QUESTIONS IN THE MAKING

A Review Essay on Zen Buddhist Ethics in the Context of Buddhist and Comparative Ethics

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ABSTRACT

In reviewing four works from the 1990s—monographs by Christopher Ives and Phillip Olson on Zen Buddhist ethics, Damien Keown's treatment of Indian Buddhist ethics, and an edited collection on Buddhism and human rights—this article examines recent scholarship on Zen Buddhist ethics in light of issues in Buddhist and comparative ethics. It highlights selected themes in the notional and real encounter of Zen Buddhism with Western thought and culture as presented in the reviewed works and identifies issues and problems for further consideration, in particular, problems of comparative and cross-cultural understanding and the articulation and redefinition of Zen Buddhist tradition.

KEY WORDS: *human rights, precepts, virtue theory, Zen Buddhist ethics*

MORE THAN ANY OTHER FORM OF BUDDHISM IN THE WEST, Zen has appealed to the imagination of popular culture as well as to the intellectual elite. Tennis stars, NBA coaches, and psychoanalysts have been styled "Zen masters" of their respective professions, and books on the Zen of drawing, the Zen of recovery, and even the Zen of golf continue to populate the shelves of booksellers long after the swell of interest in the sixties and the seventies (Ash 1993; Franck 1993; Jackson and Delehanty 1995; Wallach 1995).

As an academic field, research on Zen Buddhism was long dominated by philosophical and theological interests focused on the soteriological significance of religious awakening and related studies in intellectual history. The work of D. T. Suzuki, the pioneer who set the tone for Zen studies throughout much of the twentieth century, was still being praised as late as 1986 as the standard against which all other

contributions would be measured (Abe and Harr 1986). Only in the past decade or so have social and cultural analyses of Zen gained prominence through the work of scholars such as Bernard Faure and Will Bodiford (Faure 1991, 1993; Bodiford 1993). Important as Zen has been in defining the image of Buddhism and Asian religion in the West, the study of Zen Buddhist ethics has been conspicuous by its absence. In the last several years, a trickle of significant works dealing with Zen ethics has finally begun to appear along with the emerging literature on Buddhist ethics more generally.

In order to place the scholarly study of Zen ethics in context, it is necessary to examine more general developments in Buddhist ethics. Thus, this review article looks at four recent works, two specifically on Zen Buddhism and two others dealing with larger issues of Buddhist ethics. Christopher Ives's *Zen Awakening and Society* gives a historical and theoretical treatment of developments in Zen Buddhist ethics with particular attention to recent developments in modern Japanese Zen. Phillip Olson's *The Discipline of Freedom: A Kantian View of the Role of Moral Precepts in Zen Practice* offers a Kantian reading of the Soto Zen Buddhism of Shunryu Suzuki, correlating the practice of Zen meditation and precepts with Immanuel Kant's moral law. Damien Keown's *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* seeks to articulate the essence of Buddhist ethics within the framework of its Indian categories. The authors represented in *Buddhism and Human Rights* offer multiple Buddhist perspectives on a pressing issue of contemporary concern.

Common to all four works is the attempt to find Western categories of ethical thought that parallel or resonate with Buddhist thought and therefore provide bridges to cross-cultural understanding and categories for comparative analysis. Implicitly or explicitly, they attempt to articulate the normative basis for contemporary Buddhist ethics. With the exception of *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, they all involve explicit responses to specific historical challenges facing the transmission of Buddhism to the West; and while they thus deal with the actual circumstances of Buddhist history and the contemporary world, their focus is on the theoretical basis for Buddhist ethical practice, the ideal solution to very real practical problems. Taken together, these four volumes provide important insights into issues concerning the normative basis, history, comparative analysis, cross-cultural understanding, and contemporary Western manifestations of Zen Buddhist ethics as questions in the making.

1. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* by Damien Keown

Writing in 1992, Damien Keown states, "The study of Buddhist ethics has been neglected not just by the tradition but also by Western scholarship. . . . Only recently have the signs appeared that this neglect is to be

remedied" (1992, *viii*). Keown's own work is a welcome addition. His focus is on the role of the *śīla*, the moral precepts for monks, nuns, and laity, as they relate to Buddhist soteriology, the goals of enlightenment and nirvana. His work is descriptive and metaethical as he seeks to identify the formal characteristics and the meaning of Buddhist ethics in the larger scope of ethical inquiry. He concludes that Buddhist ethics is a form of virtue ethics and that the practice of the *śīla* is designed to cultivate virtues reflective of the highest reality, nirvana. He finds significant parallels with Aristotle and sees Buddhist ethics as objective, naturalist, and teleological. Two aspects of his argument are of particular note: (1) He treats the status of nirvana in light of what he calls the problematic "transcendency thesis," namely, that nirvana is beyond definition by ethical categories, and (2) he reassesses the role of *upāya*, or skillful means, which often appears to be antinomian and situational in contrast to objective moral prescriptions.

Keown's project is comparative in two senses: He compares Buddhist ethics to Western moral theory—specifically, Aristotelian virtue theory and what he calls the situational ethics of utilitarianism.[1] He also compares Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist ethics and concludes that the latter is the more complete expression of Buddhist ethics.

The book is organized into eight chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter provides a preview of Keown's basic position, in which he rejects a utilitarian interpretation of Buddhist ethics in favor of an Aristotelian one based on virtue theory. Chapters 2 and 6 are devoted to descriptions of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist ethics, respectively. Chapter 3 classifies Buddhist virtues and meditational practices in light of Buddhist psychology. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the role and nature of karma in relation to the goal of nirvana (where karma is understood to be moral actions that have consequences, good or bad). Chapters 7 and 8 return to the tension between utilitarian and Aristotelian interpretations of Buddhist ethics, finding a place for a utilitarian element within the larger framework of virtue theory. The conclusion briefly summarizes the book as a whole.

There are some terminological difficulties. In general, Keown uses "Theravada" to denote ideas represented in the early, Nikaya literature, and "Mahayana" to denote later developments of Indian Buddhism that started to emerge around the beginning of the common era, but scholars

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[1] Keown's characterization of utilitarianism as a situational ethic does not represent the conventional understanding of utilitarianism. He derives it from Joseph Fletcher's situational ethics: "a form of act-agapism in which each ethical decision must be assessed afresh in the situation in which it arises with the goal of maximizing the well-being of one's neighbour" (Keown 1992, 185). A detailed critique of Keown's problematic conjunction of act-utilitarianism and act-agapism is beyond the scope of this essay.

of Buddhist studies will note that this may be problematic, since historically the Theravada is just one of the eighteen diverse early schools of Buddhism that were rejected as insufficient by the numerous schools of the later Mahayana. (Keown's use of the terms "Hinayana" and "Mahayana" is also problematic, as the former, meaning "lesser vehicle," was and is a nomenclature used derogatorily by followers of the latter, the "great vehicle.") In some cases, Keown makes it clear that he is referring to Theravada in particular, and not, in general, to earlier non-Mahayana developments, but he also uses the Theravada as representative of all schools based on the early Nikaya literature. Keown is a learned scholar conversant with both the Nikaya literature and Indian Mahayana, but he also shows his own normative orientation, favoring certain Mahayana ideals. While there is nothing wrong with *making an argument* that the Mahayana offers a more comprehensive or superior understanding, Keown fails to make clear his presuppositions in using nomenclature and in some of his theoretical reflections. Nevertheless, his work is valuable insofar as he carries out a detailed analysis of Buddhist ethics in light of theories found in the literature of both Nikaya and Mahayana Buddhism.

1.1   *The transcendency thesis*

Keown offers an extended critique of the transcendency thesis, set forth by such scholars as Melford Spiro and Winston King. They have described two forms of Buddhism: *kammatic* (Pali: *kamma*; Sanskrit: *karma*) and *nibbanic* (Pali: *nibbana*; Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*). They hold that the former is concerned with the karmic accumulation of ethical merit, which is said to be the focus of laity; it is therefore secondary to (transcended by) the latter, which is concerned with the ultimate goal of transcending this world, the focus of monks (Keown 1992, 9–10). Spiro claims that there is a radical disjunction between the two types of Buddhism:

> From an ontological point of view, Buddhism postulates the existence of two planes which, like parallel lines, *never meet*. On the one hand there is *saṃsāra* [the world of karmic suffering], . . . on the other hand there is nirvana [the transcendence of suffering and of karma]. . . . These two planes are not only ontologically discontinuous, they are also hedonistically dichotomous. The former is the realm of unmitigated suffering; the latter is the realm of the cessation of suffering [Spiro 1982, 68, quoted in Keown 1992, 88].

King, while less radical than Spiro, still sees a qualitative difference between the two realms that leaves Buddhism with an ambiguity and tension internal to its logic:

> Thus in the end the ethical significance of Kamma is ambiguous. Or perhaps it is better to say that its ethical significance is relative, not absolute. For kammic evils are only temporary evils, and kammic goods only half-way houses on the way towards the truly good. Kammic goodness is the necessary but not sufficient condition for either the saintly life or the attainment of Nibbana. True perfection is transcendent of all kammic values [King 1964, 67, quoted in Keown 1992, 89].

The transcendency thesis has its roots in European interpretations of Buddhism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, interpretations that presented the Buddhist goal of nirvana as life denying and nihilistic. Although simplistic reductions of Buddhism to such nihilistic views are relatively uncommon today, two problems still remain: the relation between karma and nirvana, and the ethical status of the latter. In fact, these problems are central not only to Keown's book but also to the other two monographs reviewed here: If nirvana transcends all karmic distinctions between good and evil, then what possible basis for ethics could there be in Buddhism? If nirvana is the highest goal, then life in this world seems to be devalued and the ethical life would seem to be of merely secondary importance in Buddhism.

Keown responds to these challenges in two ways: first, by raising questions as to whether the arguments of Spiro and King are internally consistent in their application of anthropological method and their textual interpretation; and second, by presenting his own interpretation of Buddhist ethics. While internal inconsistencies in the works of Spiro and King are important and Keown's counterarguments are strong, the significance of Keown's work rests upon the alternative that he provides, an alternative that is based on five main ideas:

1. the definition of nirvana as the *summum bonum* of Buddhist life, its ultimate *telos*;
2. the definition of nirvana not merely as an end state attained at the time of physical death but also as the fount of values that sustains the Buddhist ideal of religious life throughout the course of practice;
3. the continuity of karmic good works and the eventual full attainment of nirvana;
4. the identification of moral precepts, the *śīla*, as the concrete basis for Buddhist self-cultivation;
5. the resolution of the tension between the practice of the *śīla* with the Mahayana Buddhist notion of *upāya* (skillful means), which at times appears to allow the suspension of moral codes.

In addition, he identifies key elements of Buddhist psychology as the basis for the moral agency necessary for progress toward the *telos* of nirvana and the expression of ethical values reflective of nirvana (nibbanic values).

1.2   *Nirvana, śīla, karma, and upāya*

The arguments Keown presents are detailed, based on an abundance of textual references, and closely argued. Some of the ideas are fairly straightforward, such as the view that the historical Buddha Śākyamuni established a paradigm of ethical action as much as of religious knowledge (1992, 31) and that nirvana is twofold, both an event in life, as exemplified by Śākyamuni's enlightenment at the age of thirty-five, and the final enlightenment at the end of life, the *parinirvāṇa* (1992, 91).

Others are more complex, such as the notion that the attainment of nirvana in this life involves a sense of completion, but not a discontinuity from the path of karmic self-cultivation through the practice of the precepts. For one who has attained nirvana and *arhathood* (enlightened sainthood) in this life, "it is unnecessary to [any longer] guard against misdeeds of body, speech, and mind" (1992, 114). Such an enlightened being enjoys the fruits of practice and continues to live according to the precepts without fear of falling back. Even those who have not attained such an exalted state, however, participate in the goods of nirvana insofar as they subscribe to and practice the precepts. In this sense, the difference in ethical states, pre- and post-nirvana, is one of degree, not one of kind. One continues to purify one's ethical state until one is no longer subject to the negative effects of destructive karma. The enlightened are said to have gone beyond good and evil because they have gone over to the side of good (Pali: *kusala*; Sanskrit: *kuśala*) and are thus beyond the *conflict* between good and evil (1992, 124). If there is any real sense in which both good and evil are actually transcended, it occurs only with the attainment of *parinirvāṇa* at the time of physical death, when one leaves behind earthly personhood or moral agency and there is nothing left to be reborn in future lives.

The Mahayana notion of *upāya*, or skillful means, allows a certain degree of flexibility. The *bodhisattva*, the religious virtuoso, makes adjustments based on changing circumstances and, more important, balances the disciplined practice of austerities with compassionate action, though the latter at times requires one to transgress the precepts in order to reach out to suffering sentient beings. However, Keown emphasizes that even textual sources that recognize the necessity for a flexible view of the precepts insist on close adherence to the traditional monastic ideal. The more extreme antinomian behavior he either places in a separate category of *upāya*, as teachings to be taken in a symbolic rather than a literal sense (1992, 159–63), or classifies as aberrations not characteristic of authentic Buddhist practice.

According to Keown, the practice of the precepts that brings about the karmic purification of one's moral character requires a cultivation of both intellectual and moral virtues that is similar to the Aristotelian

understanding of *virtus*. The elimination of confusion (Pali: *moha*) and ignorance (Pali: *avijjā*; Sanskrit: *avidyā*) is closely allied with the elimination of emotional complexes (Pali: *anukampā*) and misplaced desire (Pali: *taṇhā*) (1992, 72–82). Like Aristotle, the good Buddhist seeks, indeed requires, a proper balance of reason and desire, of intellect and emotion, to achieve that happy state that partakes of nirvana in this life, not as an escape from the realm of ethics, but as the perfection of the ethical ideal. There are, then, definite Buddhist virtues that correspond to the structure of mind and the path to nirvana, virtues that are cultivated and expressed through the practice of the precepts, the *śīla*.

Keown's work provides a much needed corrective not only to the erroneous views of such scholars as Spiro but also to Buddhist studies' tendency to overemphasize the cognitive dimension of enlightenment at the expense of the moral dimension of the precepts. The comparisons with Aristotelian virtue theory provide a bridge for Western audiences and a significant point of departure for further work in comparative ethics.

1.3   *Questions*

At the same time, Keown's work raises a number of questions that require further reflection: Whose Buddhism does he describe? What are the relations among moral agency and no-self (Pali: *anatta*; Sanskrit: *anatman*) and emptiness (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*)? What is the relation between Buddhist ethics and non-Buddhist ethics, as defined or implied by classical Buddhist literature?

The first of these questions was implied in my earlier reference to his use of the terms "Mahayana" and "Hinayana." To what extent is Keown's work truly representative of a pan-Buddhist perspective on Buddhist ethics? Or, for that matter, how representative is it of Indian Buddhist ethics? To what extent does it constitute Keown's own theoretical construction of Buddhism? This question bears not only on the problem of the representation of Asian traditions but also on the role of Western philosophy in his work. Is Keown's representation of Buddhism more a synthesis of Aristotelian virtue ethics and Buddhist ethics than merely a delineation of the latter's formal characteristics and meaning?

This last question leads to the problem of no-self and emptiness. In the Buddhism of both the Nikaya and Mahayana literatures, no-self denotes the lack of a fixed, permanent self. In the Mahayana, this idea is extended to all things and beings: reality is devoid or empty of any discursively identifiable essence. Attachment to intellectual constructs and to preconceptions imposes a conceptual filter that distorts reality. When human beings become free from attachment to these preconceptions, they are freed from ignorance and suffering. In the realization of emptiness, a deeper world of understanding and experience opens up beyond

the artificial boundaries that alienate human beings from one another and the world. Yet, if there is no self, defining moral agency becomes problematic. Keown sidesteps the difficulty by simply asserting that Buddhism offers ample grounds for speaking of personhood without having to justify the attribution of moral agency (1992, 19). While this seems self-evident at one level, a consideration of no-self and, in particular, emptiness may have important ramifications for Buddhist ethics, especially as regards the nature and role of compassion. There can be a significant difference between ethical acts that are based on the assumption that one independent moral agent is acting upon another and those that are based on the assumption that two sentient beings are related to one another in terms of emptiness. In the latter case, the sense of shared identity forms the basis for compassionate action. Aristotle did not make this kind of compassion the centerpiece of his virtue ethics, but historically Mahayana Buddhism has espoused an ideology of compassion.

Finally, Keown's study of Buddhist ethics, based as it is on the *śīla*, focuses on a short list of the most important precepts, in particular those that he sees as being universal, such as the precepts against killing, lying, and sexual misconduct. The lists of precepts found in early Buddhist literature offer as many as 250 precepts for monks and 350 for nuns. These lists deal not only with precepts that bear directly on the individual cultivation of religious virtue but also with precepts bearing on the maintenance of order within the *sangha*, as well as on a code of professional ethics that has to do with the image of the monastic community in relation to the lay community, Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Buddhism in ancient India emerged within a multicultural, multireligious milieu, and precepts dealing with the ordination of monks and nuns, relationship to family members, and the appearance of impropriety (regardless of actual ethical conduct) were all part of a system that regarded the institutional, organizational, and social life of the Buddhist community as inseparable from the pursuit of nirvana. While it may be meaningful to isolate specific aspects of the *śīla* for the purpose of undertaking the kind of study carried out by Keown, these questions are very much alive for Buddhists today—as can be seen by the other works reviewed here.

2. *The Discipline of Freedom* by Phillip Olson

Like Keown, Phillip Olson is concerned to delineate Buddhist ethics in terms that are intelligible in the context of Western ethics. Rather than turning to Aristotelian virtue ethics as the basis for his cross-cultural understanding, however, he looks to Kant's deontological ethics. More specifically, he compares the Zen Buddhist practice of seated meditation, or

zazen, as found in the work of twentieth-century Japanese Zen teacher Shunryu Suzuki, with Kant's moral theory, as found in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. The intent of Olson's comparison is simple: to show that Suzuki's practice of *zazen* is identical to the practical realization of Kantian moral law.

There are some obvious problems with this comparison. Suzuki was a religious teacher, not a philosopher or systematic religious thinker; Olson's primary source for his understanding of Suzuki is *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, a brief, informal collection of edited sermons on Zen Buddhism, addressed to a particular audience: Suzuki's American followers. Although Olson qualifies his presentation of Suzuki, he nevertheless takes Suzuki's understanding to be representative of Japanese Sōtō Zen practice (1993, *xv–xviii*), which traces its roots to the thirteenth-century Zen master Dōgen Kigen. In order to establish this genealogical continuity, Olson includes an appendix in which he outlines an argument for Dōgen similar to the one he makes for Suzuki. However, by his own admission, he is limited by his lack of background in Dōgen and Sōtō Zen studies and the Japanese language.

Given his lack of scholarly preparation and the attendant risk of overlooking vast differences in culture, intellectual history, and philosophical assumptions, why would he choose to make such a strong comparative claim? One answer lies in his personal commitment to the American Zen Buddhist community founded by Suzuki. Olson tells us that "an underlying purpose informing this attempt to interpret Zen practice from a Kantian standpoint is that of developing a sound philosophical basis for the criticism of 'wild' Zen Buddhism in America" (1993, *xviii*). Numerous American Zen centers in the 1970s and 1980s were rocked by "wild" scandals—financial, political, and sexual. One of the earliest and most infamous cases resulted in the dismissal of Richard Baker from the abbotship of the San Francisco Zen Center. Olson's theoretical project, then, is directed at the very real practical problem of corruption in Zen Buddhism, especially the corruption of Zen teachers, and Olson offers a kind of Kantian response to a variation of the transcendency thesis described by Keown.

2.1 *A deontological reading of Zen practice*

Despite significant problems (to be dealt with in sections 2.2 and 2.3), Olson's attempt to establish the deontological basis for Zen practice is closely argued and provides important insights into the moral dimension of Zen Buddhism and problems of cross-cultural appropriation.

Olson formulates his basic claim as follows: "The practice of *zazen*, when correctly performed in accordance with Shunryu Suzuki's account of this practice, is performed solely as a means to the end of realizing the

requirements of moral law, as Kant understands these requirements"
(1993, 9). This claim, in turn, is based upon two supporting theses,
around which the book is structured: "*Zazen* practice, according to
Suzuki, is a necessary means for realizing the requirements of moral
law, as Kant understands these requirements" (1993, 24). "In order to
practice *zazen* correctly, according to Suzuki, my sole intention in per-
forming that practice should be that of realizing the requirements of
moral law, as Kant understands these requirements" (1993, 69).

In order to justify these claims, Olson relies on four basic correspondences:

1. The Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon corre-
   sponds to the Zen Buddhist distinction between form and emptiness.
2. Suzuki's notion of original mind or buddha nature corresponds to
   Kant's moral law.
3. Kant's understanding of the autonomy of the moral will over against
   the heteronomy of the senses corresponds to the function of *zazen* as
   a practice that frees one from selfish desires.
4. *Zazen* as a practice that has no essential connection to particular
   ritual forms corresponds to the Kantian practice of the moral law as
   universally applicable.

These correspondences allow Olson to claim that both *zazen* and Kantian
moral law reflect a twofold structure of mind as the basis of a universal
moral law that is independent of any particular concrete forms of prac-
tice, such as seated meditation.

At first glance this seems unlikely. How can one deny the centrality of
seated meditation practice in a sect of Zen Buddhism known for placing
special emphasis on the importance of *zazen*, as expressed in the idea
of *shikan taza*, "just sit"? Furthermore, like much of the rest of East
Asian Mahayana Buddhism, Suzuki stresses the nonduality or unity of
form and emptiness; since Kant emphasizes the unknowability of the
noumenal realm in itself, the two thinkers seem to stand in direct oppo-
sition to one another regarding the relation between the two realms or
levels of reality, with Suzuki seeing unity where Kant sees inevitable
disjunction.

Olson's resolution of these issues rests upon the way in which he
conceives the role of reason in relation to phenomena and noumena,
form and emptiness. On the one hand, for both Suzuki and Kant, the
realm of the "empty noumenon" (Olson's term) assures the freedom of
consciousness and the free will of moral agency that cannot be deter-
mined according to the laws of the phenomenal, empirical world. On the
other, discursive reason becomes aware of its own limits, speculation
beyond which is problematic. Thus, reason simultaneously becomes
aware of its limits and of the existence of that which lies beyond itself.

Olson makes two important points supporting this idea. First, form and emptiness are not two separate realities and cannot even be described as existing in separate realms in any metaphysical sense (1993, 96–103). They are genuinely two facets of one reality, just as phenomenon and noumenon are for Kant. Second, the recognition of the limits of reason and of the exercise of the autonomous moral will frees the acting subject from the heteronomy of the senses, just as the realization of emptiness releases the Zen practitioner from delusory ego-centered consciousness. Emptiness is so named because it is devoid of any discursively identifiable attributes; as the noumenal ground of morality and personhood, it is the original (that is, noumenal) mind or buddha nature.

Building on this, Olson claims it is the sense of an unknowable noumenon (unknowable to discursive consciousness, at least) as the ground of action that infuses the sensible world with moral meaning: When I see someone helping another person to cross the street, I see this action as more than the mechanical movements of a programmed robot because I recognize its potential moral significance even though I cannot see this directly (1993, 93–95). When the Zen practitioner engages in seated meditation, it is understood to be the manifestation of that person's ethical striving to be free from the preoccupation of sense distractions and not merely the contortion of a flexible body or some psychological state of calm that can be quantified by a measurement of brain waves. Empirical sense data thus constitute the sensible signs of necessary and universal moral laws, laws that are rational though their ground remains unseen (1993, 98).

This enables Olson to argue that no single form of practice, even seated meditation, is intrinsic to Suzuki's conception of Zen practice. *Zazen*, in its true sense, remains invisible to discursive consciousness; nevertheless, all activities of this world, as sensible signs or as appearance, should conform to the moral law. The function of seated meditation can be likened to the practice of more conventional virtues such as honesty. Its outward manifestation can be taken as a sign of ethical integrity but not as proof. The seated meditation posture is regarded as conducive to an upright moral life, but it is no more a guarantee of that than the outward appearance of honesty is proof of actual honesty in conformity with the moral law. For Olson, seated meditation exemplifies the practical realization of the universal moral law; in that sense, the practice of each precept, each ritual, is *zazen*. Ideally, all actions are *zazen*.

Conversely, to reduce a person's actions to links in the chain of cause and effect within the empirical world is to deny her moral agency. For example, to say that a person suffering from gender bias is merely the victim of an oppressive patriarchal economic and political system is to deny her her personhood. Her free consciousness and free will must stand outside the chain of empirical causation and on the noumenal

ground of her selfhood as "first, *unconditioned* cause of [her] actions" (1993, 93). Then she is able both to recognize the existence of oppressive conditions and to fight back. Olson suggests that this unconditioned ground is none other than emptiness, and we can see that it is similar to Keown's notion of nirvana as the basis of ethical values, or what he calls "nibbanic values." Thus, Olson makes the case that when Suzuki and others talk about the practice of *zazen* as free from goal-oriented thinking or dualistic notions of good and evil, they are referring to the noumenal unconditional basis of the moral life, which is not subject to the relative, conventional, and therefore unreliable terms of the phenomenal world.

One advantage the deontological reading of Zen ethics has over the Aristotelian virtue interpretation is that it resonates with the "sudden teaching." Quite early in Zen history, from the time of the ascendancy of the *Platform Sutra of Hui-nêng* in the seventh century (Yampolsky 1967), the sudden path to enlightenment came to be regarded as superior to the gradual cultivation of Buddhist virtues, and the sudden path eventually became the norm for virtually all East Asian schools of Buddhism.[2] Insofar as the moral law is fully instantiated in every situation calling for a moral decision, the all-at-once character of Kant's deontological ethics makes for a better fit with Suzuki's emphasis on each moment of practice as a moment of enlightenment (Suzuki 1970).

As an antidote to "wild" Zen, Olson's Kantian reading of Zen provides a strong argument for identifying the moral dimension intrinsic to Zen Buddhist practice. Olson makes clear that Suzuki's advocacy of nondual emptiness free of discursive, goal-oriented thinking does not condemn him to the Zen version of the transcendency thesis and, thus, does not compel him to justify corrupt Zen masters who rationalize their "wild" ways by locating enlightened Zen consciousness outside the confines of conventional morality. Rather, true Zen consciousness requires a person to examine each decision and each action for integrity of consciousness and will, so that he is free from the heteronomous influence of the sensuous world. Such a person lives in the world but is not of it; such a person transcends conventional morality, which is often tainted by impure motives and seeking, and instead lives in accord with the purity of the noumenal ground.

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[2] The sudden path is deemed superior to the gradual because the latter is still caught up in the discursive understanding of reality, whereas to realize enlightenment it is necessary to break through the limits of discursive understanding. The term "sudden" carries three connotations: all at once, instantaneously, and here and now. The difference between the sudden and gradual paths is most clearly illustrated in the exchange of poems in the *Platform Sutra* (Yampolsky 1967, 130–32).

Kant's critiques of reason are often described as establishing the rational grounds for belief, but Olson emphasizes that both Kant and Suzuki establish the rational grounds for moral and religious praxis.

As compelling as Olson's arguments are (the foregoing outlines only the key points in his overall discussion), there remain a number of problems with this Kantian reading of Zen that can be grouped into two areas of concern: problems of internal consistency and larger contextual issues.

2.2   *Problems of internal consistency*

There are a few areas where internal consistency becomes an issue in Olson's work. Three in particular are of note.

First, in his brief discussion of God, Olson defines God as "one with everything" and as synonymous with the noumenal self (Olson 1993, 149–52). Such an immanent conception of divinity may not be entirely excluded by the ideas contained in *The Critique of Pure Practical Reason*, but the later development of Kant's notion of radical evil makes it difficult to sustain such a view of God through the entirety of his corpus; if human beings are separated from God by radical evil, then the possibility of immanent unity with God is called into question. Also, no matter how elusive the noumenal realm may be to discursive consciousness, Kant's God is not empty in the same way that Suzuki's emptiness is. Notions such as "original mind," "buddha nature," "nirvana," and "emptiness" are used provisionally as well as synonymously; no one notion takes precedence over the others in the way that God seems to for Kant. Thus, Kant would be hard-pressed to say, with Suzuki, that one must believe in absolutely nothing (Suzuki 1970, 116), that if one were to place one's faith in any discursive idea, one would fall into the error of reifying phenomenal distinctions.

More importantly, Olson's attempt to equate Kant's noumenal realm with emptiness by calling it the "empty noumenon" overlooks a fundamental difference between Suzuki's Zen practitioner and Kant's moral agent. Although both are concerned with ethical well-being, the former achieves the realization of the oneness or emptiness of reality while living in the world of phenomenal distinctions; the latter defines the distinctively human category of morality in terms of the independent autonomy of rational agents.

Another question concerns the status of nonhuman beings. For Suzuki's Zen Buddhism, manifestations of emptiness are to be found not only in nonhuman animals but also in nonsentient entities, such as mountains and waterfalls. Are these entities capable of following the moral law? To what extent are they ends in themselves?

2.3   *Contextual issues*

In addition to the problem of scholarly background alluded to earlier, there are other issues of contextual understanding. As with Keown, we must ask to what extent Olson's Kantian Zen is his own construction and to what extent it provides a fair representation of Kant and, in particular, Suzuki. If Suzuki's Zen and Sōtō Zen generally can be reduced to the terms of Kant's critical philosophy and if there is nothing specific about the actual forms of practice, such as the seated meditation that is thought to be essential to Zen Buddhism, then why bother with Zen at all? Why not simply become a Kantian? If, on the other hand, there are significant differences—and I suspect there are—then these must be made clear.

For example, although both espouse a morality that is lived out in this world, Suzuki goes to great lengths to describe the forms of practice, such as posture and breathing. At the very least, one might say that he emphasizes the importance of embodied realization over intellectual analysis. To whatever extent this may be true of Kant, Kant was also a philosopher who spent much of his time elucidating intellectual problems of logical concern. Whereas Suzuki is concerned that his students embody the correct forms of practice, Kant seeks to derive the correct maxims of morality. Each has his approach to inculcating and internalizing morality, but their approaches differ.

Focusing on the problem of embodied knowledge also brings our attention to bear on the extensive system of ritual practices and monastic regulations that has been integral to the Japanese Sōtō tradition since the time of Dōgen. Detailed codifications addressing everything from rules for partaking of meals and baths to instructions for Zen cooks and the administration of Buddhist temples defines a complex hierarchical religious institution of which Suzuki was a part. As his American Zen community evolved, however, many of the Japanese structures and forms were left behind. Although even Sōtō Zen priests today lament the anachronism and inadequacy of Japanese Zen institutions, some of the difficulties suffered by Zen centers may be attributable to the rapid change Zen institutions are experiencing in the United States, which leaves them with a lack of structure as they undergo the process of cultural adaptation. In this sense, it may be as important to examine the social dimensions of Zen Buddhist ethics as it is to probe, as Olson has done, the philosophical foundations. For example, what are the effects of having both women and men present in American Zen centers, rather than dividing monastic communities into monks and nuns as training centers do in Japan and elsewhere in Asia? Most Japanese monks marry and live conventional family lives, but during their intensive periods of training under a master, segregation of the sexes is still standard

practice. Ethical issues involving Zen and society, however, are better discussed in relation to Christopher Ives's work since he makes them the central focus of his study of Zen ethics.

3. *Zen Awakening and Society* by Christopher Ives

Rather than attempting to identify a single theoretical paradigm for interpreting Zen ethics, Ives provides an overview of the theory, history, recent developments, and future challenges facing Zen Buddhist ethics in social context, both in terms of its internal organization and its relation to society at large. His work is organized into an introduction followed by six chapters. Chapter 1 delineates the core components of the Zen Buddhist path: practice, awakening, wisdom, and compassion. Chapter 2 draws out the ethical ramifications of this soteriological path. Chapter 3 examines the practice of ethics in the history of Japanese Zen Buddhism. Chapter 4 reviews recent criticisms and developments vis-à-vis the relationship between Zen Buddhist thought and action, especially in Japan. Chapter 5 explores areas of Zen ethics in need of expansion, and chapter 6 outlines future possibilities for a Zen Buddhist vision of the social good. Although Ives cites sources as diverse as the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh and the American feminist Zen practitioner Sandy Boucher, much of his work is devoted to an examination of Japanese Zen, in particular the Rinzai Sect with which he is personally most familiar, and which, together with the Sōtō Sect, comprises the majority of Zen Buddhists in Japan.

Until the publication of this work, the representation of Japanese Zen Buddhism relied largely on the examination of its philosophical foundations, especially as found in the work of the Kyoto school. While acknowledging the significance of the work of Kyoto school philosophers such as Nishida Kitarō, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, and Abe Masao, who draw upon continental philosophy, especially German existentialism, to present their vision of a Zen-based world philosophy, Ives raises serious questions about the complex history and contemporary status of Zen ethics. He aims, largely successfully, to present the complexity of the problems facing Zen Buddhists and the multitude of possibilities for responding to them.

3.1   *Grounding ideas in social history*

In chapter 1, Ives presents the Zen path as the breaking out of the "self-entrapment" of dualistic thinking and the overcoming of the alienation of the self-enclosed ego by an awakening to the true reality of the self unbounded by or empty of fixed preconceptions. This is the realization of *prajñā*, nondual wisdom, which fluidly embraces the ever

changing landscape of phenomenal reality without becoming trapped by limited ideas. Since this wisdom of emptiness tends to dissolve the boundaries between self and other, the practice of *karuṇā*, compassion, flows spontaneously out of the sense of identification with the other. This is the bodhisattva path, in which the Zen Buddhist works tirelessly for the good of others, not as separate entities in need of pity but as beings intimately bound up with one's own destiny.

This well-worn definition of the Zen Buddhist path contrasts with Olson's view of the deontological ethic based on the empty noumenon. Whereas Olson's focus on the duty to be faithful to the moral law emphasizes the *accountability* of the ethical self to its own internal standards, Ives's characterization of compassion tends to emphasize the *responsibility* of the self as one who carries the fate of all beings. Likewise, in contrast to Keown's Buddhist who seeks the objective *telos* of nirvana as the highest good, Ives's Zen Buddhist embarks on the never-ending task of relieving the suffering of all beings in the endless ocean of *saṃsāra*.

Zen is said to emphasize, as the requirements of embarking on this path, simplicity of lifestyle, respect for other beings, intimacy with nature, productive manual labor, and self-discipline. Although there is obviously a social dimension to this ethic of wisdom and compassion, the emphasis is on personal transformation as the basis for social transformation; it is characterized by Ives as a *foundational* ethic, insofar as the majority of one's effort is directed at the fundamental cause of suffering lying within the deluded, dualistic self (1992, 3, 39). Awakening to nondual emptiness constitutes the basis for ethical action, and conventional distinctions of good and evil are applicable only insofar as they accord with and effectively convey nondual wisdom and compassion.

Ives argues that this definition, while rooted in traditional discourse, is a modern reformulation (some might argue that it is a modern construction [Faure 1991, 1993]) that does not adequately represent Zen Buddhist ethics as it has been practiced in history, especially institutional history. In chapter 3, Ives gives an outline of major developments in Japanese Zen institutional history, beginning with the twelfth century, when the likes of Dōgen and his contemporary Eisai began to establish the first full-fledged Zen monasteries in Japan. Some of the highlights include the formation of complex relationships of patronage between these monasteries and the nobility and warrior classes that helped to sustain them politically and economically, the establishment of large temple complexes and alliances that generated substantial economies and cultural artifacts and maintained monastic culture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the function of Zen temples and their ecclesia in the feudal society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the rise of nationalistic and militaristic rhetoric in Zen discourse of the early- to mid-twentieth century. Ives takes pains to

point out that this is not a negative history but a complex and ambiguous one. Zen institutions and individual leaders often played key roles in sustaining the cultural, economic, and spiritual well-being of the Japanese at various levels of society, but they were also implicated in problematic and oppressive structures and actions.

In chapter 4, Ives turns his attention to more recent developments, especially the work of the Kyoto school, which many have seen as offering Buddhist responses to the challenges of modernity and Western thought. On the one hand, recent scholarship suggests that philosophers of the Kyoto school themselves have, wittingly or unwittingly, contributed to nationalistic and militaristic rhetoric (Heisig and Maraldo 1995). On the other hand, some have made attempts to speak out against the narrow-minded ideology of the past, and Ives examines in detail the views of two of the figures he identifies, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi and Abe Masao.

According to Ives, Hisamatsu offers a revolutionary vision in which the self-serving interests of both individuals and entire nation-states are dissolved in a more inclusive vision of "all humankind," which renews history from a "supra-historical standpoint" based on the true awakening to emptiness ("formless self") (Ives 1992, 72–82). It is a standpoint that recognizes and embraces the full range of religious and cultural diversity without excluding any aspect of the phenomenal world. Abe expands on the vision of his mentor by articulating the renewal of ethical distinctions in the light of emptiness and by delineating a more inclusive ecological circle in which issues of human rights must be seen as inseparable from the problem of the "human responsibility to the non-human world" (Abe 1985, 256, cited in Ives 1992, 89).

While recognizing the power of these ideas, Ives rightly raises questions about their abstract character: What would the practical implementation of such radical ideas on a wide scale look like, and would it be possible? Ives argues that Hisamatsu's insistence on the need for a radical and thoroughgoing personal transformation overlooks and potentially hinders the positive work carried out by countless "unawakened" individuals on an incremental but significant day-to-day basis.

Ives also presents the work of Ichikawa Hakugen, a Marxist Zen thinker who shares Hisamatsu and Abe's vision of a Buddhist ethic of compassion based on emptiness but who is much more concrete in pointing out the historical abuses of Zen Buddhists and Zen institutions. Ichikawa insists that problematic ideology and practices must be identified before a truly viable Zen can begin to emerge. In *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin (The Buddhists' Responsibility [for Complicity] in the War)*, he identifies specific ideologies, such as Japanese ancestor worship, which have tended to mask and legitimize problematic local agendas (Ichikawa 1970, 150–54). For example, by extolling the loyalty of

previous generations to the state, Zen priests at times masked and legitimized problematic agendas including militaristic policies and actions. Ichikawa argues that the residual effects of these negative policies continue to contaminate Japanese Buddhism.

Ives notes that outside Japan such figures as the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh have begun to articulate principles of peace and nonviolent action based on Buddhist principles. In the sphere of gender and feminist issues, Sandy Boucher has chronicled the work of and the challenges faced by Zen Buddhist women in America.[3]

3.2   *Constructive contribution*

In chapter 5, on the basis provided by the work of the foregoing chapters, Ives redraws the contours of a Zen ethic relevant for postmodernity. Unlike the highly general, abstract notions offered by Hisamatsu, however, Ives proposes a multilevel program in which Zen Buddhists might engage in small acts of individual compassion, participate in grassroots organizations, or work to organize on a larger institutional or social scale. He still sees personal transformation through awakening to emptiness as fundamental to genuinely compassionate social action, but unlike Hisamatsu, he does not see the need for a radical enlightenment experience prior to engagement in social action. Just as Keown proposes participating in nibbanic values all along the path of religious self-cultivation, Ives also believes in the efficacy of Zen wisdom and compassion cultivated on the way to the full realization of the formless self. In this way, Ives seeks to avoid compassion based on a one-sided view of reality. However, because the basis of Zen compassion is so fluid and because tremendous authority is vested in the master in Zen Buddhism, Ives points out the need to articulate more concrete guidelines for legitimate actions on the part of the master, particularly in teacher-student relationships. Like Olson, he is concerned with the false legitimation of "wild" Zen.

Finally, in chapter 6, Ives outlines what he takes to be the key features of a Zen conception of the social good. He points out that Western notions of justice need not be excluded from Zen Buddhism, citing the work of Robert Aitken, who considers working toward social equality in terms of such factors as race and gender to be consonant with Buddhist notions of the interdependence of all beings and things. Since there are no fixed, isolated realities, everything and everyone exists within the constantly changing web of interrelationships. When one sees through the undistorted lens of   *prajñā*, the need to correct

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[3] Since the publication of Ives's work, Boucher has gone on to enlarge her vision of Zen Buddhism and Western women (Boucher 1998, 1999).

oppressive power imbalances should be self-evident; any entity that seeks to dominate reality by obscuring or oppressing the existence of others hides a facet of reality. However, it is not merely a case of force counteracting force, as might be found in some forms of Marxism. One form of power is not used to displace another, nor does one form of power simply counterbalance another; rather, addressing destructive imbalances empowers all those involved, for it takes place as an exercise of, and opens the way to, enlightened consciousness, free of attachment to one-sided views. Ives notes that such a transformation of society must take place not in isolation but within the larger scope of ecological and global transformation; otherwise, improvement in one area may simply take place at the expense of another. Moreover, ecological transformation must not be based on the assessment of material conditions alone but on an ecology of mind that is free from distorting greed and anger.

3.3 *Points for consideration*

These ideas articulated by Ives are not so much Zen ideals but Buddhist ideals that small yet significant numbers of people have begun to pursue at the grassroots level. Moreover, many of these ideas are not unique to Buddhism but have been articulated and preceded by the ethical reflections of other religious peoples. Ives's contribution lies in placing Zen conceptions within the historical context of practices that have not always accorded with ideological claims. For Zen Buddhists to effectively engage in social action, they must not only draw upon tradition and borrow ideas from elsewhere but also integrate these borrowed ideas into their own critical historical sense of tradition so that they can learn from the errors of the past and so that these ideas will truly become their own.

Whereas Keown and Olson emphasize the integrity of forms and thinkers within Asian tradition, Ives emphasizes change and evolution, both as historical fact and as present need in the face of changing social circumstances and new knowledge. While defining a set of core elements foundational to Zen Buddhism, he looks to various sources for inspiration in responding to both internal and external demands. In this sense, he recognizes the continual construction of Zen ethics against the background of historical and ideological continuity. As in the case of the previous authors, we must again ask to what extent Ives's definition of this set of foundational elements is truly representative of Zen Buddhism and to what extent it is his own ideological construction.

As formulations of the outlines of a Zen vision of the social good, Ives's own proposals remain on a relatively abstract plane. Nevertheless, his identification and articulation of strategies for making Zen social ethics

more concrete and responsive in the face of multiple complex challenges is an important and valuable contribution. Research similar to that of Ives, which would place social ethics in the historical context of Chinese and Korean Zen (Chinese: *Ch'an*; Korean: *Sŏn*), would help to provide a more complete account of Zen Buddhist ethics. Also, although Ives does discuss the Sōtō Zen of Dōgen, his consideration of Japanese Zen is based largely on the Rinzai tradition. Although they deal with broader questions of Buddhist thought and history, Jamie Hubbard and Paul Swanson's edited volume on the work of the Critical Buddhism movement and Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* provide most illuminating critiques of ideological and political issues in relation to Sōtō Zen (Hubbard and Swanson 1997; Victoria 1997). Further scholarly works exploring both the complex history of Zen Buddhism and the creative possibilities for social contributions by Zen and other Buddhists have continued to appear since Ives's work, indicating the fruitfulness of his line of inquiry (Faure 1991, 1992; Gross 1998; King and Queen 1996; Kottler 1996; Kraft 1992). One of these is the edited volume on *Buddhism and Human Rights* to which we now turn.

4. *Buddhism and Human Rights*, Edited by Damien Keown, Charles Prebish, and Wayne Husted

Buddhism and Human Rights represents a unique contribution to the literature on Buddhist ethics. Not only is it one of the first publications to consider this prominent topic of global ethical concern from a Buddhist perspective, it is also the result of the first on-line conference in religious studies. The resulting volume contains a wide range of articles, with some on topics as broad as the general compatibility of Buddhism and human rights and others on issues specific to particular regions, such as Tibet. Although there is only one contributor, David Bubna-Litic, who explicitly identifies himself as Zen Buddhist, no other volume on human rights from a Zen Buddhist perspective has appeared to date, and this volume serves as a valuable vehicle for exploring an issue of urgent contemporary concern relevant to Zen Buddhist ethics.

4.1   *Topics discussed*

In addition to the nine conference papers, the volume contains the Dalai Lama's statement on "Human Rights and Universal Responsibility" presented to the United Nations 1993 conference on human rights, Damien Keown's "Bibliography on Human Rights," and one previously published article, Kenneth Inada's "A Buddhist Response to the Nature of Human Rights," which first appeared in *Asian Perspectives on Human Rights*, edited by Claude Welch Jr. and Virginia Leary (1980).

Six of the articles address the general compatibility of Buddhism and human rights. Of these, two emphasize the ways in which Buddhist thought already supports or could be expanded to accommodate human rights: Damien Keown's "Are There Human Rights in Buddhism?" and Jay L. Garfield's "Human Rights and Compassion."

Three authors in addition to Inada highlight the differences between Buddhist thought and contemporary human rights discourse: Craig Ihara's "Why There Are No Rights in Buddhism: A Response to Damien Keown," Peter Junger's "Why the Buddha Has No Rights," and Śantipala Stephan Evans's "Buddhist Resignation and Human Rights."

Of the four other articles, two focus on issues specific to particular countries. In "Buddhism and Human Rights in the Thoughts of Sulak Sivaraksa and Phra Dhammapidok," Soraj Hongladarom compares the views of the well-known Thai social activist Sulak Sivaraksa and his countryman, monk Phra Dhammapidok. In "Human Rights and Cultural Values: The Political Values of the Dalai Lama and the People's Republic of China," John Powers provides historical background and gives a contemporary assessment of human rights in China and in Tibet as they relate to the situation between the two nations. The remaining two articles are topical. In "Buddhist Ethics and Business Strategy Making," David Bubna-Litic draws on the Zen and broader Mahayana Buddhist perspectives of Aitken and Nhat Hanh to critique harmful business practices and to offer Buddhist responses ranging from mindfulness in the workplace to the use of monastic institutions as models for aspects of corporate organization. In "Socially Engaged Buddhism's Contribution to the Transformation of Catholic Social Teachings on Human Rights," Charles R. Strain puts engaged Buddhists such as Nhat Hanh in dialogue with Catholic social teachings. Although Buddhism is relatively new to the discourse on human rights, Strain seeks to show how Buddhists can contribute to Catholic understanding in the mutually transformative process of religious dialogue.

4.2   *The practice of Zen Buddhist ethics*

Human rights represents just one arena of social engagement relevant to Zen Buddhist ethics, yet the diverse topics and perspectives contained in *Buddhism and Human Rights* provide a glimpse of the many challenges and possibilities that await the formulation of a more complete Zen ethics. For the purposes of the present essay, I will focus on the issue of the general compatibility of Buddhism and human rights, especially as discussed by Keown and Ihara.

Keown begins his essay by giving a brief introduction to human rights in Western ethics. Although he goes on to observe that there are no Sanskrit or Pali equivalents for human rights in Indian Buddhism, he

argues that the notion of rights is implicit in Buddhist understandings of what is due between members of traditional society: parent and child, husband and wife, renunciants and laity. In these reciprocal role relations, duty is always accompanied by rights: "If a husband has a duty to support his wife, the wife has a 'right' to support from her husband. If the wife has a duty to look after her husband's property, the husband has a 'right' to the safe-keeping of his property by his wife" (Keown 1998, 21). The rights must be protected so that, ultimately, each person can lead a good, fulfilling life in accord with the Dharma. Although this differs from the Western view that each person has the right to pursue his own goods independently, Keown argues that an ethic of reciprocal duties sets the stage for a full-fledged sense of individual rights in the modern Western sense (Keown 1998, 44).

Ihara concurs with Keown that Buddhist ethics is based more on role responsibilities than individual rights. Being a member of a Buddhist community entails duties toward that community, whether as monk, nun, or layperson. However, Ihara argues that being a member of such a community is more like playing a part in a ballet than having rights in relation to another person (Ihara 1998, 43–45). If a male dancer fails to execute his dance with his female partner, the female partner should not take it as a personal affront to her dignity or violation of her "rights"; rather, he fails to fulfill his role in the *communal* production of the dance. Western human rights, however, are based on the violation of personal integrity or *individual* rights. Ihara accuses Keown of overlooking this fundamental difference between Buddhist role obligations and Western notions of human rights (Ihara 1998, 48–49). He argues that there are many types of duties that do not come with corresponding rights and that, for this reason, one must not underestimate the difference between traditional Buddhist understandings of role obligations and modern Western notions of rights. This does not mean that Buddhist communities should not or cannot incorporate a sense of human rights into their self-understanding, and Ihara points out that Buddhists need to engage in discussions of human rights precisely to explore the possibilities (Ihara 1998, 50).

The practical challenges of trying to adopt notions of individual rights within a Buddhist context are vividly illustrated by the changes facing the Tibetan Buddhist communities in exile. As Powers recounts in his essay, attempts to implement genuine democratic principles among the Tibetans have faced many hurdles:

> Although the new constitution enshrined democratic principles and contained provisions that accord with contemporary international rights standards, the Tibetan people have experienced conceptual difficulties in the practical implementation of that constitution. After centuries of rule by lamas believed to be manifestations of buddhas, the proposal to grant

> effective power to merely human representatives struck many Tibetans as
> a misguided idea, since ordinary beings could be expected to pursue petty
> goals, engage in political maneuvering . . . and sometimes put their own
> welfare ahead of that of the people [Powers 1998, 192].

Karma theory, allocation of authority, and the sense of security afforded
by a cosmic hierarchy all seem to create obstacles to implementing the
egalitarian democratic society that is basic to the notion of rights. What
is interesting is that, despite the difficulties and cultural differences
involved, the Dalai Lama and many Tibetans find that democracy and
human rights have brought positive changes to the Tibetan community
and do not fundamentally contradict Buddhist thought (Powers 1998,
192–93). Whether rights discourse is seen as a natural extension of
Buddhist ethics or an external addition, the fact that at least one
Buddhist community has been able to see its incorporation as a positive
change should signal that it is a possibility worth exploring.

Keown denies that the central Buddhist notion of *pratītya-
samudpāda*, interdependent co-origination, can provide the basis for a
Buddhist response to issues of human rights. However, the Dalai Lama
in his statement on "Human Rights and Universal Responsibility"
makes a number of references to the awareness of interdependence as
integral to a Buddhist sense of human rights (1998, *xx–xxi*). Inada and
Evans also appeal to a Buddhist sense of interdependence in articulating
the basis of human dignity and autonomy as an alternative to Western
conceptions of human rights (Inada 1998, 9–11; Evans 1998, 147–52). It
will be recalled that Ives makes a similar appeal. I agree with Keown
that the idea of interdependence does not by itself lead to the concept of
human rights. However, that does not mean that Buddhist interdepen-
dence is incompatible with human rights, and it certainly does not mean
that *pratītya-samudpāda* is devoid of moral significance. As Evans
argues, true awareness of interdependence should help to prevent one
from abusing others because one would realize that, in abusing others,
one is ultimately abusing oneself (Evans 1998, 150).

Garfield finds a place for human rights within Buddhist ethics. His
basic position is to see rights in a derivative sense—necessary, but sec-
ondary to a foundation of compassion. Compassion forms the basis of the
moral life, but human rights are necessary for extending our natural
sense of compassion so that we are made to consider those who do not
elicit our immediate empathy (Garfield 1998, 122–29). The notion of
human rights provides the basis for moral criticisms and for protecting
the interests of others. It should be noted, however, that Garfield's
notion of natural compassion is not the same as cultivated compassion,
karuṇā, as found in Buddhism. Buddhist compassion is impartial, at
least ideally, and the language of rights is not necessary to bring it

to fruition. Yet, in a global world defined by the language of rights—human rights, individual rights, civil rights—rights discourse is an important and perhaps necessary means of extending compassion. Even Junger, who is strongly opposed to conflating Buddhist ethics with human rights discourse, acknowledges that freedom of religion and freedom of speech are necessary if Buddhism is to flourish (Junger 1998, 82). Cultivated compassion, then, might either be combined with or complemented by rights in order to critique and enhance the practice of compassion within Buddhist culture as well as in relation to the world at large. At the same time, Buddhist thought may be used to critique rights discourse; rights that may be legally allowable or protected (for example, free speech) may not in all instances be conducive to the cultivation of Buddhist compassion or enlightenment.

Ives's discussion of Japanese Zen Buddhism's complicity in the wartime rhetoric of nationalism, Nhat Hanh's Interbeing Order, and issues of gender in relation to Zen Buddhist institutions and Zen teachers all reflect the incorporation of rights thinking along the lines delineated by Garfield. As Sumner B. Twiss suggests, there are important ways in which human rights discourse provides a meeting ground on which diverse traditions and cultures can creatively reconsider dimensions of their own ethical and moral well-being (Twiss 1998).

By making use of the theoretical work of authors in this volume, Zen Buddhists can become more conscious of the changes they make within their own communities as they balance traditional structures and ideals with the need to incorporate Western ideas and practices.

Zen Buddhist institutions in Japan continue to function largely under the same suppositions that defined them in the feudal period. Many American Zen centers have changed so quickly that they have abandoned many of the old Japanese structures without having developed adequate alternatives to fill the resulting vacuum. Both their internal organization and the way that they relate to the concerns of society at large require creative responses that will preserve what they find valuable in traditions handed down from Asia while implementing it in ways that are viable for the contemporary West. Thus, Zen institutions in Asia and the West continue to grapple with contemporary social conditions that call for the rearticulation of a Zen ethics that is coherent and effective in a world vastly different from that of their forebears. The situation of the Tibetan Buddhist community in exile, as well as other sources of ideas and practices, may serve as resources for reflecting upon the kinds of changes that are possible as well as the conflicts that may arise.

5. Conclusion

   Keown's adaptation of Aristotelian virtue theory, Olson's correlation of Suzuki's Zen with Kantian deontological ethics, and Ives's foundational approach, which emphasizes the fundamental transformation of consciousness and personality, all constitute helpful models for articulating the nature and problems of Zen and Buddhist ethics. Other pardigms, such as the feminist theories of relational ethics found in the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nel Noddings (1984), may provide additional resources for conceiving Zen ethics in terms that will be intelligible to Western audiences as well as contemporary Asian societies. In thinking about the possibilities, we must consider not only fundamental philosophical and theological questions, but also the character and status of tradition, institutional practices, and contemporary ethical issues such as human rights. Tradition does not exist without innovation, and the translation of Zen and Buddhist ethics into contemporary terms inevitably involves a certain degree of creative construction. Understanding the issues and questions that must be resolved in the continual process of constructive renewal is essential. Thus, although this essay raises many more questions than it answers, it will have served its purpose if Zen and Buddhist ethics can be seen as questions in the making.

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