

53. Competing Conceptions of the Self in Kantian and Buddhist Moral Theories

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1. Introduction

Kantians emphasize the separateness and distinctness of persons. Buddhists, on the other hand, emphasize the interconnectedness and commonality of all persons, and all forms of life. The starting point of Chinese Buddhist ethics is the universality of suffering and the truth of interconnectedness. For Kant, the autonomy of the will is the source of the dignity of humanity. For Buddhists, the core values are wisdom and compassion, and they too are thoroughly interconnected and interdependent.

Since contemporary Kantians argue that the distinctness and separateness of persons is the key to a justification of deontological constraints, it is not clear how a Buddhist approach to ethics could incorporate such constraints in its normative theory. This essay focuses on the contrasting conceptions of the self in Buddhist and Kantian theories and argues that the Buddhist conception of the self is incompatible with contemporary Kantian deontology. This raises a puzzle about the Buddhist justification for the prohibition on harming and killing.

Our focus is on Chinese Tiantai (T'ien t'ai) Buddhism in particular, especially as represented by the *Lotus Sutra* and its doctrine of skilful means. In the end I conclude that a consequentialist virtue ethics, and an indirect consequentialist account of moral prohibitions (the precepts of Buddhism), provides the best interpretation of the Chinese Tiantai Buddhist ethical systems. Many consider the Tiantai school of Buddhism to be the first distinctly Chinese sect of Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra* the high-

est teaching of Tiantai Buddhism. Although the interpretation offered here can be extended to all forms of Buddhism, the emphasis on the *Lotus Sutra* limits its textual basis to Chinese and East Asian Buddhism in particular.

It should be emphasized, however, that the methodological approach of this essay is not a scholarly study of classic Buddhist texts. Buddhist moral psychology and its conception of the self are our interest and focus. Instead of a textual study of the Buddhist cultural tradition, this essay aims at a *rational reconstruction* of Chinese Tiantai Buddhist moral philosophy. What is the best, the *philosophically most defensible*, version of the tradition? The goal is to explore the central concepts and develop an interpretation that fits with the core concepts but is also independently plausible.

2. The Problem

To begin, consider an interesting feature of all Buddhist ethics: the unconditional constraints on harming any sentient creature. The first precept of Buddhist ethics is a prohibition on harming and killing. A commonplace of contemporary Western moral theory is that constraints are paradoxical in that they prohibit infringement of the constraint even when infringing it would prevent more harm.¹ For example, one cannot kill to prevent killings. One cannot violate a constraint to prevent more violations of that very constraint. The puzzle or paradox is why it is impermissible to minimize wrongs or killings. It would seem that if my killing is wrong, then killings should not happen, and thus when all killing cannot be prevented, the less killing the better. Why is the focus on the agent's action (do not kill) over and above what the agent can prevent from happening (even more killings)?

A common answer to this question is to appeal to a Kantian conception of respect for persons to justify constraints. The idea roughly is that the wrong action is intrinsically wrong because it violates formal, rational constraints on justifiable action and/or that these agent-centered constraints reflect the special status of other persons as ends-in-themselves (and not

¹ For discussion of the paradox of deontology, see Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

means only). As Rawls first emphasized, Kantian constraints are based on *taking seriously the distinctness and separateness of persons*. Kantian ethics emphasizes the distinct dignity of persons, founded on autonomy of the will, thus setting humanity apart from the rest of nature. So here is our core question: without these types of Kantian foundations, what is the justification for the Buddhist constrain on harming? Why is a Buddhist not allowed to harm to prevent more harm?

It may seem that a simple solution involves extending Kantian respect to all sentient creation. It might be argued that Buddhism simply treats all *sentient life as an end-in-itself*: the interests of all creatures count morally, so Buddhism simply extends the scope of Kantian deontological constraints. But this simple solution is clearly inadequate. To *avoid a consequentialist interpretation* of the Kantian idea that we should “treat persons as an end”, we need to focus on the *alleged distinctness of humanity* from the rest of creation, in particular on the *separateness of persons as autonomous agents*. A focus on promoting the interests of all simply does not justify deontological constraints, because the idea that “treating as an end” involves deontological constraints, rather than promoting interests, is itself based on the *alleged distinctness of humanity* from the rest of creation—in particular on the *separateness of persons as autonomous agents* each with distinct conceptions of the good.

This is a common point of contact between otherwise diverse contemporary Kantians. Robert Nozick, Thomas Nagel, Stephen Darwall, Christine Korsgaard, David Velleman, Thomas Scanlon, Thomas Hill, Paul Hurley, Frances Kamm, and many more Kantian moralists have argued that a Kantian conception of agency is a necessary condition for constraints. Consequentialists tend to agree that it may be necessary, but still object that it is not sufficient. On the other hand, Peter Singer and many others consequentialists have argued that a more basic respect for all sentient interests, based on the commonality of suffering, grounds consequentialism.

Of course, consequentialists do support constraints on harming as essential means of promoting the overall good. In addition, consequentialists, like Buddhists, can also focus on character and motives. A consequentialist virtue ethicist claims that *actions are right when they reflect the motives, character-traits, or virtues that (indirectly) lead to the best possible consequences*. In the end, we will conclude that these alternative indirect consequentialist approaches provide a clear basis for a philosophically defensible form of Buddhist virtue ethics.

3. The Buddhist Conception of the Self (and No-Self)

Chinese Buddhist ethics focuses on character and moral psychology, and it thus has much in common with Aristotelian virtue ethics. The Buddhist conception of the self, however, is really at odds with an Aristotelian approach. The Buddhist conception of the self is thoroughly anti-essentialist and really not at all Aristotelian. Indeed, the self in Buddhism is more akin to Hume's bundle theory of the self.

The self for the Buddhism is composed of five aggregates: (i) physical form, (ii) sense perception, (iii) emotions and feelings, (iv) cognition, and (v) consciousness; and these aggregates are embedded in the forces of karmic causality that cause rebirth itself. No core, or essential self, transcends and survives the flux of change and impermanence. The self, like everything else, exists only as a relational thing that is interconnected and thoroughly dependent on a web of relationships.

The Doctrine of interdependent origination (or codependent arising) is the core metaphysical doctrine of Buddhism. It asserts that all of existence is essentially interrelated, interdependent, and interconnected. This is the heart of Buddhist philosophy: "*One who sees interdependent origination sees the Dharma, and one who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha.*"² The Buddhist doctrine of no-self applies the doctrine of interdependent origination to the self, and concludes that there is no essential enduring self. Although the causal integration and slow transformation of the elements of the self creates the illusion of an enduring self, the self is simply a momentary configuration of discreet, although causally codependent, changing elements. The self is essentially interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent on the rest of existence. There is really no unitary permanent self. Again, the self is constituted by physical form, sense perception, emotions and feelings, cognition, consciousness, and the forces of karmic causality that cause rebirth itself. It is the relation of these changing elements that constitutes what we call the self, and nothing more.³

² Quoted by John S. Strong in *The Experience of Buddhism*, third edition (Florence, KY: Wadsworth, 2008), 109. I have learned much from Strong.

³ On the doctrine of no-self, see Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). In Western philosophy these issues are explored in David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature, A Treatise on Human Nature* (Oxford:

The first small step on the long path to seeing the emptiness of the self involves recognizing human interdependence. Each person is dependent on and fundamentally connected to other people and to a particular community. Confucian ethics, with its focus on family and social relationships, is in this respect similar to Buddhist ethics. Buddhism and Confucianism involve a similar worldview, but Buddhism goes further. Buddhism extends relational thinking to all other persons and indeed, to all living things, and to the natural world. As a result, individualism, often considered the central insight of modern Western thought, is viewed as a fundamental delusion from the perspective of both Confucian and Buddhist thought. Confucian ethics focuses on our connection with our family and community. Buddhism is based on a deeper and more pervasive connection between all things. Indeed, the conception of the interdependence of all beings, and an ideal of boundless compassion for all beings, replaces the relational responsibilities of Confucian ethics.

Compassion toward all living creatures and equanimity of mind reflected in all of one's actions, reactions, and perceptions are the twin ideals of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. Wisdom and compassion are the Buddha-essence or Buddha-nature. The development of wisdom and compassion is the essence of the Path and the Middle Way, but meditation is still the essential means whereby we develop ever greater wisdom and compassion. Of course, the final goal of Buddhism is release from suffering. We all want to be happy and avoid suffering. The insight of the Mahayana tradition is that the key to the release from suffering is developing both insight and boundless compassion. In particular, two insights are essential.⁴

The first is that cognition, emotion, and will are all interconnected. Let us start with the cognitive theory of the emotions. The emotion of fear usually has a clear cognitive content that includes the belief that something is dangerous or harmful. To take a simple example, fear of flying in an airplane includes beliefs about airplanes, flying, and danger. Fear of flying also involves the will in that it often includes a sense of losing control and thus a cognitive awareness of vulnerability. Some emotions may be more instinctual but most human emotions are laced with cognition. Without the underlying beliefs, it would not be the same emotion. Cognition also in-

Clarendon Press, 1896), and Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁴ See the Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), chs.6-8.

volves the will and emotion. If we do not take an interest in the objects of thought, we simply cannot concentrate and take in the information. Indeed, the more engaged and interesting something is, the more we can concentrate and the more we learn and remember. So emotions essentially include cognition and cognition presupposes affective engagement. It follows that one can change one's emotions, passions, and desires by changing one's beliefs and conception of reality. This is how insight can transform character.

Second, emotion affects cognition in another important way. If we are angry or upset about something, we cannot concentrate and think clearly. Indeed, even one's capacity for perception is diminished by powerful emotions. The Dalai Lama calls the emotions that disrupt our mind the "afflictive emotions." Emotions like anger, hatred, greed, and lust generate powerful desires and unsettle our minds. Indeed, they distort our judgment, undermine our will, and ruin our sleep. Furthermore, when we act on these desires their "satisfaction" does not leave us satisfied at all. If a person is emotional in this way, they are never at peace. Of course, if one does not act on afflictive desires, the passions do not just go away; they remain and still corrode from within. Yet, if instead the person acts on the desire and expresses hatred, for example, there is a momentary release of aggression but the person is no better off. In addition, by expressing anger one will probably just harden an enemy, who may then retaliate in turn. It follows that we need to remove the emotion itself, and this involves a deeper transformation of the self. Restraint is but a first step in moral development that is aimed at undermining the cognitive basis of anger itself. The person without the afflictive emotion of anger does not suffer from its loss, escapes its bad karma, and is thus only a gainer.

Insight meditation aimed at anger would first help one internalize a deep awareness of the self-destructive nature of anger. It would also focus on the source of the anger and reveal its causes, its thorough interdependence, and ultimately its emptiness. Anger has a cognitive component and is thus focused on an object, but the object has no real essence and is itself caused by and dependent on a complex web of connections. As the essence of the object of anger dissolves in the face of reflection, so too does the anger itself. Anger is rooted in delusion and eliminated by insight. In this way, insight into interdependent origination transforms the cognition itself, and reveals that anger and hatred, and all afflictive emotions, are based on delusion and confusion.

Not surprisingly, the satisfaction of these desires founded on delusion leads only to more misery and suffering, both for oneself and for others. But insight must get *into* the anger itself; the mere abstract knowledge that anger is afflictive and self-destructive does not extinguish anger. Similarly, if I simply give someone the facts of airline safety, that does not eliminate the fear of flying. The person's orientation must be shifted both cognitively and emotionally, and this is a matter of fundamentally transforming the way one thinks and feels. Insight meditation is the method whereby we transform our mind and heart and fundamentally shift our orientation and character.

The moral rules (or precepts) are a first step, but without insight and understanding, rules and restraint alone leave desires alive to fester within. It is thus necessary to also reflect on the causes and nature of anger and on the real nature of the object of one's animosity. It is only through greater understanding, and long practice, that established habits of thought and actions can be altered and reoriented.⁵

Cognition and emotion are interdependent, each relying on the other for the contours and content of the cognition and emotion. The embedded relations of the experience also shape and determine the experience. All of the inner aspects of the self are dependent on the outer aspects of the self and in the end the self itself is a relational construct dependent on the circumstance and interest that gives rise to the particular use of the self-reflexive concept: self. Beyond and above the relational aspects, there is no essential transcendent self at all.

So too there is no essential responsible agent that is untouched by the flux of experience and who is in some deep sense blameworthy or praiseworthy. But this is not taken to be an excuse for wrong action. Wrong actions, or unwholesome actions in classical Buddhism, harm both self and others and this is reason enough to forsake them. The doctrine of karma reflects a causal order where wrong actions rebound and harm the agent too because of the nature of the wrong. Wrong, unwholesome, actions tear at the very social relations that we depend upon. In addition, wrong actions flow from unruly passions, the afflictive emotions of anger and hatred, and delusions that need to be curbed, not encouraged.

⁵ Buddhist insight meditation thus has a mission that was lacking in the earlier yogic practices. Indeed, insight meditation (and mindfulness of interdependent origination) is also a way of life, in that one can adopt a meditative stance almost anywhere and anytime.

The Buddhist conception of responsibility and justification for punishment are thus also at odds with the Kantian retributivist approach. For the Kantian coercion is justified when it is a hindrance to a hindrance to permissible freedom. Punishment holds agents accountable for their wrongful actions that violate the permissible freedom of others, and as such punishment treats the punished as autonomous agents. A system of coercive law (Kantian justice) thus both maintains the distinct boundaries between autonomous agents, and also treats all persons with due respect as free and rational beings, as ends in themselves and not mere means. Without the Kantian autonomous agent, Buddhists must take a different approach to wrongdoing and punishment.

There is much in the Buddhist conception of no-self, cognition, and emotion worthy of sustained discussion. We have offered only a sketch of the main themes. The important point for now is simply that the relational conception of the self also transforms the related conceptions of agency, responsibility, and accountability.

4. The Wrongfulness of Killing

With this basic outline of the Buddhist conception of the self in hand, we now return to our main line of argument and inquire as to the basis of the prohibition on killing in Buddhist ethics. The first precept of Buddhist ethics is the prohibition on harming and killing. From this one might simply assume that this prohibition includes the constraint on killing to prevent more killings. In the more general case of harm or injury, however, this is not the case. For example, I may cause a lesser harm, like amputating a limb, to prevent a greater harm, like death from gangrene. We also impose lesser harms on some to prevent greater harms to others. For the Kantian, harming one person to help another person calls for special justification because of the separateness of persons. The Buddhist rejects the essential separateness of persons and so an alternative justification is called for. For the Buddhist, the reasons for not harming others and for not harming oneself are essentially the same. So if we can harm ourselves to prevent greater harms to self, why is it that we cannot harm some to prevent greater harm to others?

As a focal point for the justification of the constraint on harming, we have the agent, the subject harmed, and the relationship between the agent and subject.⁶ As should now be clear, the Kantian focus on the agent and autonomous willing (on a pure rational will governed by the categorical imperative) is not available for the Buddhist. Any focus on rational agency itself requires a more Kantian conception of the self. Similarly, if we focus on the subject harmed instead, we need to focus on the suffering caused and not a Kantian conception of the special status and dignity of the person harmed. Again, without a robust Kantian conception of the subject, we do not have grounds for concern for the subject, other than preventing the harm itself. But if we focus on the harm itself, we see that killing to prevent more killings is likely to cause less harm to fewer victims, and so the constraint on harming to prevent greater harms cannot be justified by appealing to harm to the subject. So, that leaves the relationship between the agent and the victim as the only possible focal point of justification.

The relational approach, however, is equally problematic: if I kill to prevent killing, then there is less of whatever is bad about the relationship of killing. If the relationship of killing is bad, then more killings are worse. Since the Buddhist does not have recourse to the Kantian conception of rational willing grounded in the categorical imperative or respect for the dignity of autonomous agents, only the consequences of one's actions is left to determine their rightness.

Indeed, the Buddha's wisdom is sometime summed up in his Five Remembrances: the first three are that old age, illness, and death are unavoidable; the fourth is the impermanence of all things and all that I love; and the fifth is that *my choices and their consequences* are my only true belongings.⁷ For Buddhism it seems that rightness must be based on consequences.

⁶ The discussion that follows owes much to Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), see esp. 24-32.

⁷ *Upajjhathana Sutra: Subjects for Contemplation in Anguttara-Nikaya (The Book of Gradual Sayings)*, vol.III (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 59-61 (Book 5, Sutra 57). The Pali cannon version: "I am the result of my own deeds, heir to deeds, deeds are matrix, deeds are kin, deeds are foundation; whatever deed I do, whether good or bad, I shall be heir to that." Tich Nhat Han's version: "My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground upon which I stand."

Of course, it is tempting here to appeal to the doctrine of double effect, distinguishing between intending harm and foreseeing unintended harm. The idea behind double effect is that I am especially responsible for the consequences that I intend and only secondarily responsible for the harms I foresee but do not intend. Foreseeable harms are permissible in the name of good intentions as long as they are not disproportional to the intended good. This distinction between intended and foreseeable harms, however, itself calls for justification; and the common justification offered appeals to Kantian rational agency and respect for Kantian subjects. As we have seen, these are not available to Buddhists. Furthermore, Buddhism is committed to an ideal of *universal compassion and universal responsibility*. We are supposed to develop a strong sense of compassion and responsibility for all sentient being. With this comes a primary intention to relieve suffering whenever possible and thus also to prevent wrongdoing wherever it happens. So the appeal to the doctrine of double effect is a nonstarter from a Buddhist perspective.

Although the Buddhist commitment to passivism is well known, it is important to see that passivism can easily be viewed as a means and not an end-in-itself. We have already seen that anger and hatred aimed at others is self-destructive and typically misguided as well. In this sense, acting on these emotions is a mistake. Since violence is almost always rooted in afflictive emotions and delusions, it is almost always a mistake. Nonetheless, it is not the case that Buddhists reject all uses of physical coercion. Buddhist countries, and in earlier times monasteries, have police and armies. Buddhist mythology includes the Four Heavenly Kings, who guard the four corners of the world, protect the Buddha's followers from evil and preserve the teachings (the Dharma) of Buddhism.⁸ Similarly, Buddhist rulers also used their armies to protect their country and the Dharma. Even Tibetan Buddhism led by the Dalai Lama, famous for its commitment to non-violence, owes its existence to an alliance with the Mongol warlords Genghis, Kublai, and Altan Khan. Mongol armies protected the particular Buddhist sect ruled by the Dalai Lama and raised it up to the dominant political position in Tibet. Indeed, the relationship was so close that the

⁸ For a full account of wrathful Buddhas and deities, dangerous protectors of the Dharma, and other symbols of the invincible power of compassion, see Rob Linrothe and Jeff Watt, *Demonic Divine* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2004). For the Four Heavenly Kings see 107-8; a more easily accessible online reference is http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Heavenly_Kings (retrieved 2010-02-12).

grandson of Altan Khan was actually the 4th Dalai Lama. Indeed, even the title “Dalai Lama” was itself bestowed by the Khans: *Dalai* means “ocean” in Mongolian and signified the Ocean of Wisdom manifest by the Dalai Lama. (This is also why Mongolian Buddhism is a branch of Tibetan Buddhism.) Lastly, the current 14th Dalai Lama fled Tibet *after* military resistance failed, though he now emphasizes that non-violence is the best means to achieve Tibetan cultural autonomy and reconciliation with China.⁹

In short, the Buddhist position is not that one can never use force and violence for self defense or national defense; rather it is that the use of force and violence is usually counter-productive and it is thus always the means of truly last resort. From a historical perspective, Buddhist passivism seems to be pragmatic and consequentialist, not absolutist. We will now see that the indirect, pragmatic, consequentialist status of moral rules is also supported by doctrinal considerations.

5. The Doctrine of Skilful Means

The prime text of Chinese Tiantai Buddhism is the *Lotus Sutra* and the core doctrine of the *Lotus Sutra* is the Doctrine of Skilful Means (also translated as Expedient Means).¹⁰ The *Parable of the Burning House* perhaps best captures this core doctrine of the *Lotus Sutra*: to explain the many doctrines of Buddhism, and the evolution and advance of Mahayana Tiantai Buddhism, the *Lotus Sutra* uses a parable of a rich man whose house is on fire but whose children are inside playing and will not escape

⁹ For additional discussion, see my article, “The Law of Peoples and the Right to War: From Islamic Jihad to Buddhist Pacifism”, forthcoming in *Morality and Global Justice*, ed. Michael Boylan (New York: Westview Press).

¹⁰ *The Essential Lotus: Selections from the Lotus Sutra*, tr. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Also see Michael Pye, *Skilful Means: A Concept of Mahayana Buddhism*, second edition, (New York: Routledge, 2003). On Tiantai Chinese Buddhism, see Dan Lusthaus, “Buddhist philosophy, Chinese”, in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998); retrieved 2010-02-12 from <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/G002SECT7>.

the burning house. As a skilful or expedient means, the rich man tells his children that there is a cart outside the house waiting for them, and he tells each that there is the type of cart outside that each child desires, a goat-cart or deer-cart or ox-cart. In joyous anticipation each child runs out of the burning house to seize the particular cart desired by each. Once outside the burning house, there are no carts. The rich man responds to his disappointed children, however, by providing each child the same fabulous ox-cart that is actually the best of all the carts, and this transcends the original, more limited desires of each of his children.¹¹

This parable was used to explain the many distinct and often incompatible doctrines, practices, and sects of Buddhism that flowed into China from India. The parable tells us that the Buddha has provided different sects and doctrines to different people, but each with the goal of helping people escape the burning house, the treadmill of afflictive desires and delusion that lead to suffering. Once out of the fire, the more advanced doctrines and True Path, or Vehicle of Enlightenment, can be revealed; these include the doctrine of skilful means, the idea that rules, precepts, and rituals are themselves skilful means to achieve the ever greater insight and compassion that leads to inner peace and happiness.

The elevation of the *Lotus Sutra* to the central text of Tiantai Buddhism is distinctly Chinese, first because it answers the problem of how to make sense of the many sects and competing doctrines of Buddhism introduced to China. Second, the conception of the Buddha as a benevolent father, who must use skilful means to lead his children to happiness, fits perfectly with the well-established Confucian ideal of the ruler (modeled on the benevolent father) who acts with skilful means for the benefit of his subjects and must be trusted and respected. Tiantai Buddhism is thus especially apt and well suited to the historical moment and Chinese cultural tradition it emerges from.

Returning to moral philosophy, we suggest that the doctrine of skilful means also applies to the ethical precepts of Buddhism. Clearly, many of the hundreds of moral precepts for Buddhist monks serve the end of developing inner discipline and restraint; these are prerequisites to virtue, rather than ends-in-themselves. Similarly, the point of insight meditation is transformative, as we have seen (although, as we also have seen, insight and virtue are inseparably interconnected). Perhaps the basic ethical precepts, like prohibitions on harming and lying, are also expedient means and sec-

¹¹ Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, 34-49.

ondary rules that help keep one on the right path, but are not absolute rules. Actually, the parable of the burning house already shows that justified deception is not a prohibited lie. The father misleads his children justifiably for their own good as the Buddha misleads his early followers do get them on the right path so that they can come to see the deeper truth.

Similarly, here is an interesting example of compassionate killing from the Buddhist canon that reflects the defeasible nature of all moral rules:

One night deities inform a Bodhisattva sea captain that one of his passengers is a robber intent on killing 500 merchants and stealing their goods. He realizes the robber will suffer many ages in hell for his deed, and that his only option is to kill the robber and take the bad karma on to himself. Accordingly “with great compassion and skilful means” he kills the robber. But by willingly accepting the karmic punishment, the bad karma is cancelled.¹²

There are several things to notice about this example of compassionate killing. First, killing is usually harming and rooted in aggression. In contrast, compassionate killing is rooted in Great Compassion both for the potential victims and for the potential victimizers. In principle, compassion can justify preemptive violence. Second, the sea captain is a Bodhisattva and has foreknowledge provided by deities. Although compassion can justify killing, only enlightened beings can have the virtue and wisdom to infringe such basic norms as the prohibition on killing. Third, as a corollary, it follows that ethical precepts are rules for the unenlightened. The conclusion is that the less enlightened should stick to simple moral rules but the more enlightened the being, the more judgment and compassion should guide one’s actions in confronting difficult moral decisions. The right act will sometimes involve infringing rules for the greater good of all. Although transgressions still result in some bad karma, the good karma rooted in great compassion more than compensates for the infraction and harm caused.

The resulting position is strikingly similar to recent consequentialist moral theories.¹³ For example, R.M. Hare argues that archangels, with perfect knowledge and perfect character, could follow direct consequen-

¹² From Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 135-6.

¹³ R.M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13.2 (Spring 1984), 134-71; Robert Adams, “Motive Utilitarianism”, *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976), 467-81.

tialist principles, but that simpler folks like us humans, “proles”, need moral rules so as to do what is generally best. Of course, in fact we find ourselves, to varying degrees, in different contexts, and during different times of life, between the extremes of simple-minded proles and perfect archangels. So, too, for different people and contexts, moral rules can be more complex and refined; and in some cases of moral dilemmas, we should directly do what seems to be best overall. Peter Railton has also defended a compelling “sophisticated consequentialist” moral theory that incorporates the virtues of character into a broader indirect consequentialist ethical system. Similarly, Robert Adams has developed a character-based moral theory that he calls motive utilitarianism.

This approach leads us to the solution to the justification of constraints, precepts (and virtues) in Buddhist moral theories. Buddhist moral philosophy should be interpreted as a form of consequentialist virtue ethics. Roughly, *actions are right when they reflect the motives, character-traits, or virtues that lead to the best possible consequences*. The Buddhist conception of the self, with its account of the afflictive emotions and the interconnectedness of all things, shows that the best set of motives clearly will include a strong aversion and commitment to not killing or harming. This is the most plausible justification of Buddhist constraints. Unlike a Kantian conception of the distinctness and separateness of persons from each other and from the rest of nature, it is completely in synch with the Buddhist conception of the self. This consequentialist approach is also completely compatible with Chinese Tiantai Buddhism; indeed, it solves the problem of the basis of constraints for all forms of Buddhism.

We have seen that Buddhist precepts and virtues are not based on a Kantian conception of the self. We have also seen that indirect consequentialism fits nicely with Chinese Buddhism and it provides a clear basis for Buddhist ethical precepts and virtues. We can conclude that either Buddhist precepts are based on indirect consequentialist considerations or Buddhists must provide some other alternative to the Kantian and consequentialist conceptions of constraints. If one rejects our consequentialist solution, one must provide a new, alternative justification for Buddhist precepts.