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Deploying the Dharma: Reflections on the Methodology of Constructive Buddhist Ethics

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Christopher Ives*

Abstract

Recent Buddhist ethical argumentation has been hampered by a set of methodological issues. The Buddhist soteriological scheme offers at least a partial solution to several of those issues, and more importantly, provides a framework for more rigorous and systematic formulations of Buddhist ethics.

In recent decades “Engaged Buddhists” have been responding to a range of ethical issues. To date, however, their theorizing has not kept pace with their praxis. When formulating moral arguments about environmental and other issues, contemporary Buddhist thinkers have generally tapped metaphysical, epistemological, and preceptive dimensions of Buddhism,¹ but their theorizing has harbored several methodological issues, such as (1) argumentation that falters from certain translations and interpretations of key terms; (2) a form of the naturalistic fallacy; (3) ahistorical and idealized representations of Buddhist ethical resources; (4) the ethical multivalency of Buddhist constructs; (5) eisegesis in the excavation of resources; and (6) a lack of explicitly articulated first principles. I would argue that deploying the Buddhist soteriological frame-

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work can help them address these issues and grant their ethical reflection more rigor.

Problems of Translation and Interpretation

Recent Buddhist ethical argumentation has stumbled at times because of certain translations and interpretations of such core constructs as *pratītya-samutpāda*, *anātman*,² and karma.³ For example, Engaged Buddhists often deploy *pratītya-samutpāda* in arguments about how “interdependence” indicates or provides a basis for an ecological worldview in Buddhism. David Loy writes that “everything, including us, is dependent on everything else” (85); Martine Batchelor writes about how the doctrine of emptiness was “developed to emphasize how things do not merely depend for their existence upon their own immediate set of causes, but upon everything in the universe” (10); Stephen Batchelor states that “in an undivided world everything miraculously supports everything else” (35); and Zen teacher Robert Aitken tells us, “We are born into a world in which all things nurture us” (426).

When writers adopt “interdependence” as the English rendering of *pratītya-samutpāda* or interpret this Sanskrit term and the closely related doctrine of emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*) in the ways these quotations indicate, they step onto a slippery rhetorical slope and, by extension, run the risk of succumbing to sloppy argumentation. Insofar as these writers are arguing that all things are interrelated, that they affect and condition each other, their discourse would be congruent with Buddhist metaphysics. And from a Buddhist perspective it goes without saying that each of us is dependent on myriad things that have generated us and sustain us, whether our parents, doctors, the water we drink, the plants we eat, soil, rain, the sun, photosynthesis, agricultural workers, and on and on. But to claim that our flourishing is dependent on everything else, or that every thing nurtures us, is to move onto shaky ground. Though a Ukrainian baby does have a relationship with the Chernobyl reactor, and lingering

radioactivity may affect her, one can hardly argue in any intelligible sense that she “arises in dependence upon” the failed reactor, or that once born she is “supported” and “nurtured” by the dangerous iodine and strontium isotopes released by the 1986 accident, or that her well-being is “dependent on” these forms of radioactive poison. Her well-being is actually dependent on limiting her physical relationship with radioactivity, on being independent of it. Hence the reactor gets encased in concrete.

The Naturalistic Fallacy

One could respond to this critique by marshaling the counterargument that everything is interdependent in constituting this world, this particular whole with its particular individuals. But is this world necessarily the optimal world? How can Buddhist ethicists avoid the naturalistic fallacy of conflating the “is” and the “ought?” To formulate a viable, systematic Buddhist environmental ethic, they must clarify on Buddhist grounds what an optimal world might be, what the exact interrelating conditions are that sustain the well-being—and ultimately the awakening—of humans, other species, and the biosphere as a whole, and then set forth a convincing Buddhist rationale for creating and/or protecting those conditions. Something more than metaphysics is needed here, and this is where soteriology can play a role. That is to say, discussion of metaphysical constructs needs to be coupled with exposition of the exact conditions that most support a release from suffering in its various senses.

A related issue emerges in the application of Buddhist epistemologies. Many Buddhists, especially those of the Zen persuasion, celebrate how meditative practice generates non-dual ways of experiencing that bridge the chasm between experiencing subject and experienced object, transporting the person beyond dualism to a “oneness” with things.⁴ Applying this to environmental problems, Doug Codiga writes, “A skillful

Zen student will strive to be awakened to an identity with all phenomena” (108), and Thich Nhat Hanh argues, “We should be able to be our true self. That means we should be able to be the river, we should be able to be the forest.... That is the non-dualistic way of seeing” (Being Peace, 68-69).

Buddhist practice may indeed erode the crenellated walls of the ego and release us from existential estrangement from the world,⁵ but non-dual identification is possible with anything: we can “become one” with Mount Everest or a mountain of burning tires. Hence this epistemology alone does not get us very far in the direction of a workable environmental ethic, unless it offers a basis for making a distinction between pristine glaciers and smoldering rubber, between what is preferred and what is to be avoided or eliminated, basically, between what is “good” and what is “bad.” But is such a dualistic distinction inherent in a non-dual epistemology? Does not “becoming one” with things presuppose—and require—overcoming all distinctions and the mental tendency to make them? Arguably, valuational or moral distinctions derive from something other than this sort of religious experience, namely, rational reflection. What is important ecologically, then, is not simply non-dual identification but reason, which can address the question of the degree to which the things we become one with contribute to a healthy environment, ecological sustainability, and a net reduction of suffering, or the degree to which the transformation of the meditator who becomes one with things contributes to those ends.

Idealized, Ahistorical Representations

A further issue crops up in the idealized, ahistorical representations put forth by Buddhist thinkers. Masao Abe (1915-2006), for example, repeatedly claimed that wisdom and compassion are attained by awakening to emptiness and that the bodhisattva minted in this way then automatically acts to liberate others through vows (Skt. *praṇidhāna*) and action (*cari-*

ta) (58). The first question here is whether awakening to emptiness has in all cases brought about this ethical transformation. A closer look at the historical record of institutionalized Buddhism, especially modern “Imperial-Way Zen,”⁶ would lead Buddhist ethicists to reconsider this doctrinal claim that awakening equips one with wisdom and compassion.

And even if we bracket that issue and view Abe as simply lifting up a Buddhist ideal, we are still left with a methodological issue of representation. Specifically, in discourse on “ethics in Buddhism” it is not always clear whether writers are sketching something ideal and prescriptive or actual and descriptive. If done explicitly, sketching ideal forms of Buddhist ethics is not necessarily a problem, but Buddhist ethicists to date have not adequately treated actual Buddhist ethical stances, how actual Buddhism has at times come up short, how certain things have obscured or distorted those ideals when they have been put into practice in the messy complexity of historical actuality.⁷ By analyzing discrepancies between ideal morality and actual behavior, Buddhist ethicists could grant their reflection greater rigor and contribute to a more genuine expression of Buddhist values at the practical level.

Multivalency and Malleability

Hanging over most of the constructs mobilized by contemporary Buddhist ethicists—whether interrelational arising,⁸ no-soul, non-dualism, compassion, or the Five Precepts—is a further issue: these doctrines lend themselves to multiple interpretations and, by extension, multiple ethical stances. They are ethically malleable and, historically, other non-Buddhist values, concepts, and doctrines have colored the interpretations that Buddhist thinkers have given them.

For example, in addition to metaphysical and epistemological resources, Buddhist environmental ethicists have employed the preceptive dimension of their tradition and given the precepts⁹ an ecological read-

ing with an eye toward fostering non-destructive human relations with the environment. In particular, they have enlisted the first precept with its concept of *ahimsā*, non-harming (or “no killing”). In making a case for becoming vegetarian, for example, Philip Kapleau lifts up the first precept and argues that “to willfully take life . . . means to disrupt and destroy th[e] inherent wholeness [of reality] and to blunt feelings of reverence and compassion arising from our Buddha-mind” (19). The methodological challenge facing ethicists here is the fact that the doctrine of non-harming has never been absolute, and it has been interpreted in many ways, not unlike the Ten Commandments or the larger set of 613 mitzvot in Judaism. While it may provide an overall ideal to which one can aspire, the doctrine of non-harming does not necessarily give unequivocal guidance. It requires something else, some principle or criterion. Again, Buddhist soteriology can help here. Like Asaṅga in his *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* (*Bodhisattva Stages*), the criterion may be that of which actions, perhaps even violent ones, serve to free people from suffering, or at least express what Asaṅga termed the “purified intention” of liberating others.

Malleability is also evident when we compare how wartime Japanese Buddhists and contemporary Engaged Buddhists have interpreted the doctrines of no-soul, interrelational arising, and indebtedness for blessings one has received (J. *on*, Skt. *upakāra*). The former used these doctrines to advance an ethic of obligatory self-sacrifice for an increasingly hierarchical and totalitarian state, while the latter have used them to advance an ethic of egalitarian cooperation in democratic communities inclusive of other species. Though tapping the same doctrines, the ethical reflection of wartime Japanese Buddhists was highly influenced by the Confucian orientation of the traditional Japanese ethos while the value system of contemporary Engaged Buddhists has been influenced by extra-Buddhist notions of representative democracy, legal equality, human rights, animal rights, and sustainability.

The multivalency of Buddhist concepts and the ability to splice Confucianism and Western liberal thought onto them generate the question of whether any core components of Buddhism point inexorably to specific moral stances and preclude other, divergent, and perhaps even contesting stances. If they do not, something else is needed to sort the varying interpretations of doctrines, and I would argue that it is the Buddhist soteriological scheme that can best function as this touchstone.

Extra-Buddhist Resources and Eisegesis

In speaking of core components of Buddhism here, I am not assuming there is a singular true or pure Buddhism, nor that, even if there were such an essence, one should never develop Buddhist ethics through extra-Buddhist ideas. Bringing outside constructs and values to bear on the tradition is nothing new, for it has occurred throughout Buddhist history. In East Asia, Zen Buddhists have assimilated Confucian and Shintō elements into their tradition, and with the exception of “Critical Buddhists” in Japan and a few other minority voices, no one has taken issue with this practice. Many Engaged Buddhists, reared in such traditions as Christianity and Judaism, have been shaped by an array of non-Buddhist values, moral stances, and political philosophies that they have brought to their practice of and reflections on Buddhism.

One methodological issue worth considering, however, is whether, in their efforts to address specific moral issues, contemporary Buddhist ethicists are formulating genuinely Buddhist ethical stances or are, consciously or otherwise, engaging in acts of eisegesis by looking selectively in Buddhist sources—whether experiences, texts, doctrines, practices, or institutions—to find support for the ethical and political stances that they brought to their practice of Buddhism in the first place. This search in Buddhist sources for support of ethical stances deriving largely from non-Buddhist ethical and political systems has been critiqued by Ian

Harris in several articles about recent attempts to advance a Buddhist environmental ethic.¹⁰

In light of this issue, Buddhist thinkers need to reflect on how Buddhist their stances are, and how true their ethical arguments are to Buddhist sources.¹¹ And they can grant their ethical argumentation added rigor by noting when they have incorporated extra-Buddhist ideas and then, if possible, justifying that splice as congruent with Buddhism. Buddhist soteriology can play a role here, too, by providing a basis for that justification.

Lack of Explicit First Principles and Systematic Frameworks

As our analysis to this point has indicated, recent ethical arguments that draw from the metaphysical, epistemological, and preceptive dimensions of Buddhism often reach a point where something else is needed, some sort of criterion or an overarching principle. Moreover, that argumentation has usually been occasional and issue-specific, not systematic. Granted, many Buddhist ethicists have been setting forth their arguments with the overall Buddhist approach in the background, but often their argumentation reads like they are pulling tools from a toolkit in an ad hoc manner to address a specific issue rather than arguing on the basis of clearly articulated first principles or from within a systematic ethical framework that has been worked out with rigor in advance.

Zen ethicists in Japan, for example, have often made arguments without formulating explicit principles of criticism and, as seen in Imperial-Way Zen, some of their argumentation has stood in tension with key Buddhist principles, whether non-harming or compassion. In response it is easy—though often facile, anachronistic, and intellectually imperialist—to brand wartime Zen as “anti-democratic,” “co-opted,” and “fascist,” but insofar as these adjectives imply extra-Buddhist criteria the more constructive response is to explore which of the more univer-

sal if not transcendent elements of Buddhism itself might be used to evaluate Zen utterances and actions. As a thoroughly embedded Japanese religion embracing conventional norms before and during the war, Zen has never systematically and rigorously formulated its ethical and political stances on the basis of the universal resources in the Mahāyāna tradition of which it is part, that is to say, on the basis of Buddhist values that can function as norms transcendent of conventional and at times parochial Japanese morality.

In the case of Japanese Zen, breaking out of its embeddedness and constructing a social ethic that transcends conventional Japanese morality may not be as easy as it might appear, for most Japanese Zen priests are focused, as in the past, on getting trained in monasteries, performing rituals, administering temples, and, insofar as they engage in any kind of analysis, studying Zen texts. Moreover, Japanese ethical reflection over the past two centuries has generally construed morality in immanent and parochial terms, as seen in wartime discourse on the national essence (*kokutai*) and in recent essentialist and exceptionalist portrayals of the Japanese in *Nihonjinron*, popular “treatises on the Japanese.”

The key question here is this: What core Buddhist values can ethicists most fruitfully employ as Buddhist (rather than extra-Buddhist) and transcendent (rather than conventional) criteria for assessing specific actions or socio-political arrangements? Of course, Zen has been steeped in Confucianism for so long that attempts to get back to some ostensibly “truer” or “purer” Buddhist ethical stance may strike some as a misguided call for Zen to stop being Zen and to judge itself on the basis of an abstract set of broader Buddhist principles—or reified Buddhist essence—floating above specific Buddhist traditions. Even so, insofar as thinkers are pursuing Buddhist ethics, they must clarify the specific Buddhist principles that should be deployed for critical assessment of actuality and for constructive thought about optimal societies. Buddhist

ethicists might lift up meditation and awakening as the key to ethical life, on the assumption that once people deepen their practice and are awakened they will “just know” what to criticize or what to do. Or they might lift up compassion. Or the first precept.

Some Buddhist thinkers have argued that meditative states and awakening are the true basis of ethics insofar as they transform people ethically. Hakuin (1685-1768) wrote in his “Chant in Praise of Zazen,” “Observing the precepts, repentance, and giving, the countless good deeds, and the way of right living all come from zazen. Thus one true samadhi extinguishes evils; it purifies karma, dissolving obstructions” (Low 89). As mentioned earlier, Abe Masao has argued that *satori*—or, as he was wont to put it, awakening to emptiness—generates wisdom and compassion in the awakened person, who then makes vows and engages in action to liberate other sentient beings. But even if we allow for the sake of the argument that Abe is right and that *satori* does in fact play a key role in a wise and compassionate Zen master’s working one-on-one with a disciple to liberate that person in a religious sense, how sufficient is it for prophetic moral critique, both of individuals and of society? Even D. T. Suzuki argued after World War II that “by itself *satori* is unable to judge the right and wrong of war” (413). And Zen teacher Bernie Glassman has argued that “even while possessing great realization, we still have our conditioning, our own particular characteristics, our own particular paths. Little of that changes overnight” (72).¹²

Buddhist ethicists might consider deploying compassion as the criterion. Yet although compassion is soteriologically positive, it can lead us into foggy moral territory, as indicated by stories of Zen masters expressing their compassion through such acts as cutting off a disciple’s finger or cutting a cat in half, akin to Kierkegaard’s “teleological suspension of the ethical.” Granted, insofar as compassion pertains to one’s motivation, to one’s intention to help or liberate others, it carries moral

weight. But as I have argued elsewhere, “Given the various social stances and political actions that have been taken in the name of compassion, perhaps we are compelled to conclude that while the construct of compassion may convey the message that Buddhists should help others, it offers few specifics” (“What’s” 52). And we all know of cases where people have done harmful things in the guise of “helping” or “saving” others (hence the traditional bodhisattva needs to be equipped with not only compassion but wisdom). For these reasons compassion must be coupled with something else to guide the specific actions motivated by it, with some other form of guidance about what the best interests of others or the environment might be, what actions would promote those interests, and whether immoral means can be used to pursue religious ends. In short, good intentions are admirable, but some other criterion is needed to critique actions and situations, guide actions based on compassion, and conceptualize what Buddhistically optimal situations might look like.

Perhaps the first precept can function as this transcendent criterion. But to set it up as a touchstone requires sustained intellectual labor, for even if Buddhist ethicists were to agree that the first precept about non-harming can provide a Buddhist criterion for evaluating such historical phenomena as Imperial-Way Zen, they would still be left with the task of clarifying (as much as possible, granting all the methodological challenges) whether it should be construed as an absolute, deontological prohibition that would point to radical pacifism, or as a flexible guideline that allows for self-defense, for killing that prevents greater killing (preemption), and for other exceptions that can be spelled out in a Buddhist “just violence” theory.

I would argue that more than the metaphysical, epistemological, or preceptive dimensions, the soteriological dimension can provide the needed criterion as well as a framework for rigorous Buddhist social and

environmental ethics. On the heuristic assumption that suffering is the core and proper focus of Buddhism, we can fruitfully employ the Four Noble Truths and give them a social reading by (1) delineating the exact contours of suffering in its various forms; (2) engaging in rigorous analysis of the various causes of suffering and of how different forms of suffering cause or affect each other; (3) articulating the cessation of suffering in terms of the optimal conditions in which certain problems and the accompanying suffering are reduced if not eliminated; and (4) formulating and pursuing praxis aimed at helping those who suffer by working to eradicate the causes of suffering and securing that optimal state of affairs.

The Basic Problem and Contours of Suffering

From the outset we can safely affirm that the central concern of Buddhism is *duḥkha*—suffering—and its elimination. Buddhists can develop their commitment to overcoming suffering by deepening their analysis of its two general forms: (1) ordinary suffering, the painful physical and mental feelings caused by hunger, sickness, aging, violence, and injustice; and (2) existential suffering, the dis-ease, dissatisfaction, and unsettledness caused by “unwholesome” mental states, especially our clinging to impermanent objects or conditions, including the “self,” the suffering that is the crux of the First Noble Truth. This is not to say that traditional Buddhism has not outlined the various types of suffering,¹³ but Buddhist social ethicists can grant their reflection greater rigor by clarifying the linkage between “ordinary” suffering, often caused—at least proximately—by social, economic, political, and environmental problems, and “existential” suffering, caused by unwholesome mental states in the individual. This may be the core task in Buddhist ethics at present, especially for Zen ethicists, operating in a tradition that focuses overwhelmingly on the universal fact of entanglement in dualistic modes of experience—a fundamental religious problem that pertains to Bill Gates

and a Darfur villager alike—and hence rarely takes into account the different life conditions of the secure rich and vulnerable poor. Of course, some Buddhist thinkers might argue here that the *duḥkha* with which Buddhism has traditionally concerned itself exists in a “vertical” religious dimension, not on the horizontal plane of “ordinary” suffering and that nirvana goes far deeper than social justice. Regardless of how we might respond to this argument,¹⁴ suffice it to say that concern about “ordinary” suffering and the eradication of its causes appears throughout the Buddhist tradition.¹⁵

I would also argue that even though Buddhists might have much to teach about the psychology of *duḥkha* in the core existential sense, they have much to learn about the socio-political facets of *duḥkha*. And Buddhists need to learn from thinkers like Paul Knitter, whose “soterio-centric” model focuses on “the welfare of humanity and this earth, the promotion of life and the removal of that which promotes death” (“Interreligious” 37), and lifts up “the ‘salvation’ or ‘well-being’ of humans and Earth as the starting point and common ground for our efforts to share and understand our religious experiences and notions of the Ultimately Important” (Jesus 17). Dialogue with Knitter and other liberation theologians—as well as with process theologian John Cobb and his recent writings on “economism,” globalization, and sustainability—would prove helpful, for they provide Buddhist ethicists with rich examples of religious thinkers who pursue rigorous, concrete, and detailed analysis of contemporary forms of suffering while recognizing limitations of their own tradition and learning from other traditions.¹⁶

At the outset Buddhists can follow the lead of Thich Nhat Hanh and others in the Tiep Hien Order and make a commitment: “Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering, we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering” (Interbeing 18).¹⁷ To this end they can analyze

ignorance in the sense of denial (ignor-ance) and affirm wisdom, the clear seeing of suffering and other things “just as they are.”

The Cause of Suffering

To formulate a rigorous ethic and thereby place their praxis on a firmer footing, Buddhists need to engage in thoroughgoing analysis of the complex causes of suffering in all of its forms, while also clarifying how different types of suffering cause or exacerbate each other and how the reduction of one might serve to reduce the other.¹⁸ Traditionally, Zen thinkers have analyzed the cause of suffering in terms of entrapment in dualistic subjectivity while Therāvadan Buddhists have applied a hermeneutic of mental defilements, analyzing the operation of, for example, the “three poisons” of ignorance, greed, and ill-will. That is to say, historically Buddhism has focused on a critique of the ego or ego-consciousness.¹⁹ Recently, however, writers have begun to expand this critique to social analysis, as seen in the writings of David Loy, who has analyzed how the three poisons can be institutionalized and operate on a collective level.²⁰

This focus on the three poisons strikes me a fruitful avenue for doing genuinely Buddhist constructive ethics, based as it is on the moral psychology of Buddhism with its focus on eradicating “unwholesome” or detrimental mental states and actions and cultivating wholesome mental states and actions. Joanna Macy focuses specifically on the poison of ignorance or delusion when she writes, “It is a delusion that the self is so separate and fragile that we must delineate and defend its boundaries, that it is so small and so needy that we must endlessly acquire and endlessly consume, and that it is so aloof that as individuals, corporations, nation-states, or species, we can be immune to what we do to other beings” (57). We can also refine our analysis of the causation of suffering by analyzing ignorance in all of its forms—a lack of knowledge, mistaken

views, denial, or ideologies that justify suffering²¹—and draw on the resources of Buddhism to engage in ideology critique.²²

The Cessation of Suffering

Buddhist social ethicists next need to delineate the optimal state of individuals, society, and the world (in effect, a Buddhist utopia, a fully liberative Pure Land or Buddha Land), the optimal system of interrelating as the telos of Buddhist ethical reflection and action. They need to articulate what the optimal economic and political structures might be, both for meeting basic human needs and for promoting awakening. Helpful in this regard is the Bhutanese tracking of Gross National Happiness. And fifteen years ago I sketched a Buddhistically optimal society—and optimal relationship with nature—in terms of several categories: optimal participation, participatory justice, “enoughness,” socio-ecosystems, synergistic power, a calculus of suffering, and an economic indicator (an Overall Quality of Life Index) that reflects well-being better than Gross Domestic Product does.²³

The Path to the Cessation of Suffering

Once this telos is clarified, much of the work lies in rational study and analysis, exhaustive criticism, and sustained political action, not simply in meditation, smiling at others, transferring merit, or extending loving-kindness. Buddhist ethicists need to set forth a way of life and a plan of social action that can help foster the optimal state of affairs. This goes beyond two typical forms of social ethics—being a good person and engaging in charitable activities—and encompasses social action aimed at structural change that would reduce suffering and promote flourishing.

This approach exhibits characteristics similar to Western philosophical ethics. In the parlance of philosophical ethics, we can argue here that Buddhists have a type of duty; they “ought to act in ways that reduce suffering” (in some cases to promote their own awakening). In this re-

spect, Buddhist ethics takes on a deontological coloring. In addition, we can argue from such texts as Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* that the overarching Buddhist rule of thumb is to act in ways that result in the greatest cessation of suffering for the greatest number of people. Expressed negatively, one should act in ways that cause less net suffering than alternatives, what I have termed elsewhere a "calculus of suffering" (Zen 138). In this respect, Buddhist ethics exhibits characteristics of utilitarianism. And Buddhist ethics, especially in the Therāvada, revolves around eradicating unwholesome mental states and cultivating wholesome states and thereby working toward the goal of *nirvāṇa*.²⁴ In this respect, Buddhist ethics can be seen as a kind of virtue ethic. Interestingly, these three foci parallel three traditional interpretations of the five precepts: as guidelines for how we ought to act, as ways to reduce suffering, and as a program for restraining and purifying the mind and the actions that emerge from the mind.

I offer this critical reflection on methodological issues in contemporary Buddhist ethics as a prolegomenon to the construction of the kind of rigorous, systematic ethical stances that have been lacking in the theory and praxis of "engaged" Buddhism thus far.

Notes

1. Specifically, they draw from such doctrines as interrelational arising (*pratītyasamupāda*), emptiness (*sūnyatā*), no-self (*anātman*), awakening, non-duality, and the Five Precepts.
2. Here the translation that can present problems is "no-self" as opposed to the more accurate rendering, "no-soul."
3. Many interpreters treat karma primarily as a principle of cause and effect in the external world (as in "that which goes around comes around") rather than as a descrip-

tion of the impact that mental states and actions have on one's volitional formations or dispositions (Skt. *samskāra*).

4. It is important to note that some Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism reject this representation of Buddhist epistemology as inaccurate and/or unintelligible.

5. Even if it does not, as the rhetoric would have it, open up a direct, unmediated mode of experience that runs counter to what Kant claimed about experience.

6. As Ichikawa Hakugen, Brian Victoria, and I have outlined, ostensibly enlightened Zen masters displayed distinct parochialism and belligerence during World War II. This fact presents an interesting challenge to Zen ethical discourse: either those masters were not awakened, which calls into question rhetoric about Zen lineages and the certification

(*inka*) of Zen masters therein as awakened, or the traditional claim that awakening immediately and automatically equips the awakened person with wisdom and compassion needs to be rejected or revised.

7 In an article about interfaith dialogue I once wrote,

Is there not a tendency to lift our respective heroes, whether Dogen or Luther, out of their historical contexts and portray them as universal thinkers? One sees this especially on the Buddhist side, which often offers up retrospectively-constructed and largely sanitized images of figures like Dogen and Shinran as being universal thinkers free from such popular religious practices as divination, exorcism, ancestor worship, or prayers to the local tutelary gods. This holds for the Christian side as well, where in interfaith dialogue one will hear much about Luther's notions of justification but little about his denunciation of peasant uprisings in the 1520s or his tirades against Judaism in the 1530s. ("Masao" 352)

8. Though some Sanskritists might argue that "dependent origination" or "dependent arising" is a more literal and faithful translation of *pratītya-samutpāda*, I am rendering it here as "interrelational arising" to highlight the facet of interrelationship and, for the

reasons discussed above, to avoid the word “dependent” (and, by extension, “interdependent”).

9. Whether the Five Precepts, the Ten Precepts, or such recent reformulations of the precepts as the fourteen Tiep Hien “mindfulness trainings.”

10. See his “Buddhist Environmental Ethics and Detraditionalization: The Case of Eco-Buddhism,” *Religion* 25 (1995); “Causation and Telos: The Problem of Buddhist Environmental Ethics,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 1 (1994); and “How Environmentalist is Buddhism?” *Religion* 21 (1991).

11. A further issue hanging over this is the question of whether Engaged Buddhists are developing Buddhism or, as some critics claim, distorting it or watering it down. Here, too, we encounter the question of what the core of Buddhism might be, of what, exactly, is getting distorted or watered down.

12. If he were alive today, Abe would probably disagree with Suzuki and Glassman, for in a conversation in the early 1980s about the emergent scandal over several Zen teachers’ dubious sexual behavior in the United States, Abe said to me, “If they were awakened, they wouldn’t be doing such things.”

13. The historical Buddha reportedly said, “There are, friend, these three kinds of suffering: the suffering due to pain, the suffering due to formations, and the suffering due to change” (Bhikkhu Bodhi 1299). The first form (P. *dukkhadukkhatā*) is physical pain and anguish over the challenges that life brings; the second (*sankhāradukkhatā*) refers to suffering caused by conditioned dispositions or volitional formations; and the third (*vipariṇāmadukkhatā*) refers to the suffering we experience when things to which we are attached change. Arguably, the second and third types constitute the crux of the first of the Four Noble Truths. I thank John Makransky for directing my attention to the canonical discussion of the three types of *duḥkha*, which in his own writing he renders as “obvious suffering,” “the suffering of ego-conditioning,” and “the suffering of transience” (161-163).

14. I have come to question the vertical-horizontal model for the relationship between religion and society/history. Though *duḥkha* may describe a universal problem, the genesis, tenacity, and resolution of this problem are very much influenced by socio-political factors. Expressed differently, *duḥkha* is not caused or exacerbated solely by some “original ignorance” or innate human tendency to cling.

15. See Stephen Jenkins, “Do Bodhisattvas Relieve Poverty?” In *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, edited by Christopher Queen, 38-49. (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

16. As I have written elsewhere, perhaps this is the most transformative dialogue for Buddhists at present. To some extent, of course, this dialogue has begun, with “engaged Buddhists” like Sulak Sivaraksa, Thich Nhat Hanh, and the Dalai Lama frequently discussing socio-political suffering with religious and non-religious thinkers.

17. This is the fourth of the fourteen “mindfulness trainings.”

18. Buddhist ethicists can learn from the different ways in which strands of their religion have construed this causal connection, even if not systematically.

19. To be rigorous, we must consider whether all people really are entangled in dualistic subjectivity, whether we are all caught up in an assertive, fixated self with the Three Poisons, and the possibility that we fall along a spectrum in this regard.

20. See *The Great Awakening*, chapter three.

21. This would expand the Buddhist construct of ignorance (P. *avijjā*, Skt. *avidyā*) beyond the narrow sense of ignorance of impermanence.

22. See Christopher Ives, “Not Buying in to Words and Letters: Zen, Ideology, and Prophetic Critique.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 13 (2006).

23. *Zen Awakening and Society*, chapter six.

24. As the famous verse in the *Dhammapada* reads, “Eliminate the unwholesome, cultivate the wholesome, purify the mind: this is the teaching of all the awakened ones.”

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Paul F. Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?" In *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue*, edited by Leonard Swidler, John B. Cobb, Jr., Paul F. Knitter, and Monica K. Hellwig. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990.

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Buddhism upholds lofty and demanding ethical values, but recognizes the need to adapt those values to the conditions of the real world. The three mental states on the list are closely related to the three poisons, which are among the most fundamental psychological causes of the cycle of existence and the suffering that comes with it. The three poisons are attraction, aversion and indifference. When we encounter an experience that appears to strengthen and confirm our sense of self, we are attracted to that experience and attempt to prolong or repeat it. When an experience appears to threaten our sense of self, we react with aversion, trying to avoid it or push it away. Any experience that doesn't fall into these two categories

Gayley H., Reimagining Buddhist Ethics on the Tibetan Plateau, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. . Gethin R., Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The Analysis of the Act of Killing in the Abhidhamma and Pāli Commentaries, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2004, Vol. 11. Ives Ch., Deploying the Dharma: Reflections on the Methodology of Constructive Buddhist Ethics, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol. 15. Ives Ch., Resources for Buddhist Environmental Ethics, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2013, Vol. 20. Ives Ch., What's Compassion Got to Do with It? Methodology of Constructive Buddhist Ethics Christopher Ives *. Abstract. Recent Buddhist ethical argumentation has been hampered by a set of. methodological issues. The Buddhist soteriological scheme offers at least a partial solution to several of those issues, and more importantly, provides a framework for more rigorous and systematic formulations of Buddhist ethics. In recent decades "Engaged Buddhists" have been responding to a range of ethical issues. This search in Buddhist sources for support of ethical stances deriving largely from non-Buddhist ethical and political systems has been critiqued by Ian Ives, Deploying the Dharma 30. Harris in several articles about recent attempts to advance a Buddhist. environmental ethic.10. Dharma, key concept with multiple meanings in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. In Hinduism, dharma is the religious and moral law governing individual conduct and is one of the four ends of life. In addition to the dharma that applies to everyone (sadharaṇa dharma) "consisting of truthfulness" Be on the lookout for your Britannica newsletter to get trusted stories delivered right to your inbox. Dharma. Quick Facts. Buddhist ethics are traditionally based on what Buddhists view as the enlightened perspective of the Buddha, or other enlightened beings such as Bodhisattvas. The Indian term for ethics or morality used in Buddhism is *Dharma* or *sāma* (Pāli). *Dharma* in Buddhism is one of three sections of the Noble Eightfold Path, and is a code of conduct that embraces a commitment to harmony and self-restraint with the principal motivation being nonviolence, or freedom from causing harm. It has been variously described as