



CHAPTER TEN

Mindfulness and Moral Transformation: Awakening to Others in Śāntideva's Ethics

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1. INTRODUCTION: A FLASH OF LIGHTNING IN THE DARK OF NIGHT



In Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Elder Zossima tells a story about his own moral and spiritual development that is recorded by the hero of the novel, his young attendant, Alyosha Karamazov. Prior to becoming a monk, Zossima was a military officer, living an unreflective life, seeking his own pleasure, often cruel to others. Several years into his military service, fearful of losing the freedom and adventure of his bachelor life, Zossima chose not to pursue the noble and intelligent woman to whom he was attracted. When she married a local landowner, Zossima felt humiliated, insulted his rival, and then challenged him to a duel. The night before the duel, Zossima comes home to his room in an ugly mood. For no particular reason, full of anger, he strikes his servant, Afanasy. The servant's face is covered in blood, even as Afanasy, with his hands by his sides, makes no attempt to retreat or block Zossima's blows.

The next day Zossima wakes up and perceives everything differently. Standing at the open window he watches the sun rising, feels the late June warmth, hears the birds singing. While sensing the wondrous beauty of the world, he feels mean and shameful for hitting Afanasy. He falls on his bed, crying, overwhelmed by what he has done, overwhelmed by the miserable life he has been living. Zossima goes to Afanasy, falls on his knees and begs forgiveness. He then goes to the duel, stands and accepts the first shot from his rival—which grazes his cheek—and throws his weapon away. Full of joy, and a sense of love and responsibility for all, Zossima resolves to leave his regiment and become a monk (Dostoevsky 1990: II.6.ii).



There are numerous comparable narratives of awaking to an ethical responsiveness to others in Buddhist literature. For example, in the story of King Maitribala and the five ogres, after experiencing the king's generosity, the ogres are transformed and, according to tradition, become the first five disciples of the historical Buddha in a later life. These are stories of the arising of a moral awareness, the arising of a responsiveness to the needs, sufferings, and desires of others. In a more modest way, we may feel something similar, with acquaintances and colleagues whose vulnerability and experience we sometimes appreciate—pausing in our own projects—as if for the first time.

Early in *An Introduction to the Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, the eighth-century Indian Buddhist author Śāntideva compares these moments to a flash of lightning in the dark of night (*Bodhicar.* I.5), when we are suddenly disrupted from our own preoccupations and become attentive to the needs of others.¹ The compassionate attention to the other is illuminating, like the lightning that momentarily discloses our surroundings. Zossima's sense of shame following his treatment of Afanasy, and for how he had been living, marks both an attention to an other and the recognition of the ways in which he was ignorant about what is truly of value and what is deeply nourishing. Zossima understands how his egoism obscured his perception of the lives of others and darkened the perception of his own life. In Zossima we see a compassionate attention to the other that is liberating; it is the beginning of Zossima's path to freedom from the fear, jealousy, and need for approval and distraction that impelled his pursuit of pleasure, often in the form of exerting his power over others. Zossima's moral transformation, then, is the radical transformation of his own experience from a constricted life of self-cherishing to an expansive understanding and care for others.

The illuminating and liberating ethical acknowledgment of the other's suffering that sometimes arises, like a flash of lightning in the dark of night, shows that the mind is not necessarily caught in the dissatisfaction and moral misperception of self-cherishing. In *Way of the Bodhisattva*, as well as the other extant text attributed to him, *Compendium of Teachings (Śikṣāsamuccaya)*, Śāntideva invites his readers on a path to nourish the spark of liberating attention to others, and to cultivate it. These works are presented as guidebooks on the path from the darkened perception and constricted life of self-cherishing to an awakened life, attentive to the needs of others and at peace with oneself. In Śāntideva's language, this is the path of the *bodhisattva*, the awakened or awakening (*bodhi*) being (*sattva*) who, guided by insight and compassion, works to alleviate the sufferings of others, and in doing so, finds liberation from dissatisfaction and anguish.

This path to awakening, characterized by the cultivation of a caring responsiveness to the needs and desires of others, is a path of moral transformation. Śāntideva's works—like many other Indian Buddhist texts—address the moral significance of our actions and intentions, virtues and vices, feelings and thoughts, rules and character, and our moral experience. Indeed, for Śāntideva, there is moral significance not just in our speech and action, but also in our thinking and qualities of attention. For Śāntideva, it is precisely because the moral so permeates our lives that it does not



make sense to mark off one aspect of our lives and to term it ethics or morality, for there is nothing outside of morality. This does not mean, however, that he does not explicitly reason about the grounds and principles of morality. As Charles Goodman writes:

Of all the productions of the Indian Buddhist tradition, the texts that come closest to a worked-out ethical theory are the two works of Śāntideva: the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, or *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, and the *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, or *Compendium of the Trainings*. In many cases, Śāntideva draws on earlier scriptural sources; but in synthesizing them, he creates a system of substantially greater theoretical coherence. The sophistication, generality, and power of Śāntideva's arguments give him a legitimate claim to be the greatest of all Buddhist ethicists. (2009: 89)

My purpose in this chapter is to present Śāntideva's ethics as it is embedded in his accounts of the *bodhisattva* path of moral transformation and mental discipline. I will begin with a brief historical introduction to the interdependence of morality, concentration, and insight in Indian Buddhist traditions that is the basis of the *bodhisattva* ideal and *bodhicitta*, the awakened mind of wisdom and compassion. I then turn to an explicit discussion of Śāntideva's account of the perfections of generosity, vigilant moral discipline, forbearance, and vigor. Each of these perfections, I argue, involves the cultivation of moral virtues through the development of a stable, attentive, and compassionate mind. This leads to a more explicit discussion of the fundamental role of mindfulness and the perfection of meditative concentration in Śāntideva's ethics. For, according to Śāntideva, mindfulness is the very condition for the possibility of pursuing the *bodhisattva* training. With a stable and attentive mind, it is possible, then, to pursue the perfection of wisdom. Meditating deeply on the wisdom of emptiness, dependent origination, and the distinction between the two truths enables the embodied enacting of this insight in relation with others. Especially important to Śāntideva, this embodied insight allows the aspiring *bodhisattva* to overcome the fundamental delusion of a separate, substantial self that is at the root of our fearful and confused existence. Śāntideva's moral thought has elements of both Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism. However, in the end, I argue, his texts are best understood as meditation manuals that, through skillful means, help practitioners facing different situations and with different challenges overcome obstacles to awakening. Because awakening means cultivating particular embodied, skillful, affective, and cognitive ways of being in the world that involve attending with compassionate care to the needs and sufferings of others, the *bodhisattva* path is fundamentally about moral transformation and the development of moral consciousness.

2. BODHICITTA: A GOOD BEYOND MEASURE

In emphasizing a deep relation between responding to suffering and awakening, Śāntideva is situated in a long-standing tradition of Indian Buddhist thought. In



this tradition, the Buddha is understood as a doctor and his dharma regarded as medicine. According to this therapeutic metaphor, the four noble truths presented in what is said to be his first sermon, and often taken to be the foundation of Buddhist doctrine, can be understood as a diagnosis of an illness, its etiology, prognosis, and a prescription for healing. The first truth is diagnostic: that dissatisfaction and suffering (*duḥkha*) characterize our lives. The second truth is an etiology: that the origin (*samudaya*) of suffering results from craving, typically understood as attachment that is grounded in a delusion of self. The third truth is a prognosis: that the cessation (*nirodha*) of dissatisfaction and suffering is possible. And the fourth truth is a prescription: a path (*mārga*) to the cessation of suffering through practice.

Some Buddhist traditions have understood the path articulated in the last noble truth as constituted by three kinds of practice: good conduct or moral discipline (*śīla*); mental discipline, concentration, attention, and equanimity (*samādhi*); and wisdom, understanding, and insight into the nature of reality (*prajñā*). But, according to these traditions, the three practices are interrelated; indeed, each is necessary for the others. Cultivating capacities for appropriate speech and action requires the cultivation of mindfulness and concentration. We cannot respond to others in caring ways if we react in anger or fear. At the same time, to cultivate mindfulness and concentration requires attending to one's comportment, the ways we engage with others through speech and action, and not being oppressed by remorse for one's past actions, or fears of their consequences. And both concentration and moral discipline are interdependent with wisdom: without concentration there is no possibility for insight into the nature of reality. At the same time, how we understand the world deeply impacts how we engage with others. Most obviously, perhaps, it is ethically relevant whether or not we think some people are by nature inferior to others, or not deserving of our respect. But at a more subtle level, if we understand the ways in which all things arise interdependently we are more likely to have a compassionate attention for others. Thus, wisdom, mindfulness, and moral discipline ought to be understood as three mutually conditioning aspects of a unified path to awakening. But because this path is fundamentally concerned with how we relate to others, it is a path of moral transformation, in which the practitioner becomes increasingly attuned to the needs and pains of other sentient beings.

We see this interdependence between our relations with others and meditative excellence in discussions of the four *brahmavihāras* in the early discourses of the Buddha. The *brahmavihāras* are the measureless states of *karuṇā* (typically translated as "compassion"), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), *maītra* (loving-kindness), and *upekṣā* (equanimity). They are described as states of awareness that arise with advanced meditative practice. Here, it is clear that progress on the path is marked by a concerned responsiveness to the experience of others, taking joy in the joyfulness of others, in a loving-kindness that is open and patient and understanding. Cultivating excellence in meditation, then, leads to a cultivation of attention to others and other oriented virtues.

The path in classical Indian Buddhism is most clearly presented as a way of ethical transformation in the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, the awakening—or awakened—mind of the *bodhisattva*. We see this in the narratives of the previous lives of the historical Buddha, when, having taken a vow to achieve buddhahood, he cultivated generosity, patience, and other moral qualities. These narratives were, in part, a result of the transformation of the historical Buddha from a supreme human being to something more akin to a deity. The *bodhisattva* served as a kind of transitional figure, the one who is on the path from being an “ordinary person” (*prithagjana*) to the complete awakening of a Buddha.

The *Dīgha Nikāya*, and other early Pāli texts, describe multiple buddhas. And with the idea of multiple buddhas, then, there must be multiple *bodhisattvas* on their way to buddhahood. Thus, the meaning of “*bodhisattva*” evolved from Gautama Buddha in former lives to a general category, a universal ideal. This evolution starts already in the early discourses, where scholars such as Jeffrey Samuels and Bhikku Anālayo, for instance, have highlighted the characteristics of the *bodhisattva* ideal and the path to its realization (Samuels 1997; Anālayo 2010). This ideal included making a vow to achieve full awakening; over time this vow was understood to be motivated by compassion for the sufferings of sentient beings. The *bodhisattva*, then, is motivated to awaken in order to skillfully alleviate the pains of others. The idea of the *bodhisattva* path to realize the vow came to include the development of perfections (*pāramitās*)—such as generosity, moral discipline, patience, concentration, and wisdom—that transform minds and bodies defiled by ignorance, aversion, and attachment, into awakened beings. These perfections are presented in postcanonical Theravāda texts, such as the *Cariyāpiṭaka* and the *Buddhavaṃsa*, as well as Madhyamaka and Yogācāra works by Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Śāntideva, and many others.

The *bodhisattva* ideal, then, as Anālayo notes, was “a pan-Buddhist phenomenon that drew followers from most, if not all, of the Buddhist schools, including the Theravāda tradition” (2010: 131). Thus, early texts on the *bodhisattva* path do not indicate a rebellion against Nikāya Buddhism; they were a part of Nikāya Buddhism. These texts, and the associated practices of the *bodhisattva* path, were composed and copied in monasteries where, it seems, one could also choose to follow the path of an *arhat* or a *pratyekabuddha*, and thus not aiming to liberate all sentient beings from suffering (Skilling 2004: 143). Peter Skilling suggests that it was not until later that some Buddhists in their practice and rhetoric, valorized the path of the *bodhisattva* above the others and claimed that everyone on the Buddhist path ought to pursue Buddhahood (2004: 143). For these partisans of the *bodhisattva* path, it was the great (*mahā*) vehicle (*yāna*) to liberation, the Mahāyāna.² At the heart, then, of what became known as “Mahāyāna” Buddhism, is the figure of the *bodhisattva*. And the *bodhisattva* ideal is most fundamentally about a moral transformation, the cultivation of *bodhicitta*, a mind that is insightful, stable, and deeply attentive to the needs of others.

Śāntideva identified as a Mahāyānist when the Mahāyāna had been firmly established as a school and no longer regarded by its adherents as only one of several equally worthy Buddhist paths. Thus, he presents the *bodhisattva* path as

the Buddhist path that is necessary to achieve awakening. This path consists of the cultivation of a mind that is stable, insightful, and compassionate. For Śāntideva, and the tradition in which he is working, this mind is called *bodhicitta*.³

In the first chapter of the *Compendium* and in *Way of the Bodhisattva*, Śāntideva follows the distinction in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* between two kinds of *bodhicitta* (*Śikṣā* 9/§8, *Bodhicar.* I.15). The first form is called aspirational *bodhicitta* (*bodhipraṇidhicitta*), the mind that, motivated by a compassionate responsiveness to the suffering of sentient beings, aspires to achieve awakening and alleviate this suffering. That is, “the Mind resolved on Awakening” (*Bodhicar.* I.15). This mind arises when one is moved by the sufferings of others. But this compassionate attention is not merely a feeling of sympathy. Rather, one is motivated to respond to others and has a sincere intention to cultivate moral virtues, a stable and concentrated mind, and insight so that one can skillfully respond. For Śāntideva, thoughts are important, and he is clear that while this intention alone is insufficient for awakening, it does play a beneficial role, as it orients our comportment in the world (*Śikṣā* 9–11/§8–10).

It is to inspire his readers to generate and deepen their intention to pursue the *bodhisattva* path that Śāntideva devotes much of the first chapters of the *Way of the Bodhisattva* to beautiful descriptions of *bodhicitta*. *Bodhicitta*, in Śāntideva’s words, is a good beyond measure, the only path to enduring happiness (*Bodhicar.* I.26). It is, he writes, drawing on an alchemical metaphor, an elixir that transforms an ordinary person into a Buddha (*Bodhicar.* I.9). It is “a tree that constantly fruits” (*Bodhicar.* I.12). These inspiring descriptions of *bodhicitta* at the beginning of his work reflect Śāntideva’s commitment to the idea that the right intention and the right attitude are necessary for making progress on the *bodhisattva* path. These descriptions, then, are not a “mere preliminary” to the ethics that follows later in the book. Rather, they motivate the aspiring *bodhisattva* and constitute a necessary condition for moral practice.

Having made a resolution, and thereby already begun her radical transformation, the aspiring *bodhisattva* begins to follow the path, and this results in engaged or practical *bodhicitta* (*bodhiprasthānacitta*). This second form of *bodhicitta* is “the Mind proceeding towards Awakening” (*Bodhicar.* I.15). Here the aspiring *bodhisattva* is already cultivating the cognitive and affective orientation to others that enables the skillful response to their suffering. According to most classical commentaries on the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, aspirational and practical *bodhicitta* refer to relative or conventional *bodhicitta*. Indian and Tibetan commentators typically recognize a third form of *bodhicitta* in the text. This third form of *bodhicitta*, according to Prajñākaramati, author of the earliest extant commentary, is “buddhahood: the full comprehension of the fact that all things are without a self-nature, an understanding that follows the complete abandonment of the veils [of mental affliction and confusion]” (*Pañjikā*, p. 195). According to this interpretation, ultimately *bodhicitta* is the wisdom consciousness of an enlightened being, the manifestation of a moral transformation that abandons the aversion and attachment that make us insensible to the sufferings of others.

3. GUARDING AWARENESS: MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND MENTAL DISCIPLINE

To make a vow, in Śāntideva's intellectual and religious context, included a commitment to following through on a collection of practices that actually enabled the realization of the vow. The *Introduction to the Way of the Bodhisattva*, as its title suggests, and the *Compendium of Teachings*, as its author makes clear in the first chapter, are manuals, or guidebooks, that introduce the practices necessary for the moral transformation that is the arising of *bodhicitta*. *Bodhicitta* is developed through cultivating the perfections (*pāramitās*), trainings that transform the mind, making it stable, non-clinging, compassionate, and insightful. Śāntideva presents a path of six perfections: generosity (*dāna*), vigilant moral discipline (*śīla*), patience (*kṣanti*), energy or vigor (*vīrya*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and wisdom or insight (*prajñā*).⁴ Like the eightfold path, the six perfections can be divided into trainings of actions (generosity, vigilant moral discipline, patience, and vigor), concentration (meditative absorption), and wisdom. I will turn first to the perfections associated with action, emphasizing, as Śāntideva does, the ways in which these perfections are both about cultivating particular qualities of mind and about addressing the needs of others.

Śāntideva orders the perfections according to tradition, starting with the perfection of giving, or generosity (*dānapāramitā*). Quoting the *Ratnamegha* at the end of the first chapter of the *Compendium*, he writes that “giving is the *bodhisattva*'s awakening” (*Śikṣā* 36/§34). Why is generosity so significant? It is because giving is both a form of renunciation from objects of attachment and an immediate addressing of the needs and desires of others. Through practicing generosity we loosen our attachment, first to things, but then to the more subtle objects of our clinging, such as our opinions, status, and identities. This attachment is a cause of not only our own suffering, but also our insensibility to the needs of others. Generosity liberates us from this attachment, opening us to the needs of others, and freeing us from being caught up in our things that need to be protected and defended.

As with the following perfections, Śāntideva discusses generosity first and foremost as a quality of mind. Thus, “the perfection of generosity is said to result from the mental attitude of relinquishing all that one has to all people, together with the fruit of that act. Therefore the perfection is the mental attitude itself” (*Bodhicar.* V.10). According to this definition, generosity is primarily about renunciation. Indeed, the perfection of generosity to which the practitioner aspires is a radical renunciation. To give even “the fruit of the act,” in which the *bodhisattva* offers the positive results that might follow in addition to the act of giving, is to give without reserve, outside the economy of exchange.

The practice of giving, however, is not only about renunciation, but also, for Śāntideva, about expressing devotion and respect to those who are worthy. For example, in the ritual that constitutes some of the early chapters of the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, Śāntideva visualizes giving everything imaginable to the buddhas and *bodhisattvas* in whom he takes refuge. And, most importantly, feeling destitute of

objects to give, he writes, “I give my entire self wholly to the Conquerors and to their children” (*Bodhicar.* II.8). In this giving we give up attachment to self, enacting our respect and esteem for buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, and thus embodying and thereby strengthening our confidence in the training.

But Śāntideva is also interested in actually giving to those who are in need. This is expressed most beautifully, perhaps, in his redirection, or dedication, of merit in the final chapter of the *Way of the Bodhisattva*. Here he presents meditations of redirecting merit so all those who are suffering may find solace: that the cold may be warmed, the hungry fed, the fearful calmed. This act of giving, then, is not just about renouncing that which we cherish, or showing appropriate respect, but also about compassionately alleviating the sufferings of others. Indeed, in some of the most moving passages of the text, Śāntideva explicitly offers himself to respond to the needs of others (*Bodhicar.* III.6–21): to be “medicine for the sick” (*Bodhicar.* III.7); nourishment for the hungry (*Bodhicar.* III.8); riches for the poor (*Bodhicar.* III.9); a defender of the weak (*Bodhicar.* III.17); “the boat, the causeway, and the bridge for those who long to reach the further shore” of buddhahood (*Bodhicar.* III.17); illumination for those who are in darkness (*Bodhicar.* III.18); a servant for all those who require service (*Bodhicar.* III.18); and sustenance for all beings who suffer (*Bodhicar.* III.21). These lines express the ideals of the *bodhisattva*: the complete offering of the self, and all one’s possessions and capacities without reserve, to alleviate the sufferings of others.

The second perfection is vigilant moral discipline, or *śīlapāramitā*, a notoriously difficult term to translate. It is often rendered in English as “ethics,” “morality,” or “virtue,” but it also suggests appropriate habits or good conduct. And, as with virtue, it can refer to the qualities of character that result in virtuous practice. However, as Barbra Clayton points out, it would be strange to translate *śīla* as virtue or morality, which would imply that generosity (*dānapāramitā*) or patience (*kṣāntipāramitā*) were somehow not also virtues or did not belong to morality (2006: 75). What then is *śīla* for Śāntideva? It is the disciplined, vigilant observation of acts of body, speech, and mind, and mindfully acting in ways that meet the needs of others.

In both the *Compendium* and *Way of the Bodhisattva*, Śāntideva suggests that *śīla* is cultivated through mindfulness of one’s actions of body, speech, and mind. Indeed, just as he defined generosity as a mental attitude, so Śāntideva defines *śīla* as “the mental attitude to cease from worldly acts” (*Bodhicar.* V.11). Worldly acts are those that are motivated by attachment and aversion to benefit the self. What, then, is the mental attitude that ceases from worldly acts? It is a mental attitude cultivated through a disciplining of actions that liberates the *bodhisattva* from attachment and aversion and thus is not acting based on self-interest in tension with the interests of others. To develop this mental attitude, then, is to practice mindfulness and awareness (*Bodhicar.* V:108; *Śikṣā* 120/§121). This is what motivates Śāntideva’s discussions of rules that give guidance on how to hold one’s eyes when walking about (*Bodhicar.* V:35–38, 80); how to position the body (*Bodhicar.* V:39), even in sleeping (*Bodhicar.* V:96); how to smile when engaging with others (*Bodhicar.*

V:71); etc. Śāntideva's prescriptions, many of which draw on the monastic code, are not intrinsically important or morally obligatory by nature. Rather, they are helpful because they call the mind to attend to even minor daily activities.

For Śāntideva, then, vigilant moral discipline is not primarily about following rules and avoiding what is prohibited. Instead, moral discipline is manifest in our mindful comportment in the world; it is expressed in affective, cognitive, and self-aware dispositions. Because it is primarily about the development of mindfulness, it can be cultivated in any circumstances. Indeed, Śāntideva recommends approaching any situation with the motivation, "How may I practice the discipline of mindfulness in these circumstances?" (*Bodhicar.* VII.73). It would be a mistake, however, to think that Śāntideva is only interested in moral discipline for the cultivation of mindfulness and awareness. He is also concerned with moral discipline that benefits others and is motivated by compassion. Hence, he writes, "One should speak confident, measured words, clear in meaning, delighting the mind, pleasing to the ear, soft and slow, and stemming from compassion" (*Bodhicar.* V.79). Thus, the perfection of vigilant moral discipline, as with the perfection of generosity, is simultaneously a cultivation of mental discipline and moral discipline, a cultivation of mindfulness that is also a caring attention to the needs of others.

Through the practice of generosity and moral discipline the aspiring *bodhisattva* loosens attachment to self and cultivates mindfulness and awareness that enables both a more stable mind and attention to the needs of others. However, Śāntideva notes, the fruits of generosity and vigilant moral discipline are undermined through aversion toward others (*Bodhicar.* VI.1). Aversion—as manifest in hatred (*dveṣa*), anger (*krodha*), repugnance (*pratigha*), and malice (*vyāpāda*)—sets the *bodhisattva* against precisely those she has vowed to help, namely, other sentient beings. Thus, Śāntideva devotes chapter VI of the *Way of the Bodhisattva* and chapter IX of the *Compendium* to the perfection of forbearance, or patience (*kṣāntipāramitā*). Through the cultivation of forbearance, Śāntideva argues, one develops the capacity to respond with benevolent awareness, equanimity, understanding, and compassionate attention. For this reason, Śāntideva claims, "There is no spiritual practice equal to forbearance" (*Bodhicar.* VI.102). Forbearance, he argues, is the antidote to hatred and the key to mental discipline and equanimity required by the aspiring *bodhisattva*.

In his meditations on cultivating forbearance, Śāntideva explicitly draws on fundamental tenets of Buddhist philosophy. For example, he encourages the aspiring *bodhisattva* to reflect on the selflessness of persons, a reflection that will deconstruct the very object of our hatred or anger. If we meditate on the lack of substantial persons, then we are less likely to get upset at someone. Similarly, Śāntideva argues, one antidote to aversion is meditation on dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Dependent origination refers to the way in which all phenomena are dependent on multiple conditions for their existence. Our own anger, frustration, and malice arise, in part, because of a lack of understanding of conditions. By employing the concept of dependent origination Śāntideva hopes to show that the other's actions as well as our own suffering are both dependent on a number of causes and conditions.

If the other who appears at first to be the sole cause of our suffering is moved by anger or hatred, then, Śāntideva claims, she is not freely choosing her actions. If we understand how her actions are one element of an unlimited series of conditioned events we are less likely to feel aversion (*Bodhicar.* VI.24, 33). Indeed, if we are to feel resentment or anger we should focus it not on the other person, he argues, but on the mental defilements that may be causing her to act in hurtful ways toward us (*Bodhicar.* VI.41).

Śāntideva seeks to motivate his audience with the argument that hatred and anger destroy our peace and pleasures, and alienate our friends (*Bodhicar.* VI.3–5). But ultimately, he argues, forbearance as the patient enduring of suffering, the forgiveness of those who harm us, and the mental discipline achieved through reflecting on dependent origination and the lack of a substantial self, leads to mindfulness, awareness, equanimity, and is necessary for the achievement of *bodhicitta*. Indeed, Śāntideva insists, the very obstacles that hinder us provide the necessary opportunities to pursue our training as aspiring *bodhisattvas* (*Bodhicar.* VI.102). “After all,” Śāntideva notes, “a person in need who turns up at a suitable time is not a hindrance to generosity” (*Bodhicar.* VI.105). For this reason, “since he helps me on the path to Awakening, I should long for an enemy like a treasure discovered in the home, acquired without effort” (*Bodhicar.* VI.107). I ought to worship my enemy as the “True Dharma,” for he is the condition for my spiritual development (*Bodhicar.* VI.111). In certain respects, then, my enemies are the equals of enlightened teachers, for they also are necessary conditions for progress along the path (*Bodhicar.* VI.114).

What we see here, as throughout the *Compendium* and the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, is Śāntideva’s method of presenting arguments and meditations to help frame each situation in the way that is most conducive to awakening. If we are suffering, it is an opportunity for practice. And, according to Śāntideva, our own suffering, when understood appropriately, motivates compassion for others who suffer: “The virtue of suffering has no rival, since, from the shock it causes, intoxication falls away and there arises compassion for those in cyclic existence” (*Bodhicar.* VI.21). For Śāntideva, then, the various forms of suffering we encounter are not obstacles that prevent us from speedily accomplishing the path to wisdom; sufferings occasioned by others provide us with the necessary opportunities to realize liberation from attachment and suffering in general motivates us to care about the needs and desires of others. (Śāntideva does recognize that depending on what stage of the path we might be on, some suffering might be beyond our capacity to work with; I address this point in my conclusion.)

Śāntideva makes clear that cultivating the perfections of generosity, moral discipline, patience, and meditative absorption and wisdom requires strength, energetic commitment, and vigor (*vīrya*; *Bodhicar.* VII.1). Perhaps this is why, according to tradition, in his final words the Buddha advised his disciples to practice with energetic discipline, to “strive with vigilance” (*apramāda*). Indeed, vigor is required as a supplement to all the perfections as it enables the their actual practice. Thus, Śāntideva’s discussion of forbearance is followed by his account of the perfection of vigor (*vīryapāramitā*).

Śāntideva defines vigor as “the endeavor to do what is skillful” (*Bodhicar.* VII.2). He opposes vigor to four negative tendencies: laziness or sloth, clinging to what is vile, despondency, and self-contempt or self-doubt (*Bodhicar.* VII.2). He proposes two sorts of antidotes to these obstacles to progress on the path, cognitive and affective. First, there are ideas to motivate the aspiring *bodhisattva* in her progress. For example, to counteract sloth—the laziness of indulgence in pleasures, sleep, dependence on others, and an apathetic response to the sufferings of dependent existence (*Bodhicar.* VII.3)—Śāntideva recommends meditation on the sufferings of cyclic existence, of the inevitability of death (*Bodhicar.* VII.4–13), and of a human birth as a precious opportunity for practice (*Bodhicar.* VII.14). This emphasis on the sufferings of conditioned existence is also employed to disengage the aspiring *bodhisattva* from attachment to practices, habits, and objects that are not beneficial to her development.

In addition to cognitive antidotes to overcome obstacles to vigor, Śāntideva recommends particular affects to motivate the *bodhisattva*. One should, he argues, cultivate desire (*chanda*) for liberating self and others from suffering, perseverance (*sthāma*) in the practice of the perfections, delight (*rati*) in the pleasures of learning and virtuous activity, and letting go (*mukti*) of the attachment to passing pleasures and distractions (*Bodhicar.* VII.31). Moreover, to increase vigor, Śāntideva claims, one must draw not only on renunciation, dedication, and self-mastery, but also on desire, pride, and pleasure (*Bodhicar.* VII.32). Desire, pride, and pleasure are often associated with defilements that lead one away from the *bodhisattva* path and toward the sufferings of self and others. But Śāntideva’s discussion of vigor emphasizes that particular ways of feeling are necessary conditions for *bodhicitta*, especially delight in virtuous activity, pride—or confidence—in one’s capacities, and desire for the good of others.

Pleasure and desire are often characterized by Indian Buddhists as afflictive; for Śāntideva these feelings are to be transmuted, and employed in the service of others. Indeed, Śāntideva writes, desire for the benefit of sentient beings, is “the root of all skillful deeds” (*Bodhicar.* VII.40). Acting according to this desire leads to delight as a karmic consequence and delight as the transformed mind that takes pleasure in altruistic activity (*Bodhicar.* VII.42). There is, Śāntideva insists, a sweetness to the fruit of skillful action (*Bodhicar.* VII.64), but perhaps even more importantly, in the very activity itself there is delight and pleasure (*Bodhicar.* VII.63). While thirst (*trṣṇā*) is almost exclusively employed to refer to attachment as a mental defilement in Indian Buddhism, Śāntideva writes of the thirst the *bodhisattva* feels for virtuous action (*Bodhicar.* VII.66).⁵ It is this pleasure that the *bodhisattva* takes in caring responsiveness to others that, according to Śāntideva, overcomes the heavy indolence of despondency and apathy.

Similarly, Śāntideva encourages meditations to cultivate pride in one’s abilities to act compassionately, to overcome obstacles, and not to be dissuaded by others (*Bodhicar.* VII.49). Śāntideva understands pride as the confidence that one can actually awaken, a confidence he believes all sentient beings are justified in. This belief is grounded in the argument that because there is no substantial existence,

there is ultimately no difference between ordinary beings and awakening, between saṃsāra and nirvana. Thus, each of us should have confidence that we can act compassionately, make progress along the path, and achieve awakening.⁶

4. MORAL DIMENSIONS OF MINDFULNESS AND CONCENTRATION

What Śāntideva's discussions of the perfections of generosity, vigilant moral discipline, forbearance, and vigor show, is that to understand morality is to recognize the way in which the qualities of our minds condition how we engage with others. In this section I show how Śāntideva's discussions of mind training similarly lead to moral action. Indeed, Śāntideva begins his discussion of the *bodhisattva's* perfections in the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, claiming, "One who wishes to guard his training must scrupulously guard his mind. It is impossible to guard one's training without guarding the wandering mind" (*Bodhicar.* V.1). Guarding the mind is the very foundation of the practice of the *bodhisattva*. As Śāntideva says, "If I let go of the vow to guard my mind, what will become of my many other vows?" (*Bodhicar.* V.18). What does Śāntideva mean by "guarding the mind?" It is, Śāntideva writes, to cultivate both mindfulness (*smṛti*) and awareness (*samprajanya*; *Bodhicar.* V.23).

"Mindfulness" (*smṛti*) and "awareness" (*samprajanya*) are technical terms in Indian Buddhism that in different texts possess somewhat different meanings. "*Smṛti*" is the Sanskrit word that in Pāli is *sati*, particularly well-known today from the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, typically translated as the *Sutta on the Foundations of Mindfulness*. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* directs the practitioner to attend to four foundations of mindfulness, namely, the body, feelings, mind, and objects of the mind. Thus, a particular aspect of the body is chosen—for example, the breath, or the posture of the body, or bodily actions, or specific parts of the body, or its constituent elements—and the practitioner is encouraged to maintain attention on the object of awareness. This attention then makes possible the insight that the body, feelings, mind, and objects of mind possess the three marks of saṃsāric existence, namely, they are impermanent, empty of substantial self-existence, and ultimately cannot satisfy us. In chapter XIII of the *Compendium*, Śāntideva takes up these same four foundations of mindfulness and exhorts his readers to analyze each and understand its impermanence and ultimately that it is empty of inherent existence. But, to hold the object of attention for analysis requires a capacity for both attention and recollection. Thus, for Śāntideva, *smṛti* and *samprajanya* have slightly different connotations. *Smṛti*, which is derived from the verbal root *smṛ*, to remember, refers not only to an awareness of an object of attention, but also includes a sense of recollecting the object. *Samprajanya*, on the other hand, has more of a cognitive and evaluative quality of observation. Śāntideva defines "*samprajanya*" as "the observation at every moment of the state of one's body and one's mind" (*Bodhicar.* V.108). "*Samprajanya*" is a cognate of "*samprajñā*"—a kind of complete wisdom—which suggests a form of understanding. Jay L. Garfield employs "mindfulness"

to translate “*smṛti*” and “*samprajanya*” together, because, he writes, it “captures the unification of these cognitive functions under the rubric of *calling to mind* and vigilantly *retaining in mind*.” As Garfield notes, even though “mindfulness” works as a translation for both terms, these two terms still have distinct meanings. “It is one thing to attend, and another to guard that attention with vigilance, but,” Garfield continues, “it is important to note that these functions are cooperative, each enabling and reinforcing the other” (2012: 3).

Attention and awareness are necessary conditions for acting skillfully because they enable us to not merely react to external conditions with fear or anxiety or desire. Instead, we can step back and attend to the conditions that have made possible whatever might otherwise disturb us. And we can attend to our own motivations, and the feelings and past experiences that might be pushing us to react in one way or another. In short, we can be aware of the attachments and aversions that might drive us to act in unhelpful ways. When we are attentive, we can discern how to respond most appropriately. Sometimes, a mindful response might lead us to transgress prescriptions or proscriptions of particular actions. Indeed, on presenting 12 forms of mindfulness to be maintained, at the beginning of chapter VI of the *Compendium*, Śāntideva suggests the aspiring *bodhisattva* should “aim to maintain all these forms of mindfulness . . . even at the cost of relinquishing other [recommended] actions” (*Śikṣā* 118/§118). Ultimately, Śāntideva argues, it is mindfulness that enables the practitioner to avoid unskillful actions that cause suffering. Mindless actions and mindless speech result in our own pain as well as the pain of others. Thus, Garfield has noted, “Not only is there an important reciprocal relation in this tradition between the cognitive and the moral, but mindfulness, *per se*, lies at the foundation of *everything*” (2012: 2).

For Śāntideva, then, the way of the *bodhisattva*, fundamentally a path of moral development, requires an attentive, stable mind. Mindfulness is the very condition for the possibility of pursuing any of the perfections. As he writes in the *Compendium*: “The doctrine of the *bodhisattvas* simply amounts to the preparation of the mind: and this is a mind not unstable” (*Śikṣā* 123/§123). The mind, Śāntideva argues, can be compared to an elephant. A rutting, wild elephant can cause great suffering, but when tamed there is no danger and indeed, the elephant can benefit others (*Bodhicar.* V.3). The pains of fear, anxiety, worry, embarrassment, etc. all arise through an untamed mind. And they lead us away from attending to the experience of others. Thus, he writes, “By these two, virtue and meditation, interacting one on the other, comes the complete perfection of the action of the mind; the *bodhisattva*’s doctrine amounts to this, the cultivation of the mind, because all things have their root in the mind” (*Śikṣā* 121/§121).

It is through the cultivation of mindfulness, then, that Śāntideva suggests we can find liberation from mental defilements. Thus, awakening requires mindfulness: “One who desires to protect her person, must reach the root of mindfulness and must ever have mindfulness at hand” (*Śikṣā* 119/§120). The path of the *bodhisattva* is one of cultivating mindfulness. However, cultivating mindfulness, while it leads to virtuous activity, also requires virtuous activity. As Śāntideva writes

in the *Compendium*, commenting on the *Candrapradīpa Sūtra*, in order to achieve meditative concentration it is necessary to develop awareness (*samprajanya*) and mindfulness (*smṛti*) of our conduct. That is, it is necessary to be vigilant of our actions of body, speech, and mind. And, at the same time, this vigilance requires the cultivation of meditative concentration (*Śikṣā* 121/§121).

Indian Buddhist communities developed numerous fine distinctions and a similarly refined vocabulary for a wide variety of mental states and the exercises or activities to achieve such states, all of which are translated with the very general English term “meditation.” The many Sanskrit technical terms for different stages and practices of meditation, including *dhyāna*, *samādhi*, *bhāvanā*, *samāpatti*, etc., do not have uniform translations. The term employed by Śāntideva to refer to the perfection of stabilizing and calming the mind, *dhyānapāramitā*, has been rendered as “meditation,” “meditative absorption,” “meditative concentration,” “contemplation,” or simply left untranslated.

Śāntideva begins his discussion of meditative absorption in the *Way of the Bodhisattva* by noting that without calming the mind one is inevitably caught by mental defilements (*Bodhicar.* VIII.1). For it is the calming of distractions and the overcoming of self-cherishing that leads to the equanimity necessary for responsiveness to others. He recommends temporarily removing oneself from social life in order to train the mind. Only after one has calmed the mind, Śāntideva writes, is one prepared to generate *bodhicitta* through meditation (*Bodhicar.* VIII.89). Generating *bodhicitta* requires the neutralization of attachment, particularly desire and self-cherishing. For Śāntideva, and most of his commentators in Tibet, two of the most important meditations for the achievement of *bodhicitta* are the equality of self and others (*par ātma samatā*), and the exchange of self and others (*par ātma parivartana*).⁷

The meditation on the equality of self and others is constituted by a deep attention to the fact that all sentient beings experience happiness and suffering (*Śikṣā* 3/§2; *Bodhicar.* VIII.90–91). For Śāntideva, we all take suffering and pain to be bad and its alleviation good. Because despite their immense diversity, sentient beings are the same in their desire for happiness and aversion toward suffering, Śāntideva argues, there is no adequate reason to prioritize my own desire for happiness and my own aversion from suffering over anyone else’s. Indeed, he argues, we should treat the other’s suffering as no different from my own suffering, equally making demands and appeals to me for alleviation and medication. There is no morally significant difference, Śāntideva insists, between my suffering and the suffering of others; I should relieve both kinds of suffering. To realize this care for the suffering of others, Śāntideva suggests, I ought to regard others as myself.

Regarding others as myself is not simply a change in perspective, an understanding of the needs, desires, aversions, and concerns of the other: regarding others as myself is primarily the cherishing of the other as I would cherish myself. By exchanging positions with the other I come to value the happiness and needs of the other over my own. This meditation, then, seeks to reorient the mind from seeking to use others as means to my ends, to offering myself as a means to the satisfaction of



the desires of others (*Bodhicar.* VIII.138–139). This devotion to the needs of the other, according to Śāntideva, is simultaneously the response to my own deepest needs. For attachment to self is precisely what causes my own suffering as well as the suffering that I cause others (*Bodhicar.* VIII.129, 134). Desiring the benefit and working to achieve the happiness of others, on the other hand—that is, overcoming self-cherishing—is what liberates me from suffering. Indeed, Śāntideva writes, the very care for the other becomes a care for myself as the distinction between selfish and selfless actions is dissolved (*Bodhicar.* VIII.173).

5. THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

As we have seen, Śāntideva discusses each perfection as an antidote to a particular mental affliction; generosity is an antidote to attachment, vigilant moral discipline is an antidote to mindlessness, forbearance is an antidote to anger and hatred, vigor is an antidote to apathy, and meditative absorption and concentration are antidotes to a reactive and wandering mind. But for Śāntideva, as for other Indian Buddhist intellectuals, the root cause of all other defilements, and thus the root cause of our own suffering and our insensitivity to the suffering of others, is ignorance. Wisdom is the highest perfection, then, because it acts as an antidote to the ignorance that is the condition for all other mental afflictions. Indeed, according to Śāntideva, without understanding the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, and most particularly, the lack of substantial existence of the self, the aspiring *bodhisattva* cannot loosen the fortress walls that we build around the self and that make us insensible to the pains of others. Thus, Śāntideva writes, all the preceding trainings were preliminary preparations for the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*; *Bodhicar.* IX.1).

Śāntideva's presentation of wisdom is informed by his understanding of Madhyamaka Buddhist metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology, especially the intertwined doctrines of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), emptiness of inherent existence (*śūnyatā*), and the distinction between conventional truth (*samvṛti-satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). This understanding is grounded in an interpretation of Nāgārjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, second-third century CE), perhaps the most significant Indian philosophical work for later traditions of Mahāyāna Buddhism. While there is no evidence that Nāgārjuna himself thought he was inaugurating a new school of Buddhist philosophy, later doxographers in India, Tibet, and China characterize him as the founder of the Madhyamaka, or Middle Way, School, and the *Fundamental Wisdom* as its foundational text. Nāgārjuna's purpose in this text is to argue that all phenomena are dependently originated, and to the degree that they depend on a multiplicity of conditions, they lack the substantial, enduring, essentializing, autonomous nature we ascribe to them. Thus, not only trees and stones, tables and books, but also the Buddha, the four noble truths, dependent origination, and other fundamental Buddhist doctrines are empty (*śūnya*) of the inherent or self-nature (*svabhāva*) that by linguistic and social convention we attribute to them. This does



not mean that trees and stones, tables and books, dependent origination, etc. do not exist. Rather, Nāgārjuna argues, they are not somehow ultimately natural kinds; they exist otherwise than we take them to exist in the realm of language and conceptual objectification. Our words and concepts do not ultimately have the traction with the world that we take for granted. Things are not independent, but empty precisely of the independent nature that they seem to possess. This emptiness, this lack of substantial existence, this absence of an autonomous nature is ultimately the truth about phenomena. However, this ultimate truth of emptiness is itself dependent on the mental imputation of a conventional nature. Thus, Nāgārjuna argues, emptiness is also dependently originated and therefore emptiness is also empty. Without meditative insight into the emptiness of emptiness, one will still have a positive opinion to which one is attached, and be unable to achieve liberation.

Śāntideva shares Nāgārjuna's basic metaphysical framework. His commitment to Buddhist ideas of dependent origination and the lack of substantial existence of the self informs his approach to moral life. The self is a multiplicity of phenomena of perception, feeling, intention, discriminating consciousness, and the body. There is no autonomous moral agent, freely choosing how to act in the world, and thus no locus of responsibility. Rather, the self is itself always dependent on the forces in which we are embedded—in our own communities and in the natural world. Thus, for example, he argues for patience when others who are angry treat us poorly, for their actions are themselves dependently originated; they are not autonomously, freely intending to harm us. And he argues for a recognition of the delusion of a substantial self, and thus, to prioritize the relief of my own suffering and neglect the sufferings of others is arbitrary. Moreover, as Garfield has argued, it does not make sense for the kinds of beings we are and the world in which we find ourselves (2015: 313). Ultimately, though, this irrationality that is the ground of our motivations makes it harder to achieve the alleviation of our suffering. Insight grounds the view that I should work to alleviate the sufferings of others just as I am concerned with my own suffering.

While Śāntideva employs Buddhist insights in his reasoning throughout his texts, like Nāgārjuna, he insists that it is meditative insight into emptiness that finally liberates *bodhisattvas* from attachment, even to opinions and identities. “Without emptiness,” he argues, “a mind is fettered” (*Bodhicar.* IX.48). And, he notes, if you are interested in becoming a *bodhisattva*, then you need to gain insight into the emptiness of phenomena. Because when you have understood the emptiness of all phenomena then you understand the emptiness of the self, and this insight undermines defilements at their root (*Śikṣā* 225/§242). Wisdom of emptiness is necessary, then, to be liberated from ignorance, aversion, and attachment, because it enables a deep understanding of the emptiness of self. Thus, chapter XIV of the *Compendium*, on “Self-Purification,” concerns arguments for the lack of existence of the essential, substantive nature we attribute to phenomena. And, for Śāntideva, as for Nāgārjuna, insight into emptiness is precisely an understanding of the emptiness of emptiness: “When there is no perception of something falsely projected as existent, there is no understanding of the non-existence of that entity. For it follows



that, if an entity is not real, the negation of it is clearly not real” (*Bodhicar.* 139). Śāntideva, then, recognizes a moral dimension to the self-subversion of conceptual reification (Edelglass 2007).

To move beyond a merely rational understanding of Buddhist wisdom, the practitioner needs to enact the overcoming of attachment through a compassionate engagement with others. What Śāntideva shows with his considerable attention to the distinction between the two truths, dependent origination, and the emptiness of emptiness, is that the compassionate engagement with others is a way of being in the world that conforms to the world as it actually is. *Bodhicitta*, then, is realized with the arising of wisdom and the caring responsiveness to others. As Śāntideva argues in both the *Compendium* and the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, wisdom needs to be enacted intersubjectively, and morality can only be perfected when informed by understanding.

6. VIRTUES AND CONSEQUENCES IN ŚĀNTIDEVA'S ETHICS

The *Compendium* and the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, Śāntideva's guidebooks to the path of radical transformation, begin from the place of an ordinary person who becomes attentive to the needs of others. This path of liberation from emotional and cognitive obscurations is long, slow, and arduous. It is a path of the cultivation of moral, intellectual, and meditative excellence through practices that transform the mind from self-cherishing to radically compassionate. Śāntideva's emphasis on cultivating perfections that are dispositions to act, feel, think, and attend in ways that cultivate *bodhicitta*, show some similarity between the morality of the *Compendium* and *Way of the Bodhisattva* and Virtue Ethics. Thus, Damien Keown draws on Śāntideva to make the claim that “Aristotelianism provides a useful Western analogue ... [for] ... elucidating the foundations and conceptual structure of Buddhist ethics” (2001: 196). According to this interpretation, *bodhicitta* is the telos of moral development, analogous to the role of eudaimonia in Aristotle's ethics. For Śāntideva, just as with Aristotle, as one cultivates the perfections one takes greater pleasure in virtuous action. And indeed, as with Virtue Ethicists, Śāntideva possesses great confidence in the possibility of transforming character through proper habituation. Thus, while actions of body, speech, and mind do have a “ripened consequence” (*vipākaphala*)—the fruit of an action, such as the suffering or happiness we experience in this life or a future birth—Śāntideva is much more interested in the secondary consequence (*niṣyandaphala*) of our actions. This more subtle fruit of our actions is manifest in the quality of our minds. For instance, if I am angry and act with cruelty, the ripened consequence may be that I suffer some specific harm in the future. But the secondary consequence is that my mind will change and be more easily angered and overcome with cruelty. Every thought, every word, every action, according to this view, makes us more likely to act, speak, and think in a similar way. Cultivating the perfections, then, involves actions that are



responsive to others—for example, giving to the needy or being patient with those around us—but also, importantly, form who we are. They transform our minds from the grasping, deluded, and suffering mind of an ordinary person, to the open, responsive, calm mind of *bodhicitta*.

Śāntideva's ethics is oriented toward a *telos*—*bodhicitta*—that is identified as the perfection of our nature, and this perfection is realized through cultivating virtues by making appropriate choices of attention, energy, and action.⁸ Nevertheless, it would be misleading to interpret Śāntideva simply as a Virtue Theorist in any traditional sense. For example, in contrast to the role of eudaimonia in Aristotle, *bodhicitta* is not an end in itself; the aspiring *bodhisattva* cultivates *bodhicitta* motivated by compassion to alleviate the suffering of other sentient beings. Moreover, Śāntideva is not suggesting practices for the practitioner's good, or the good of those who are nearest and dearest. We need to prioritize the good of the other over one's own good. However, in prioritizing the good of the other, according to Śāntideva, we are in fact acting for our own greater benefit. But the benefit to the self is a secondary consequence; it is not the goal. And indeed, the goal of Śāntideva's ethics is universalist: to free all sentient beings from suffering.

Śāntideva, like Mill and other Consequentialists, takes suffering to be manifestly bad and freedom from suffering to be a good for which no argument is necessary. And Śāntideva seems to think the consequences of this fact are not just relevant to oneself, but reason and morality demand a response to all suffering. Thus, he asks, “When happiness is liked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I strive after happiness only for myself? When fear and suffering are disliked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I protect myself and not the other?” (*Bodhicar.* VIII.95–96). And the very first verse of the *Compendium* asks, “Since I and others abhor pain and fear alike, what distinction can I rightly make for self, that I should preserve it and not another?” (*Śikṣā* 3/§2). When Śāntideva does recognize a benefit to suffering, it is generally because this instance of suffering leads to a greater alleviation of overall suffering. Indeed, he writes, “If the suffering of one ends the suffering of many, then one who has compassion for others and himself must cause that suffering to arise” (*Bodhicar.* VII.105). In contrast to Virtue Ethics, then, Śāntideva is making a Consequentialist argument that the suffering of the self is less significant than the overall reduction of suffering. And this Consequentialist reasoning appears elsewhere in his texts. For example, he writes, we should sacrifice ourselves for someone who is equally or more responsive to the sufferings of others; we should not sacrifice ourselves for someone who is less compassionate. “That way,” he argues, “there is no overall loss” (*Bodhicar.* V.87). Śāntideva's Consequentialist reasoning and his universalist commitment to the welfare of all sentient beings as the goal of the path and the grounding of the perfections has led some scholars, such as Goodman, to interpret him as an act Consequentialist (2009: 89–103).

Interpreting Śāntideva as an act Consequentialist helps make sense of his claim that to alleviate suffering a *bodhisattva*, informed by wisdom and motivated by compassion, can transgress any moral rules. This is the doctrine of skillful means (*upāya kauśalya*).⁹ According to this doctrine, because diminishing suffering and

increasing peace and happiness is the ground and justification of ethics, being skillful (*kauśalya*) in the method, strategy, or means (*upāya*) for reducing suffering overrides any moral rules. Thus, Śāntideva writes in the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, “even what is proscribed is permitted for a compassionate person who sees it will be of benefit” (*Bodhicar.* V.84). In the *Compendium*, Śāntideva makes clear that motivated by compassion and informed by wisdom—two very important caveats—it is appropriate to transgress not only monastic vows, but also the moral precepts, such as those against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying (*Śikṣā* 163–165/§167–168). Indeed, he cites examples of all these from various Mahāyāna sūtras, and the circumstances under which they are allowed.¹⁰ Often these transgressions are attributed to the Buddha, who in previous births, motivated by compassion, abandoned the precepts if it was efficacious in leading others to the dharma or alleviating their suffering. Because they lead to a reduction of suffering, these transgressions, if enacted with wisdom and compassion, are morally right. As Goodman points out, this widely accepted view, which justifies acting in ways that might be considered vicious if a *bodhisattva* sees that it will diminish suffering, does not fit well with Virtue Ethics. But in a Consequentialist framework they can stand as exemplary moral acts.¹¹

It is unsurprising that Śāntideva has been interpreted through the hermeneutic frameworks of Western ethical theories. Clearly, there are elements of Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism in both the *Compendium* and the *Way of the Bodhisattva*. The perfections are cognitive, affective, embodied dispositions that are cultivated to act virtuously and transform the mind. And Śāntideva's ethics is grounded in the premise that suffering is bad, and universalized to maximize the alleviation of suffering for all sentient beings. Clearly, drawing on Virtue Ethics and Consequentialism to interpret Śāntideva can help disclose aspects of his moral theory and the practices he recommends. But to understand Śāntideva's ethics simply as a form of Virtue Ethics or a kind of Consequentialism would obscure some of its distinctive features.¹² These include the ways in which the common tension between other-oriented and self-interested motivations is dissolved, the unique and necessary role of reason in relations with others, the primary importance of meditation in ethics, and Śāntideva's appreciation for difference and diversity among practitioners even as he defends a particular path of moral transformation. In conclusion I will elaborate briefly on these last two points.

7. CONCLUSION: MORAL TREATISE AS MEDITATION MANUAL

Śāntideva, as with other Indian Buddhists, conceives of the *bodhisattva* path as a set of practices that function as antidotes to the “three poisons” that cause us suffering and diminish our responsiveness to the sufferings of others. These three poisons are attachment, aversion, and delusion, which are the source of all the other mental defilements, such as jealousy, avarice, pride, sloth, hatred, and *schadenfreude*. The

trainings that Śāntideva recommends, then, are intended to neutralize particular defilements. Thus, meditating on the dependent origination of the anger and actions of others can neutralize our resentment, frustration, anger, and hatred toward them. Meditating on the preciousness and brevity of human life can neutralize our laziness in moral development. Meditating on the actions of body, speech, and mind can neutralize our lack of awareness that leads us to react in ways that produce more suffering. Meditating on the equality of self and others can neutralize our insensitivity to the sufferings of others. Meditating on the exchange of self and others can neutralize our self-cherishing. Meditating on dependent origination, the distinction between the two truths, and the emptiness of emptiness can neutralize the delusion of inherent nature, especially the fundamental delusion of our own substantial self. The *Compendium* and the *Way of the Bodhisattva* are meditation manuals that serve as guidebooks to the *bodhisattva* path because they offer meditative antidotes to mental afflictions.

To deeply cultivate the meditations that lead to *bodhicitta* requires that they be embodied; they need to be enacted with others. Thus, Śāntideva's texts consist of arguments concerning moral theory and practice. Aversion to others, prioritizing the self over others, insensitivity to the suffering of others, all need to be overcome through actual engagements. Thus, Śāntideva says, yes, one needs to spend some time cultivating meditative concentration and mindfulness in solitude, without the distractions of social life. And in solitude one ought to cultivate mindfulness or pursue meditations that counteract self-cherishing or overcome the existential delusion of a separate self that is the basis of attachment. But even while Śāntideva describes the perfections as qualities of the mind, these qualities of mind can only be fully cultivated through engaging with others. To cultivate the awakening mind requires *both* wisdom and compassionate caring for others.

Because the path of the *bodhisattva* is a set of trainings to neutralize mental defilements, depending on the situation or the practitioner there will be a different emphasis on which meditative practices to pursue. In some situations, if one finds one's mind attracted or repelled in unhelpful ways, Śāntideva recommends meditating on being "like a block of wood" (*Bodhicar.* V.48–53). In other situations, however, it might be appropriate to increase desire, or zeal, for example, if one is feeling lethargic (*Bodhicar.* VII.40). Throughout, Śāntideva is attentive to such differences—differences of capacity, differences of temperament, different challenges that require different responses. And he is sensitive to the vulnerability of our bodies and minds, that being overwhelmed or pushing ourselves too far is counterproductive. One needs to be sensitive to the appropriate difficulty of a practice and not take on too much; at whatever level one is, one should find suitable practices. Starting to practice with minor challenges will make them easy, he suggests, and eventually make it possible to practice with major challenges without being overwhelmed (*Bodhicar.* VI.14). Indeed, Śāntideva writes, "The Guide enjoins giving only vegetables and the like at first" (*Bodhicar.* VII.25). That is, the Buddha himself suggests that when starting out on the path one should only give away that which is possible to give without resentment, such as vegetables, that can nourish

the body of another and are beneficial. “Later,” he continues, “by degrees, one acts in such a way that one is even able to give up one’s own flesh!” (*Bodhicar.* VII.25). Thus, in contrast to moral theories that lead to one or another act that ought to be done regardless of who the agent might be, Śāntideva argues that one should carefully discern whether or not a given practice or act is beyond one’s abilities, and then act accordingly (*Bodhicar.* VII. 47–48). And if a task is taken up that exhausts one, it should be set aside until strength and energy and zeal are revived (*Bodhicar.* VII.66). Thus, he is not suggesting that anyone can simply be mindful even in a situation of immense physical suffering, such as forced labor, extreme heat or cold, or the weakness of the body and mind that comes with starvation. Rather, Śāntideva is making the more modest suggestion that we ought to try to make the most of the situations we find ourselves in to cultivate mindfulness and a caring responsiveness to others.

At the heart of Śāntideva’s ethics, then, is the skillful means of discerning what is suitable at any given time, and recognizing that there will be differences in practices for different practitioners. And his texts exhibit the skillful means of trying to reach a multiplicity of readers where they are. This helps us understand why sometimes Śāntideva inspires fear, sometimes desire, and sometimes equanimity. And why he moves freely from evocative poetic language, to the very technical discourse of scholastic Buddhist philosophy. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret Śāntideva’s appreciation for difference and multiplicity together with his commitment to the idea that language and thought cannot grasp ultimate reality as an acknowledgment that all moral claims and practices are equal. While there is no ultimate grounding of ethics in a transcendental Being or value, it is still the case that we find ourselves embedded in a world of suffering and that some modes of being can lead to awakening and others leave one entangled in the confusion, aversion, and attachment of *samsāra*. Śāntideva’s meditations invite the reader to experience the path from ordinary existence to awakened compassion. Meditating on his vivid descriptions of a life of fear, loss, and clinging attachment can indeed provoke a sober reflection on the reality of our lives. And meditating on his inspiring expressions of the compassion and calm of one who has taken refuge and is pursuing the *bodhisattva* path gives a taste of what we might imagine to be the wisdom and compassionate caring for others that constitute the awakened mind.¹³ For Śāntideva, the *bodhisattva* path, then, is about moral transformation through the cultivation of mindfulness that is embodied and enacted as wisdom and a caring responsiveness to others.

NOTES

1. Śāntideva’s dates are sometimes given as 685–763 ce. However, this specificity is misleading. 685 was the year that the Chinese pilgrim, I-Tsing, left India. I-Tsing visited the great Buddhist university, Nālandā, where Śāntideva was active, and makes no mention of him in his writings, suggesting Śāntideva was not

widely known. In 763 Śāntarakṣita travelled to Tibet and quotes from the *Way of the Bodhisattva* in his *Tattvasiddhi*. For a detailed discussion of Śāntideva's dates, see Pezzali (1968: 38–40). Also, see J. W. de Jong's response to Pezzali (1975: 179–181).

2. Because the early Mahāyāna was not in opposition to any particular institution or organization, Jonathan Silk points out, it would be a mistake to conflate “Hīnayāna” with a particular Buddhist tradition, such as one of the early sects, including Theravāda. Silk interprets “Hīnayāna” as a “rhetorical fiction,” best translated as “small-minded”: “The term embodies a criticism of certain types of thinking and of certain views, but does not refer to institutional affiliations” (2002: 369).
3. In Indian Buddhist texts the verbal noun “*bodhi*” refers to the characteristic quality of being a buddha, namely, awakened. Thus, contemporary translators render it as “enlightenment” or “awakening.” *Citta* means “mind,” but may also have a broader range of meanings. For a discussion of the term “*bodhicitta*,” and its various translations, see Brassard (2000: 7–8).
4. Some presentations of the *bodhisattva* path have ten perfections, including skillful means (*upāya-kauśalya*), vows (*prañidhāna*), power (*bala*), and knowledge (*jñāna*). In fact, Śāntideva addresses these as well in both his texts, but not as distinct perfections.
5. Indeed, Śāntideva compares the delight and pleasure of virtuous activity along the *bodhisattva* path to the pleasures of intoxicants and sexuality: “One should be addicted solely to the task that one is undertaking. One should be intoxicated by that task, insatiable, like someone hankering for the pleasure and the fruit of love-play” (BCA VII.62).
6. According to Śāntideva's accounts of the lack of substantial existence of phenomena, the various mental defilements that are obstacles on the path are empty of inherent existence. Thus, every sentient being is, in some sense, already liberated, as this very world is just as much *nirvāṇa* as it is *samsāra*. For a detailed discussion of Śāntideva's approach to inherent liberation, and the diverse interpretations of this approach in Tibetan traditions, see Williams (2000: 1–28).
7. While these meditations are often associated primarily with Śāntideva, they have precedents in other Mahāyāna authors, all the way back to Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland*.
8. For an extended discussion of Buddhist ethics and Virtue Ethics that is significantly grounded in Śāntideva, see Mroziak (2002).
9. The term “skillful means” (*upāya kauśalya*) has several other meanings, the most important of which are concerned with teaching the dharma in ways that are appropriate for a particular student, and with compassionate action (Harvey 2000: 134–135).
10. Śāntideva cites the *Ratnamegha*, which argues that when a man is intending to commit one of the five deadly sins that lead to severe suffering for the agent—patricide, matricide, killing an *arhat*, shedding the blood of a Buddha, and causing disharmony in the Saṅgha—it is appropriate for a compassionate person to kill him (*Śikṣā* 164/§168).



11. For a discussion of skillful means in Śāntideva, see Clayton (2006: 102–109).
12. For a longer discussion of the relationship between Buddhist ethics and Western moral philosophy that draws in part on Śāntideva, and why it would be a mistake to interpret Śāntideva purely according to a particular Western moral theory, see Edelglass (2013).
13. Thus, Garfield reads the *Way of the Bodhisattva* “as a treatise on the distinction between the phenomenologies of benighted and of awakened moral consciousness” (2015: 300).

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