J Ethics (2015) 19:293–304
DOI 10.1007/s10892-015-9210-9

Ego, Egoism and the Impact of Religion on Ethical Experience: What a Paradoxical Consequence of Buddhist Culture Tells Us About Moral Psychology

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Received: 4 November 2015 / Accepted: 7 November 2015 / Published online: 25 November 2015

Abstract We discuss the structure of Buddhist theory, showing that it is a kind of moral phenomenology directed to the elimination of egoism through the elimination of a sense of self. We then ask whether being raised in a Buddhist culture in which the values of selflessness and the sense of non-self are so deeply embedded transforms one's sense of who one is, one's ethical attitudes and one's attitude towards death, and in particular whether those transformations are consistent with the predictions that Buddhist texts themselves make. We discover that the effects are often significant, but not always expected.

Keywords Cognitive science of religion · Cross-cultural psychology · Death anxiety · Personal identity · Self · Tibetan Buddhism

> How we raise our children makes a very great difference, or rather, all the difference. (Aristotle NE 2.1, 1999)

In this essay, we discuss the general structure of Buddhist ethical theory, focusing on the relationship between egoism, the conception of the self and ethical comportment. We then ask about the connection between this moral framework and

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actual moral life. We have been examining the degree to which being raised in a Buddhist culture and being educated in the Buddhist philosophical tradition determines certain dimensions of folk metaphysical conceptions and ethical attitudes. We will discover that while a Buddhist upbringing and Buddhist education can have significant impact on many of these dimensions, the precise nature of that impact is often surprising.

We begin with an overview of the structure of Buddhist ethical theory and of the orthodox Mahāyāna account of the relationship between various dimensions of self-grasping or egoism and ethical comportment. We will then discuss some predictions that Buddhist theory might make regarding the impact of Buddhist ideology on ethical conduct and attitudes. We will then describe some research we recently conducted to examine these predictions and the curious results we obtained.

1 Introduction: The Broad Structure of Buddhist Ethics

It is important not to assimilate Buddhist ethics to any system of Western metaethics. It is neither utilitarian nor deontological nor areteic in form. (Garfield 2015) In Buddhist philosophical and religious literature we find many texts that address moral topics, and a great deal of attention devoted to accounts of virtuous and vicious actions, virtuous and vicious states of character and of virtuous and vicious lives. However, we find very little direct attention to the articulation of sets of principles that determine which actions, states of character or motives are virtuous or vicious, and no articulation of sets of obligations or rights.

This is not because Buddhist moral theorists were and are not sufficiently sophisticated to think about moral principles or about the structure of ethical life, and certainly not because Buddhist theorists think that ethics is not important enough to do systematically. It is instead because from a Buddhist perspective there are simply too many dimensions of moral life and moral assessment to admit a clean moral theory. While it is particularist in some respects, however, there are general principles that guide Buddhist moral theory. Buddhist ethical thought has been concerned with understanding how the actions of sentient beings are located and in turn those beings within the web of dependent origination, or *pratītya-sammutpāda*. This web is complex, and there is a lot to be said. And so Buddhists have had a lot to say. But the web is also untidy, and so what Buddhists have had to say resists easy systematization.

It is also important not to take the various Buddhist philosophical and religious traditions as constituting a homogenous whole. An enormous variety of positions have been defended within the Buddhist world on just about every philosophical position, and ethics is no exception. Here we restrict our attention to one strand of Buddhist moral thought, that beginning with the articulation of the four noble truths at Sarnath and running through the work of Nāgārjuna in his *Jeweled Garland (Ratnavalī),* Candrakīrti in his *Introduction to the Middle Way (Madhyamakāvatāra*), and Śāntideva in *How To Lead An Awakened Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra).* This is the tradition most directly relevant to our research on attitudes towards death and the self among Tibetan Buddhists.

Thinking about the good from a Buddhist perspective begins from the first principle of Buddhist metaphysics—the commitment to the interdependence of all things: every phenomenon is causally and constitutively dependent upon countless other events and phenomena, and in turn is part of the causal ancestries and constitutive bases of countless other phenomena. Moral reflection on action must take all of these dimensions of dependence into account. To focus merely on motivation, or on character, or on the action itself, or on its consequences for others, would, on any Buddhist view, be to ignore much that is important.

Interdependence is relevant when thinking about identity and interest as well. Many Western moral theorists begin by taking a kind of ontological and axiological individualism for granted in several respects. First, agency is taken to reside in individual actors, with an attendant focus on responsibility as a central area of moral concern. Second, interest is taken to be *au fond* an individual matter, and even when the self is consciously deconstructed, as it is by such philosophers as D. Parfit (1984), interest is taken to attach to individual stages of selves. Third, and consequent on these, a conflict between egoistic and altruistic interests and motivations is regarded as at least *prima facie* rational, if not morally defensible or *ultimately* rational.

Buddhist accounts of identity reflect this commitment to interdependence. The boundaries between self and other are regarded as at best conventional and relatively insignificant, and at worst deeply illusory. Agency is not taken as a primary moral category, at least if taken to indicate a unique point of origin of action in an individual self, and so moral responsibility is not foregrounded in moral reflection. Interest is hence also seen as a shared phenomenon, and egoism as fundamentally and obviously irrational. We will work out the ramifications of these views as we proceed.

Nāgārjuna argues persuasively in *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)* (Garfield 1995) that to understand dependent origination is to understand the four noble truths. The first noble truth is suffering; this sets the problem that Buddhism sets out to solve. The Buddha also assumed that suffering is a bad thing. If one disagrees with this assessment, from a Buddhist perspective, moral discourse has no basis: there would then be problem to be solved. If you just love headaches, do not bother taking aspirin; if you do not, you might consider how to obtain relief.

The Buddha then argued that suffering does not just happen. It arises as a consequence of actions conditioned by attachment and aversion, each of which in turn is engendered by confusion regarding the nature of reality. This triune root of suffering is represented in the familiar Buddhist icon of the Wheel of Life with the pig, snake and rooster at the hub, the six realms of transmigration (or aspects of the phenomenology of suffering as we might understand them less cosmologically) turning around them, structured by the twelve links of dependent origination (a detailed psychology of perception and action), all of which is depicted as resting in the jaws of death, the great fear of which, according to Buddhist moral psychology, propels so much of our maladaptive psychology and moral failure. (Garfield 2010/2011; 2015)

Attention to the second noble truth allows us to begin to see how very different Buddhist moral thought is from most Western moral thought: the three roots of suffering (attachment, aversion, and confusion) are each regarded as moral defilements, and are not seen by Buddhist moral philosophers as especially heterogeneous in character. None of them, however, is seen as especially morally problematic in most Western moral theory, and indeed each of the first two– attachment and aversion– is valourised in at least some contexts in some systems, particularly that of Aristotle. The third, confusion, is rarely seen in the West as a *moral* matter, unless it is because one has a *duty* to be clear about things.

But this is far from the case in Buddhist moral theory. Buddhism as a way of taking up with the world is all about solving a problem; the problem is suffering; the three root vices are vices because they engender the problem. The moral theory here is not meant to articulate a set of imperatives, nor to establish a calculus of utility through which to assess actions, nor to assign responsibility, praise or blame, but rather to solve the problem set by the fact that the world is pervaded by unwanted suffering. The diagnosis of the cause of the problem sets the agenda for its solution.

The third truth articulated at Sarnath is that, because suffering depends upon confusion, attraction and aversion, it can be eliminated by eliminating these causes. And the fourth, which starts getting the ethics spelled out in a more determinate form, presents the path to that solution. The eightfold path is central to an articulation of the moral domain as it is seen in Buddhist theory, and careful attention to it reveals additional respects in which Buddhists develop ethics in a different way than do Western moral theorists. The eightfold path comprises correct view, correct intention, correct speech, correct propriety, correct livelihood, correct effort, correct mindfulness and correct meditation.

The eightfold path may be represented as broadly consequentialist, but it is certainly not utilitarian, and it is consequentialist only in a thin sense: that is, what makes it a path worth following is that things work out better to the extent that we follow it. By following this path, by attending to these areas of concern in which our actions and thought determine the quality of life for ourselves and others, we achieve greater individual perfection, facilitate that achievement for those around us, and reduce suffering. There is no boundary drawn here that circumscribes the ethical dimensions of life; there is no distinction between the obligatory, the permissible and the forbidden; there is no distinction drawn between the moral and the prudential; the public and the private; the self-regarding and the other-regarding. Instead, there is a broad indication of the complexity of the solution to the problem of suffering.

While many, following the traditional Tibetan classification of three trainings, focus on correct speech, action and livelihood as the specifically ethical content of the path, this is in fact too narrow, and misses the role of the path in Buddhist practice and in the overall moral framework through which Buddhism recommends engagement with the world. The eightfold path identifies not a set of rights or duties, nor a set of virtues, but a set of areas of concern or of dimensions of conduct. The path indicates the complexity of human moral life and the complexity of the sources of suffering. To lead a life conducive to the solution of the problem of suffering is to pay close heed to these many dimensions of conduct.

Our *views,* from a Buddhist perspective, matter morally. It is not simply an *epistemic* fault to think that material goods guarantee happiness, that narrow self-interest is the most rational motivation, that torture is a reasonable instrument of national policy or that women are incapable of rational thought. Such views are, from a Buddhist perspective, morally problematic, *per se*. That is, from this perspective, to hold such views is not to commit a morally neutral cognitive error, like thinking that Florida is south of Hawai'i. It is to be involved in a way of taking up with the world that is at the very root of the suffering we all wish to alleviate.

So, from the perspective of Buddhist moral theory, our cognitive life is every bit as important as our behavioral, and the two are deeply intertwined. Therefore much Buddhist moral practice is directed to modifying our cognitive approach to the world, including not only the way we attend to the needs of others, but our general metaphysical perspective. This metaphysical perspective from the standpoint of Buddhist moral theory is foundational to the rest of our moral life. We will be interested to see just how far a Buddhist society can go in affecting the cognitive life of its participants and then in bringing that cognition to bear in effecting a transformation of specifically moral attitudes.

2 Action Theory and Karma

The term *karma* plays a central role in any Buddhist moral discussion. It is a term of great semantic complexity and must be handled with care, particularly given its intrusion into English with a new range of central meanings. Most centrally, *karma* means *action.* Derivatively, it means *the consequences of action.* Given the Buddhist commitment to the universality of dependent origination, all action arises from the karmic consequences of past actions, and all action has karmic consequences. Karma is not a cosmic bank account on this view, but rather comprises the natural causal sequelae of actions. Karma accrues to any action, simply in virtue of interdependence, and karmic consequences include those for oneself and for others, as well as both individual and collective karma.

Buddhist action theory approaches human action and hence ethics in a way slightly divergent from that found in any Western action theory, and it is impossible to understand moral assessment without attention to action theory. Buddhist philosophers distinguish in any action the *intention*, the *act* itself (whether mental, purely verbal, or non-verbally physical as well) and the *completion* or the final state of affairs resulting directly from the action itself. If I intend to give ten dollars to *Care,* hand over the ten dollars to a *Care* worker, who then uses it to bribe a policeman, beneficial karma accrues from the intention, beneficial karma from the act, but non- beneficial karma from the completion. If I intend to steal your medicine, but instead pocket the poison that had been placed on your bedstand by your malicious nurse, thereby saving your life, negative karma accrues from the intention, but positive karma from the act and from the completion, and so forth.

It is important to see that karma is neither additive nor subtractive. There is no calculus of utility or of merit points here. The fact that something I do is beneficial does not cancel the fact that something else I do is harmful. It just means that I have

done something good and something harmful. I have generated both kinds of consequences, not achieved some neutral state. No amount of restitution I pay for destroying the garden you worked so hard to cultivate takes away the damage I have done. It only provides you with some benefit as well. Truth and reconciliation commissions do indeed reveal the truth and promote reconciliation, and that is good. But to pretend that they thereby erase the horrific consequences of the deeds they reveal for those who are reconciled is naïve.

Note as well that the relevant kinds of karma include the impact on my character and that of others, such as the tendency to reinforce or to undermine generosity or malice and the degree to which the action promotes general well-being. There is hence attention both to virtue and to consequence here, and attention to the character of and consequences for anyone affected by the action. The fundamental facts relevant to moral assessment are causal interdependence and the moral equivalence of all moral agents and patients.

Buddhist moral assessment and reasoning hence explicitly takes into account a number of dimensions of action. We cannot in this framework ask whether a particular action is good or evil *simpliciter*, nor can we ask what our obligations or permissions are. Instead we ask about the states of character reflected by and consequent to our intentions, our words, our motor acts, and their consequences. We ask about the pleasure and pain produced, and about how actions reflect and enhance or ignore and undermine our universal responsibility. In sum, we ask how these actions are relevant to solving our collective problem = the omnipresence of suffering. The fact that a terrible outcome ensues from a good intention does not make the outcome morally acceptable; nor does a good outcome somehow cancel malicious intent. Each component of action has its consequences and reflects morally relevant features of its genesis.

Attention to this approach to moral assessment and reasoning reveals that in this framework there is no morally significant distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding actions. Nor is there any distinction between moral and prudential motivations. Motivations that appear to be immoral but prudential are, on deeper analysis, simply confused. Nor is there any limit to the domain of the ethical. Karma is ubiquitous; interdependence is endless. Responsibility, as the Dalai Lama constantly reminds Buddhist practitioners, can only be universal: there is no one to whom we are not connected, and there is no-one to whom we have no responsibility. We will be interested to see just how far this metaphysical perspective extends into moral sensibility.

3 Virtue, Consequence and Obligation

We can now see that Buddhist moral theory is neither purely consequentialist (despite the fact that consequences of action are important in moral evaluation) nor purely areteic (despite the fact that certain salutary states of character are to be cultivated) nor purely deontological (despite the centrality of a strong sense of personal responsibility for others). Elements of each kind of evaluation are present, but there is no overarching concern for a unified form of moral assessment. And

none of these is thematized as the focus of moral assessment. Rather, as we emphasized at the outset, the concern of Buddhist reflection on ethics is the solution of a fundamental, pervasive problem, the problem of suffering.

Suffering, according to Buddhist moral psychologists, is both caused and constituted by fundamental metaphysical views and the attitudes consequent upon them, including pre-eminently egocentric attraction, egocentric aversion grounded in regarding the nature of reality. That confusion consists in seeing impermanent phenomena as permanent, seeing the self as real, and seeing the distinction between self and others as significant. Hence the cultivation of virtues that undermine these vices is morally desirable, as is the cultivation of a metaphysical sensibility that extirpates their roots.

When we put this complex account of the moral status and dimensions of evaluation of action together with the tripartite theory of action and the tripartite distinction between kinds of action, we find a distinct overarching vision of the complexity of ethical life, a distinct overarching vision of the purpose of moral reflection and of moral cultivation and a distinct overarching vision of the nature of agency and of the nature of life. That is, we see a distinctive way of taking up with ethics grounded in a distinctive metaphysical understanding of the self and the world. The research we report below explores both the degree to which that metaphysical understanding is internalized by members of Buddhist communities and the degree to which that metaphysical picture issues in a distinct moral orientation.

4 The Bodhisattva Path and Buddhist Moral Psychology

We now turn to specifically Mahayana Buddhist moral psychology as the Mahayana tradition is dominant in the Tibetan community in which we conduct our research. This is the tradition of ethics grounded in the work of Nagārjuna, Āryadeva, Cāndrakīrti and Śāntideva. When we turn to this tradition we find an emphasis on the thesis that confusion regarding the nature of reality in the moral realm manifests itself most directly in the grasping of oneself and of that which most immediately pertains to oneself as having special importance and justifiable motivational force. In Mahayana literature this is referred to as the two-fold self-grasping involving the grasping of *I* and *being-mine* and issues directly in the moral duality of self and other.

This duality in turn, according to such moral theorists as Śāntideva, leads to the distinction between prudential and moral concern, self-regarding and other-regarding acts and between those to whom one owes special regard and those to whom one does not, all taken by Buddhist philosophers to be spurious. In general, this duality engenders a view of the world as comprising me, et al., a view not rationally sustainable once one sees that it is equally available, and so equally unjustifiable, for any moral subject. It is for this reason, at bottom, that confusion about the nature of reality is taken to be a root moral delusion, and not simply an epistemological problem. While the arbitrariness of taking oneself as the center of the moral universe can be demonstrated in a number of ways (see, for example,

Nagel 1986), the Mahāyāna point here is that the best way to get to the wrong view is through the duality that issues from self-grasping.

In the Mahāyāna, moral attention is focused on the cultivation of a set of perfections, or virtues, including those of generosity, patience, propriety, attention, meditation and wisdom. Once again, this list might seem odd to the Western ethicist, in virtue of the inclusion of such *prima facie* non-moral virtues as those of attention, meditation and wisdom on the same list as generosity, patience and propriety. Once again, though, attention to the focus of Buddhist ethics on solving the problem of suffering, and attention to the role of inattention, failure to develop the insights and traits of character cultivated in meditation, and ignorance as causes of and maintainers of suffering should dispel this sense of oddness.

It is also important to recognize that while one signal conceptual innovation in the Mahāyāna movement is the overlay of this distinctively aretaic conception of moral development on the framework of the eightfold path with its delineation of areas of concern, and on the account of the nature of action and karma familiar from earlier Buddhism, this is not an abandonment of the more basic framework, but an enrichment and a refocus. The eightfold path remains a central guide to the domains in which the perfections figure, and the perfections are manifested in the propensity to perform cognitive, verbal and physical actions of the kind assessable in the familiar framework of Buddhist action theory. The framework of the perfections hence only represents an approach to morality more focused on states of character than on their manifestations as the fundamental goals of moral practice.

The most important innovation in Mahāyāna moral theory, however, is not the framework of the perfections but the installation of *care* as the central moral value and the model of the bodhisattva's caring engagement with the world as the moral ideal. The care at issue is not a passive emotional response, and not a mere desire. That is regarded as sloppy sympathy, at bottom self-centered, and of benefit to nobody. Instead it is a genuine commitment manifested in thought, speech and physical action to act for the welfare of all sentient beings. It is in this most sophisticated flowering of Buddhist ethics, with the anticipations of such moral theorists as David Hume and Arthur Schopenhauer that Buddhist moral theory makes its closest contact with Western ethics.

Care in this tradition is founded upon the insight that suffering is bad, *per se*, regardless of whose it is. On this view, to fail to take another's suffering seriously as a motivation for action is itself a form of suffering and is irrational. The bodhisattva path is motivated in part by the realization that not to experience the suffering of others as one's own and not to take the welfare of others as one's own is to suffer even more deeply from a profound existential alienation born of a failure to appreciate one's own situation as a member of an interdependent community.

5 What Might We Expect Buddhist Agents to Look Like?

Suppose that the ethical and metaphysical commitments of a religious tradition actually have profound impact on the psychology and moral attitudes of those who grow up in that tradition and perhaps even more so on those who devote themselves

to the study of the tradition. What might we expect in particular regarding the impact of Buddhist metaphysics and ethics on those who grow up in a tradition saturated by Buddhism?

First, if we focus simply on metaphysics, we might expect Buddhists to believe to a much greater degree than, say, Christians in the impermanence and interdependence of phenomena, including persons, and to disbelieve, unlike Christians or Hindus, in the reality of the self. We might also expect that those raised in a Buddhist culture would fear death less than others, and in particular we might think that they would have less fear of self annihilation, the fear that I will cease to exist—a kind of fear regarded as a primal core of the fear of death by terror management theory and by much clinical psychology—simply because they have less belief in the self and less commitment to its prominence and endurance. And, if we take seriously Śāntideva's account of the relationship between the fear of death and the development of self grasping, we might expect a greater development of an attitude of care, and we might expect that Buddhist practitioners would exhibit less attachment to their own lives and more commitment to benefit others.

To test this hypothesis it would be necessary to investigate members of other communities thoroughly saturated in particular religious and metaphysical ideologies in order fairly to compare the impact of Buddhism with that of religious traditions that diverge from it in their metaphysical and ethical orientations. Moreover, it is important to study those who are actually raised in the relevant religious traditions. That is, if one were to study those who were raised Christian, Jewish or Muslim and then converted to Buddhism, or those who study Buddhism superficially and found it kind of compelling, one might expect that even though one was studying Buddhists, one would not be studying those appropriately saturated in a Buddhist tradition. If we are really interested in the impact of ethical training on character and ethical compartments we need to examine those who are raised in fairly homogenous Buddhist culture. To that end, we examined the attitudes of Tibetans living in relatively isolated settlements in India. Our sample included both lay people and monastics. We compared the attitudes of participants in these two populations with those of orthodox Hindus living in a very traditional part of India (Varanasi) and with those of Americans from the Abrahamic religious traditions. Our study relies on questionnaire data collected by native speakers of the relevant languages (Tibetan and Hindi, and for a later sample from Bhutan taken to confirm our results from the Tibetan group, Bhutanese).

6 What We Found: Metaphysics

Many of our predictions are confirmed. Tibetan Buddhists (including both Tibetans living in the resettlement and Bhutanese) differ dramatically from members of other populations in a number of salient respects. First, they are far more committed to the impermanence of the self than either Abrahamics or Hindus. This is evident in a number of ways. First note that they simply say more frankly that the self is impermanent than do members of the other religious groups. Secondly the

Buddhists report the impermanence of self as a greater source of consolation to them as they contemplate death than do members of the other religious groups.

Second Tibetan Buddhist lamas are less essentialist than are Abrahamics or Hindus. To measure essentialism, we used Keil's transformation task. (Keil 1992) Participants were presented with several scenarios in which scientists transform one object to have the prototypical features of another object. Two examples involved species. For instance, a horse was transformed to have the prototypical features of a deer. The other two examples involved artifacts. For instance, a tie was transformed to have the features of shoelaces. Our Abrahamic and Hindu subjects showed a strong difference such that they were much more likely to say that the horse was still a horse than they were to say that the tie was still a tie. Tibetan monastics showed a much smaller difference in judgment between these two kinds of cases. Interestingly, the *lay* Tibetan participants look very much like the Abrahamics and Hindus, showing a strong essentialist response. This indicates that the reduction in essentialist response seems to require systematic philosophical training.

These results on the metaphysical attitudes are quite dramatic. They show rather convincingly at least with respect to metaphysics, Aristotle was right. It does make a great difference how we raise our children. But does it make *all* the difference? To find out let us turned the domain of ethics.

7 What We Found: Ethics

Recall the predictions that Śāntideva's ethical theory makes. First he predicts that a greater understanding of impermanence, interdependence, and selflessness should to less fear of death. That in turn should lead to greater care for others and less egoism. First we consider fear of death. We used an extensive questionnaire for measuring fear of personal death (Strohminger et al. in preparation). This scale has a number of subscales including such as *self-fulfillment, consequences to family and friends,* and *fear of self annihilation*. Each of these subscales measures a distinct dimension of the fear of death; a particular target of that fear (such as failure to achieve all of my goals, or the anxiety that my death will cause to my family and friends).

Hindus, Abrahamics and Buddhists are comparable in their anxiety on most subscales. To our great surprise, however, we find that Tibetans are *much* more fearful of self-annihilation than are Abrahamics or Hindus, and this fact is the most paradoxical of all. As we noted above, this subscale indexes the fear that I will simply cease to exist. If we remove the fear of self-annihilation from the anxiety about death scale there is no difference between groups.

When we attend to self-annihilation on its own, however, the difference between the Tibetans and all other groups is absolutely dramatic. Moreover, monastic Tibetans, who understand Buddhist doctrine better than do lay Tibetans, demonstrate significantly greater fear of self-annihilation than do lay Tibetans. So, paradoxically, Buddhist monastics, who report much less belief in the reality or permanence of the self than do members of other religious groups, are more terrified of the annihilation of that thing in which they do not believe, and of that which they take to be impermanent, and of that which they do not believe constitutes their

essence, than are groups who believe that that thing is real, permanent, and constitutes their essence.

So we might say that one key plank of Mahāyāna Buddhist moral psychology is not confirmed. Deep conviction in the central metaphysical commitments that are meant to have significant moral impact, and in particular are meant to reduce death anxiety, does not reduce death anxiety at all. In particular, it does not lead to reduced anxiety about the annihilation of self. That anxiety seems to be far too deeply rooted for philosophy to extirpate it, even philosophy that seems to saturate once very way of taking up with the world.

Now, how about attachment to oneself and generosity towards others? To explore this question, we use a simple trade-off task. We ask our participants to imagine that they been diagnosed with a terminal disease that gives them only six months to live. They are told, however, that there is a medication that can extend their life for an additional six months. There is, however, they are told, only one dose of this medicine and there is somebody else, a very similar person, whom they don't know, who also needs it. Now, they are asked how long that medicine would have to keep this other person alive before they would give up the dose themselves. The possible answers range from one month to 5 years.

We expect the Buddhists to be more generous than members of the other groups on this task. To our surprise, we found quite the reverse. Most Christians and Hindus reported greater willingness to give up the medicine if it kept the other person alive for 2 or more years. Most Buddhist monastics, however, would not give up the medicine even if it would keep the other person alive for more than five years. This is especially striking: the monastics are presumably most familiar with and committed to Buddhist doctrine, and yet they are less generous than the non-Buddhists.

While this result might be surprising, we should note that it is completely consistent with one of Śāntideva's claims: the more afraid one is of self annihilation, the more self selfish and egoistic one to be. On the other hand, it is inconsistent with his view that the more deeply one understands impermanence, selflessness, and interdependence the more generous one will be. How should we understand this? Buddhist philosophy might give us a clue. Buddhist moral psychologists distinguish between two levels or two kinds of self-grasping. The most superficial level is that due to bad philosophy as the Tibetan philosopher Tsongkhapa puts it. (Thurman 1991) The deeper level is what he refers to as innate, or primordial, self-grasping. The former, Tsongkhapa argues, can be eradicated just by refuting bad philosophy by good philosophy. The latter, however, according to philosophers in this tradition can only be extirpated by years of meditative practice designed to reorganize our cognitive life at a very fundamental level.

On this view, then, our results are not surprising at all. Buddhist metaphysics does transform the way those raised in this community see the world. But it does not go all the way. To go all the way to a complete apprehension of selflessness and a consequent extirpation of the fear of death would require far more meditative practice then anyone in our population could be expected to undertake. The consequence is that for Tibetan monastics there is a substantial reduction of belief in the self, belief in permanence, and of essentialism. That probably leads them to

recognize that they will not exist at all after their biological death. But that does not lead to a deep sense of their lack of identity within this life. So biological death for the monastics represents a very dramatic transformation: the transformation from what is *experienced* as real existence to what is regarded as *no existence at all*.

Hindus and Abrahamics, on the other hand, can look forward to a postmortem existence either in a future incarnation or in heaven, and so for them the fear of annihilation is not nearly so poignant. We therefore may have found at least tentative confirmation of central thesis of Mahāyāna Buddhist moral psychology: the connection between a specific component of death anxiety—that concerned with self annihilation—and egoism. Even though we expected them both to be lower among Buddhists we do find that they co-vary. We have however also found that if one wishes to become less egoistic and less fearful of death and so to cultivate greater care for others, a little Buddhism may be worse than none at all. Or to put differently, while how we raise our children makes a *great* difference it does not make *all* the difference.

Acknowledgments We thank the John Templeton Foundation, The University of California, Riverside and the Central University of Tibetan Studies for valuable research support.

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