Teleologized "virtue" or mere religious "character?"
A critique of Buddhist Ethics from the Shin
Buddhist point of view

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ABSTRACT

When comparative ethicists consider the question of ethics in Buddhism, they are tempted to implicate conceptions of teleology and virtue from Western philosophy. Such implications cannot apply to Mahāyāna exemplified in the Japanese Shin tradition. Shin is characterized not only by emptiness philosophy but also by its emphasis on spontaneous (*tariki*) enlightenment; both of these features undercut the notion that Buddhism can ultimately concern an intentional goal. But a teleological or virtue-oriented sensibility is not needed for the purposes of ordinary life. On the contrary, Shin social history has demonstrated that a powerful tradition of practical life based on Buddhist teaching can exist perfectly well without it. Such wisdom manifests itself both socially and at the individual level as a kind of "character," if not ethics in the usual sense.

The study of ethics has always been under the pressure of overgeneralization. Kantian, analytical, neo-Aristotelian and history of religions traditions tend to assume that important ethical, as well as religious, qualities and values are theoretically universal, in other words that they are congruent with the positions discovered by the modern, i.e. recent Christian and post-Christian West. However, as anthropologists have known for some time, the comparability of "ethics" and "virtues" has always really depended on some demonstrable degree of convergence, both practically and linguistically, across different cultural fields. If the convergence of meanings and interests is only partial or ambiguous, the hermeneutics must be carefully qualified or else serious communication cannot take place.

It is in fact historically not clear that cross-contextual intelligibility of the term "ethics" has even existed with the diversity of "Western" traditions themselves. There are ancient Greek definitions, Christian definitions, neo-Kantian definitions, utilitarian definitions, modernist pragmatic definitions, relativistic definitions, and so on. It is tempting to reach the conclusion that, without extensive contextualization, the term ethics even in English is already an unusably multivocal term.

In Buddhism the problem of multivocality is severe.[1] Buddhism is a set of traditions outside of any of the Western spheres. In addition there is no term in Buddhism that corresponds directly to the term ethics.[2] Of course the term has been used to refer to a wide variety of phenomena, all of which are to some extent idiosyncratically Buddhist and not necessarily correspondent to any Western term. The most obvious apparent parallel with "ethics" has been *vinaya* codes and their abbreviated variants for lay people.[3] Even the clear definition of something as fundamental as *sīla*, however, raises problems.[4] The diversity of other candidates for ethics includes the performance of thaumaturgical services, the compassionate roles played by supernormal spiritual beings, the preaching of philosophical and religious ideas, lay patronage of the monastic sangha, often for purposes of karmic improvement;[5] and traditions of what we might call mundane wisdom (often expressed in

storytelling).[6]

Buddhist traditions about "good behavior" introduce another problem which is unknown in the West: the tension between kammatic and nibbanic attitudes corresponding to different levels of spiritual development. The long karmic time line of spiritual progress in Indian traditions deeply affects the sense of ethical integration, because significantly different good behaviors might be required at various times of an individual's karmic history.[7]

In trying to accommodate Buddhism to comparative religious ethics, two basic methodological poles have been tested. Wholists, beginning perhaps with Frank E. Reynolds,[8] have been interested in expanding the narrow focus that ethicists have traditionally adopted towards Buddhism, making an attempt to incorporate the larger contexts within which Buddhism interacts with society. Formalists such as David Little,[9] on the other hand, understand ethics as a study of rational forms which are communicable trans-culturally; they are apprehensive about historical methodologies which can be confused with arguments for ethical relativism. While Reynolds and Little have sometimes tried to minimize underlying differences of approach (for instance, Reynolds has expressed the idea that a Weberian-style comparative ethics is often intelligible, and Little has accepted that historical or cultural understanding can be helpful to the study of ethics), Russell F. Sizemore[10], surveying the dialogue between the poles, has suggested that the two approaches remain substantially separated. "The problem is that they have different questions to put to their material. They disagree over what it is that they should be clear about, over the sorts of categories that are required for the studies they want to do. They disagree over the object of the field as a discipline."[11]

Against this unsettled background, this article is concerned with a critique of one of the fundamental assumptions which is involved in the very idea of comparative ethics and Buddhism. The critiqued assumption is: ultimate Buddhist good behavior is teleological and can be related to generalizable concepts of "virtues."[12]

The assumption of teleology deeply affects concepts of appropriate behavior in any tradition. It has been seen as both applying to both Western and Buddhist sets of traditions. The question is inseparable from comparative ethics because of the pressure to construe the best behavior as teleological or virtue-oriented. Although some kinds of Western ethics have already been identified as non-teleological (especially in the twentieth century) and called post-modernist,[13] dominant Western notions of what ethics should be are still based largely upon quasi-Christian paradigms seen through a neo-Kantian lens. (This pressure has certainly been involved in the ongoing Western attraction to what looks like the clear-cut moral rationalism of Theravāda as contrasted to the indeterminacy of large parts of Mahāyāna traditions.) Of course basic epistemological decisions are at stake, rooted in long standing philosophical divergences which are only now beginning to be adequately applied to Buddhist ethics. Historians/relativists (perhaps cultural anthropologists would be the widest definition) are primarily concerned with how religious morality interacts with a fluid social setting; traditional ethicists are primarily concerned with how morality interacts with rationality and larger conceptions of transcendent reason. Wholists suggest that rationality is only another social construction; formalists accuse anthropologists and historians of being relativists and confused over the primacy of rationality.

It is important to note, by way of qualification, that formalist ethical models are not rigidly absolutist; thus, to various degrees, they can be said to be pluralistic or semi-formalist, often falling along a classical continuum contrastingly emphasizing the teleological and the deontological. (The teleological pole accepts the existence of the moral rules, but emphasizes the consequentialist effects in relation to social utility; the deontological pole, as in ethical formalisms such as Kant's, explicitly excludes social consequences as irrelevant to the validity of moral rules.) Neo-Christian moral systems usually combine both teleological and deontological elements to fashion sophisticated understandings in which a specific ethical rule is considered integrated

with the transcendent, and yet at the same time maintains a certain flexibility in real world practice in order to operate in a meaningfully goal-oriented fashion.[14]

The dominant recent argument about Buddhism, associated with Damien Keown,[15] is that Buddhist ethics can be treated as semi-formalist and construed in a comparative context as flexibly teleological in a neo-Aristotelian manner. While admitting that there is "no point of contact between Aristotelian ethics and the transcendent dimension of nirvana" directly,[16] he suggests links between nirvana and the Greek conception of eudaemonia. For example, each is desired for its own sake, everything else that is desired is directed toward desire for the sake of it, and it is never chosen for the sake of anything else.[17] On this view, both Buddhism's and Aristotle's conceptions of a flexible telos follow the pattern of a final good attainable through proper intentional action.

James Whitehill[18] has made a related attempt to classify Buddhism as an ethics of virtue. By ethics of virtue he means an ethics that is "character-based (rather than principle-driven...), praxis-oriented, teleological, and community-specific."[19] His focus on concrete action is also semi-formalist. Buddhist practice is essentially most interested in social performance of religious actions; it is "the ritualization of morality."[20]

Arguments like Keown's and Whitehill's assume moral perfectibility can be intended. Hence, both Aristotelean virtue and Buddhist virtue are in a sense unnatural, for it is only through disciplined effort that a state of "goodness" can be achieved.[21]

Now, this causal approach is fundamentally questionable, beginning within the Indian philosophical perspective itself. Ian Harris[22] has pointed out that "the minimum qualification for an authentic Buddhist ethics is that it is able to construe causation in such a way that goal-oriented activity makes sense."[23] However, after a technical exploration of the inconclusiveness of Buddhist causation theory, Harris has concluded that the "soteriological structure of Buddhism appears...essentially dysteleologic."[24] The paradoxes of causation suggest it is difficult to

support any claim that radical epistemic flux has an "end" located anywhere. Any achievable end is provisional and momentary.[25]

Several of the above issues come to a head in Jōdoshinshū Buddhism. Its wholistic rhetoric is both radically non-teleological and radically non-virtuous. Its ideas were not just hidden in the technical disputations of academic monastic specialists, but were carried to a mass audience and became the basis of the most important Buddhist institution in Japan. Somehow, however, at the same time something about Shin has always resembled Protestant Christianity to outside observers more than any other non-Christian world religious tradition. Shin raises the most intransigent of all methodological problems for comparative religious ethics.

Two main theoretical issues are involved in the critique of teleology and virtue from the Shin perspective.

First, it is a truism that the ground of reality as described by Mahāyāna emptiness theory does not involve a fixed metaphysical regime. As has long been explored in the familiar rhetoric of Madhyamaka or Ch'an, merging or contacting with emptiness through an enlightenment experience cannot be described non-paradoxically as a goal or telos.

Consequently, the Mahāyāna theory of knowlege does not fit well with the normal understanding of ethics which tends to presume that there is not only a fixed agent acting ethically, but also a fixed set of behaviors that can be described as ethical. The premise of Buddhist "ethical life" is the awareness of interdependence. Compassion is made possible by grasping the inter-defining tie between subject and object. The isolated self is cast aside.[26] Compassion is in one sense a personal goal, but by definition also extends outward from the individual, as a transformative openness to the world, which both interacts with the outside world and includes it. Detailed a priori stipulation regarding ethical behavior is restrained by the technical rejection of determinate epistemological or ontological conceptual categories. Ethics is a dynamic process, manifesting itself as contingent social actions which aid the world toward this awareness. Frequently labels of good and evil are inappro-

priate. A more accurate description of action may be skillful and unskillful. A skillful action leads to deeper insight, and helps the individual to break free of karmic entanglements; an unskillful action clouds awareness and causes backsliding. Yet these categories are not set or fixed, and what is skillful in one individual may be unskillful in the next.[27] Only outside the lived context of traditional Buddhist cultures is the hesitancy to speak prescriptively confused illegitimately with a hesitancy to act in the world.[28]

The second point, and the one most distinctively emphasized by Shin among traditional Asian Buddhisms, involves its handling of another truism that an involuntary existential leap occurs at the critical threshold point of enlightenment which cannot be described as intentional or (in the final analysis) rationally controllable.

Although relatively little attention was ordinarily paid to it because it tended to cast doubt on the purpose of renunciant life (the mythos of the Buddha) or was irrelevant to the basic maintenance of that ritual life,[29] there is abundant evidence that an assumption of involuntariness at the critical threshold was embedded throughout Buddhist traditions. Indian technical thought about causation was shot full of the kinds of problems noted by Harris; even popular mythic materials like the parables of the raft or the snake chronically raised logical questions.[30] In Pali Buddhism, "exterior" help towards enlightenment was often assumed under the guise of "divine revelation."[31]

In the Chinese tradition, where more doubts about the Indian-style institutionalization of Buddhism occurred, ambivalence about the question of causation was rife. The *p'an chiao* classification schemes ranking the texts and schools of Buddhism were deeply affected by the issue. The *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* was typically thought to be sudden in its teaching, representing the first occurrence where full enlightenment was expounded; however, this weakened its effectiveness in real-world praxis. Texts like the *Lotus* and *Nirvāṇa sūtras* were considered to be more useful because they blended *prajñā* and *upāya* (perfect teaching and provisional teaching) together into pragmatic, if not logical, syntheses.

The seminal sixth century monk Chih-I (538-597) was well known for his analysis of the interplay between these aspects of the teaching. Seeking an integration of *prajñā* and *upāya*, he held that the highest truth could not be taught over a lengthy period of time, yet meditation and constant practice helped to hone the faculties. Rhetorically, then, there were no levels of progression on the Buddhist path, yet there were levels; and though there were said to be attainable levels, there were ultimately no levels to be found.[32] The two truths (corresponding in structure to two truths found in Madhyamaka rhetoric) were inseparable from one another, and every *sūtra* had elements of both. Enlightenment had a necessarily indeterminate quality to it.[33] Chih-I apparently theoretically maintained the possibility that an individual could be of such supreme intrinsic capacity that upon a single encounter with the "perfect" teaching (which can be found implicitly or explicitly in every Buddhist *sūtra*) they he would spontaneously burst into Buddhahood without further conscious effort.[34]

Later, as is well known, Ch'an debates returned ad nauseam to the question whether the process was embodied in a "sudden" moment of insight or a "gradual" series of practices spanning multiple lifetimes (sudden enlightenment exponents usually referred to the founder Śākyamuni; interpreters of the *sūtra* literature instead emphasized gradualness and *upāya*)[35]. Ch'an lineages adopting each perspective existed contemporaneously and polemicized against one another.[36] Conservative monastics following Chih-I tried to find the perfect teaching in all Buddhist literature, Mahāyāna and Hinayāna alike, but by the end of the 8th century the gradualist schools had come to be pejoratively associated with Hinayāna lineages, and practices understanding the enlightenment process as involving multiple lifetimes or multiple stages of progression were derogated. Eventually enlightenment was dominantly regarded in China as a multivalent and ambiguous event, without any precise agreement on how the individual, in the final analysis, crossed the threshold between ignorance and enlightenment.

By the first millenium CE, consequently, in large sectors of later

Mahāyāna Buddhism—especially the sectors where Indian monastic conventions had been most questioned—the tradition had become openly inconsistent. Monastic thinkers insisted on a positive relation between traditional authority and causation towards enlightenment; they were interested in merging Buddhist lineages with the problematic assumptions about self-causation of enlightenment. Meanwhile, however, although the monastic sangha was clearly an institution with various important purposes (religious reenactment of the founder's myth, maintenance of scholastic knowledge, thaumaturgical services, and so on) a widespread suspicion, even positive understanding, had emerged that none of these other purposes were unambiguously related to "causing" enlightenment. Technically there was no doctrinal consensus over the alleged causation, and Enlightenment was, in the final analysis, possibly (or even necessarily) sudden and beyond control.[37]

In Japan, Shinran's *tariki* principle merely eliminated inconsistencies by taking the spontaneity principle to the institutional limit. Removing in his theory even a provisional precept-based praxis, Shinran recast Buddhism in terms of a pure leap to enlightenment. From Shinran's viewpoint, the tradition had not sufficiently justified how the threshold could be crossed by any intentional practices initated by the ignorant mind, whether calming techniques, seclusion, or deliberate suppression of the ego. Instead Shinran emphasized through his methodical *p'an-chiao* scheme the point that enlightenment was impossible for the ignorant mind to achieve directly; enlightenment did not happen in the final analysis due to action by the individual, but rather by the "activity of Amida Buddha" (which Shinran redefined as the ultimate reality of enlightenment). Only through involuntarily "yielding" or "entrusting" to the Amida could enlightenment emerge. The existential leap was no longer even demarcated as a specific moment, but as a developing religious process outside of normal self-observation or self-consciousness.[38] Institutional change in Buddhism was among the most important implications of these ideas.[39]

Returning then to the critique of teleology and virtue theory: if a

Buddhist practitioner (especially one keying on Shin rhetoric) cannot causally achieve his own ultimate soteriological end (even in relation to a flexible teleology), it is impossible to refer to that end as teleological or as ultimately amenable to processes of rational organization, and thus as ethical or virtue-oriented in any normal English sense of the term.

The Shin tradition's core inability to generate the expected kind of stipulative moral rhetoric has always been confusing outside of Japan. One of the more or less hidden assumptions of modern neo-Christian or neo-Aristotelian styles of ethical reasoning is that only teleological ethics or virtue ethics can result in genuine moral action and social efficacy. Against this assumption, unfortunately, Shin tradition demonstrates that a religious system which is theoretically non-teleological and non-virtuous can be associated with a conservative social organization and a powerful tradition of practical wisdom.[40]

On the surface, as in much of Ch'an rhetoric, Shinran's radically minimalist interpretation of the enlightenment process left little to be discussed overtly about social ethics. The repeated principle of reliance on the compassion of Amida and the complete inefficacy of any form of self-enlightenment appears to preclude the promotion of any meaningful praxis. Shin apparently obviates action by its definitive denial of any form of self capable of significant accomplishment.[41]

But this was not at all the case. Observations of classical Shin (especially in the pre-WWII period) by foreigners indicated there has never been any serious empirical justification for these speculations about amorality. On the contrary, committed Shin members have usually impressed foreign observers as the most serious of the Japanese Buddhists, and there has been little question that such practitioners have followed deeply moral lives.[42] Social praxis in Shin has been thoroughly solid, sharing mundane ethical features with Japanese life generally such as cooperative morality in economic communities, acceptance of state law, commitment to family life, preaching, journalism, storytelling, and social service.[43]

It is not really difficult to understand why concrete good behavior

and moral seriousness could be associated with the formal Shin rhetoric of *tariki*. On one hand, Shinran's teachings actually raised expectations for the average member of the Buddhist community because of its anti-magical stance, its egalitarianism, and its dispersal of power. Compared to monastically organized Buddhism, Shin created an even wider context of common communal expectations which encouraged positive behavior.[44] Shin Buddhism was often in the early part of the 20th century thought by foreigners to be a more serious form of Buddhism than the monastic traditions.[45]

The even more fundamental basis for this continuing Buddhist moral seriousness was the fact that although enlightenment could not ultimately be "caused," such recognition scarcely eliminated the mass of practical wisdom about suffering and its amelioration that was associated with Buddhism generically. Compared to other versions of Buddhist rhetoric, Shin's minimalist theory merely further reduced the range of allowable formal expression or conceptual stipulation regarding good behavior or ethics in Buddhism. What was still left to flourish, however, was the sophisticated accumulation of empirical wisdom which was traditionally bound up with the high-level emptiness philosophy.

This pattern was not dissimilar to other Buddhist traditions, for any Buddhist tradition seems to have involved an understanding that the majority of individuals are neither enlightened nor thoroughgoingly ignorant, but instead are located these two poles. Buddhas may be enlightened and animals may reside in complete ignorance. For the mass between these vague boundaries, however, life is an interplay of increasing awareness set against karmic backsliding. In the existential struggle, the suffering felt by individuals remains empirically real. Social behavior can be understood (albeit provisionally) as throughly meaningful. Social conduct must still endeavor to approximate the compassionate nature of ultimate existence. From this point of view, the "Buddhist ethics" which can be dealt with rationally or intentionally can be described as a kind of qualified pragmatism or humble consequentialism, as action with a common-sense understanding of utility limited by the background

presuppositions about the imponderable causality of enlightenment.[46]

Emphatically, however, although Shin was not associated with ethics or virtue in any normal sense, it was certainly associated with a kind of distinctive personal character. This is not the "character" of the comparative virtues theorists; rather, it is a kind of residual, non-intentive category, one that comes indeed more from the questioning of "virtue" rather than from any intentive practice of virtue. The nature of this Shin character is a matter of post hoc anthropological observation rather than doctrinal or programatic stipulation. It is expressed, for example, in the story literature of Shin, especially that concerned with *myōkōnin*, the "rare followers" of Shin teachings. Rather than ethics or virtue, these sources report mere psychological and aesthetic features as the hallmarks of the ideal Shin consciousness: simplicity, an unselfconscious frugality, gratitude, worrilessness, joy, naturalness, disinvestment in personal ego, and concern for others.

Such qualities of mere religious character are not very useful to comparative religious ethics or to a theory of comparative virtues. Perhaps they are only useful to an empirical theory of comparative religious psychology. In any case, however, they were substantial enough to create a moral foundation for the one of the strongest and richest sectors of traditional Japanese society.

Notes

[1] On multivocality regarding ethics in Buddhism, see Charles Hallisey, "Recent Work on Buddhist Ethics," *Religious Studies Review* v. 18, no. 4 (October 1992), pp. 276-285, and Charles S. Prebish, "Ambiguity and Conflict in the Study of Buddhist Ethics: An Introduction." *Journal of Religious Ethics*. Vol. 18, no. 4 (Fall 1996). pp. 294-304

[2] In modern Japan the problem is confused due to the presence of the Confucian term *rinri*, which has been adopted as a terminological equivalent for ethics. This convention from the beginning places Buddhism outside the pale of ethics because it essentially has no *rinri*, i.e. no Confucian content.

[3] Most research into "Buddhist ethics" has focused on Theravāda monastic models, frequently explaining ideal social behavior in terms of circles of morality extending outward from the monks. Relatively little attention has been given to Mahāyāna practices outside of *vinaya* codes or precepts which are in large part shared with Theravāda. The emphasis on *vinaya* probably occurs because it is the only kind of Buddhist thinking that makes any sense to Western ethicists, perhaps because it alone appears to engage an identifiable agentive self.

[4] See Richard Gombrich, "Notes on the Brahminical Background to Buddhist Ethics," in Dhammapala, Gatare, ed. *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Hammalava Saddhatissa* (University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka: Hammalava Saddhatissa Felicitation Volume Committee, 1984), especially p. 100. Gombrich, anticipating to some extent the comments below, suggested that the object of Buddhist *sīla* can only be compared to the development of character, that is, a complex integration of inner habits and outer behaviors.

[5] Spiro's well-known *Buddhism and Society* reinforced the skeptical idea that most real-world Buddhists are concerned about what he called kammatic interests. (Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University

of California Press, 1982). They are not interested in enlightenment, but rather a more pleasurable or wealthier rebirth (see esp. pp. 31-139). Buddhism as a medieval (and post-modern) religion has been a tapestry of interests, always rich in syncretized folk beliefs, deity worship, and thaumaturgical interests, and even the Buddhist doctrinal or monastic authority has typically incorporated these low-level religious practices wherever Buddhism traveled.

[6] Attention is beginning to be drawn to this aspect of Theravāda. See Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen. "Narrative, Sub-ethics, and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravāda Buddhism." *Journal of Religious Ethics*. Vol 18, no. 4 (Fall 1996) pp. 305-328.

[7] Many Buddhist ethicists who take an emic position towards the tradition regard Spiro's treatment of these interests as misleading, but the important point here is that it in any case raises a problem for cross-cultural ethical comparison. See Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 83-92.

[8] See e.g. Frank E. Reynolds, "Ethics and Wealth in Theravada Buddhism." in Sizemore, Russell F. and Donald K. Swearer, eds. <u>Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics</u> (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 59-76.

[9] See e.g. David Little, "Ethical Analysis and Wealth in Theravada Buddhism," in Sizemore, Russell F. and Donald K. Swearer, eds. *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 77-86.

[10] Russell F. Sizemore, "Comparative Religious Ethics as a Field: Faith, Culture, and Reason in Ethics." in Sizemore, Russell F. and Donald K. Swearer, eds. *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 87-99.

[11] Sizemore, p. 91. The debate on comparative ethics and Buddhism is less than two decades old, beginning perhaps with the *Journal of Religious Ethics* vol. 7, no. 1 Spring 1979. In that volume, regarding the Theravāda context, Swearer and Reynolds initially questioned the ap-

plication of Kantian models. Shortly thereafter, David Little first defended a modified neo-Weberian approach. (David Little, "The Present State of the Comparative Study of Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* vol. 9, no. 2 (Fall 1981), pp. 210-227. More recently Lovin and Reynolds have contrasted the three poles of Ronald Green's overt formalism, Little and Twiss's semi-formalism, and their own empirical wholism. Lovin, Robin W. and Frank E. Reynolds, "In the Beginning," in Lovin, Robin W. and Frank E. Reynolds, eds. *Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[12] Teleology will refer here to a fixed goal orientation in ethical behavior, which is associated with a relatively fixed sense of a metaphysical regime (sometimes an evolutionary regime) so that the ethical goal can be sought intentionally according to a relatively rational, systematic plan.

[13] See e.g. Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993.

[14] Even when moral traditions are typologized, it can be argued that each one is a complex synthesis of typological dimensions: some degree of borrowing and cross-fertilizing can be taken for granted. See John P. Reeder Jr., "Three Moral Traditions," *Journal of Religious Ethics* vol 22, no. 1 (Spring 1994), pp. 75-92.

[15] See *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, particularly his detailed examination of Mahāyāna practices (pp. 129-164) and Aristotelian comparison (pp. 193-227).

[16] Ibid., p. 195.

[17] Ibid., pp. 197-199. Aristotelian teleological perspectives have been appropriated even by modern Japanese thinkers. See e.g. Ichimura Shohei, "Buddhist Dharma and Natural Law: Toward a Trans-Cultural, Universal Ethics." in Fu, Charles Wei-hsun and Sandra A. Wawrytko. *Buddhist Ethics and Modern Society: An International Symposium.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1991. pp. 383-405.

[18] James Whitehill, "Buddhist Ethics in Western Context: The Virtues Approach." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* vol. 1 (1994):1-22.

[19] Ibid., p. 3. Emphasis in original.

[20] Ibid., p. 5.

[21] Such approaches are related to the recent variant of semi-formalist comparative ethics known as virtue ethics, which is represented in Asian- or Buddhist-related studies by the work of scholars such as Lee H. Yearley, John P. Reeder, Jr., or Donald K. Swearer.

[22] Ian Harris, "Causation and Telos: The Problem of Buddhist Environmental Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* vol. 1 (1994):45-56.

[23] Ibid., p. 1.

[24] Ibid., p. 6. Surveys of Theravāda ethics seem to have ignored the inconsistencies related to issues of causation and to have left the issue unproblematized. Similarly unproblematized has been the inconclusiveness of this-worldly versus other-worldly tendencies (immanence versus transcendence) in some Pali sources. (Grace G. Burford, *Desire, Death and Goodness: The Conflict of Ultimate Values in Theravada Buddhism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

[25] Thus, among other things, Buddhist thinking may not really corroborate modern Western practical interests (e.g. Buddhism may offer nothing in particular to reinforce environmental morality).

[26] Compassion implies a kind of benevolence, which may not be an authentic description of enlightenment when it involves an intentional attempt to suppress the ego and the various appetites driving the individual further into karmic entanglement; nevertheless, compassion evokes an emotive feel that is pragmatically useful.

[27] These attitudes have long been described in sources such as Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978). The act of murder could, in theory, be skillful to an individual. Perhaps the extreme guilt over the crime might cause a break in his normal egoistic workings and a real emotive change; this could be the penultimate event that might set the individual down the path of awareness. In practice, of course, Buddhism has never also lacked a degree of common-sense moral regimentation among its constituents.

[28] Statements such as the below by Robert A. F. Thurman, for example,

seem to cling to various bifurcations of reality, thus ultimately pushing societal issues and actions into the lower category of importance. The practical impact of this advice is that the necessities and will of the collective, the "business of society" is just not that important. It is, after all made up of individuals, their collective interest is the specific sum of their individual interests, one by one. Therefore, as the enlightenment of each one individually is the most important thing for each one, one by one, the enlightenment of any one individual is of supreme importance at any one time. (Thurman, "Guidelines for Buddhist Social Activism Based on Nagarjuna's Jewel Garland of Royal Counsels." *Eastern Buddhist* n.s. vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 1983), pp. 19-51; quote from p. 32). See also Thurman, "The Emptiness that is Compassion." *Religious Traditions* vol. 4, no. 2 (October-November 1981), pp. 11-34. For commentary from a Shin point of view, see John S. Ishihara, "A Shin Buddhist Social Ethics." *The Pure Land* n.s. no. 4, pp. 14-33 (December 1987)

[29] See Keown, *Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, pp. 155-157 on the fundamental concern for *vinaya* in monastic Mahāyāna.

[30] Ibid., pp. 92-105. Keown discusses the difficulties on interpreting the parables of the raft and snake, and resulting implications for moral causation.

[31] See Peter Masefield, *Divine Revelation in Pali Buddhism* (Colombo: Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 1986). On the arising of awareness without personal causation, see especially pp. 98-144.

[32] See Neal Donner, "Sudden and Gradual Intimately Conjoined: Chihi's T'ien-t'ai View." in Gregory, Peter N., ed. *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987.

[33]   ... Subhuti asked, "If all dharmas are ultimately without substance, why then do you say there are the ten stages?" The Buddha answered, "It is precisely because there is ultimately no substance to the dharmas that the ten stages of bodhisattva exist. If dharmas had a fixed nature, there could be no stages." Know therefore that to speak of two kinds of Mahāyāna as separate from each other is to contradict the *sūtras*. (Trans-

lated from Chan-jan's Hsuan-i in Donner, p. 211).

[34] Ibid., p. 220.

[35] In traditional Buddhist practice, *upāya* refers to methods of teaching the dharma where the audience is assumed to be ignorant and lacking the skill to hear or witness the complete truth. Since most of the hearers of Buddhism could not grasp anything beyond the elementary levels, the Buddha is said to have instructed a wide range of listeners with different messages at each occasion. This helped justify an enormous canon of literature which appears to be internally inconsistent.

[36] See essays in Peter N. Gregory, ed. *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987).

[37] In tandem, of course, the relations of various kinds of phenomena that might be called Buddhist ethics to the enlightenment problem were indeterminate or ambiguous. Some aspects of ethics spoke from the ignorance side of the enlightenment transformation: *vinaya*, donation, or practical wisdom. Other aspects spoke from the other side of the transformation: emptiness rhetoric, the activities of *sambhogakāya* supernormal beings, or the poetry of Buddhas.

[38] Thus the characteristic *bhaktic* structure of Shin rhetoric. Undoubtedly the majority of Shinshu followers conceived of Amida as a resplendent deity figure. This was, however, not the way Shinran—and the later Shin intellectual tradition, which was the single largest among premodern intellectual traditions of any kind in Japan—understood Amida in its purest sense. Amida was non-dual and without distinction; Shinran's language was highly metaphorical; enlightenment happened only "as if" Amida reached down and pulled one in.

[39] Historically Shinran's teaching is most clearly understood as a questioning of authority, specifically challenging the mainstream monastic authority that had dominated Buddhism for nearly two thousand years. His minimalist philosophy was constructed in part to exclude elements used to justify monastic authority, such as *vinaya*, thaumaturgical effects, or visionary contacts with supernormal beings. See Galen Amstutz,

"Shinran and the Question of Authority in Buddhism." *Eastern Buddhist*, forthcoming.

[40] It might be added that the idea that a strong practical ethics can be dysteleological can be closely linked to some streams of current Western social research. Norma Haan and her colleagues, for example, have offered a critique of the neo-Kantian Kohlbergian model of cognitive developmental psychology. Haan proposes an "interactional theory" of cognitive behavior, wherein human behavior can pragmatically be seen as a stream of moral tensions embedded in the surrounding social setting. There is an active dialogue at play, and "morality" exists insofar as an agent generates patterns of tendentious behavior over time; moral action can only be realistically described as a changing process, formulated situationally. The moral agent, according to this model, *does* morality rather than cognitively map out a rigid ethical system, and the action itself always involves a skillful balancing of psycho/social tensions and conflicts. Societal rules are necessarily contradictory and ambiguous, and resolutions, developed by specific agents, are the result of various complex factors, both internal and external, converging into a (moral) decision. (Norma Haan, Elaine Aerts and Bruce A.B. Cooper, *On Moral Grounds: The Search for Practical Morality* (New York: New York University Press, 1985).

[41] Of course, the normal presentation of Shin has been conducive to these appearances. Scholars who have presented Shin tradition in its radically dysteleological classic doctrinal form have omitted to discuss the actual social history associated with that doctrine. (See e.g. Ishihara and Michael Pye, "The Source and Direction of Ethical Requirements in Shin Buddhism." *The Pure Land*. n. s. no. 6, pp. 165-177).

[42] On observations of Shin by foreigners, see Galen Amstutz, *Interpreting Amida: Orientalism and History in the Study of Pure Land Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

[43] These perspectives have not been sufficiently represented only because of the peculiar non-status Shin holds outside of Japan. The methodological problem is that Shin behavior must be assessed through mun-

dane religious anthropology rather than speculative philosophy or strict formal doctrine. Shin semi-popular and popular journalism, which is a major part of the vast store of modern Japanese publishing on Buddhism, contains a plethora of practical messages about mundane behavior. (On social life, work, leisure, family, and sexual relations see e.g. Miki Terukuni, *Shinshū kenkyū* [Research on Shin Ethics] (Kyoto: Nagata bunshodō, 1976), pp. 247-330. For an indication of Japanese Buddhist discussions on medical ethics, see Helen Hardacre, "Response of Buddhism and Shinto to the Issue of Brain Death and Organ Transplant." *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Issues*, vol. 3, pp. 585-601 (1994))

[44] An example is the marriage of Shin teachers (ministers). This was a practice forbidden by the standard Buddhist *vinaya*, but monastic celibacy was inextricably linked with the acquisition of magical powers associated with renunciant lifestyles. Shin teaching, which denied performing merit transfer to the dead, neutralized such features of Buddhism.

[45] Shin teaching has been more distanced from the traditional linear interpretation regarding of life-to-life karma and its implications. (Exploring this point see Winston L. King, "A Buddhist Ethic Without Karmic Rebirth," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* vol. 1 (1994):33-44. Shin rhetoric also forcefully encouraged the individual to direct thoughts inward and to acknowledge the ego pointedly, cultivating a consciousness which lay constituents in monastic communities did not necessarily typically possess.

[46] Cf. Damien Keown, "Karma, Character, and Consequentialism." *Journal of Religious Ethics*. Vol. 18, no. 4 (Fall 1996). pp. 329-350. Actually, since intentional good behavior is in a sense a secondary category of interest in the Shin context, it is not crucial whether ethical action of that kind be definitively analysed as character-driven, or consequentialist, or pragmatic, or even loosely utilitarian. This too is not dissimilar from larger patterns of Buddhist practice. It would appear that in working contexts Buddhist medical ethical decisions are overwhelmingly "pragmatic" in nature. (See James J. Hughes and Damien Keown, comp. "Bud-

dhism and Medical Ethics: A Bibliographic Introduction," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* vol. 2 (1995)105-124 and Keown, *Buddhism and Bioethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).