than Mahāyāna, even in Burma and Ceylon. In fact, he mentions the *prajñāpāramitā* as though it were generally *Buddhist* rather than specifically *Mahāyāna Buddhist*:

to those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing... This is also the Prajna-Paramita of the Buddhists, the “beyond all knowledge,” in other words, the point where subject and object no longer exist. See I. J. Schmidt, *Ueber das Mahajana und Pradschna-Paramita*.

(WWR1 §71, Payne, 1969, p. 412)

This is in WWR1 and by WWR2 he does not seem to have advanced his knowledge of the idea or school from which it comes nor does he mention that it is related to the Noble Eightfold Path (which he knows about by this time too, see WWR2, Payne, 1969, p. 623) nor does he mention it in context with the other five *pāramitās*. In fact his source for the *prajñāpāramitā* is exactly the same in both volumes (despite being around 26 years apart) and is not supplemented by any other references to the *pāramitās* at all. The reference, 26 years later, again is to Schmidt:

knowledge and plurality, or individuation, stand and fall together, for they condition each other. It is to be concluded from this that, beyond the phenomenon, in the true being in-itself of things, to which time and space, and therefore plurality, must be foreign, there cannot exist any knowledge. Buddhism describes this as Prajna Paramita, i.e., that which is beyond all knowledge. (See I. J. Schmidt, *On the Mahayana and Prachna-Paramita*.)

(WWR2, Ch. XXII, Payne, 1969, p. 275)

This might tell us that he was unaware of the other *pāramitās* or their relationship to the Eightfold Path, or it might tell us that he did not consider the other *pāramitās* important enough to mention. Any conclusion on this would be a matter of conjecture.

Returning to the Four Noble Truths, comparisons can be made with Schopenhauer’s idea that (1) the world is a place of suffering and all sentient creatures experience that suffering in it, (2) suffering is caused by a kind of desire or craving, (3) it might be possible to overcome this suffering and (4) that the way of overcoming involves a path of knowledge and certain kinds of action.<sup>221</sup>

As far as other general comparisons go, both Conze and Dauer go so far as to say that the similarities between Schopenhauer and Buddhism are so obvious that a comparison should only point out the differences. (See Conze, 1968, pp. 222ff and throughout Dauer’s short 1969 commentary.)

However, despite this claim I believe there are at least two major areas of comparison which have been largely overlooked by other commentators:

---

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Nicholls (in Janaway 1999, pp. 189-96) who believes that ‘what can be compared is a *general* [my italics] outline of Schopenhauer’s philosophy and what is commonly taken to be the essential teaching of Buddhism.’ (Nicholls in Janaway 1999, p. 188.)

Schopenhauer's principle of sufficient reason *vis à vis* dependent origination and the concept of rebirth.

### 7.3.1 The Principle of Sufficient Reason and Dependent Origination

#### Sufficient Reason

Schopenhauer sees a version of the world (*our* version) as existing at the level of (our) ideas. Whatever we take to be 'real' in these ideas is, for Schopenhauer, not the way things really are and is only apparently real as a result of our mental constructs. In other words, for Schopenhauer the things which appear to exist in a certain way (i.e. as cognisable objects to sentient animals) do so only as a result of the forces which suspend them in the artificial realm of cognisance and that means there is a dependent relationship between objects and their representation as apparently projected permanencies to us. Schopenhauer (after Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Hume, Kant, Wolff and others: see FR, §1-10, Payne, 1995, pp. 5-31) calls this *sufficient reason*; in other words things have their apparent existence *in dependence* on other factors. I think this can be compared to the Buddhist concept of dependent origination (*pratīyasamutpāda*) and I think it does the same job in both philosophies.

Although Schopenhauer acknowledges that the principle of sufficient reason 'has frequently been stated in a general way long ago' (*ibid.*, p. 2, also see p. 9) he goes on to point out that he is the first to examine it in adequate detail (*ibid.*, pp. 2-3). The most concise summary of it comes as 'everything has a reason or ground which justifies us in everywhere asking why' (*ibid.*, p. 5). In other words when we ask why something is the case, there will be a reason(s) why it is so. In fact this must be the case with *everything*, he thinks, and he accepts Wolff's assertion that 'Nothing is without a ground or reason [as to] why it is' (*ibid.*, p. 6).

In explaining the principle of sufficient reason in FR, Schopenhauer refers us to both WWR1 and WWR2 where, as he himself points out, the arguments are more of a summary and repetition of what he has already explained more fully in FR. Nevertheless, there are illuminating passages in both WWR1 and 2 which help explain the *relationship* between one state or thing and another:

The consequence of the action of every material object on another is known only in so far as the latter now acts on the immediate object in a way different from that in which it acted previously...[t]hus cause and effect are the whole essence and nature of matter; its being is its acting.

(WWR1 §4, Payne, 1969, p. 9)

Something similar is advanced in WWR2 where he tells us that '*Every change in the material world can appear only in so far as another change has immediately preceded it; this is the true and entire content of the law of causality*' (WWR2, Payne, 1969, ch. 4, p. 39). Then, returning to FR, he explains how we got to the stage we are now and implicit in this, I think, is the suggestion that incremental changes will drive us forward to our next definable state:

we again find ourselves on the ladder of causes up which we are whipped by the inexorable law of causality higher and higher, ad

infinitem, ad infinitum...[t]he law of causality is therefore not so obliging as to allow itself to be used like a cab which we dismiss after we reach our destination.

(FR §20, 1995, Payne, p. 58)

Although I see no developed analogue to karma in Schopenhauer's philosophy, the above passage does suggest that he has some idea of cause and effect and changes occurring due to what has previously been done. Part of the reason I am cautious about making a comparison here is that it would require a very detailed analysis of what he takes to be the *fourfold root* of the principle of sufficient reason and the comparison I have thus far made looks at only one class of the four roots. The principle of sufficient reason is constituted, for Schopenhauer, of four classes of object (material, logical, mathematical and moral) and an extended treatment of them is beyond the scope of the current work. However, if we continue to look only at the first one (material form), then Schopenhauer believes nothing comes into being or exists in isolation:

the principle of sufficient reason appears as the *law of causality*, and I call it as such the *principle of sufficient reason or ground of becoming*...[t]hrough it are mutually connected all the objects presenting themselves in the entire general representation, which constitutes the complex of the reality of experience, as regards the appearance and disappearance of their states...[t]he principle is that, if a new state of one or several real objects appears, another state must have preceded it upon which the new state follows regularly...

(*Ibid.*, pp. 52-3)

In other words things are the way they are as a result of what has preceded them. This general principle is intended to cover everything which *is* in the phenomenal world. I think Richard Taylor in his introduction to FR gives a pertinent example of what Schopenhauer means in the above explanation when he says:

No *thing* ever comes into being or ceases to be. Causes and effects are always changes in what already existed. We think, for example, of a flower coming into being and then perishing, but in fact what has happened is this: Matter...undergoes certain changes, losing certain properties and acquiring others, until at a given point in time and space it has the properties of a flower. Subsequently, these particular properties are replaced by others, and we say that the flower has perished...

(FR, 1995, Payne, from the Introduction by Richard Taylor, p. xiii)

Schopenhauer has already said as much in a different example (see below, p. 149) when he talks about living creatures as constituted by what was considered in the past to be mere dust and ashes. Everything changes and whatever seems to exist only does so in relation to other things; nothing exists *absolutely*, nothing exists in isolation, nothing comes into or out of being without a cause or causes – everything is *dependent* on other things which are in turn dependent on others *ad infinitum*.

an unbroken chain of causes and effects fills the whole of time...the changes (in other words, the succession of states or conditions) are a

continuum, like the time they fill...and each of them with reference to the one preceding it is called “effect,” and with reference to the one succeeding it, “cause.”

(WWR2, Ch. Ch. IV, Payne, 1969, p. 39)

Schopenhauer believes that *his* idea of the grounds of sufficient reason shows that objects only *appear* to be existent and that if we look for *justification* for believing such objects are real, we will find it since there is a chain of what seem to be causal relationships which all lead up to the apparent reality. In fact this is no *proof* that the things in question are real – just that what artificially makes them so is *so*. In other words, when we look for a validation of conventional reality and our means of validation are *restricted* to conventional reality, then we will find our justification. That does not mean that conventional reality is *real* reality. If a very intelligent fish in Loch Lomond looked for evidence there of life forms which do not live under water, it would not find them since it is limited to an underwater life itself. It may then erroneously conclude that life consisted solely of fish and the world was limited to Loch Lomond. The unenlightened human can no more step outside of its life-picture than can the fish.

### 7.3.2 Dependent Origination<sup>222</sup>

In Buddhism the concept of dependent origination is a way of explaining the states we find ourselves in in *samsāra*: that can be a state of suffering as well as states of pleasure and everything in between. Dependent origination explains the causal links between things and a very general way to summarise the idea is to say, as earlier when looking at the principle of sufficient reason, that things are the way they are in dependence on what caused them. In Buddhism, as in Schopenhauer, nothing self-creates so both rule out the idea of creation from nothing; in fact, not only is creation from nothing ruled out in both Buddhism and Schopenhauer, but the idea of a self-created omnipotent God is ruled out.

Everything has a cause behind it and in Buddhism this is expressed in the form of a chain with twelve links: ignorance has a causal link to formations which have a causal link to consciousness, which links to mind and form/body, then senses, sense contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, old age and death. (See SN II:12:1.)

If everything is dependent on a cause or causes then nothing exists independently or permanently; things only exist for as long as their causes exist and in this way *samsāra* is seen as the realm of transient things. Dependent origination provides a principle which accounts for everything in *samsāra*.<sup>223</sup>

All elements of *samsāra* exist in some sense or another relative to their causes and conditions. That is why they are impermanent, for if the cause is impermanent then so too will be the effect. In particular, our

---

<sup>222</sup> Also known as ‘conditioned arising’ and ‘conditioned co-production’.

<sup>223</sup> Although see Conze, 1962, Ch. 2, p. 158 who takes this to be an Abhidharma idea and points out that: ‘Some schools maintained that conditioned co-production is unconditioned. As one may say that nothing is permanent except impermanence, so also that nothing is unconditioned except that everything is conditioned. This had great consequences for the future.’

own existence as embodied individuals is the result of the coming together of appropriate causes, and we exist just as long as appropriate causes keep us in existence.

(Williams and Tribe, 2003, p. 64)

Although everything in *saṃsāra* is transient, most sentient creatures are ignorant of this. That ignorance is what keeps them from seeing the reality of the situation and seeing *that* reality is what differentiates the enlightened from the unenlightened, the sufferers from those who have found liberation from suffering. Just as there is a chain of causal dependence, there is a way to destroy the chain through taking away the conditions to which the links attach. *Trṣṇā* (thirst, craving) is crucial here:

This, monks, is the truth of suffering:  
Birth is suffering; ageing is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering;  
association with what one dislikes is suffering; separation from what one likes is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering;  
in short, the five groups of grasping<sup>224</sup>] are suffering.

This, monks, is the truth of the cause of suffering:  
It is thirst, that leads to rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and lust, finding its delight here and there, the thirst for sensual pleasures, the thirst for existence, the thirst for non-existence.

This, monks, is the truth of the cessation of suffering:  
It is the complete fading and cessation of this thirst,  
its forsaking and giving up, the liberation and detachment from it.  
(SN II: 12:20, Bodhi, 2000 (my modification))

The way to overcoming this thirst (*trṣṇā*) it is to follow the Eightfold Path. Following the path creates the conditions in which the chain can be broken and the conditions on which it relies no longer pertain.

If suffering ceases because the causes of suffering cease and the causes of suffering cease when grasping/thirst/craving ceases, then there is a parallel in Schopenhauer who also has a soteriological exit with his idea of liberation from suffering through the negation of willing altogether. In other words if you do not crave then you do not suffer.

Dependent origination has a clear connection to rebirth in that if you destroy the chains which cause arising then there is nothing to arise or be reborn. Rebirth is a concept Schopenhauer was aware of and he believes his own philosophy accommodates it closely.

### 7.3.3 Rebirth

Rebirth has an analogue in Schopenhauer but, despite his claims for affinity with Buddhism, I think it turns out to be an area of divergence, at least when compared to Mādhyamaka Buddhism. When examining the coming into being of apparently

---

<sup>224</sup> form, feelings, cognitions, inclinations, and perceptions (knowledge or consciousness).

new life, Schopenhauer is happy to accept that creatures were not created by an omnipotent god (as we have seen as a consequence of his principle of sufficient reason, see above p. 147, although that is not the only reason) but believes they have a link with what has happened in the past:

the millions of animals of every kind which come into existence at every moment in endless variety, full of force and drive, can never have been absolutely nothing before the act of their generation, and can never have arrived from nothing to an absolute beginning.

(WWR2, Ch. XLI, Payne, 1969, p. 476)

Creatures come into being as a result of previous ones following the ego-driven will whose strongest manifestation is the impulse to procreate. The will drives all creatures ever onward to produce more willed beings, and although Schopenhauer's writings come well before developed evolutionary theory, he does suggest that we are prepared to undergo all manner of avoidable dangers simply in order to reproduce, thus satisfying the will of nature: 'If in our conception of the world we start from the thing-in-itself, we find as its kernel and greatest concentration the act of generation' (PP2, §166, Payne, 1974, p. 316). This act of generation burdens us with even more than we had previously had to endure: 'in the case of man, there is associated with sexual satisfaction an obstinate selection, peculiar to him alone, which rises sometimes to a more or less passionate love...In this way, it becomes for him a source of much suffering and little pleasure' (PP2, §153, Payne, 1974, p. 295).

There are also all manner of dreadful things we are prepared to do to simply *continue* our existence for another five minutes but even this personal continuation can be overcome, although not by everyone, if the survival of our offspring is jeopardised. Although we are phenomenally different from others, including our offspring, we are noumenally the same. Phenomenon is the world of appearance and it may appear to us that egotistical actions are sensible but the whole thing is an illusion.

If we imagine ourselves as just matter, we know that regardless of how that matter came into being in the first place, once it is in existence it is neither created nor destroyed. It may be manifested as energy, it may appear on its own or it may be manifested as part of a conglomerate with other matter. There is a temptation to think that 'lifeless' matter, say in the form of the dust and ashes to which our corporeal bodies return, is in some way inferior to matter which has organised itself into the form of human beings who are *conscious*. Schopenhauer advises us not to be dismissive of this dust and ashes and not to regard it as permanently lifeless and static – we *are* it and it is us:

But it will be asked: 'How is the permanence of mere dust, of crude matter, to be regarded as a continuance of our true inner nature?' Oh! Do you know this dust then? Do you know what it is and what it can do? Learn to know it before you despise it. This matter, now lying here as dust and ashes, will soon form into crystals when dissolved in water; it will shine as metal; it will then emit electric sparks. By means of its galvanic tension it will manifest a force which, decomposing the strongest and firmest combinations, reduces earths to

metals. It will, indeed of its own accord, form itself into plant and animal; and from its mysterious womb it will develop that life, about the loss of which you in your narrowness of mind are so nervous and anxious.

(WWR2, Ch. XLI, Payne, 1969, p. 472)

We have a false view of reality and do not see that there is a permanent organising and reorganising of non-living things into living ones then living ones into non-living things. The people who will be around in their billions in the future will be composed of the dust and ashes which is present now. Time is what makes dust and ashes *appear* to be separate from conscious living entities and time is, for Schopenhauer, ‘a form and limitation of our intellect’ (*ibid.*, p. 479).

For Schopenhauer there is constant rebirth or rebecoming (although not the reincarnation of an *ātman* or soul) but time prevents us from seeing that. Time (along with space and causality) is the artificial construct of sentient creatures. Sentient creatures fail to see that there is endless becoming (an idea Schopenhauer will have encountered in Plato; see, FR, Payne, 1995, p. 232), and wrongly assume an individual life starts at one point and ends at another. We should remember that this is seen at a conventional (or phenomenal) level for Schopenhauer. Ultimately (noumenally) existence is not the way we see it and it is therefore not clear how similar or different he is to a Buddhist idea of rebirth or to a Mādhyamaka idea of the emptiness of self.<sup>225</sup> He himself, at least, believes his idea of rebirth is to some extent similar:

it appears that there are in Buddhism, as regards continued existence after death, an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine. The former is just *metempsychosis* as in Brahmanism, but the latter is a *palingenesis* which is much more difficult to understand and is very much in agreement with my doctrine of the metaphysical permanence of the [W]ill in spite of the intellect’s physical constitution and fleeting nature in keeping therewith.

(PP2, §140, Payne, 1974, pp. 276-7)

Schopenhauer thinks that this small droplet of impermanent will returns to the non-plural pool of Will. It was never anything other than part of the pool but we tend to labour under the misapprehension that it was, in the same way as a wave, despite being made entirely of water, appears to be *distinct* from it. It both is and is not. He likens the varieties of life and their relation to Will as a kaleidoscope ‘that shows us a new configuration at every turn, whereas really we always have the same thing before our eyes’ (WWR2, *op. cit.*, p. 478).

I read him as differing from Śāntideva in that he believes (notwithstanding his claim to reject metempsychosis) that there is some permanent core to us which is the noumenal Will and it is this which maintains constant rebirth: ‘man as phenomenon is certainly perishable, yet his true inner being is not affected by this. Hence *this true inner being is indestructible* [my italics].’ (*Ibid.*, p. 494). Schopenhauer is quite clear that what is impermanent is the phenomenon (which

---

<sup>225</sup> Whether or not he would accept the pre-Mahāyāna idea of a person being constitutive of consecutive *dharmas* or the Mādhyamaka idea of *nothing* having any discernable beginning or end (including *dharmas*) is unclear.

is the same in Mādhyamaka Buddhism) but what is permanent is the Will – which is not the same:

with death consciousness is certainly lost, but not what produced and maintained consciousness; life is extinguished, but with it not the principle of life which manifested itself in it. Therefore a sure and certain feeling says to everyone that there is in him something positively *imperishable and indestructible* [my italics].

(*Ibid.*, p. 495)

And:

Consciousness is the life of the subject of knowing, or of the brain, and death is its end. Therefore consciousness is finite, is always new, beginning each time at the beginning. *The [W]ill alone is permanent* [my italics].

(*Ibid.*, p. 500)

When we die it is not that ‘we’ return to ‘our’ original place or position but, rather, that the coalescing ideas contained within the space-time framework (which are taken as individuality) no longer coalesce, but there is something permanent and indestructible which underlies everything which appears as fleeting phenomena.

When Schopenhauer examines death he looks at animals, who are not, he thinks, aware of the possibility of their own death, but humans are and this knowledge terrifies us. We can compensate to a certain extent by having metaphysical ideas which can offer some consolation and these take the form of religion and some philosophies. It is incorrect to think of death as complete annihilation *or* as immortality ‘but we have not so much to find a correct mean as rather to gain the higher standpoint from which such views disappear of themselves’ (*ibid.*, p. 464).

He thinks it is irrational to fear being dead since this will be exactly the same situation as it was before our birth. Since we do not fear those countless eons then we should not fear the ones after our phenomenal entity ceases to exist. He thinks these two periods of non-existence are divided only by ‘the intervention of an ephemeral life-dream’ (*ibid.*, p. 467).

This life-dream is a temporary identification as a projected entity which comes from Will. That entity ceases to exist upon death with conscious life having been nothing but a temporary aberration:

I stood on a mercury trough and with an iron ladle drew off a few drops. I threw them up and again caught them in the ladle [*sic*]. When I missed, they fell back into the trough and nothing was lost except their momentary form; and so success and failure left me somewhat indifferent. Thus is the *natura naturans* or inner nature of all things related to the life and death of individuals.

(PP2, §384, *op. cit.*, p. 648)

We should be happy about the certainty of our phenomenal extinction, he thinks, since that extinction is effectively release from the abnormality which we call 'life'. This cheerful resignation to death is simply the abandoning of the individual will to life; a will which is the source of all our moral conflicts. The will-less state beyond our conception is nothingness, which he likens to *nirvāṇa*:

to die willingly, to die gladly, to die cheerfully, is the prerogative of the resigned, of him who gives up and denies the will-to-live. For he alone wishes to die *actually* and not merely *apparently*, and consequently needs and desires no continuance of his person. He willingly gives up the existence that we know; what comes to him instead of it is in our eyes *nothing*, because our existence in reference to that one is *nothing*. The Buddhist faith calls that existence *Nirvana*, that is to say, extinction.

(WWR2, *op. cit.*, p. 508)<sup>226</sup>

He thinks that since this extinction, or death, is when our consciousness ceases, it can be likened to an extended fainting fit or sleep and that we experience a little bit of death every night when we go to bed. We would be none the wiser if we slept for a hundred years or were in a coma for months – life is only life for us when we are *conscious* of it.

there is just as little occasion for concluding that, because organized life has here ceased, the force that actuated it hitherto has also become nothing; just as little as there is to infer from the stopping of the spinning-wheel the death of the spinner. If, by finding its centre of gravity again, a pendulum finally comes to rest, and thus its individual apparent life has ceased, no one will suppose that gravitation is annihilated, but everyone sees that now as always it is active in innumerable phenomena.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 470-1)

Will, or Life-Force or Inner Nature finds different forms – sometimes rocks and fish and at other times sentient self-aware creatures.

taken already as a force of nature, vital force remains entirely untouched by the change of forms and states, which the bond of cause and effect introduces and carries off again, and which alone are subject to arising and passing away, just as these processes lie before us in experience. To this extent, therefore, the *imperishableness of our true inner nature* [my italics] could already be certainly demonstrated.

(*Ibid.*, pp. 470-1)

The intellect ceases when the body it relies on no longer functions. Thus for Schopenhauer the intellect which has created the world as its own idea vanishes and reality returns to being unperceived and to its original core of timeless Will. He is sure that our phenomenal existence ceases but that *something* continues.

---

<sup>226</sup> Schopenhauer has a footnote to 'Nirvana' where he explains various other translations of the word, such as *nera* (without) *vana* (life); *without sinful desires*; *departed* or *escaped from misery*; *the opposite of saṃsāra*; *complete vanishing*. Schopenhauer also acknowledges here that in WWR1 from 1818, he had not really understood this concept and was now better informed.

This something exists *before* the thing we call ‘I’ and it does not cease with our physical death.

man as phenomenon is certainly perishable, yet his true inner being is not affected by this. Hence *this true inner being is indestructible* [my italics], although, on account of the elimination of the time-concepts which is connected with this, we cannot attribute continuance to it. Accordingly, we should be led here to the concept of an indestructibility that was nevertheless not a continuance.

(*Ibid.*, p. 494)<sup>227</sup>

Will is the part of us, the inner-nature, which survives death, but intellect – the part which mistakenly tells us we exist as a personal entity – does not.

Accordingly, the word palingenesis is more correct than metempsychosis for describing this doctrine [that intellect is temporary and does not remember previous life and that the Will alone is permanent]. These constant rebirths then constitute the succession of the life-dreams of a [*W*]ill in itself indestructible [my italics].

(*Ibid.*, pp. 502-3)

Śāntideva would not make a positive statement about a permanent core and we may assume that this idea of Schopenhauer’s is incompatible with what Śāntideva (and indeed the Mādhyamaka more generally) taught.<sup>228</sup>

Schopenhauer seems to have unwittingly come up with some Hindu-Buddhist hybrid interpretation of rebirth. The Hindu component is that, like the mercury trough, there is something *permanent* to which we (the mercury drops) return after death; the trough can be likened to *Brahman*.<sup>229</sup> The Buddhist component is that during the ‘life dream’ the entity, like the mercury drops, only exists in a conventional or relative sense and has no permanency. However, the traditional Buddhist idea of rebirth would be more of a chain of consecutive karmic formations which produce similar karmic formations and through that a certain direction appears. This is not metempsychosis, but neither is it a return to some kind of ‘mother’ form as it seems to be in Schopenhauer.

If we had a complete knowledge of our own true nature through and through to its innermost core, we should regard it as ridiculous to demand the immortality of the individual, since this would be equivalent to giving up that true inner nature in exchange for a single one of its innumerable manifestations, or fulgurations.

(PP2 *op. cit.*, §137, p. 271)

Schopenhauer thinks there *is* a core. It is *beyond* the individual but is, he believes, at the centre of existence and seems to transcend the phenomenal world. However,

---

<sup>227</sup> Because any knowledge we have is still a representation of something else, therefore we can never *fully* know anything.

<sup>228</sup> Although that might not be the case with the concept of Buddha-nature which was widely adopted in Mahāyāna after the time of Śāntideva. It might be fruitful to examine this in future studies of the relationship between Schopenhauer’s philosophy and that of the Yogācāra.

<sup>229</sup> Although strictly speaking the ‘reunification’ with *Brahman* takes place only when you reach salvation.

in Mādhyamaka Buddhism there is no core, no permanency and nothing has essence. As I have indicated earlier, this is largely the case for Theravāda and Yogācāra Buddhism too; in fact one of the things which sets Buddhism in opposition to Hinduism is the idea of nothing existing independently and nothing being permanent.<sup>230</sup> Again, Schopenhauer sounds more Hindu than Buddhist here.

I would not wish, however, to draw too strong a comparison with Hindu ideas of reincarnation since there are, I believe, some inconsistencies in his treatment of it which leave the door open a little to more than one interpretation. The most pertinent is a non-specific comment he makes which may be taken as an (unknowing) nod to the śūnyatā doctrine:

To begin, to end, and to continue are concepts that derive their significance simply and solely from time; consequently they are valid only on the presupposition of time. But time has no absolute existence; it is not the mode and manner of the being-in-itself of things, but merely the form of our *knowledge* of the existence and inner being of ourselves and of all things; and for this reason such knowledge is very imperfect, and is limited to mere phenomena. Thus in reference to this knowledge alone do the concepts of ceasing and continuing find application, not in reference to that which manifests itself in them, namely the being-in-itself of things; applied to this, such concepts therefore no longer have any true meaning...We might indeed assert that our being-in-itself continues after death, because it would be wrong to say that it was destroyed; but we might just as well assert that it is destroyed, because it would be wrong to say that it continues; at bottom, the one is just as true as the other.

(WWR2, *op. cit.*, p. 493)

Overall I do not find his claims for affinity with a Buddhist conception of rebirth (or palingenesis as he calls it) as convincing as he does.

#### **7.4 Schopenhauer and Mādhyamaka Buddhism**

I agree with the various commentators (above) that some *general* areas of both systems of thought are compatible, but I think a more detailed comparison can be made in the specific area of *compassion* as the central element of ethics and in what both Mādhyamaka Buddhism and Schopenhauer take to be the wisdom or knowledge required to find liberation from the sufferings of existence.

In the few comparisons already made, what has emerged is that there is no clear consensus as to whether Schopenhauer's philosophy is similar to Buddhism in general or to any school in particular. Amongst those who believe a comparison is fruitful, there is likewise no clear consensus as to how deep the comparison can go – in which case there might be only superficial similarities. I would like to avoid making too much of comparisons which look at superficial points (such as the fact that in both systems there is the idea that living involves suffering/*duḥkha* and both advocate non-cruelty to animals, cf. Abelsen, 1993, p. 256) and this can be achieved by comparing Schopenhauer's specific moral value of compassion to

---

<sup>230</sup> Although, as we have seen, in Theravāda there are dharmas which, arguably, 'exist' and in Yogācāra and later Mahāyāna there is the concept of Buddha Nature.

that of the Mādhyamaka. Śāntideva, to me, embodies the central idea of compassion in the Mādhyamaka and the emphasis is therefore on Schopenhauer's ideas in relation to Śāntideva's.

#### 7.4.1 Morality and the World as Idea

If we accept Schopenhauer's argument that our world exists at the level of ideas and the Mādhyamaka view that the conventional world is not reality (a view shared by Schopenhauer) then it might seem that compassion as the basis of morality makes no sense since compassion does not appear to deal with reality but only with its representations in the conventional 'dreamlike' world. This objection is exactly like Śāntideva and the Yogācāra having their discussion about whether or not there is anything wrong in killing someone who (according to the Mādhyamaka and to Schopenhauer) does not ultimately exist (see BCA 9:11). We are actually *in* the illusion right now and none of us even as illusions would enjoy the prospect of being 'illusorily' killed. Another side of the same thing is that most of us would be quite happy if we were shown 'illusory' *compassion* despite the fact that our existence cannot be proven. This problem (discussed above p. 124) is explicitly mentioned by Śāntideva in BCA 9:75ff and he says that for the sake of compassion we do not reject illusion.

As far as the 'illusory' world goes morality *has* to operate in it since that 'dreamworld' is the one we (ignorantly) inhabit. Mādhyamaka Buddhism and Schopenhauer both offer to wake us up through the understanding of our situation. Neither claim (as some have assumed) that the conventional world *does not exist*, just that it is not as we assume. Śāntideva discusses this when he talks about the ignorant and the wise (BCA 9:5), where the ignorant think that conventional things are true and the wise understand that the conventional world is not ultimately real.<sup>231</sup>

This 'metaphysical superstructure' in Schopenhauer's philosophy is what underpins his ethics and I think Schopenhauer is right to say that moral philosophy finds its best application in a university rather than in the real world and experience shows that in recorded history people seem to be stubbornly immune to adhering to university-invented systems but, instead, stick to the kind of behaviour Schopenhauer observes. This may seem like a pessimistic conclusion whereas there is more optimism in Buddhism about our ability to find salvation from suffering. The reason Schopenhauer's conclusion is pessimistic is, I believe, largely as a result of his belief that people cannot morally 'improve', which itself is due to his belief that there is a core Will which cannot be changed. Obviously at this point there is an important difference between Buddhist ethics and Schopenhauer's. I do not accept Schopenhauer's thesis of an unchangeable core and think that if he dropped that quasi-Platonic idea then we would not be left with a pessimistic conclusion as to the possibility of escaping suffering. This is something I think he could learn from Buddhism and adapt to his system and it is difficult in this respect to agree with him that his conclusions are remarkably similar to those found in Buddhism. Having said that, there are times when Schopenhauer is quite correct to compare his ethics with Buddhist ethics, but is

---

<sup>231</sup> Note he does not say that the wise have a *perfect* understanding of reality.

mistaken in another very important area: that of drawing a comparison between himself and Buddhism when it comes to the finer detail of the path to liberation from suffering. As we have seen (above pp. 19ff), Schopenhauer (rightly in my view) thinks it is not possible to examine his moral system in isolation from the metaphysical superstructure which lies behind it, and it is worth summarising that metaphysical system in order to illuminate the ethics.

#### 7.4.2 Summary of Schopenhauer's Metaphysics

For Schopenhauer the world exists in two ways: as it really is and also as revealed to us in perception; hence the *World as Will and Representation* respectively. Animals and ordinary humans readily know only the world as representation.<sup>232</sup> Sentient creatures see the world as dependent on what he calls sufficient reason: i.e. three dimensions of space, linear time and causality which appear to give us empirical reasons for justifying our view as 'real'. Were any or all of these three elements to be missing, then our view of the world would be radically different. Our view is not the correct view: it is merely a *possible* view and is incomplete: 'This actual world of what is knowable, in which we are and which is in us, remains both the material and the limit of our consideration' (WWR1, *op. cit.*, p. 273). The world as it actually is (beyond our experience), the world as Will, has manifestations as phenomena and the Will can be seen as a *force* or property of energy which exists in all phenomenal things. The wish to procreate is an example of the underlying Will, the wish to stay alive is another very strong one in all animals. The Will is also manifested in less significant things such as the wish to move one's arm, turn one's head or even in the form of gravity found in inanimate objects. Influenced by our perception of reality as one which resides within space, time and causality, we readily identify with a 'self' which we distinguish from 'others'. Being driven on by the relentless force of Will and accepting that there are differences between ourselves and others contributes to the sufferings of the world since we are self-absorbed and less interested in the sufferings of others than we are in our own. This world as representation is one of suffering, fear and death (see PP2, Ch. XII, pp. 291-305<sup>233</sup>). However, the primary source of suffering is not the activities of others but our own will which drives us ever onward with three possible outcomes: firstly the possibility of temporarily *satisfying* the will, secondly the disappointment of *failing* to temporarily satisfy the will and thirdly the disappointment of failing to *permanently* satisfy the will. In the first case imagine the craving for a cigarette; smoking it gives you *temporary* satisfaction. In the second case being *denied* a cigarette when you want one causes (at least) disappointment since the will is not satisfied. In the third case, adding up all the small cravings such as the wish for cigarettes and all the larger cravings such as not wishing to get old, ill, or to die, combine to create a greater form of suffering and in humans there is also the realisation of this and the fact that we are impotent (prior to Schopenhauer's philosophy) in terms of finding a solution. Being born, then, is the 'crime' for which we suffer, but Schopenhauer thinks he has found two solutions, which I would term his minor and major solutions to the problem of the sufferings of the world.

---

<sup>232</sup> This is no advance on Kant so far, except that the world as Will, for Schopenhauer, is not plural.

<sup>233</sup> This is just for a *summary* of his explanation of suffering. There are references too numerous to mention throughout WWR1 and 2 and in OBM.

### 7.4.3 Schopenhauer's Minor Solution to Suffering

Schopenhauer believes that we can find a minor form of liberation from suffering through aesthetic contemplation. Since phenomenal existence is marked by identification with self and the natural condition of that self is one of suffering,<sup>234</sup> it follows that any way we can 'forget' the self will result in non-suffering. Contemplation which is deep enough to allow one to forget oneself results in freedom from suffering, which is essentially freedom from *willing*. This can be achieved by reflecting on works of art, poetry, philosophy and music.<sup>235</sup> In fact I cannot see Schopenhauer disagreeing with the idea that *anything* which produces a contemplative experience would result in freedom from willing and with it freedom from suffering. The point is that we are *detached* from identification with self and object, with perceiver and perceived and in this way the Will is made quiet, but it is still there in the background even though we have temporarily *transcended* it by overcoming the principle of sufficient reason as found in space, time and causal relationships. The distinction between subject and object no longer exists in the contemplator and s/he no longer suffers. The only problem with aesthetic contemplation as a solution to suffering is that it offers only a *temporary* solution.<sup>236</sup> Schopenhauer was well aware of this and now offers his major solution to the sufferings of existence.

### 7.4.4 Schopenhauer's Major Solution to Suffering

Although Schopenhauer does not, in the strict sense, offer a *path* to salvation (in contrast to Śāntideva), he does identify what we might take to be a gradation of moral behaviour which has similarities with elements of the path found in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. This gradation can be seen as threefold with the first kind of behaviour being unable to find salvation and the last as the most able. The first is found in the pure egoist, who identifies strongly with their own self and is therefore most comprehensively under the influence of the Will. This person demands the satisfaction of all their desires and is not interested in the desires of others. In fact such a person would have no qualms about using others (people and animals) to satisfy their own wants. The second person is one in whom the barriers between self and other are beginning to break down and s/he can see beyond what Schopenhauer calls the *principium individuationis*, or the principle of individuation. Such a person begins to do exactly as Śāntideva in BCA 8:90-119 and *equalise* self and others. They recognise that others are victims of the power of Will-driven craving, and as a result, suffer in the same way:

---

<sup>234</sup> This might seem strange from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century first world, but at the time of writing, Schopenhauer's developed world was still one where life was incomparably harder and shorter than today. He takes suffering to be the natural state of things and for humankind it has always been, on the whole, war, famine, disease and want.

<sup>235</sup> Music is a special case where he thinks it is not a representation of a representation (say in the way a painting of a landscape might be) but it is a representation of the Will itself. Regardless, it does the same job here as the other objects of, and means to, contemplation.

<sup>236</sup> There appears to be special dispensation for the genius, who is able to maintain contemplation for longer than others: 'genius is the capacity to remain in a state of pure perception' (WWR1, Payne, 1969, p. 185). The result of this longer freedom from our skewed view of reality appears to be the production of works of art. Cf. the Buddha's dissatisfaction with his first two meditation teachers. Meditation provided only a temporary escape from suffering.

But now how is it possible for a suffering which is not mine and does not touch me to become just as directly a motive as only my own normally does, and to move me to action? As I have said, only by the fact that although it is given to me merely as something external, merely by means of external intuitive perception or knowledge, I nevertheless feel it with him, feel it as my own, and yet not within me, but in another person; and thus there occurs what is expressed by Calderon...“that there is no difference between suffering and seeing suffering.”

(OBM §18, Payne, 1995, pp. 165-6)

Schopenhauer thinks that it is in fact rather *obvious* that apparent differences between creatures are only superficial, and we might assume, then, that the egoist's view is defective: 'One must be really quite blind or totally chloroformed...not to recognize that the essential and principal thing in the animal and man is the same' (*ibid.*, §19, p. 178). The compassionate person does not seek to exploit others nor has s/he any wish to harm them, but instead seeks to help them as much as possible:

Boundless compassion for all living beings is the firmest and surest guarantee of pure moral conduct...Whoever is inspired with it will assuredly injure no one, will wrong no one, will encroach on no one's rights; on the contrary, he will be lenient and patient with everyone, will forgive everyone, will help everyone as much as he can, and all his actions will bear the stamp of justice, philanthropy, and loving-kindness...Tastes differ, but I know of no finer prayer than the one which ends old Indian dramas...“May all living beings remain free from pain.”

(*Ibid.*, pp. 171-3)

Schopenhauer's compassionate person cannot be explained: s/he just *is*. Schopenhauer is not concerned with explaining how someone naturally comes to *be* compassionate, i.e. how someone is imbued by nature with the ability to see beyond the *principium individuationis*, but just takes it as a fact of life which I think is no stranger than the fact that some people are just born more intelligent than others and we, to this day, have no comprehensive explanation as to why this is the case.

Every purely beneficent act, every instance of wholly and truly disinterested help, which as such has another's distress as its motive, is, if we probe the matter to the bottom, really a mysterious action. It is practical mysticism insofar as it ultimately springs from the same knowledge that constitutes the essence of all mysticism proper. In no other way can it be truly explained.

(*Ibid.*, §114, p. 212)

The altruist, despite *alleviating* the sufferings of other sentient creatures, does not find full liberation from suffering themselves through being compassionate. That comes in the form of the third kind of person who can *permanently* transcend suffering (the ascetic) and this is where I think Śāntideva and Schopenhauer part company in quite a significant way. As we have seen, Śāntideva at this point takes

the equality of self and others further, to the point of *exchanging* them and seeing no difference between the two. Schopenhauer claims that the way to permanently transcend the sufferings of the world caused by the Will, is to *deny* the Will completely. This means transcending everything given to us in perception by space, time and causality, transcending our entire world view and negating it completely so that the world as representation no longer exists (to *us* – it will exist for those who do not undergo this transcendence): ‘Absolute freedom consists simply in there being something not at all subject to the principle of sufficient reason’ (WWR2, Ch. XLIII, Payne, 1969, p. 530). The means to that end is the very *unBuddhist* life of the ascetic. The ascetic goes beyond all willing and is impervious to the workings of the Will:

The will now turns away from life; it shudders at the pleasures in which it recognizes the affirmation of life. Man attains to the state of voluntary renunciation, resignation, true composure, and complete willlessness....We would like to deprive desires of their sting, close the entry to all suffering, purify and sanctify ourselves by complete and final resignation...the man who sees through the *principium individuationis*, and recognises the true nature of things-in-themselves...withdraws. His will turns about; it no longer affirms its own inner nature, mirrored in the phenomenon, but denies it. The phenomenon by which this becomes manifest is the transition from virtue to *asceticism*.<sup>237</sup>

(WWR2, Ch. XXXI, *op. cit.*, pp. 379-80)

This is a *denial* of life, at least as it is conventionally taken to be and, for Schopenhauer, becoming an ascetic entails giving up on all life altogether, it requires ‘the euthanasia of the will.’ (WWR2, Ch, XLIX, *op. cit.*, p. 637). Schopenhauer seems to think that this is in tune with Buddhist thinking (the most pertinent examples being in his later works, especially at WWR2 pp. 560, 604, 628, 623, 643, 645) but it clearly is not and *radical* asceticism was specifically identified by the Buddha as a false way of trying to attain liberation. In fact in Buddhism there is no conflict between virtue (or morality) and liberation – a view which Schopenhauer misunderstands.

Schopenhauer at times seems to *almost* make the step Śāntideva does, by exchanging self and others, but in the end does not attribute sufficient strength to this to suggest it as a means of permanent liberation.

But this [feeling another’s suffering as your own] presupposes that to a certain extent I have identified myself with the other man, and in consequence the barrier between the ego and non-ego is for the moment abolished; only then do the other man’s affairs, his needs, distress, and suffering, directly become my own. I no longer look at him as if he were something given to me by empirical intuitive perception, as something strange and foreign, as a matter of indifference, as something entirely different from me. On the contrary,

---

<sup>237</sup> This last line is an example of the kind of early view of Buddhism which led to later Western misinterpretations (such as King’s and Spiro’s). Some still view Buddhism through the 19th century prism and think that liberation is beyond virtue.

I share the suffering *in him*, in spite of the fact that his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way can *his* woe, *his* distress, become a motive *for me*; otherwise it can be absolutely only my own. I repeat that this *occurrence is mysterious*, for it is something our faculty of reason can give no direct account of, and its grounds cannot be discovered on the path of experience. And yet it happens every day...  
(OBM, §18, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-6)

Had Schopenhauer lived long enough to gain knowledge of Mādhyamaka philosophy, he might well have seen that the exchange of self and other in *itself* could be enough to negate the will rather than making the step to asceticism as he does. It is at this point he goes in a direction which is no longer compatible with Śāntideva.

Perhaps we could conclude that Śāntideva's path is intended to offer a *long-term* solution to *duḥkha* which will take (almost) endless amounts of time until all sentient creatures are free, whereas Schopenhauer's permanent solution is only for certain human beings in the here and now with the compassionate person alleviating the sufferings of unfortunate humans (such as slaves and child mill workers, WWR2, p. 578) and animals through not harming them and through helping them as much as possible. The best way to reach salvation from suffering is by following:

the narrow path of the elect, of the saints, and consequently is to be regarded as a rare exception. Therefore without that first path [compassion and aesthetic contemplation], it would be impossible for the majority to hope for any salvation.

(WWR2, Ch. XLIX, *op. cit.*, p. 638)

He recommends equalising self and others, acting compassionately and seeing through the *principium individuationis*, all of which can be compared to what Śāntideva advocates. However, the problem in the comparison comes with Schopenhauer's recommendation of asceticism and Schopenhauer's ascetic is not anywhere near as compatible to a Buddhist solution as he took it to be. In fact it seems that, for Schopenhauer, there are several ways to limit suffering: experiencing temporary aesthetic contemplation; experiencing extended periods of aesthetic contemplation (the genius); benefiting from acts of compassion from those who can see beyond the *principium individuationis*; denying the will altogether through asceticism. This begins to sound rather unlike what Śāntideva taught. The perfected Bodhisattva (or Buddha) is free from attachment but Schopenhauer's ascetic saint is free from willing *altogether* which makes Schopenhauer's enlightened person one who is *beyond* morality and therefore very unlike the Bodhisattva or even the Arhat. It seems that King's and Spiro's interpretations of the Arhat might be more applicable to Schopenhauer's ascetic saint, and in that respect Schopenhauer's ethics does not chime with Śāntideva's.

It seems that the ascetic saint finds salvation in a different way to Śāntideva's Bodhisattva i.e. by renouncing the world. He also thinks the ascetic is an advance on the compassionate person and in that respect is not compatible with what Śāntideva taught as the focus of morality:

it is no longer enough for him [the ascetic] to love others like himself, and to do as much for them as himself, but there arises in him a strong aversion to the inner nature whose expression is his own phenomena, to the will-to-live, the kernel and essence of that world recognized as full of misery. He therefore renounces precisely this inner nature...[and]...tries to establish firmly in himself, the greatest indifference to all things.

(*Ibid.*, XXXI, p. 380)

Again this sounds more like the kind of claim King and Spiro (mistakenly) make in relation to Theravāda Buddhism.

Those lesser beings in Schopenhauer's scheme who are unable to be ascetic saints are the ones who practice equalisation of self and other, but they do not have the *prajñāpāramitā*. Schopenhauer claims that the ascetic does, and sees that 'this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing' (WWR1, §71, p. 412). Compassion, then, plays a less important role in Schopenhauer's philosophy than in Śāntideva's and does not offer liberation from suffering in any significant way.<sup>238</sup> It can be regarded more as a sign of someone who has a better grasp of what unites creatures rather than what divides them – the *principium individuationis* which the egoist (wrongly) takes to be reality. Were the compassionate person to understand the *prajñāpāramitā* then, in Schopenhauer's view, s/he would be beyond good and evil and as a life-denying ascetic would have no further use for compassion since s/he would have completely renounced the world. Clearly this is at odds with Śāntideva's account of compassion and its significance in his philosophy, and *in this respect* compassion in Buddhism and in Schopenhauer's philosophy do not fulfil the same function.

---

<sup>238</sup> No matter how altruistic people are to other people and to animals, the fact remains that they all experience unsatisfied craving which comes in the ultimate forms of illness and death which no amount of compassion can end. Our sufferings are only *diluted* by compassion but are not ended.

## Appendix 1: BCA Chapter Outline.

Ch.	Tun-huang Recension	Ch.	Batchelor, 1979	Crosby and Skilton, 1995	Kelsang, 2002	Berzin, 2004
1	Untitled	1	The Benefits of the Awakening Mind	Praise of the Awakening Mind	An Explanation of the Benefits of <i>Bodhicitta</i>	The Benefits of Bodhicitta
2	Adopting the Awakening Mind ( <i>bodhicitta-parigraha</i> )	2	Disclosure of Evil	Confession of Faults	Purifying Negativity	Openly Admitting Previous Negative Acts
		3	Full Acceptance of the Awakening Mind	Adopting the Awakening Mind	Generating Engaging <i>Bodhicitta</i>	Gaining Hold of a Bodhicitta Aim
3	Selflessness ( <i>nairātmya</i> )	4	Conscientiousness	Vigilance regarding the Awakening Mind	Relying on Conscientiousness	Taking Care (about Bodhicitta)
4	The Guarding of Awareness ( <i>samprajanya-rakṣaṇa</i> )	5	Guarding Alertness	The Guarding of Awareness	Guarding Alertness	Safeguarding with Alertness
5	Forbearance ( <i>kṣānti</i> )	6	Patience	The Perfection of Forbearance	Relying upon Patience	Showing Patience
6	Vigour ( <i>virya</i> )	7	Enthusiasm	The Perfection of Vigour	Relying upon Effort	Joyful Perseverance
7	Meditative Absorption ( <i>dhyāna</i> )	8	Meditation	The Perfection of Meditative Absorption	Relying upon Mental Stabilization	Far-Reaching Mental Stability
8	Understanding/Wisdom ( <i>prajñā</i> )	9	Wisdom	The Perfection of Understanding	The Perfection of Wisdom	Far-Reaching Discriminating Awareness
9	Dedication ( <i>pariṇāmanā</i> )	10	Dedication	Dedication	Dedication	Dedication

## Appendix 2: BCA 8:101-3

Batchelor, 1979	Crosby and Skilton 1995	Williams, 1998	Kelsang, 2002	Berzin, 2004
Such things as a continuum and an aggregation Are false in the same way as a rosary and an army. There is no (real) owner of suffering, Therefore who has control over it?	The continuum of consciousnesses, like a queue, and the combination of constituents, like an army, are not real. The person who experiences suffering does not exist. To whom will that suffering belong?	A continuant and a collective - such as a (caste) row (paṅkti) or an army - are fictions (mṛṣā) The one of whom there is a pain (duḥkha) does not exist. Therefore of whom will there be ownership of that?	Things that we call “continuums” or “collections”, Such as rosaries or armies, are falsely existent. Thus, there is no independent possessor of suffering, For who is there who has control over it?	What are called “a continuum” and “a group,” Such as a rosary, an army, and the like, are not truly (a findable whole), And so, since a possessor of suffering doesn't exist, Whose responsibility is it (as “mine”)?
Being no (inherent) owner of suffering, There can be no distinction at all between (that of myself and others). Thus I shall dispel it because it hurts : Why am I so certain (that I shouldn't eliminate the suffering of others)?	Without exception, no sufferings belong to anyone. They must be warded off simply because they are suffering. Why is any limitation put in this?	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?	Since there is no independent possessor of suffering, There is no real difference between my own and others' suffering. Thus, we should dispel all suffering simply because it is painful – Why cling to false distinctions with such certainty?	In their being without an owner, All sufferings lack a distinction: So it's (simply) because they're suffering that they're to be averted. Why are there fixed (limitations) made here?
[Question] - But, (since neither the suffering nor the sufferer truly exist,) why should I turn away the misery of all ?- [Mādhyamika] This is no ground for argument, For if I prevent my own (sufferings), surely I should prevent the (sufferings) of all. If not, since I am just like (other) sentient beings, (I should not prevent my own suffering either).	If one asks why suffering should be prevented, no one disputes that! If it must be prevented, then all of it must be. If not, then this goes for oneself as for everyone.	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 is also thus. If not oneself also is like (other) beings.	[Opponent] “ <i>There is no need to dispel everyone else's suffering!</i> ” [Mādhyamika] This is not a valid argument. If my suffering should be dispelled, so should everyone else's; And if others' suffering should not be dispelled, neither should mine.	[Question] “But why is the suffering of everyone to be averted?” [Mādhyamika] Well, it's indisputable: If (anyone's) is to be averted, then everyone's is to be averted; If not, (that applies) to me as well, just like to (every other) limited being.

## Bibliography

### *Primary Sources*

1. Aristotle and Thomson, J. A. (tr.) (1953) *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
2. Bodhi, B. (tr.) (2000) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.
3. Buddhaghosa, B. and Ñāṇamoli, B. (tr.) (1999) *Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification*, Seattle: BPS Pariyatti.
4. Carter, J.R., Palihawadana, M. and Various Scholars', (tr.) (ed.) Müller, M.), (1881, (1987)) *Dhammapada*, in *Sacred Books of the East, Vol. X, Part I*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
5. Conze, E. (1958 (1970)) *Prajñāparamita Sūtra: Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāparamita Sūtra*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society.
6. Fausböll, V. (tr.) (1881) *Sutta Nipāta*, Oxford: The Clarendon press.
7. Gooneratne, E.R.J. (tr.) (1913) *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Galle, Ceylon: Lankaloka Press.
8. Hardy, E. (ed.) (1902) *Netti-Pakaranam*, Pali Text Society
9. Hill, T.E. and Zweig, A. (tr.) (2002) *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. Hobbes, T. and MacPherson C.B. (1985) *Leviathan*, New York: Penguin.
11. Hobbes, T. and Oakeshott, M. (1946) *Leviathan*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
12. Hobbes, T., Rogers, G.A.J. and Schuhmann, K. (eds.) (2005) *Leviathan*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
13. Hobbes, T., Wilson, C. H. and R. B. MacCallum (eds.) (1946) *Leviathan*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
14. Horner, I.B. (tr.) (1954-9) *Majjhima Nikāya*, London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac.
15. Hume, D. (1748) *Essays, Moral and Political*, Volume I, Essay 8, 'Of the Independency of Parliament', London and Edinburgh: A. Millar; and A. Kincaid (Edinburgh).
16. Hume, D. (1903) *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, London: Grant Richards.
17. Hume, D. and MacIntyre, A. (ed.) (1965) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, from *Hume's Ethical Writings*, London: Collier-MacMillan.
18. Hume, D. and Selby-Bigge, L. (ed.) (1963) *Enquiries*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
19. Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, 'Of Morals'.
20. Hume, D., Norton, D. and Norton, M., 2000. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
21. Kaccana, T. and Ñāṇamoli, B. (tr.) (1962 (1977)), *The Guide: (Netti-Pakarāṇa)*, London: Pāli Text Society.
22. Kant, I. and Kingsmill Abbott, T. (tr.) (c2005) *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Stilwell, Kan.: Digireads.com Publishing.
23. Kant, I., Guyer, P. and Wood, A.W. (tr.) (1998) *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
24. Lal, P. (tr.) (1967) *Majjhima Nikāya*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

25. Lusthaus, D. (tr.) (2002) Part 4: *Trimśatikā* in *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih lun*, London: RoutledgeCurzon.
26. Machiavelli, N. and Bull, G. (tr.) (1985) *The Prince*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
27. Mill, J. S. and Bentham, J. (ed, Mary Warnock) (1986) *Utilitarianism and Other Essays*, Glasgow: Fontana.
28. Müller, M. (tr.) (1879) *The Upanishads*, in *Sacred Books of the East, Vol. I*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
29. Nāgārjuna and Garfield, J.L. (tr.) (1995) *Nāgārjuna: The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
30. Nāgārjuna and Inada, K.K. (tr.) (1975) *Nāgārjuna: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Tokyo: Hokuseido Press.
31. Nāgārjuna and Streng, F. J. (tr.) (1967) *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (incl. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press.
32. Ñāṇamoli, B. and Bodhi, B. (tr.) (2001) *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Boston: Wisdom Publications.
33. Plato and Grube, G.M.A. (tr.) (1977) *Phaedo*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
34. Plato and Hamilton, W. (tr.) 1951, *Plato: The Symposium*, St Ives: Penguin.
35. Plato and Jowett, B. (tr.) (1938) *Apology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
36. Plato and Lee, H.D.P. (tr.) (1962) *The Republic*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
37. Plato and Waterfield, R. (tr.) (1994) *Republic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
38. Rhys Davids, C.A.F. (1929), *Stories of the Buddha (being Selections from the Jātaka)*, London: Chapman and Hall.
39. Rhys Davids, T.W. (1899-1921) *Tipitaka, Suttapitaka, Dīgha Nikāya*, English Title: *Dialogues of the Buddha*, London: Oxford University Press.
40. Rhys Davids, T.W. (tr.) (1925) *The Questions of King Milinda*, London: Oxford University Press.
41. Rhys Davids, T.W. and C.A.F. (tr.) (1899-1921) *Dīgha Nikāya: Dialogues of the Buddha*, London: Oxford University Press.
42. Rhys Davids, T.W. and Oldenberg, H. (tr.) (1881-5) *Vinayapitaka* (from *The Sacred books of the East*; v. 13, 17, 20), Oxford: The Clarendon press.
43. Śāntideva, A. and Batchelor, S. (tr.) (1979), *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
44. Śāntideva, A. and Berzin, A. (tr.) (2004) *Engaging in Bodhisattva Behavior, (The Bodhicaryāvatāra)* [Internet]. Available from: <http://www.berzinarchives.com/web/en/archives/e-books/unpublished-manuscripts/bca-shantideva/engaging-Bodhisattva-in-tro.html> [Last Accessed 21 July 2008].
45. Śāntideva, A. and Kelsang, G. (tr.) (2002) *Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life: How to Enjoy a Life of Great Meaning and Altruism*, Ulverston: Tharpa.
46. Śāntideva, A., Bendall, C. and Rouse, W.H.D (tr.) (1922) *Śikṣāsamuccaya*,

- (comp. Śāntideva), London: John Murray.
47. Śāntideva, A., Crosby, K. and Skilton, A. (1995) *Śāntideva: The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  48. Schopenhauer, A. (translator unnamed) (1898) *Two Essays by Arthur Schopenhauer: On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and On the Will in Nature*, London: George Bell and Sons.
  49. Schopenhauer, A. and Hollingdale, R.J. (tr.) (1970) *Essays and Aphorisms*, London: Penguin.
  50. Schopenhauer, A. and Kolenda K. (tr.) (1985) *On the Freedom of the Will*, New York: Blackwell.
  51. Schopenhauer, A. and Payne, E.F.J. (tr.) (1969) *The World as Will and Representation Volume I*, New York: Dover Publications.
  52. Schopenhauer, A. and Payne, E.F.J. (tr.) (1969) *The World as Will and Representation Volume II*, New York: Dover Publications.
  53. Schopenhauer, A. and Payne, E.F.J. (tr.) (1974) *Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol I*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  54. Schopenhauer, A. and Payne, E.F.J. (tr.) (1974) *Parerga and Paralipomena, Vol II*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  55. Schopenhauer, A. and Payne, E.F.J. (tr.) (1974) *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  56. Schopenhauer, A. and Payne, E.F.J. (tr.) (1995) *On the Basis of Morality*, Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books.
  57. Schopenhauer, A. and Payne, E.F.J. (tr.) (1995) *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court. (First published 1813 but this edition was 1848 and Schopenhauer has made alterations to the 1813 volume.)
  58. Schopenhauer, A., and Bailey Saunders, T. (tr.) (1995) *The Wisdom of Life and Counsels and Maxims*, New York: Prometheus Books. (This volume consists of selected extracts from *Parerga and Paralipomena*.)
  59. Smith, A. and Haakonssen, K. (2002) *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  60. Suzuki, D.T. (tr.) *Lankavatara Sūtra* [http://lirs.ru/do/lanka\\_eng/lanka-nondiacritical.htm](http://lirs.ru/do/lanka_eng/lanka-nondiacritical.htm) [Last Accessed 21 July 2008]
  61. Thurman, R.A.F. (tr.) (1991, c1976) *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
  62. Vasubandhu and Kochumutton, T. (tr.) (1989) *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience: A New Translation and Interpretation of the Works of Vasubandhu the Yogācārin*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
  63. Walshe, M. (tr.) (1995) *Aggañña Sūtra*, from *The Long Discourses Of The Buddha: A Translation Of The Dīgha Nikāya*, Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications.

### **Secondary Sources**

1. Abelson, P. (April 1993) 'Schopenhauer and Buddhism.' *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 43, No. 2. University of Hawaii Press.
2. Aiken, H.D. (ed.) (1972) *Hume's Moral and Political Philosophy*, New York: Hafner Publishing Co.

3. Ames, R.T. and Dissanayake, W. (1996) *Self and Deception: A Cross-cultural Philosophical Enquiry*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.
4. Aronson, H. B. (1980) *Love and Sympathy in Theravāda Buddhism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
5. Atwell, J.E. (1995) *Schopenhauer and the Character of the World: The Metaphysics of the Will*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
6. Balslev, A.N. (1997) 'Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Conversation: Some Comments on the Project of Comparative Philosophy' *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 28, No. 4, October 1997, Malden, MA: The Metaphilosophy Foundation and Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
7. Baron, M. (1987) 'Kantian Ethics and Supererogation.' *Journal of Philosophy*, 84.
8. Bastow, D. (1969) 'Buddhist Ethics.' *Religious Studies*, Vol. 5.
9. Cabezón, J.I. (2007) 'A Response to Paul Williams's *The Unexpected Way*.' *Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity*, D'Arcy May, J.D.A. (ed.), Sankt Ottilien: EOS.
10. Cartwright, D., (Winter 2001), 'Two Senses of "Thing-In-Itself" in Schopenhauer's Philosophy.' *Idealistic Studies*, ISSN 0046-8541, Vol. 31/No.1.
11. Chang, Garma, C.C. (ed.) (1983) *A Treasury Of Mahayana Sutras*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.
12. Chimpa Lama and Chattopadhyaya, A. (tr.) (ed.) (1970) *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi.
13. Clayton, B.R. (2001) 'Compassion as a Matter of Fact: The Argument from No-self to Selflessness in Śāntideva's Śikṣāsamuccaya.' *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 2, No. 1.
14. Clayton, B.R. (2006) *Moral Theory in Śāntideva's Śikṣāsamuccaya: Cultivating the Fruits of Virtue*, Oxford: Routledge.
15. Coghlan, I.J. (2004) 'A Survey of the Sources of Buddhist Ethics.' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 11, pp. 143-166.
16. Collins, S. (1982) *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
17. Compson, J. (June 1996) 'The Dalai Lama And The World Religions: A False Friend?' *Religious Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2.
18. Conze, E. (1962) *Buddhist Thought in India*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
19. Conze, E. (1968) *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*, Oxford: Cassirer.
20. Conze, E. (1973) *The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, London: Luzac.
21. Conze, E. (1974) *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Oxford: Cassirer.
22. Conze, E. (1974) *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Oxford: Cassirer.
23. Cooper, D.E. in Janaway, C. (ed.) (1998) 'Self and Morality in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.' *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
24. Copleston, F. (1946) *Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism*, London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne.
25. D'Arcy May, J.D.A. (2007) *Converging Ways?: Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity*, Sankt Ottilien: EOS.

26. Dauer, D.W. (1969) *Schopenhauer as Transmitter of Buddhist Ideas*, Berne: Herbert Lang and Co.
27. Dayal, H. (1932) *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, London: Kegan Paul and Co.
28. Dennett, D.C. (1981, c1978) *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
29. Dharmasiri, G. (1989) *Fundamentals of Buddhist Ethics*, California: Golden Leaves Publishing Company.
30. Dilworth, D.A. (1989) *Philosophy in World Perspective: A Comparative Hermeneutic of the Major Theories*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
31. Divatia, S.C. (1994) *Idealistic Thought in Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd.
32. Dunne, J.D. (2004) *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, Boston: Wisdom Publications.
33. Fleming, J. (June 2003) 'Comparative Philosophy: Its Aims and Methods.' *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30:2.
34. Gardiner, P. (1980) *Schopenhauer*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
35. Gert, B. (December 1967) 'Hobbes and Psychological Egoism.' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXVIII, 4.
36. Gowans, C.W. (2003) *Philosophy of the Buddha*, London: Routledge.
37. Gudmundsen, C. (1972) 'Ethics Gets in the Way: A Reply to David Bastow.' *Religious Studies*, Vol. 8.
38. Guevara, D. (1999) 'The Impossibility of Supererogation in Kant's Moral Theory.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 59.
39. H. H. the XIV Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso), Wallace, B.A., (tr.) (1988) *Transcendent Wisdom: A Commentary on the Ninth Chapter of the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, New York: Snow Lion Publishing.
40. Halbfass, W. (1988) *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, Albany: State University of New York.
41. Hamilton, S. (1996) *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism*, London: Luzac Oriental.
42. Hamlyn, D.W. (1985) *Schopenhauer*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
43. Harris, E.J. (1997) *Detachment and Compassion in Early Buddhism*, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
44. Harvey, P. (1990) *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
45. Harvey, P. (1995) 'Criteria for Judging the Unwholesomeness of Actions in the Texts of Theravāda Buddhism.' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. 2.
46. Harvey, P. (1995) *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāṇa in Early Buddhism*, Surrey: Curzon.
47. Harvey, P. (2000) *An Introduction To Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
48. Harvey, P. (2007) 'Avoiding Unintended Harm to the Environment and the Buddhist Ethic of Intention.' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. 14.
49. Haydar, B. (2002) 'Forced Supererogation and Deontological

- Restrictions.’ *Journal of Value Inquiry*, 36.
50. Heim, M. (2007) ‘Toward a “Wider and Juster Initiative”’: Recent Comparative Work in Buddhist Ethics’ *Religion Compass* 1/1, pp. 107-19.
  51. Herman, A.L. (1983) *An Introduction To Buddhist Thought: A Philosophic History of Indian Buddhism*, Lanham, Md: University Press Of America.
  52. Heyd, D. (1980) ‘Beyond the Call of Duty in Kant’s Ethics.’ *Kant-Studien*, 71.
  53. Hill, T. (1971) ‘Kant on Imperfect Duty and Supererogation.’ *Kant-Studien*, 62.
  54. Holmes, K. and Holmes K. (1999) *Maitreya on Buddha Nature: A New Translation of Asaṅga’s Mahāyānauttaratantra Śāstra*, Forres: Altea.
  55. Hübscher, A. and Baer, J.T. and Cartwright D.E. (tr.) (1989) *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer in its Intellectual Context: Thinker Against the Tide*, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press.
  56. Huntington, C.W. and Namgyal, W. (1989) *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
  57. Jacques, D. (ed.) (1996) *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  58. Janaway, C. (ed.) (1999) *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  59. Janaway, C., (1989) *Self and World in Schopenhauer’s Philosophy*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  60. Jayatilleke, K. (Feb/Mch 1971) ‘The Basis Of Buddhist Ethics.’ *The Mahabodhi*, Vol. 79, pp. 50-6.
  61. Jayatilleke, K.N. (July 1970) ‘The Ethical Theory of Buddhism.’ *The Mahābhodi*, Vol. 78.
  62. Jayatilleke, K.N. (September 1970b) ‘The Buddhist Ethical Ideal or the Ultimate Good.’ *The Mahābodhi*, Vol. 78.
  63. Jones, R.H. (1979) ‘Theravāda Buddhism and Morality.’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, XLVII/3.
  64. Kalupahana, D.J. (1992) *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i.
  65. Katz, N. (1982) *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection: The Arahant of the Sutta Piṭaka Compared with the Bodhisattva and the Mahāsiddha*, Dheli: Motilal Banarsidass.
  66. Kavka, G.S. (c1986) *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
  67. Kawamura, L. (1981) *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism*, Waterloo, Ont, Gerrards Cross: Published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Corporation Canadienne Des Sciences Religieuses by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Smythe (Distributor).
  68. Keown, D. (1992) *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
  69. Keown, D. (ed.) (c2000) *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, Richmond: Curzon.
  70. King, W.L. (1964) *In the Hope of Nibbana: An Essay on Theravada*

- Buddhist Ethics*, LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing.
71. King, W.L. (1964a) *A Thousand Lives Away*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
  72. Kishan, B.V. in Fox, M. (ed.) (1980) 'Schopenhauer and Buddhism.' *Schopenhauer: His Philosophical Achievement*, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books.
  73. Krishna, D. (1988) 'Comparative Philosophy: What It Is and What It Ought to Be.' In Larson, J. and Deutsch, E. (eds.) *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
  74. Larson, J. and Deutsch, E. (eds.) (1988) *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
  75. Lindtner, C. (1981) 'Atiśa's Introduction to the Two Truths.' *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Dordrecht, Vol. 9.
  76. Lindtner, C. (1982) *Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag.
  77. Lopez, D.S. Jr. (c1987) *A Study of Svātantrika*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications.
  78. Machiavelli, N. and Bull, G. (tr.) (1985) *The Prince*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
  79. MacIntyre, A. (1981) *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, London: Duckworth.
  80. MacIntyre, A. (1988) *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, London: Duckworth.
  81. MacIntyre, A. (c1990) *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Gifford lectures delivered in the University of Edinburgh in 1988 by Alasdair MacIntyre), London: Duckworth.
  82. Magee, B. (1983) *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  83. Magee, B. (1989) Blithell Memorial Lecture, *Misunderstanding Schopenhauer*, (at the Institute of Germanic [sic] Studies at the University of London), ISBN 0 85457 1485; ISSN 0144-9850.
  84. Makransky, J. (2005) 'No Real Protection without Authentic Love and Compassion.' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. 12.
  85. Malter, R. (1991) *Arthur Schopenhauer: Transcendentalphilosophie und Metaphysik des Willens*, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog.
  86. Masson-Oursel, P. (1951) 'True Philosophy is Comparative Philosophy.' *Philosophy East and West*, 1: 6-9.
  87. Mercer, P. (1972) *Sympathy and Ethics*, London: Oxford University Press.
  88. Misra, G.S.P. (Oct. - Dec., 1986) 'Development of Buddhist Ethics.' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 106, No. 4.
  89. Mitomo, R. (1991) 'The Ethics of Mahayana Buddhism.' In Fu, C.W. and Wawrytko, S.A. (eds.) *Buddhist Ethics and Modern Society*, Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Press.
  90. Mohanty, J.N. (1992) *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought: An Essay on the Nature of Indian Philosophical Thinking*, Oxford:

- Clarendon Press.
91. Murti, T.R.V. (1955) *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of The Madhyamika System*, London: Allen and Unwin.
  92. Nagao, G.M. and Kawamura, L.S. (ed.) (1991) *Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra: A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophies*, New York: State University of New York Press.
  93. Ñāṇajīvako, B. (1970) *Schopenhauer and Buddhism*, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society.
  94. Neeley, S.G. (1994) 'A Critical Note On Schopenhauer's Concept of Salvation.' *Jahrbuch Der Schopenhauer Gesellschaft*, pp. 97-127.
  95. Neeley, S.G. (1996) 'The Knowledge and Nature of Schopenhauer's Will.' *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 77, pp. 85-112.
  96. Neeley, S.G. (2003) *Schopenhauer: A Consistent Reading*, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press.
  97. New, C. (1974) 'Saints, Heroes and Utilitarians.' *Philosophy*, 49.
  98. Nietzsche, F. and Janaway, C. (tr.) (ed.) (1998 (1868)) 'On Schopenhauer.' *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  99. Obermiller, E. (tr.) (1986) *Bu-ston's History of Buddhism in India and Tibet: The Jewellery of Scripture*, Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica 26, Delhi: Sri Satguru.
  100. Panikkar, R. (1988) 'What is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?' In Larson, J. and Deutsch, E. (eds.) *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
  101. Parfit, D. (1984) *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  102. Pérez-Remón, J.N. (1980) *Self and Non-Self In Early Buddhism*, The Hague: Mouton.
  103. Pettit, J.W. (1999) Review of Paul Williams' *Altruism and Reality*. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 6.
  104. Portmore, D.W. (2003) 'Position-Relative Consequentialism, Agent-Centered Options, and Supererogation.' *Ethics*, 113.
  105. Prebish, C.S. and Keown, D. (2007) *Introducing Buddhism*, New York and London: Routledge.
  106. Premasiri, P.D. (1975) 'Moral Evaluation In Early Buddhism.' *Sri Lanka Journal Of The Humanities*, Vol. 1, June pp. 63-74.
  107. Premasiri, P.D. (June 1976) 'Interpretation of Two Principal Ethical Terms in Early Buddhism.' *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, II, I.
  108. Reat, N.R. (1980) 'Theravada Buddhism And Morality.' *Journal Of The American Academy of Religion*, Vol. xlvi, Part 3, pp:433-40.
  109. Ronkin, N. (2005) *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition*, Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon.
  110. Rosemont, H. Jr. (1988) 'Against Relativism.' In Larson, J. and Deutsch, E. (eds.) *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
  111. Ruegg, D.S. (1981) *The Literature of the Mādhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
  112. Runzo, J. and Martin, N.M. (2001) *Ethics in the World Religions*,

- Oxford: Oneworld.
113. Schmidt-Leukel, P. (2006a) *Buddhism, Christianity and the Question of Creation: Karmic or Divine?*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
  114. Schmidt-Leukel, P. (2006b) *Understanding Buddhism*, Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.
  115. Schmidt-Leukel, P. (ed.) (2004) *War and Peace in World Religions*, London: SCM Press.
  116. Siderits, M. (2000a) Review of Paul Williams' *Altruism and Reality*. *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 3.
  117. Siderits, M. (2000b) Review: Reply to Paul Williams. *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 3.
  118. Siderits, M. (2003) *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
  119. Simmel, G., Loiskandl, H., Weinstein, D. and Weinstein, M. (tr.) (1986) *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
  120. Smart, N. (1988) 'The Analogy of Meaning and the Tasks of Comparative Philosophy.' In Larson, J. and Deutsch, E. (eds.) *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
  121. Smart, N. (1999) *World Philosophies*, London: Routledge.
  122. Smart, N., Clayton, J., Katz, S. and Sherry, P. (eds.) (1985) *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  123. Soll, I. in Janaway, C. (ed.) (1998) 'Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Redemption of Life through Art.' *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
  124. Spiro, M.E. (1971 Hardback) *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, London: Allen and Unwin.
  125. Spiro, M.E. (1972 Paperback) *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, New York: Harper.
  126. Timmermann, J. (2005) 'Good but Not Required? - Assessing the Demands of Kantian Ethics.' *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 2.
  127. Vasubandhu and Pruden, L.M. (tr.) (1988-9) *Abhidharmakosabhāsyam*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.
  128. Velez de Cea, A. (2004) 'The Criteria of Goodness in the Pāli Nikāyas and the Nature of Buddhist Ethics.' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 11, pp. 123-142.
  129. Veljādi, C. (1970) *Schopenhauer and Buddhism*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
  130. Weber, M. (1958) *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*, New York: The Free Press.
  131. Welbon, G.R. (1968 (1975)) *The Buddhist Nirvana and its Western Interpreters*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
  132. Wetlesen, J. (2002) 'Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 9.
  133. Whitehill, J. (1994) 'Buddhist Ethics in Western Context: The "Virtues" Approach.' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 1.
  134. Whitehill, J. (c2000) 'Buddhism and the Virtues.' *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, Keown, D. (ed.), Richmond: Curzon.

135. Williams, P and Tribe (2003) *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Buddhist Tradition*, New York: Routledge.
136. Williams, P. (1989) *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, New York: Routledge.
137. Williams, P. (1998) *Altruism and Reality: Studies In the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon.
138. Williams, P. (1999) 'A Response to John Pettit.' *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 6.
139. Williams, P. (2000) 'A Response to Mark Siderits' Review.' *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 50, No. 3. University of Hawai'i Press.
140. Williams, P. (2002) *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism*, Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.
141. Williams, P. (2007) 'Buddhism, God, Aquinas and Morality: An Only Partially Repentant Reply to Perry Schmidt-Leukel and José Cabezón.' *Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity*, D'Arcy May, J.D.A. (ed.), Sankt Ottilien: EOS.
142. Young, J. (1984) 'Schopenhauer's Critique of Kantian Ethics.' *Kant-Studien*, 75.
143. Young, J. (1987) *Willing and Unwilling: A Study of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff.
144. Young, J. (2005) *Schopenhauer*, Abingdon: Routledge.