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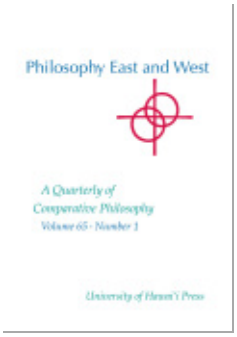

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ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF ŚĀNTIDEVA'S ETHICS IN THE *BODHICARYĀVATĀRA*

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Introduction

Recently, several contemporary scholars have considered the question of whether Indian Buddhist ethics should be classified as a type of contemporary normative ethical theory. Damien Keown and James Whitehill, for instance, have stressed similarities with virtue ethics, while Charles Goodman has presented a lengthy and sophisticated argument that Buddhism is consequentialist.[1] Perhaps more than any single text, Śāntideva's *Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva, or Bodhicaryāvatāra* (hereafter *BCA*) is appealed to in support of a chosen categorization. In this essay, I raise several challenges to the project of classifying Śāntideva's ethical reasoning. Many of these concerns will apply to classifying other Buddhist ethical writings as well, but I will not be able to defend this in detail in this essay.

The first difficulty I highlight with classifying the ethical structure of the *BCA* is that Śāntideva wrote it to act as a manual of psychological transformation, and often uses skillful means *(upāya)* to appeal to readers with different psychological propensities. For this reason, it is difficult to determine when his statements indicate his own ethical views. A second, and related, difficulty is that different statements in the text seem to support interpreting him as holding different moral theories. Finally, even assuming we can identify a set of statements that accurately portray the moral position of Śāntideva, I argue that these statements underdetermine which foundational normative theory should be ascribed to him. Goodman's detailed argument that Buddhism is consequentialist provides the best-developed current case for a particular classification of Indian Buddhist ethics, so I develop this section of my argument in response to him. Since he draws upon texts from a wide variety of Indian Buddhist authors, I will need to expand my focus from Śāntideva's *BCA* somewhat in this section. An important part of my argument here depends on a distinction by Shelly Kagan between normative factors, which determine if an action is right or wrong, and normative foundations, which provide the justification for why these actions are right or wrong (Kagan 1998, pp. 17–18, 190). In the next section, I briefly explain how a similar concern would apply to the attempt to classify Śāntideva's ethics as a virtue ethics. I conclude with a suggestion as to why Śāntideva might not necessarily be inclined to endorse any particular normative theory.

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Normative ethical theories provide more than simply a list of right or wrong actions; they also unify moral judgments by explaining why certain actions are right or wrong at the deepest level. Normative ethical theories also usually provide guidance over how we ought to act, and may consider ethical questions such as what a good life consists of, but for simplicity I focus on their role in determining the ultimate grounds for the rightness of actions. The contemporary authors I consider in this essay, and Charles Goodman in particular, have done insightful work in locating similarities between Buddhist ethical texts and contemporary theories, and I agree that we should continue to think about what these similarities can teach us. Contra Goodman, however, I do not believe that they will teach us which kind of underlying normative ethical theory provides the best fit for Buddhist writers like Śāntideva.

I will be referring specifically to four versions of normative theory in this essay, so let me briefly state what I mean by each. Consequentialism holds that consequences are the sole factor that determines the rightness or wrongness of action. Generally, consequentialist theories claim that the right act is the one that maximizes good consequences, and a universal consequentialist theory holds that the right action is the one that maximizes good consequences for all concerned. Egoism is also technically consequentialist, since it claims the right action is the one that maximizes good consequences for the agent. Nevertheless, I follow the standard practice of restricting the term 'consequentialism' to refer to universal consequentialist theories. A deontological normative theory, in the sense in which I will be using the term, claims that the right action is the one that corresponds to the appropriate duty or rule. A virtue ethics claims that the right action is the one a person of virtuous character would habitually perform in the relevant situation (Hursthouse 1999, p. 28).[2]

Writers of Buddhist moral texts do not themselves develop taxonomies of ethical theories, such as the four I have just mentioned, and so do not provide criteria for distinguishing one from another. Śāntideva, therefore, will not directly tell us that he ascribes to a particular normative theory. Instead, an author who wants to classify the ethics of a writer like Śāntideva must infer which normative theory provides the best fit for those passages that state his ethical views. There are several ways this project of rational reconstruction can be characterized.[3] Charles Goodman talks of determining which ethical theory a Buddhist author would ascribe to, should he learn of the available contemporary options (Goodman 2009, p. 4).[4] A stronger characterization claims that a Buddhist writer *should* commit to a given normative theory, or even that they are implicitly committed to it, based upon their stated ethical views. My argument will apply to all of these ways of characterizing the project of rational reconstruction; I will be claiming that Śāntideva's *BCA* does not provide sufficient evidence to allow us to conclude that Śāntideva *would,* or *should,* commit or had already implicitly committed to any given normative theory. For brevity's sake, however, I will usually phrase this project as determining whether Śāntideva is committed to a given normative theory, although commitment here should be understood to refer to implicit commitment and the other options just discussed.

An issue relevant to this debate currently being discussed by contemporary philosophers is whether the major forms of contemporary moral theory—deontology, virtue ethics, and consequentialism in particular—can be precisely differentiated from each other. Particularly relevant here is a current debate over whether all moral theories can be given consequentialist forms. Some authors, for instance, have suggested that any plausible moral theory may be given a consequentialist form by phrasing the moral requirements of the theory as consequences to be evaluated. For instance, if a deontology includes an absolute prohibition against lying, the consequentialist version claims that lying is a consequence with a high enough negative value to outweigh any positive benefits resulting from telling a lie (Dreier 1993, p. 23). If we conclude from such projects that every ethical theory is consequentialist, then it would be trivially true that the best fit between Buddhist moral works and a contemporary ethical theory would be consequentialism. Other philosophers have argued either that not all moral theories can be given a consequentialist form (Brown 2011), or that merely fashioning a consequentialist counterpart providing equivalent ethical judgments to the original moral theory is not sufficient to equate the two theories (Portmore 2007, pp. 60–61).

These debates are not likely to be concluded soon, and it is beyond my scope to evaluate the various possible positions. Fortunately, the arguments I develop below could be easily modified to remain effective, even assuming someone concluded from such arguments that all moral theories were actually species of consequentialism. Presumably the debate about the classification of Śāntideva's ethics would then become a question of which species of consequentialism provided the closest analogue to his moral works. My claim, then, would be that there is insufficient evidence to determine which species of consequentialism is the best fit for Śāntideva, and the phrasing of my arguments would be adjusted correspondingly. Another conclusion that has been drawn from work on consequentializing moral theories is that classifying theories as agent-neutral or agent-relative, that is, according to whether the theory gives the same normative aims to all its agents, is more promising than a classification according to whether or not the theory assigns moral weight to factors other than consequences (Dreier 1993). Again, rather than evaluate this claim, I need only indicate that my arguments could be adjusted to support the conclusion that there is insufficient evidence to determine whether Śāntideva's position should be classified as agent-neutral or agent-relative. I briefly develop such an argument below as part of my response to Goodman.

Ethics, Psychology, and Skillful Means in the Bodhicaryāvatāra

The project of rational reconstruction, as I am using it, depends on taking statements expressing the moral positions of the author in question and using them to infer which ethical theory he is committed to. A problem with appealing to passages in the *BCA* as evidence about the underlying structure of Śāntideva's ethics, however, is that this text was intended primarily as a manual of psychological transformation, not a treatise on ethical reasoning. It will often be unclear, therefore, when a given

statement represents a position Śāntideva would ultimately endorse, or whether it is intended as a therapeutic technique. Śāntideva himself characterizes this work as a guide to developing the qualities of a bodhisattva, the Mahāyāna saint who commits to eliminating the suffering of all sentient beings and willingly takes rebirth through countless lives to do so (*BCA* 1:1).[5] Most of its chapters focus on developing some key virtue that partially constitutes the character of a high-level bodhisattva, such as the aspiration to obtain awakening *(bodhicitta)* (*BCA* chaps. 1, 3, and 4), perseverance *(vīrya)* (chap. 7), and so on. The text is filled with psychological techniques meant to transform a selfish, deluded mind into a virtuous one, many of which cannot be plausibly construed as normative arguments. The example below is taken from the sixth chapter, devoted to developing the virtue of patience *(kṣānti)*:

> If there is a remedy, then what is the use of frustration? If there is no remedy, then what is the use of frustration? (*BCA* 6:10)

This passage points out that anger is always an added and unnecessary suffering, since it is unneeded if the situation provoking the anger can be resolved, and useless if resolution is impossible. The verse is easily interpreted as a therapeutic technique, but it would be strange to claim that the passage supports the interpretation of Buddhism as a particular species of ethical theory. It gives little reason, for instance, to think that consequences alone determine the rightness of an action.

There are many passages in the *BCA,* however, that can be read as either psychological techniques to develop a virtuous mind, or as normative arguments describing how we must act. Consider, for instance, the following verses taken from Śāntideva's chapter on meditation:

> When happiness is equally dear to others and myself, then what is so special about me that I strive after happiness for myself alone? (*BCA* 8:95)
>
> When fear and suffering are equally abhorrent to others and myself, then what is so special about me that I protect myself but not others? (*BCA* 8:96)

As with the prior example, these two verses may be read as providing a psychological tool to transform the mind, in this case by developing compassion and reducing anger. If one focuses intently on the fact that others want to obtain happiness and avoid suffering as much as oneself, sympathy toward them will arise, and frustration toward them will be reduced. These verses, however, can also be read as a normative argument describing why we ought to act ethically. In this interpretation, the implied premise is that we should not prioritize our own welfare unless we have a good reason for doing so. Since happiness and the avoidance of suffering are as important to others as they are to me, my own desire to avoid or achieve these does not provide a sufficient reason for prioritizing my own welfare. Therefore, unless I can find another justification, I should promote everyone's happiness equally. This second reading might be used as evidence that Buddhism is a species of universal consequentialism, since the verses can be interpreted as claiming that we ought to concern ourselves

with the happiness of everyone equally. Nevertheless, one reason to prefer the reading of these verses as a psychological technique intended to dissolve selfishness is Śāntideva's own statement that his goal in writing the *BCA* was to provide a manual for becoming a bodhisattva. He makes no promise to offer an ethical justification of the bodhisattva's way of life.

A second reason to prefer the psychological-technique interpretation is that passages such as these are relatively atomic, meaning they do not go into extensive detail about what exactly makes an action right, nor do they consider lengthy objections against their view. An opponent could raise obvious objections against the normative interpretation of the verses I have suggested above. For instance, even a Buddhist accepting the doctrine of no-self *(anātman)* might point out that my current and future collections of physical and mental states are closely connected and claim that this justifies prioritizing my own welfare, even though the other person desires happiness as much as I do.[6] In Indian works of metaphysics and epistemology, objections to the position an author sets forth are developed in detail before being responded to, and the fact that Śāntideva does not do so here suggests that his primary motivation may be psychological transformation, rather than normative theorizing.[7] These concerns do not rule out the possibility that passages like the one just cited might be intended to provide *both* psychological techniques to transform mental states *and* normative reasoning explaining why we are obligated to act a certain way; however, they should make us hesitate before drawing such conclusions.

Another related difficulty with taking passages such as these as evidence for which foundational normative commitments Śāntideva would endorse is the Mahāyāna doctrine of skillful means *(upāya).* As exemplified in early Mahāyāna Buddhist texts such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra,* high-level bodhisattvas and buddhas offer various teachings and sometimes even employ falsehoods in ministering to the needs of beings at various levels of spiritual development.[8] These skillful means become redundant once their purpose is accomplished (Pye 2003, p. 3).

Contemporary commentators such as Goodman correctly point out that certain passages in texts like Śāntideva's *BCA* have strong resonances with various ethical theories, such as consequentialism. Even assuming that these passages were intended as normative claims, rather than being merely psychological techniques, however, it remains possible that some may be skillful means aimed at beings at a certain level of development, and should not be taken as providing definitive reasons for why one should accept Buddhist ethical positions. Universal consequentialist reasoning might be offered for beings receptive to it, while passages emphasizing the virtues, or egoistic benefits, could be offered for beings of different propensities.

This possibility leads to a closely related but distinct problem. Śāntideva's text appears to contain multiple forms of moral reasoning that have resonances with different underlying moral theories. Setting aside for a moment the possibility that some of these passages are meant only as psychological techniques, it remains unclear which, if any, of these passages ought to be accepted as providing evidence for his

foundational normative commitments. Certain passages that we will consider shortly seem to support a universal consequentialist reading. Yet Śāntideva also claims that great karmic merit *(puṇya)* accumulates as a result of developing the bodhisattva's character (*BCA* 1:19–20); he frequently points out the harmful karmic consequences of remaining in a selfish deluded state (*BCA* 4:5–6, 4:12, 5:20); and he emphasizes the joy of a stable mind that is free of defilements (*BCA* 7:28). All of these reasons for adopting the bodhisattva's way of life could support an ethical-egoistic reading of Buddhist ethics, since they seem to claim that it is self-interest that justifies developing the bodhisattva's virtues. Śāntideva also sometimes appeals to our innate compassion for others' pain (*BCA* 8:90, 8:94), suggesting that, like Hume, he may hold that the foundations of morality lie in innate human sentiment. Other passages suggest that we ought to help others because we are linked in interdependence with them (*BCA* 8:114). Finally, certain passages claim that becoming a bodhisattva would be the highest state a human could achieve (*BCA* 8:107–108), suggesting a more refined egoism with resonances to *eudaimonist* virtue ethics, in which normativity arises out of a conception of perfected human nature.[9]

Śāntideva's appeal to multiple strands of moral reasoning would make sense if his primary intention is to offer psychological techniques, or to offer teachings to beings of different levels of development. If his primary intention is to offer his own view as to why we ought to be bodhisattvas, then he appears to be inconsistent. One way of meeting this challenge would be to argue that in some parts of the text Śāntideva is presenting his views about why we should remove others' suffering, while in other parts he merely offers skillful means and psychological techniques that he would not ultimately endorse as justification for the bodhisattva's way of life. Śāntideva never explicitly marks which of his arguments defend his actual position, however, and so the contemporary commentator is left with the difficulty of providing some justification for identifying certain passages as examples of normative reasoning, while classifying others as skillful means or psychological techniques.

As we saw above, the project of classifying Buddhist ethics requires taking claims made by Buddhist authors that express their moral views and inferring what theory this suggests they are implicitly committed to. In this section, I have raised several closely related difficulties in identifying which statements actually represent Śāntideva's ethical position. First, Śāntideva states that his purpose in writing the *BCA* is primarily to encourage psychological transformation. Second, many of his claims might be best interpreted as examples of skillful means directed toward beings of varying levels of spiritual development. Finally, even if we set aside these difficulties, different verses in the *BCA* seem to support different categorizations of Śāntideva's ethical position. The classifier of his position, therefore, would have to argue that verses seemingly supportive of alternative classifications should be set aside. I have developed these concerns in relation to Śāntideva's *BCA,* a text that a number of contemporary commentators have drawn upon in classifying Buddhist ethics. Nevertheless, these same concerns should be born in mind when we look at texts from the early Pāli canon, as well as works by Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga and other Buddhist authors of moral works.

Appealing to Consequences

In this and the following sections I consider Charles Goodman's arguments that Buddhist ethics is a kind of universal consequentialism, a position he supports by citing features Buddhism shares with universal consequentialism. For the sake of argument, I set aside the concerns raised above and assume that the passages Goodman cites represent normative claims made by their authors. I focus on Goodman's arguments because they are developed in great detail, although I later argue that similar concerns apply to contemporary authors who suggest a virtue-ethics interpretation of Buddhist ethics. Although my own concern is mainly focused on Śāntideva, since Goodman draws upon a variety of Buddhist texts in developing his argument I will have to widen my scope occasionally in this and the following section.

Perhaps the most straightforward evidence that might be cited to show that Buddhism represents a consequentialist ethical theory are passages explicitly mentioning features strongly associated with consequentialism. Goodman cites one such passage as evidence that Theravāda Buddhism is a kind of consequentialism:

> When you reflect, if you know: "This action that I wish to do with my body would lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with painful results," then you definitely should not do such an action with the body. But when you reflect, if you know: "This action that I wish to do with the body would not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both; it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences, with pleasant results," then you may do such an action with the body.[10]

Goodman takes this passage as *prima facie* evidence that early Buddhist Theravāda ethics is consequentialist:

> This passage says that actions are to be evaluated in terms of their consequences for both self and others, just as in universalist versions of consequentialism. It refers only to happiness and suffering, suggesting a hedonistic consequentialism such as classical utilitarianism. . . . This statement purports to state a criterion that distinguishes right action from wrong actions. (Goodman 2009, p. 48)[11]

Goodman also cites passages from the Mahāyāna writers Śāntideva and Asaṅga, which state that rules may be set aside and small harms committed when outweighed by large gains. The following passage comes from Śāntideva's *BCA*:

> Even what is proscribed is permitted for a compassionate person who sees it will be of benefit. (Goodman 2009, p. 98)[12]

This passage appeals to positive consequences in justifying breaking a rule, a strategy employed by act consequentialism. Goodman also cites the following passage, taken from Śāntideva's *Compendium of the Trainings (Śīkṣāsamuccaya),* as providing particularly strong evidence of Śāntideva's consequentialism:

> Through actions of body, speech, and mind, the Bodhisattva sincerely makes a continuous effort to stop all present and future suffering and depression, and to produce present

> and future happiness and gladness, for all beings. But if he does not seek the collection of the conditions for this, and does not strive for what will prevent the obstacles to this, or he does not cause small suffering and depression to arise as a way of preventing great suffering and depression, or does not abandon a small benefit in order to achieve a greater benefit, if he neglects to do these things even for a moment, he is at fault.[13] (Goodman 2008, p. 21; 2009, pp. 89–90)

This passage recommends a commitment to the welfare of all beings, and endorses causing some suffering when greater positive consequences arise as a result. Goodman analyzes the passage as follows:

> None of the distinctive characteristics of classical act-utilitarianism are missing from this passage. The focus on actions; the central moral importance of happy and unhappy states of mind; the extension of scope to all beings; the extreme demands; the absence of any room for personal moral space; the balancing of costs and benefits; the pursuit of maximization—every one of these crucial features of utilitarianism is present. (Goodman 2008, p. 21; Goodman 2009, pp. 89–90)

Goodman's strategy in these passages is to point to commonalities between Buddhist texts and consequentialism in order to infer that Buddhist authors like Śāntideva would identify as consequentialist should they have known of the theory. One of these commonalities mentioned in the final passage, the demanding nature of Buddhist ethical texts, will be considered in the next section. Here, I want to consider four of the other commonalities identified in these passages. First, Buddhist authors are concerned with the consequences of actions on the welfare of themselves and others; second, the last passage suggests a universalistic concern that puts the welfare of others on a par with one's own; third, the second passage shows that rules may sometimes be violated when they lead to good consequences; and fourth, the last passage reveals that Śāntideva believes we can inflict small amounts of harm when much greater benefits will result.

Goodman is correct that all four of these features are often associated with consequentialism. Helpful here in determining to what extent they provide evidence that Śāntideva and other Buddhist authors are consequentialists is the distinction between strong and weak consequentialism. A weak consequentialist acknowledges that consequences play some role in determining whether an action is right or wrong. The passages Goodman cites suggest Śāntideva and other Buddhist authors are consequentialist in this sense. To be a strong consequentialist, however, one must hold that the *only* relevant factor in determining whether an action is right or wrong, or a rule acceptable, is its consequences. Further, Goodman clearly believes that Buddhist authors like Śāntideva are consequentialist in this stronger sense.[14]

It is not clear, however, that any of the commonalities identified by Goodman provide strong evidence that Śāntideva would accept that consequences *alone* determine the ethical status of an action. Most normative theories, or simply commonsense morality, will likely hold that some rules may be broken on occasion, and that sometimes we need to hurt people a little to help them a lot.[15] A mother taking away her son's video games as punishment does not provide evidence that she is a conse-

quentialist in the strong sense, nor do the actions of a father who relaxes curfew to let a child attend a late movie with friends.

Regarding the passages that advocate concern for the welfare of others, here it needs to be stressed that there is an important difference between claiming we should care about certain consequences and claiming that *only* consequences are relevant in determining the rightness of actions. Almost every moral theory, as well as common sense, insists we should care about at least some consequences! What is needed in addition is an indication that there are absolutely no constraints in play that may limit our pursuit of good consequences, and it does not seem to me that the passages Goodman appeals to suggest this. The final passage cited by Goodman indicates we should perform small amounts of harm for great gain, but what about massive amounts of harm? If a bodhisattva could spur countless sentient beings toward buddhahood by drastically impeding the spiritual progress of a single sentient being, should he do so? I know of no Buddhist text that suggests there might not be constraints, like not doing great spiritual harm to an individual being, that might be relevant in determining the correct action for a bodhisattva.[16]

The fourth common factor identified by Goodman, universal impartial concern for all beings, is the most convincing, since this feature is strongly identified with many varieties of consequentialism, and absent from many other normative theories. As Michael Barnhart has recently pointed out, one concern here is that the passage contains advice for bodhisattvas, those who have taken a vow to become buddhas and work for the sake of all sentient beings (Barnhart 2012, p. 22). It does not, directly at least, claim that all beings should manifest this level of benevolence. To strengthen his position, Goodman also owes us textual support for the position that Mahāyāna texts claim that all beings should become bodhisattvas.[17] Second, it is not clear why a commitment to impartial benevolence implies that one is strongly consequentialist in holding that *only* consequences are relevant in determining whether an act is right or wrong. As with what has been discussed above, I see no reason to rule out the possibility that constraints might be in play that limit the form such impartial benevolence might take. A father might, for instance, have an impartial concern for the welfare of all his children, but still be obligated to fulfill his promise to their grandfather to disperse an inheritance only to the grandfather's favored grandchild.

Thus far, I have argued that the features Goodman identifies are not sufficient to provide substantial evidence that Buddhism is strongly consequentialist, at least until additional passages are located that suggest no factor other than consequences plays a role in determining the rightness of actions. For the sake of argument, let us assume that Goodman, or others interested in developing his argument, are able to locate passages like these. Here, we can examine a deeper problem with Goodman's strategy, which arises because the right-making and wrong-making factors may themselves be justified by a deeper level of normative commitments.

Helpful in understanding this issue is Shelly Kagan's distinction between normative factors and normative foundations. Normative factors are those considerations that need to be taken into account in determining whether an action is right or wrong

(Kagan 1998, pp. 17–18). Universal consequentialism at the level of normative factors accepts only one factor: if an action maximizes good consequences, for all involved, it is the right action to perform.[18] Deontology, at the level of normative factors, claims that what makes an action right is following the relevant law or rule. A virtue ethics holds that an action is right if it is the one that would be performed by a virtuous agent acting characteristically in the given circumstances. In contrast to normative factors, normative foundations explain *why* these given factors determine whether an act is wrong or right (Kagan 1998, p. 190). Normative foundations act as the ultimate justifiers of the right-making properties of actions endorsed by a normative theory.

An easy way to illustrate these two levels of normative discourse is to consider the difference between act and rule consequentialism. Rule consequentialism claims that at the level of normative factors, the right action is the one that follows an established set of moral rules. At the factor level, then, rule consequentialism is deontological. The justification for accepting these rules as the factors that determine which actions are right, however, is that following this set of rules maximizes good consequences in the long run. The rule consequentialist claims that we should not depart from rules on occasions where better consequences would follow, not because a rule has intrinsic worth, but because given human fallibility, and the potential effects of others being influenced by our breaking the rule, in the long run following the rule will have better consequences than breaking it. Rule consequentialism, then, is deontological at the level of normative factors, but consequentialist at the deeper level of normative foundations.[19] In contrast, act consequentialism is consequentialist at both the level of factors and the level of foundations. An act consequentialist holds that what makes an act right is that it maximizes good outcomes, and holds that there is no further justification at the level of foundations than this very same maximization of good outcomes.

If we agree with Goodman that the quoted passages provide evidence that Śāntideva believes that consequences alone determine which actions are the right ones to perform, we should conclude that he is a consequentialist at the level of normative factors. Nevertheless, we have seen that it is possible for a theory to employ one form of normative commitments at the level of factors, and then justify these commitments at the foundational level by a distinct set of normative commitments. In the case of rule consequentialism, a list of rules was adopted in determining which actions were correct (deontology), but this list itself was justified because its adoption maximizes good outcomes over time (universal consequentialism). Likewise, it is possible for a theory to employ consequentialist reasoning at the level of normative factors, and to justify these factors by appeal to a distinct form of moral reasoning.

Here are some examples of how these passages might be interpreted in a way that is consequentialist at the level of factors, but not at the level of foundations. Buddhists hold that performing actions for another's welfare creates karmic merit *(puṇya),* which results in benefits in this and future lives and ultimately creates some of the conditions for obtaining *nirvāṇa.* Furthermore, merit is created in dependence on the

intention one has when one performs an act, so that if I perform a generous act motivated by the selfish desire to gain future karmic benefits, the merit will be less beneficial than if I perform an act motivated to help another person.[20] It is consistent with these passages, therefore, to claim that an author like Śāntideva is consequentialist at the level of normative factors, in claiming that the right action to do is the one that benefits everyone, but still hold that this is justified at the deeper level by foundational egoistic commitments, since acting in this way creates karmic merit that benefits oneself.[21]

Other possibilities might be considered as well. One might claim that at the deepest level Śāntideva is committed to perfecting human character, and this is accomplished by perfecting virtues such as compassion, generosity, and equanimity. At the level of normative factors, then, he might hold that the right act is the one that maximizes consequences for all concerned, but also hold that this was justified because this maximizing action is what a virtuous person would do in this situation. Likewise, one might hold that at the deepest level it is the bodhisattva's vow to liberate all sentient beings from suffering that justifies the adoption of consequentialism at the level of normative factors in Mahāyāna ethics, at least for bodhisattvas. In this case, the obligation of a bodhisattva to maximize consequences would derive from the deeper deontological commitment to keeping his vow.[22]

Between Goodman's suggestion and the three possibilities I have just raised, we have four potential foundational sources of normative value that are consistent with the passages cited above. It may be, as Goodman seems to hold, that at the deepest level Śāntideva is a universal consequentialist, committed to maximizing good consequences for all. It is also possible that he is an egoist, holding that maximizing good consequences is what we should do because this creates the most merit for ourselves. He may also be a virtue ethicist, holding that the practice of benefiting others is justified, ultimately, because it is what a person with perfected virtuous character would do. He may also be a deontologist, holding that one should maximize good consequences for all beings because this is what is required of a person who has taken the bodhisattva vow. A fifth possibility is that Śāntideva is an ethical pluralist, holding that two or more of the considerations above play the role of ultimate justifier. There may be other possible interpretations of the passages as well, and likewise he may simply be uninterested in questions of foundational normative justification.

What would clearly settle this issue is a statement by Śāntideva, or some other Buddhist ethical writer, explicitly identifying the ultimate right-making factor(s) of actions, and explaining why the factor is accepted. Such explicit statements are given in Western ethical texts, like John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism,* when Mill states that actions are right to the extent that they follow the principle of utility and promote happiness for all persons, and wrong to the extent that they produce unhappiness (Mill 2001, p. 10).[23] It is less clear whether Indian Buddhist texts give one predominant answer regarding what the right-making features of actions are; however, even if we were to agree with Goodman that Buddhists do hold consequences to be the right-making factor of actions, then we would still have to consider the possibility

that this would hold only at the level of normative factors, leaving the question of normative foundations open.

Demandingness, Agent-neutrality, and the Connection between Ethics and Metaphysics

In the last section, I argued that the presence of the consideration of consequences and similar factors in texts like Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* does not provide sufficient evidence that the author is a universal consequentialist, since such consideration is consistent with multiple foundational normative theories. In this section, I consider three additional similarities to which Goodman draws attention: the demanding nature of Buddhist ethics, the endorsement of agent-neutrality, and the use of metaphysical arguments about the self to support normative conclusions. He argues for the first and last of these similarities by appealing to Śāntideva's writing, and so they will be directly relevant to concerns I am raising about classifying Śāntideva's ethics. Goodman's argument regarding agent-neutrality draws upon other Mahāyāna texts, but since Goodman presumably would ascribe an agent-neutral perspective to Śāntideva as well, I will also consider this argument. Although Goodman is correct that at least some Buddhist ethical texts contain these features, as before they do not provide significant evidence for his position that Buddhist authors like Śāntideva are consequentialist, since all three are compatible with multiple normative foundations. In what follows, I show how each factor is compatible with a virtue ethics, a deontological and an ethical-egoistic interpretation of the normative foundations of Śāntideva, although other possibilities might be argued for as well.

The first of these three features that Goodman draws attention to is the demanding nature of both Śāntideva's ethics and Western forms of universal consequentialism. Consequentialisms, in general, tend to be demanding because they require the adherent to choose the act or follow the rule that would maximize good consequences. For instance, since donating all my income above what is needed to pay basic living expenses could alleviate great amounts of suffering, and since this would far outweigh the relatively modest pleasure I would gain from spending it on myself, I ought to donate it. Goodman contrasts this to certain forms of virtue ethics, such as Aristotle's, that emphasize personal flourishing and leave room for the agent to develop their own interests (Goodman 2009, p. 90). He claims that "if we find a thinker presenting an ethical position that is extremely demanding, that is evidence that we are dealing with a form of consequentialism" (Goodman 2009, p. 44).

Goodman then points out that the conception of the bodhisattva developed by Śāntideva is extraordinarily demanding:

> Whatever suffering is in store for the world, may it all ripen in me. May the world find happiness through the pure deeds of the Bodhisattvas. (Goodman 2009, p. 92)[24]

Goodman holds that the shared demanding nature of Śāntideva's ethics and universal consequentialism supports his thesis that Buddhist authors like Śāntideva would endorse consequentialism (Goodman 2009, pp. 90–92).

The difficulty with Goodman's argument, as before, is that the property of being demanding is compatible with multiple ethical theories. Consider, again, the possibility of interpreting the commitments of the bodhisattva as deriving their normative force from the vow she takes to liberate all sentient beings. If this were the case, at its deepest level Mahāyāna Buddhism would be a deontology whose demanding nature results from the specific form of the rules accepted. Since the bodhisattva's vow requires her to liberate all sentient beings, great demands are placed upon her; however, in this interpretation, the normative force of the demands stems from the nature of her vow rather than from a commitment to consequentialism.

Goodman in particular singles out a virtue-ethics *eudaimonism* as being incompatible with a demanding conception of morality. As evidence for this, he cites Aristotle's *eudaimonistic* virtue ethics, in which great emphasis is placed on the flourishing of the individual (Goodman 2009, p. 90). Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility that a certain *eudaimonistic* virtue ethics might be as demanding as a universal consequentialism. What makes a theory *eudaimonistic* is that the development of a virtuous character is closely linked to the flourishing of the agent. How demanding particular *eudaimonism*s will be depends largely on the conception of flourishing that the theory employs.

For instance, if someone held that the *eudaimonia* of human life partially consists in pushing one's physical boundaries by running back-to-back marathons, then great physical pain would be included as part of their conception of the flourishing of the agent. If we interpret Mahāyāna Buddhism as a *eudaimonism,* moreover, the state of perfection that individuals strive to obtain is that of the high-level bodhisattva, who is most effectively able to remove the suffering of others. This conception of human flourishing includes a willingness to endure great suffering for the sake of others' welfare.

In the following verses, Śāntideva beautifully illustrates how closely his conception of human flourishing is linked to the extraordinary demands placed on the bodhisattva:

> Thus those whose mind-streams are cultivated in meditation and who equally accept the suffering of others dive into the Avīci hell like swans into a pool of lotuses. (*BCA* 8:107)
>
> They become oceans of joy when sentient beings are liberated. Have they not found fulfillment? What is the use of sterile liberation? (*BCA* 8:108)

In the first verse, Śāntideva makes the extremely demanding suggestion that bodhisattvas be reborn in the hell realms to work for the welfare of sentient beings residing there. In the second verse, we learn that it is exactly this undergoing of hardships for the sake of sentient beings that constitutes the highest fulfillment for bodhisattvas. Śāntideva, then, accepts an extremely demanding conception of human flourishing, and therefore the demanding nature of his ethics provides no reason to rule out interpreting it as an *eudaimonistic* virtue ethics.[25]

In fact, given Buddhist presuppositions about the functioning of karma, as mentioned above, even a foundational ethical egoism is compatible with the demanding

nature of Śāntideva's ethics. This is because both the karmic and the psychological benefits of being a bodhisattva committed to helping others are positive. Therefore, even self-sacrifice might be seen, at the deepest level, as entailed by a commitment to help oneself as much as possible. As stated above, I am not arguing that Śāntideva offers a foundational *eudaimonism,* a deontology, or an ethical egoism; rather, I suggest that the demanding nature of his ethics is compatible not just with a universal-consequentialist but also with a *eudaimonistic,* deontological, or ethical-egoistic interpretation. For this reason, simply noting the demanding nature of his ethics does not provide evidence for any particular interpretation of its underlying normative structure.

A second feature shared with universal consequentialism that Goodman emphasizes is that Mahāyāna Buddhism is an agent-neutral theory (Goodman 2009, p. 75). A moral theory is agent-neutral when it gives the same moral aims to all agents.[26] Most forms of universal consequentialism are agent-neutral, since they require all agents to promote or maximize the good, no matter whose good is being promoted. A moral theory is agent-relative when different agents are given different moral aims. For instance, a theory that says one should give greater priority to the welfare of oneself and close relatives is agent-relative, since different agents would be required to prioritize the welfare of different persons. In support of his claim that Mahāyāna ethics is agent-neutral, Goodman cites texts emphasizing the importance of impartiality for a bodhisattva. For instance, the Mahāyāna *Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts* advocates giving away one's last bite of food as a way of counteracting ingrained selfishness, and the *Inquiry of Ugra* emphasizes the importance of not favoring one's children over others (Goodman 2009, p. 74). Goodman concludes that since Mahāyāna Buddhism and consequentialism are agent-neutral, and since most nonconsequentialist moral theories are agent-relative, Mahāyāna ethics is therefore probably a variety of consequentialism (Goodman 2009, p. 75).

A difficulty with this strategy is that the appearance of agent-neutrality at the level of normative factors may be justified by a deeper commitment to agent-relative aims at the level of normative foundations. As suggested above, given Buddhist assumptions of meritorious karma resulting from acts directed toward the welfare of others, endorsing an apparently agent-neutral aim, like removing the suffering of all beings, may be justified by a foundational egoism that sees such selfless activity as providing one's own greatest benefit in the long run. Likewise, it might be justified because this is what a person exemplifying the virtuous character of a Buddha or a bodhisattva would do. Also, the foundational commitment might be the bodhisattva's vow, from which an obligation to help all sentient beings arises. Since apparent agent-neutrality at the level of factors is compatible with multiple ethical theories, as with the other features we have surveyed, it fails to provide significant evidence that Mahāyāna Buddhism is consequentialist. Further, since all the theories just mentioned are agent-relative, focusing respectively on benefiting oneself, developing one's own virtue, and keeping one's own commitments, we cannot determine with any certainty that a theory is agent-neutral from the fact that it endorses agent-neutral aims at the level of normative factors.

A third commonality between Buddhist ethics and consequentialism that Goodman draws attention to is Śāntideva's use of arguments drawing upon reductionist views of personhood in support of ethical conclusions (Goodman 2008, p. 24; Goodman 2009, p. 92). Goodman cites the following verses by Śāntideva:

> If I give them no protection because their suffering does not afflict me, why do I protect my body against future suffering when it does not afflict me? (*BCA* 8:97)
>
> If you think it is for the person who has the pain to guard against it, a pain in the foot is not of the hand, so why is the one protected by the other? (*BCA* 8:99)
>
> Without exception, no sufferings belong to anyone. They must be warded off simply because they are suffering. Why is any limitation put on this? (*BCA* 8:102; Goodman 2008, p. 24; Goodman 2009, pp. 92–93).

Śāntideva's argument, in brief, seems to be that since upon analysis selves do not exist, they cannot provide a good reason to prioritize one's own welfare over that of others. Therefore, if I am committed to removing pain, I ought to commit to removing all pain equally. I will therefore accept a commitment to impartial benevolence and strive to eliminate all pain, regardless of whom it belongs to.[27] Goodman claims Śāntideva's argument is intended to establish universal consequentialism:

> If we accept the doctrine of no self, it will be very difficult to resist the claim that the only ethical theory that could possibly be viable is some form of universalist consequentialism. (Goodman 2009, p. 93)

A difficulty with Goodman's argument is that these passages by Śāntideva do not directly argue for a consequentialist position, which would require accepting that only consequences determine the rightness of actions. Instead, they argue that we should accept a commitment to impartial benevolence, and make an equal commitment to removing everyone's pain. But a commitment to impartial benevolence is compatible with multiple foundational normative theories. A deontology might hold that the right-making property for actions is that they are in accordance with a rule, the content of which is that we must impartially remove the suffering of all beings. A virtue ethics might hold that the right-making property of actions is that it is what a virtuous person would characteristically do, and insist that compassion manifesting an equal concern for all beings is an essential element of such a character. An ethical egoism might hold that actions of impartial benevolence are the best method of accumulating karmic merit and a happy psychological disposition.

A second difficulty is that in these verses Śāntideva employs premises that he would not ultimately accept. Śāntideva belongs to the Madhyamaka school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, a school that holds that nothing is ultimately real. Therefore, both pain and selves should be accepted as mere conventions that have no ultimate existence. The argument, however, seems to depend on the claim that pain, but not selves, ultimately exists, a position that would be accepted by some early Buddhists, but not by a Mādhyamika (Siderits 2000, p. 421). In fact, what this suggests is that the argument by Śāntideva just cited by Goodman may be an example of an *upāya,* a

skillful means using positions that Śāntideva did not ultimately hold against opponents receptive to such an argument.[28] If this is correct, it supports my already stated concern that it will be difficult to distinguish Śāntideva's moral positions from psychological techniques and skillful means in his writing.

In his argument Goodman identifies a number of features shared between Buddhist writers like Śāntideva and consequentialism, and argues that these shared features provide evidence that these writers would be willing to endorse consequentialism. The features he draws attention to include the presence of reasoning about consequences in determining what actions to take, the endorsement of impartial benevolence and agent-neutrality, the demandingness of both Buddhism and consequentialism, and the utilization of reductionist arguments in drawing ethical conclusions. I have replied by arguing that each of these features is compatible with multiple normative theories, at least at the foundational level, and that therefore their presence offers little support for Goodman's contention that these authors would endorse consequentialism rather than some other theory.

To conclude this section, I need to consider a possible objection to my argument against Goodman. It might be argued that even if all the shared features identified by Goodman are *theoretically* compatible with multiple ethical theories, they are *in fact* all endorsed by universal consequentialism, while known varieties of deontology and virtue ethics, such as those formulated by Kant and Aristotle, endorse few if any of these features. It might then be argued that this fact suggests that consequentialisms in general tend to adopt these features, while other ethical theories tend not to. Therefore a Buddhist author's acceptance of these features reveals that he is, implicitly at least, consequentialist.

This objection can be successfully responded to by illustrating why, given Buddhist presuppositions, a Buddhist who ascribed to an ethical theory other than consequentialism would also endorse the features identified by Goodman. As a first step in answering this objection, we can note that the Buddhist features Goodman draws attention to have impartial benevolence as their common root. 'Impartial benevolence' here refers to the commitment to remove as much pain as possible, without partiality, a commitment that includes a concern for basic material needs as well as the conditions for progressing on the Buddhist path. The requirement to consider the consequences of one's actions arises as a result of this very commitment to minimize the suffering of others. Likewise, universal acceptance of impartial benevolence at the level of normative factors supports the acceptance of an agent-neutral perspective, since it suggests that all persons should accept the same aim of removing everyone's suffering. Further, Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics is demanding precisely because it accepts this commitment to impartial benevolence, and holds that everyone should strive to eliminate all suffering. The argument from no-self, also, draws as a conclusion that we should be impartially benevolent, since there is no reason to prioritize one's own welfare.

The core commitment that Buddhism shares with universal consequentialism, then, is impartial benevolence. Further, an insistence that everyone should adopt impartial benevolence would be compatible with multiple normative foundational

theories, in ways I have already explained above, as ultimately justified by the vow of a bodhisattva, or egoistic concerns or flowing out of specific virtues like compassion and equanimity. Goodman, however, might respond that the fact that both consequentialism and Buddhism adopt impartial benevolence, while other forms of normative theory developed in the West do not, provides some evidence that Buddhism is a consequentialism. In the history of Western ethics, there has been something of a tension between a concern for one's own welfare and a concern for the welfare of all. Western theories such as egoism, Aristotle's *eudaimonism,* and some versions of deontology allow for prioritizing one's own welfare above others, while many types of universal consequentialism forbid this. Goodman, therefore, could claim that a Buddhist author's commitment to impartial benevolence, and the other features considered above that arise out of it, suggests that he would ascribe to a type of consequentialism rather than any other kind of ethical theory.

The problem with this argument is that two Buddhist presuppositions, the functioning of karmic merit and the Buddhist understanding of suffering *(duḥkha),* entail that for the Buddhist the welfare of self and the welfare of others are more closely connected than in counterpart Western theories. As we have already seen, Buddhists hold that performing actions benefiting others will create good consequences *(puṇya)* for oneself in present and future lives. Therefore, acting to benefit others also benefits oneself. Further, Buddhists hold that many of the ordinary goals that are thought to give life meaning are saturated with subtle suffering *(duḥkha),* and are therefore not really worth pursuing. As we have seen above with Śāntideva, Mahāyāna Buddhists in particular suggest that the most fulfilling type of life is that of the bodhisattva who perfects the Buddhist virtues in order to work selflessly for the benefit of all beings. In this sense also, the Buddhist would hold that the state of flourishing of the individual largely consists in the performance of activities that benefit other beings.[29] For the Buddhist, then, the gap between impartial benevolence and egoism narrows, and arguably disappears, as one progresses along the Buddhist path.[30]

Marking this point about Buddhist ethics allows us to answer the objection framed above. Since Buddhists hold that a commitment to impartial benevolence will ultimately be the most skillful way to accomplish one's own happiness, and is partially constitutive of one's flourishing as a bodhisattva, it follows that if a Buddhist were foundationally an egoist or accepted a *eudaimonistic* virtue ethics, he would accept a commitment to impartial benevolence, and likewise accept the other features identified by Goodman that follow from it. He would, therefore, consider the consequences to all beings when performing actions, adopt an agent-neutral perspective at the level of normative factors, and accept an extremely demanding conception of morality. There would also be nothing to constrain him from making the kind of arguments Śāntideva employs in arguing that selfishness is irrational given the ultimate nonexistence of the self. The presence of the five features pointed out by Goodman, therefore, provides little evidence that a Buddhist would endorse consequentialism, since not only are the features compatible with other foundational normative theories but, given the background assumptions of karmic merit and *duḥkha,* we would also expect any Buddhist version of *eudaimonism* or egoism

to accept them. Likewise, if the deepest commitment of a bodhisattva was to follow their vow, then the specific content of this vow would commit the bodhisattva to impartial benevolence and entail that he or she will accept the other four features Goodman identifies.

Virtue Theory or Virtue Ethics?

In the preceding sections, I have drawn attention to two sets of problems that face anyone attempting to classify the underlying normative structure of Śāntideva's ethics by attempting to identify the right-making properties of actions that he would endorse. First, the proclivity of Buddhist authors to engage in skillful means, and the close connection between techniques of psychological transformation and normative reasoning, make it difficult to identify which textual passages are intended to identify these right-making properties. Second, the presence of surface-level moral features, such as talk of consequences, virtues, compassion, and so forth is compatible with multiple foundational normative theories.

Thus far I have developed this second concern in relation to Charles Goodman's argument that Buddhist ethics is consequentialist, but in this section I argue that similar concerns face anyone trying to classify Śāntideva as holding a kind of virtue ethics. I do not have space here to engage in detail with the reasoning provided by Damien Keown, James Whitehill, and others who draw analogies between Buddhism and virtue ethics;[31] instead, I will be limited to indicating in a general way how objections similar to those I have developed against Goodman would problematize attempts to classify Śāntideva as a virtue ethicist. My concern in this section is to raise difficulties for an attempt to classify Śāntideva as offering a virtue ethics in the sense of taking virtue as the foundational unit of normative value that must be appealed to in determining the ethical status of actions.[32] It might initially appear plausible to categorize Śāntideva as a virtue ethicist, since he places great emphasis on the important role the virtues play in moral development. Noting this is insufficient to categorize his theory, however, since other types of theories such as consequentialism and deontology can also acknowledge the important role the virtues play in moral life. For instance, a consequentialism may claim that only consequences are relevant in determining the rightness of action, but acknowledge that virtues have instrumental value in helping the agent to effectively bring about the best consequences.

In this section, therefore, I need to explain what it would take to classify Śāntideva as a virtue ethicist, as opposed to merely acknowledging the importance he gives to the development of the moral virtues. Helpful here is Julia Driver's distinction between virtue ethics and virtue theory (Driver 1998, p. 113 n. 1). For Driver, a virtue theory is any systematic explanation of what the virtues are and their role in moral life. There is no question that Śāntideva provides at least the beginning of a virtue theory in this sense. For instance, he offers definitions of certain virtues, such as defining generosity as the mental state that intends to give everything away (*BCA* 5:10), and perseverance as "enthusiasm for virtue" (*BCA* 7:2). Any moral theory, including

consequentialisms and deontologies, may have virtue theories, however; for instance, a universal consequentialist might hold that virtues are those qualities that allow one to maximize good consequences for everyone, or a deontology can acknowledge the importance of the virtues in performing one's duty or following the relevant rules.[33] Claiming that Śāntideva provides a virtue theory, in Driver's sense, does not classify the foundational normative structure of his ethics, but only notes the importance of virtues in his thought.

In contrast to a virtue theory, Driver defines virtue ethics as "the project of basing ethics on virtue evaluation" (Driver 1998, p. 113 n. 1). In Driver's sense, virtue ethicists see the virtues as the foundational unit in moral theory, and see themselves as providing an ethical theory distinct from consequentialism and deontology. The question of how, or even whether, a distinct boundary between virtue ethics and other types of moral discourse can be drawn is currently under debate by moral theorists, but here is an example of one way a distinction might be drawn that relates to the evaluation of actions. A virtue ethicist might hold that virtues are conceptually prior to other moral terms, such as the good. For instance, a virtue ethicist might hold that the good is not comprised of discrete items like pleasure, but rather only pleasure handled virtuously, that is, temperately (Swanton 2003, pp. 5, 35–36). Since one cannot speak of good consequences, for example, without also referring to the virtues, such theorists might claim that such a theory cannot be accurately described as a consequentialism.[34] Virtue ethicists would make similar claims to distinguish their theories from deontologies, or other kinds of moral theory.

Talk of the virtues and their role in moral life, then, provides evidence that a particular author provides a virtue theory, but of itself provides little evidence that the author should be classified as a virtue ethicist, since any moral theory, including consequentialisms and deontologies, can recognize and discuss the importance of the virtues in moral life. Authors like Damien Keown, Barbra Clayton, and James Whitehill appropriately draw attention to the role the virtues play in the writing of Buddhist authors including Śāntideva; it is not always clear, however, whether they are suggesting that these authors provide a virtue theory, in the sense of explaining the role of virtues in moral life, or a virtue ethics in which the virtues are somehow seen as foundational to moral discourse in issues such as the evaluation of actions.[35] If it is the former, then this is clearly correct, but we should note that this thesis does not conflict with Goodman's claim that Buddhism is foundationally a consequentialism, since consequentialisms can also provide virtue theories. If it is the latter, then the authors need distinct arguments as to why an author like Śāntideva should be interpreted as holding that the virtues are the basic term of moral discourse, and cannot be classified as holding a deontology, consequentialism, or other theory that recognizes the importance of the virtues.

In the preceding section, I used Kagan's distinction between factoral and foundational normative reasoning to explain why surface-level talk of consequences is not in itself sufficient evidence that Buddhism is a consequentialism at the deepest level. In this section, I have used Driver's distinction between virtue ethics and virtue theory to make a related point about surface-level talk of virtues. These remarks are

not intended to rule out the possibility of developing an argument that Śāntideva ascribes to a virtue ethics, but rather clarify what must be done in order to make this case. To claim that a Buddhist author is a virtue ethicist in Driver's sense, one needs to provide evidence that they hold virtues to be foundational to moral discourse in a way that does not allow their theory to be identified as a species of another kind of ethical theory. Even if this were done, however, the interpreter would also have to consider the possibility that the passages that their interpretation appeals to were intended as a skillful means or as a psychological technique for transforming the mind rather than describing the author's normative commitments.

Interpretations of Śāntideva as offering a theory other than virtue ethics or consequentialism, of course, might be defended, but such possibilities cannot be considered here. From what has been said already, it should be clear that such attempts would have to provide arguments that the passages cited explain the normative structure of the author's ethics, rather than acting as psychological techniques or skillful means; further, they would need to be aware of the possibility that surface-level talk of moral features might be compatible with multiple underlying normative theories.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have raised two types of objections against the project of classifying Śāntideva's ethics in the *BCA*. Both objections depend upon the recognition that the primary purpose of Śāntideva's text is to provide instructions for how to become a bodhisattva, encourage people to practice these instructions, and provide techniques to lessen suffering *(duḥkha)*. Keeping this in mind, the first kind of objection suggests that we should consider the possibility that what appear to be statements of moral principles may actually be therapeutic techniques or skillful means *(upāya)* for individuals of different psychological temperaments. The second type of objection reminds us that there is often a gap between the criteria determining which actions are right or wrong and the underlying normative foundations justifying the acceptance of these principles. Therefore, we should hesitate to draw conclusions as to the underlying normative commitments of a Buddhist author whose primary purpose was to explain how to end the suffering of all, not to justify at the deepest level why we ought to end that suffering.

I have framed my conclusions in this essay conservatively, as laying out what I see as some difficulties in classifying the structure of Śāntideva's ethics, rather than arguing that no such classification is possible. A related question that may help focus this discussion is to ask what Śāntideva, *qua* his project of bodhisattva training, would gain from endorsing a specific foundational normative theory that specifies why suffering should be eliminated.[36]

In the last section I argued that multiple moral theories give a role to the virtues in moral life. Therefore, at least in theory, the virtues of the bodhisattva, such as generosity, perseverance, patience, and so on, will be compatible with multiple foundational normative theories. Further, as I have argued in the first half of this essay, Śāntideva's primary purpose in writing the *BCA* was to provide guidance on how to

develop these virtues. What this suggests is that we have no particular reason to expect Śāntideva to favor a particular foundational normative theory in this text, since the psychological advice he offers would be useful to adherents of multiple normative theories. This is not to disregard the possible benefits of doing systematic ethical philosophy, but only to question whether Śāntideva's *BCA* is likely to provide us with the information necessary to make an informed guess as to which foundational normative theory he would have endorsed.

Notes

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1 – Keown 2001, Whitehill 1994, Goodman 2009. See Siderits 2005 for another example of an argument that Indian Buddhism is a consequentialism. Clayton 2006 also emphasizes similarities between Śāntideva's moral thought and virtue ethics, but suggests Śāntideva is actually a moral pluralist. Jay Garfield 2010 expresses doubt as to the value of classifying Buddhist ethics, and develops a phenomenological reading of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra.* See also Davis 2013 for a treatment of deontological elements in bodhisattva ethics.

2 – These terms are used in various ways in contemporary ethical writing. For instance, 'deontology' is sometimes used to refer to Kant's moral theory. My arguments are intended to highlight the difficulty of ascribing any underlying normative theory to Śāntideva, and so do not hinge on a particular specification of the underlying right-making criteria of action.

3 – I take the phrase "rational reconstruction" from Siderits 2003, pp. xiii–xiv, where he characterizes rational reconstruction as determining what contemporary position a traditional author *should* accept.

4 – At times, Goodman's phrasing suggests that Buddhist writers have already committed to consequentialism, although of course they would not use that term. See, for instance, his comments about Śāntideva in Goodman 2009, pp. 89–91.

5 – Citations and quotations of the *BCA* are from the Wallace and Wallace translation (Santideva 1997), unless otherwise indicated.

6 – Mark Siderits considers this kind of response to an argument made by Śāntideva in *BCA* 8:97–103. See Siderits 2007, p. 83.

7 – This is in contrast to the ninth wisdom *(prajñā)* chapter of the *BCA,* which deals largely with metaphysical and epistemological issues arising in relation to the

Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness *(śūnyatā),* in which Śāntideva considers and responds to positions of his opponents in some detail. Śāntideva does take several verses to consider the ethical implications of the Buddhist doctrine of no-self *(anātman)* in the eighth chapter of the *BCA,* verses 90–103; I will consider a selection of these verses below.

8 – The classic example of such a skillful means is the story of the father who tricks his children into leaving a burning house by telling them exciting toys wait for them outside. See Reeves 2008, pp. 112–118.

9 – My suggestion here is distinct from that of an author like Peter Harvey, who stresses that Buddhist theories contain features of multiple moral theories, such as a Utilitarian concern for the promotion of happiness, an Aristotelian concern for the development of a virtuous character, and a Kantian emphasis on the importance of motivation. See Harvey 2000, pp. 49–51. Harvey is right, of course, that Buddhist texts have certain resonances with various moral theories. In texts such as the *BCA,* however, there is an independent issue as to whether some of these resonances might not express commitments the author holds.

10 – *Majjhima Nikaya* 61 (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995, pp. 524–525; cited in Goodman 2009, p. 48).

11 – The passage quoted records a dialogue between the Buddha and his son Rahula in which Rahula is admonished to avoid lying. Passages like this are particularly susceptible to the objection that the Buddha may be giving teachings as a skillful means to a particular individual, rather than setting forth universal normative standards. The Buddha here could be emphasizing negative consequences as a means of helping Rahula see the harms arising out of telling lies, but might in other circumstances accept other normative factors that are relevant in determining the rightness of an action, such as the intrinsic value of keeping a vow or developing a virtuous character.

12 – *BCA* 5 : 84; translation by Goodman.

13 – Goodman also cites similar passages from the Mahāyāna author, Asaṅga. For instance: "If the bodhisattva sees that some caustic means, some use of severity would be of benefit to sentient beings, and does not employ it in order to guard against unhappiness, he is possessed of fault, possessed of contradiction; there is fault that is not defiled. If little benefit would result for the present, and great unhappiness on that basis, there is no fault" (Goodman 2009, p. 79).

14 – It is clear from the way Goodman defines consequentialism as holding that "the right action is the one that produces the best consequences" that he intends the stronger form of consequentialism (Goodman 2009, p. 24). See Barry 1991, 73–76, for a more detailed explanation of this distinction. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I raise this distinction here.

15 – Even rule consequentialism can posit a rule requiring occasional violations of ethical rules if this would raise good outcomes overall. I will not consider here whether this blurs the distinction between rule and act consequentialism.

16 – See also, on this point, Barnhart 2012, pp. 20–21, 25. See Barnhart 2012, 20–26, for his full critique of Goodman's position.

17 – See Nattier 2003, pp. 174–176, for doubts as to whether this was the dominant position in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

18 – This is something of a simplification, since various varieties of consequentialism hold that maximizing consequences is optional, provided a certain threshold is met. See Kagan 1998, especially chapter 6, for a discussion of some of the possible modifications to basic consequentialism.

19 – Goodman utilizes Kagan's distinction between factors and foundations as part of his argument that Theravāda Buddhism accepts a form of rule consequentialism. See Goodman 2009, p. 59. Since my focus is on Śāntideva, I do not evaluate this argument here; however, as should become apparent, my concern would be whether we have good reason to believe that Theravāda Buddhism is indeed consequentialist at the deeper, foundational level.

20 – In fact, Śāntideva makes an argument at the beginning of the *BCA* with resonances to this position, in which he suggests a reason to develop *bodhicitta* is the vast amounts of positive merit *(puṇya)* that a commitment to eliminating the suffering of all living beings results in. One should commit to removing the sufferings of all beings, at least in part because of the benefits one will accrue from doing so. See *BCA* 1:21–22.

21 – A possible response is suggested by Goodman, who argues that the dedication of merit *(puṇya-pariṇāmanā)* endorsed in Mahāyāna texts, in which the bodhisattva transfers his good karmic merit *(puṇya)* to others, shows that bodhisattvas place others' welfare above their own. See Goodman 2009, pp. 75–77. Such a dedication of merit, however, would be an act of generosity, which would itself help the practitioner accumulate meritorious karma; therefore, it remains possible that the ultimate normative justification for the dedication of merit itself is egoistic.

22 – The suggestion I am making is different from Goodman's suggestion that early Mahāyāna ethics is a form of rule utilitarianism. See Goodman 2009, p. 76. Rule utilitarianism claims that the right-making property of any act is whether it conforms to the relevant rule (factorial deontology), but justifies the adoption of such rules by appealing to the maximization of pleasure that results from following them (foundational utilitarian-consequentialism). By contrast, I am suggesting that these texts may be read as endorsing a foundational deontology, in which normativity results from keeping one's commitment to the bodhisattva path. I am not suggesting that this interpretation is correct, but only that it, as

well as a foundational consequentialism, is consistent with the evidence presented in the texts.

23 – Mill provides his justification for the Principle of Utility in chapter 4 of *Utilitarianism.*

24 – *BCA* 10:56; Goodman's translation.

25 – See also Clayton 2009, pp. 17–18, regarding the bodhisattva's development of virtues for the welfare of other beings. Clayton, however, seems to side with Goodman in holding this endorsement of other-regarding virtues is a consequentialist element in Śāntideva's moral theory.

26 – See Parfit 1984, p. 27. Nagel 1986 defines an agent-neutral reason as being one that can "be given a general form which does not include an essential reference to the person who has it," while agent-relative reasons do essentially refer to the bearer of the reason (Nagel 1986, pp. 152–153).

27 – A number of contemporary commentators have offered evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of Śāntideva's argument. Williams 1989 and Harris 2011 provide criticisms of Śāntideva's argument, while Pettit 1999, Siderits 2000 and 2003, and Clayton 2001 defend it.

28 – See also Siderits 2000, pp. 421–422.

29 – This does not necessarily mean that Buddhism is foundationally a pluralism, in which the right-making properties of actions include both one's own flourishing and the maximization of consequences impersonally conceived. It is possible that Buddhists hold that one of these properties acts as the ultimate right-making property, and that the other merely accompanies it. It is more likely that Buddhist ethical writers are content to point out that actions that benefit others will also benefit oneself, and are not interested in marking any property as the fundamental right-making property. I am not arguing for this further point in this essay, however.

30 – See Perrett 1987 for a different analysis emphasizing no-self *(anātman)* as eliminating tension between egoism and altruism in Buddhist ethics.

31 – See Keown 2001, especially chapter 8, and Whitehill 1994 for two of the most detailed attempts at drawing analogies between Buddhism and virtue ethics. See also Clayton 2006.

32 – It is important to note that not all writers who are usually identified as virtue ethicists attempt to specify the underlying right-making properties of action. On this point, see Annas 1993, pp. 7–10. According to Driver's terminology, such authors are virtue theorists, but not virtue ethicists.

33 – See Driver 2001 for a carefully developed consequentialist virtue theory.

34 – For another example of an attempt to provide virtues with a foundational normative role that meets Julia Driver's conception of a virtue ethics, see Slote 2001.

35 – Clayton, for instance, suggests that Śāntideva's "emphasis on character formation and the development of virtuous qualities" is "suggestive of a virtue ethics" (Clayton 2009, pp. 16–17).

36 – Cf. Keown 2006.

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