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THE DALAI LAMA XIV
A Modern Indian Philosopher

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Introduction

It may sound odd to some ears to represent the present Dalai Lama (the Ven. Tenzin Gyatso, 1935–) as an Indian philosopher. After all, he was born and educated in *Tibet* and is associated primarily with *Tibetan* Buddhist philosophy. But there are several good reasons to read him as an *Indian* philosopher, and these reasons also serve as a good introduction to his philosophical career. First, Tibetan Buddhist philosophy does represent a clear continuation of an Indian Buddhist tradition, and most of the reference points even for contemporary Tibetan philosophy – and particularly for the work of the Dalai Lama XIV – are Indian. That would hardly be sufficient, though; in that case, every Tibetan philosopher would count as Indian, and the distinctive character of Tibetan philosophy would be elided.

But when we add several other reasons, the case becomes more compelling. The second reason is this: the Dalai Lama XIV has spent his entire adult life (and professional philosophical career) in India, after fleeing Tibet in 1959 amidst an uprising against Chinese occupation. And that residency in India has hardly been one of isolation within the Tibetan community; he has been in constant dialogue with Indian philosophical and religious figures and with the wider world. Third, as a contemporary Indian philosopher, one of his most important touchstones beyond the classical Indian Buddhist tradition has been Mohandas K. Gandhi, one of the most important public Indian philosophers of the twentieth century.

Finally, the approach to philosophy taken by the Dalai Lama throughout his extensive corpus is utterly continuous with that of modern Indian philosophers. That is, he works self-consciously in engagement with a classical Indian tradition but also in self-conscious dialogue with contemporary philosophy derived from non-classical, non-Indian traditions, addressing philosophical problems by drawing freely from both (see Bhushan and Garfield 2017). The fact that this long-term resident of India works self-consciously in the context of recent Indian philosophy and uses a methodology consonant with that of his compatriots more than justifies reading the Dalai Lama XIV as an Indian philosopher. Indeed, the Dalai Lama XIV himself agrees with this characterization, writing in *Beyond Religion: Ethics for the Entire World* (2011):

> Sometimes I describe myself as a modern-day messenger of ancient Indian thought. Two of the most important ideas I share whenever I travel – the principles of

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> nonviolence and interreligious harmony – are both drawn from ancient Indian heritage. Though I am of course a Tibetan, I also consider myself to be, in a sense, a son of India. Since childhood my mind has been nourished by the classics of Indian thought. . . . And since early adulthood my body, too, has been nourished by Indian fare: rice and *dal*.
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> *(11)*

The Dalai Lama XIV's corpus is vast, comprising about 50 books and countless transcribed lectures, interviews, and teachings. It would be impossible to survey this entire body of work in a single chapter. Instead, I will discuss the outlines of his philosophical project and views and some of the respects in which he is philosophically distinctive. We can divide the Dalai Lama XIV's published work into several broad (overlapping) genres. First, he has written substantial commentarial work on Indian Buddhist literature. Second, he has written systematic ethical treatises aimed at a global audience. Third, he has written on metaphysics and science. Fourth, he has written on the philosophy of religion, particularly on interfaith dialogue. Fifth, he has written religious homilies aimed sometimes at Buddhist audiences and sometimes at more general audiences, designed to help readers to lead happier lives. Finally, he has written autobiographical texts. Here, I will address the work comprising the first four of these rough categories.

General Philosophical Framework

The overarching philosophical framework within which the Dalai Lama XIV works represents an intersection between several philosophical traditions. First and foremost, he is a follower of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tradition of Buddhism, a tradition grounded in Candrakīrti's (seventh century CE) reading of Nāgārjuna's (ca. second century CE) *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*). Philosophers in this tradition take seriously the ultimate emptiness of all phenomena of any intrinsic nature in virtue of their interdependence. But at the same time, they take seriously the conventional reality of these interdependent phenomena. Since this is a Mahāyāna tradition, Madhyamaka moral philosophers ground ethical thought in the bodhisattva ideal – that is, in a commitment to attain awakening, conditioned by the cultivation of *karuṇā*, an attitude of universal care, for the benefit of all sentient beings. On the ethical side, the principal texts to which the Dalai Lama XIV refers are Śāntideva's (eighth-century) *How to Lead an Awakened Life* (*Bodhicāryāvatāra*) and Kamalaśīla's (eighth-century) *Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama*).

The Dalai Lama XIV's understanding of this tradition is mediated in several respects (even prior to the interaction with the other strains of thought that combine in his philosophical outlook). First, he reads this tradition through the extensive Tibetan commentarial tradition. Most specifically, he is influenced enormously by the commentaries and treatises of his own lineage, the dGe lugs (Geluk) school founded by rJe Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), a lineage that, more than most, emphasizes a robust realism about conventional reality and the possibility of genuine knowledge of conventional truth (Cowherds 2011; Jinpa 2019; Thakchöe 2007; Yakherds 2021).

That influence is rendered less parochial, however, in virtue of the Dalai Lama XIV's commitment to an ecumenical approach to Buddhist philosophy following the nineteenth- to twentieth-century Tibetan *ris med*, or non-sectarian movement, and he has received instruction from many scholars belonging to lineages other than the dGe lugs tradition, often commenting on texts from the perspective of these other lineages. Moreover, the commitment to the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school is mitigated by the Dalai Lama XIV's deep interest in

and sympathy with other strands of Buddhist thought, including that of the Theravāda and Yogācāra traditions. His own Madhyamaka thought often incorporates ideas from these other schools, something unusual in Tibetan scholarship but reflecting the kind of cosmopolitan approach to philosophy characteristic of Indian philosophers.

This cosmopolitan sensibility also informs the Dalai Lama XIV's philosophy of religion, in particular his religious pluralism. I have already noted his intra-Buddhist ecumenism deriving from the Tibetan non-sectarian movement, a tendency amplified by his constant dialogue with Buddhists of other traditions. But like Gandhi, and Ramakrishna before him, the Dalai Lama XIV has been a constant advocate for interfaith dialogue and for pluralism in religious practice and commitment. Given the historically missionary nature of Buddhism (a tendency still very much in evidence), this is a remarkable posture. Not only has the Dalai Lama XIV urged that all religions share common core commitments and that there is no single religious view appropriate to all religions and cultures, but he has actually offered commentary on the Christian gospels. This pluralist ecumenism is another respect in which his modernism and cosmopolitanism are very much in evidence.

The second line of influence to note is that from Mohandas K. Gandhi, in particular Gandhi's emphasis on *ahiṃsā*, or avoidance of harm. Although the Dalai Lama XIV relies principally on Buddhist teachings, while Gandhi draws inspiration from a combination of Hindu and Western pacifist teachings (Bhushan and Garfield 2017), their views converge on this point, as well as in the conviction that *ahiṃsā* is first and foremost an inner state, or commitment demanding self-cultivation, and only secondarily an external recusal from violent action. The Dalai Lama XIV draws heavily on Gandhi's theorization of non-harm both in his own ethical theory and in his approach to the political campaign for greater Tibetan autonomy within the People's Republic of China (see especially *Beyond Religion*, 9).

Gandhi's political thought, as many have noted, has a complex relationship to modernity. On the one hand, his theological outlook and his hostility towards technology, urbanization, and central government – ideas inspired by Thoreau, Ruskin, and Tolstoy – contribute to a trenchant critique of modernity, most explicitly in *Hind Swaraj*. On the other hand, Gandhi draws heavily on a discourse of rights and rule of law that depends on ideals of European modernity, arguing for Indian independence, for instance, on the grounds that colonial rule violates fundamental rights. The Dalai Lama XIV is more friendly to modern science, technology, and government but follows Gandhi on this latter route, developing a political and ethical theory that takes rights seriously in a way unprecedented in Buddhist thought. This has allowed him to become a potent actor on the world political stage and has allowed him to bring Buddhist ethical reflection into dialogue with global modernity.

The Dalai Lama XIV's modernism is also evident in his robust engagement with science and in his scientific realism. He has a long-standing interest in physics, in the biological sciences, and in cognitive science in particular. In keeping with the realistic spirit of the Geluk understanding of conventional reality, he has taken modern science to provide the best understanding of the nature of that reality and has always insisted that where science and Buddhist doctrine conflict, science wins. (Whether he always follows that dictum faithfully is a matter of some controversy, but I leave that aside here.) Through a series of dialogues among senior Tibetan scholars and scientists in which he is a regular participant, organized by the Mind and Life Foundation, and in a series of influential books inspired by those dialogues, the Dalai Lama XIV has argued that Buddhist philosophy entails a respect for science and that modern science confirms many of the most central tenets of Buddhist philosophy. He has also been instrumental in revising monastic curricula, incorporating extensive education in modern science.

Buddhist Philosophy

Not surprisingly, a large portion of the Dalai Lama XIV's corpus is devoted specifically to topics in Buddhist philosophy. The majority of that consists in commentarial exposition of Indian Madhyamaka texts; the remainder are independent treatises addressed predominately to popular audiences. The Dalai Lama XIV has commented on sūtras, texts addressing the graduated path to awakening, and tantric texts. These commentaries include: *The Essence of the Heart Sūtra* (2005); *The Path to Enlightenment* (1994a); *Tantra in Tibet* (2007); *A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night* (1994b); *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying* (1997); *Dzogchen: The Heart Essence of the Great Perfection* (2000); *For the Benefit of All Beings: A Commentary on* The Way of the Bodhisattva (2009); and *Practicing Wisdom: The Perfection of Shantideva's Bodhisattva Way* (2014). In most of these texts, his approach eschews traditional line-by-line commentary as the primary mode of explanation (although there is some of this). Instead, he favors the reconstruction of a broader philosophical picture in which fundamental metaphysical and epistemological ideas are first defended and then used as premises on the basis of which an account of cultivation and of the good life, or of salutary meditative practices, is defended. These commentaries are very much addressed to a Buddhist audience interested in advice regarding spiritual practice or illumination of difficult texts in Buddhist philosophy.

The Dalai Lama XIV has returned to *How to Lead an Awakened Life* – a text he often teaches in public – many times. In his discussion of this text, unlike some others, the Dalai Lama XIV is self-consciously addressing both a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist audience, treating *How to Lead an Awakened Life* both as a cultivation text within the Buddhist tradition and as a secular text, defending an approach to ethical cultivation and conduct for everyone from premises that require no religious commitment. His books on this text include *Transcendent Wisdom* (1988), *A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night* (1994b), *Practicing Wisdom* (2004), *A Profound Mind: Cultivating Wisdom in Everyday Life* (2011), *For the Benefit of All Beings: A Commentary on* The Way of the Bodhisattva (2009), *Practicing Wisdom: The Perfection of Shantideva's Bodhisattva Way* (2014), and *Perfecting Patience* (2018). While some of these are traditional verse-by-verse commentaries on the text, others are more discursive, focusing on a single chapter or set of verses, explaining their meaning in the text, their context in Madhyamaka ethical thought generally, and their importance in moral cultivation and daily life. In each case, the Dalai Lama XIV works to ground ethical ideas in metaphysical and psychological claims about the nature of the person, following the lead of Śāntideva and his predecessor Āryadeva (third century CE). And in each case, the principal link to which he draws attention is that between interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the fundamentally social nature of human beings, and care (*karuṇā*), arguing that a true understanding of the nature of reality and of human life spontaneously gives rise to an attitude of care.

Religious Pluralism

One might expect the leader of a major branch of a traditionally missionary religious movement to be a religious monist, to believe that the religious tradition that he leads is the one true religion. This is indeed the case regarding most religious leaders of this stature, reflecting the truth-claims religions make. There have been notable exceptions to this stance in the history of Indian philosophy: Jainism is pluralistic, and the nineteenth- to twentieth-century Vedānta sage Ramakrishna was a pluralist as well. The Dalai Lama XIV follows in this Indian religious tradition, advocating not only tolerance of other religious beliefs but also genuine pluralism

regarding them. He has argued that each religion can legitimately be regarded as true by its followers, that all religions have a common ethical core, that the metaphysical differences among religions are of no great import, and that different religions are best for different individuals, just as different medicines are appropriate to different patients and yet all aim at a cure.

The Dalai Lama XIV has brought this pluralist spirit to interfaith dialogue, including notable dialogues with the Catholic monk Thomas Merton, with a group of Jewish leaders, and with the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He has also defended and expressed these views in several notable books. In *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* (1996), a volume arising from a teaching residency in a Benedictine monastery in England, the Dalai Lama XIV offers commentary on the Christian Gospels. In *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, he argues that the values advanced by religions are equally well – or even more effectively – advanced in a secular context, radicalizing his vision of religious pluralism to include irreligion as an option he also endorses.

In *The Good Heart*, the Dalai Lama XIV introduces his project by saying

> I believe the purpose of all the major religious traditions is not to construct big temples on the outside, but to create temples of goodness and compassion *inside*, in our hearts. Every major religion has the potential to create this. The greater our awareness is regarding the value and effectiveness of other religious traditions, then the deeper will be our respect and reverence toward other religions. This is the proper way for us to promote genuine compassion and a spirit of harmony among the religions of the world.
>
> *(38–39)*

He reinforces this strong pluralism a few pages later:

> People often experience feelings of exclusivity in their religious beliefs – a feeling that one's own path is the only true path – which can create a sense of apprehension about connecting with others of different faiths. I believe the best way to counter that force is to experience the value of one's own path through a meditative life, which will enable one to see the value and preciousness of other traditions.
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> *(41)*

This does not amount to a universalism, according to which all religions are taken to be basically the same, albeit articulated in different ways, but a genuine pluralism, respecting the real differences among religions, as the Dalai Lama XIV immediately emphasizes:

> I have always felt that we should have different religious traditions because human beings possess so many different mental dispositions: one religion simply cannot satisfy the needs of such a variety of people. If we try to unify the faiths of the world into one religion, we will also lose many of the qualities and richnesses of each particular tradition.
>
> *(*Ibid.*)*

He makes the same point in the introduction to his exposition of the *Heart of Wisdom Sūtra* (2005, 9–13) in a discussion replete with genuine appreciation for the benefits of views foreign to Buddhism. He concludes that discussion with an admonition against proselytizing and in

favor of maintaining faith in one's own tradition (13–14). He then characterizes productive interfaith dialogue as follows:

> At the beginning of such a dialogue, it's important that all the participants fully recognize not only the many areas of convergence between each other's faith traditions, but more crucially, that they recognize and respect the differences between the traditions. Furthermore, we should look at the specific causes and conditions that gave rise to the differences between the traditions. . . . Then, having clarified the differences and the origins, we look at the religions from a different perspective: becoming aware of how different religious philosophies and practices can give rise to similar results. By entering into interfaith dialogue in this way, we develop genuine respect and admiration for each other's religious traditions.
>
> *(14–15)*

The Dalai Lama XIV argues that the benefits from interfaith dialogue go well beyond the achievement of greater understanding of and respect for other religious traditions; he argues that traditions can actually benefit from lessons learned from other faiths:

> Though I don't recommend that a person abandon his or her native religion, I believe that a follower of one tradition can certainly incorporate into his or her own spiritual practice certain methods for spiritual transformation found in other traditions. For example, some of my Christian friends, while remaining deeply committed to their own tradition, incorporate ancient Indian methods for cultivating single-pointedness of mind through meditative concentration. . . . These devout Christians, while remaining deeply committed to their own spiritual tradition, embrace aspects and methods from other teachings. This, I think is beneficial to them and wise.
>
> Buddhists can incorporate elements of the Christian tradition into their practice – for instance, the tradition of community service. In the Christian tradition, monks and nuns have a long history of social work. . . . In providing service to the greater human community through social work, Buddhism lags far behind Christianity.
>
> *(17–18)*

In *The Compassionate Life*, he devotes an entire chapter (chapter 4) to an exploration of religious pluralism, developing these ideas in greater detail, and arguing directly for a serious religious pluralism that embraces difference to the benefit of all traditions.

Let us now consider one example of the Dalai Lama XIV's approach to a Christian scripture, drawn from his commentary on the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Here we see both his insistence on recognizing difference but also his genuine interest both in preserving that difference and in utilizing it to gain deeper insight into commonality. After pointing out that both Buddhist and Christian philosophers see the problem of suffering as structuring human life and that both affirm a close connection between the moral valence of one's actions and the nature of their consequences for one's future life, he notes:

> One of the most difficult concepts involved here, especially for Buddhists, is the concept of a divine being, God. Of course, one can approach this concept in terms of something which is inexpressible, something which is beyond language and

> conceptuality. But one must admit that, at the theoretical level, the conceptions of God and Creation are a point of departure between Buddhists and Christians.
>
> *(55)*

The Dalai Lama XIV then uses this "point of departure" to explore the motivations for theism and a theory of universal creation by an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent god in Christianity and the motivations for rejecting such an account in Buddhism, concluding that there are good arguments on each side. The discussion is a model of judicious pluralism in the philosophy of religion. He returns to the question of theism later in the text, explicitly grounding this pluralism in Buddhist philosophy:

> All [of the Buddha's various teachings] are aimed toward sentient beings' diverse mental dispositions, needs, and spiritual inclinations. And when I understand the truth of this, I am able to truly appreciate the richness and value of other traditions, because it enables me to extend the same principle of diversity to other traditions as well . . .
>
> Within Christianity there seem to be a number of diverse interpretations or understandings of the concept of God. . . . [Q]ualities such as compassion can also be attributed to [a] divine ground of being. Now if we are to understand God in such terms – as an ultimate ground of being – then it becomes possible to draw parallels with certain elements in Buddhist thought and practice . . .
>
> We should also be careful not to reduce everything to a set of common terms so that at the end of the day we have nothing left . . . that is distinct about our specific traditions. . . . For example, if one were to try hard to draw parallels between Buddhism and the idea of the Trinity, the first thing that might come to mind would be the idea of the three *kayas*, the doctrine of the three embodiments of the Buddha: *dharmakāya, sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*. But . . . we should not push these lines of comparison too far.
>
> *(72–73)*

We could say much more. But it should be clear that the Dalai Lama XIV is approaching the philosophy of religion through a sophisticated, cosmopolitan pluralism grounded in Buddhist philosophy, that is, as a true modernist.

Ethics

The Dalai Lama XIV has written a good deal on ethics, and indeed this may be the area in which he has made the most substantive – as well as the most public – contributions to philosophy. It is also an area in which his modernism and in which his connections to Western and to Indian philosophy are particularly evident. As I noted in the previous section, the Dalai Lama XIV's ethical thought is firmly rooted in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, particularly that of Śāntideva. As a consequence, his orientation to ethical thought is structured by several themes that run through that tradition and that are emphasized by Śāntideva. The first is that he conceives of ethics as the cultivation of modes of perception and experience and not in the first instance in terms of conduct or duties. A second is that he thinks about ethics in terms of a path to cultivation of these modes of perception and so in terms of the techniques one can use to advance ethically. Third, he conceives of the qualities one cultivates on that path in terms of the six perfections adumbrated in the context of the bodhisattva stages (generosity, attention,

patience, enthusiasm, mediation, and wisdom). Fourth, he conceives the goal of the path as the attainment of the four divine states (*brahmavihāras*) that are common to most Buddhist ethical thought – friendliness or beneficence (*maitrī*), care (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and impartiality (*upekṣā*) – with care taking center stage.

On the other hand, there are aspects of the Dalai Lama XIV's ethical thought that come from other sources. For instance, his secularization of his arguments for moral cultivation and moral education lead him to justify his ethical vision not in terms of the goal of awakening but rather in a reasoned account of human nature and human goals. He argues that taking human nature and human goals seriously entails adopting this moral perspective. For instance, in *Ethics for the New Millennium* (1999), he writes:

> My call for a spiritual revolution is thus not a call for a religious revolution. Nor is it a reference to a way of life that is somehow otherworldly, still less to something magical or mysterious. Rather, it is a call for a radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self. It is a call to turn toward the wider community of beings with whom we are connected, and for conduct that recognizes others' interests alongside our own.
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> *(23–24)*

He amplifies this idea both throughout *Ethics for a New Millennium* and more recently and with greater emphasis on the secular basis of his ethical thought in *Beyond Religion: Ethics for the Whole World* (2011), where he cites the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution explicitly (7). This approach reflects his ecumenism as well as his commitment to a universal standard of rationality and to argument based on shared premises, ideas that come both from the Indian philosophical tradition and from European modernity.

There are two other distinctive features of the Dalai Lama XIV's approach to ethics. First, there is his commitment to human rights. Second, there is his appropriation of Gandhi's commitment to non-harm and a representational approach to action which reflects his debt to modern Indian moral and political theory. The Dalai Lama XIV's ethical thought is developed in several books, prominently including *The Power of Compassion* (1995), *Ethics for the New Millennium* (1999), *The Compassionate Life* (2003), *The Art of Happiness at Work* (2003), *The Wisdom of Forgiveness* (2004), and *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight* (1984).

Let us begin with the Buddhist roots of the Dalai Lama XIV's ethics. Śāntideva's *How to Lead an Awakened Life* is a systematic development of a Buddhist moral phenomenology, characterizing vice and suffering as depending on egocentricity grounded in a primal fear of death (Cowherds 2016; Garfield 2010/2011, 2019; Heim 2021). The path to fearlessness and moral maturity involves the accumulation of the six perfections of generosity, attention, patience, enthusiasm, meditation, and wisdom. Each of these is developed by Śāntideva and articulated by the Dalai Lama XIV as a way of experiencing oneself, the world, and other moral agents, and the progressive cultivation of these perfections leads to a more accurate, salutary, and effective mode of engagement with the world.

One is transformed from an agent who self-reifies, locates oneself at the center of the moral universe, sees others as mere objects, and as a consequence takes egoism to be a rational mode of engagement into an agent who experiences herself as an impermanent interdependent participant in a vast network of beings with whom one is co-constituted, and so one who takes the interests of all to be equally motivating. In his own work, the Dalai Lama XIV places special emphasis on the cultivation of patience as an antidote to anger and aversion and the meditation on emptiness and interdependence as an antidote to egoism.

In each case, the Dalai Lama XIV argues directly that these are the only rational comportments towards the world. Anger and egoism presuppose an incoherent model of our existence as entirely independent of that of others and of agency as involving autonomy that ignores our casual dependence on our history and our environment. Egoism involves the absurd notion that I am far more important morally than anyone else. He argues that any rational understanding of the world reveals instead that people act due to countless causes and conditions for which they are not responsible, and so anger is never justified. And we are no different from others, so our own interests have no special weight in decision making.

The outcome of this path of cultivation is the achievement of an understanding of ourselves as embedded, conventionally real, but ultimately empty persons, persons whose goals can only be achieved through cooperation and who are happier to the degree that they are enmeshed in bonds of friendship than if they are in competitive strife. This understanding of the world, the Dalai Lama XIV argues, is not simply that articulated in Buddhist philosophy but is supported by modern science, including the life sciences and behavioral sciences. As he puts it in *Ethics for a New Millennium*:

> [w]hen we come to see that everything we perceive and experience arises as a result of an indefinite series of interrelated causes and conditions, our whole perspective changes. We begin to see that the universe we inhabit can be understood in terms of a living organism where each cell works in balanced cooperation with every other cell to sustain the whole.
>
> *(40–41)*

In *Beyond Religion*, he writes that

> there is now a reasonably substantial body of evidence in evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and other fields suggesting that, even from the most rigorous scientific perspective, unselfishness and concern for others are not only in our own interests but also, in a sense, innate to our biological nature.
>
> *(5–6)*

Understanding oneself and the world in this way, he argues, leads to a spontaneous attitude of friendship to those with whom we share the world and upon whom our existence is dependent; a care for others, whose suffering we recognize as immediately motivating; happiness at success, no matter whose it is; and a sense that nobody's value depends upon their relation to us in particular. These are the four *brahmavihāras*, valorized in Buddhist ethics, and argued by the Dalai Lama XIV to be the only rational attitudes towards ourselves and others. He also develops this argument in *The Compassionate Life* (2003, 8–10).

This secular defense of his approach to ethics is one respect in which the Dalai Lama XIV is developing a modernist version of Buddhist ethics. Another is his commitment to human rights – an idea with no antecedents in Buddhist or classical Indian thought – and to an international order that guarantees them as a moral imperative. While this commitment, grounded in Western political and moral theory in a commitment to individual autonomy and a deontological ethical framework, might appear to be in tension with a Buddhist ethical framework committed to interdependence and phenomenological ethics, the Dalai Lama XIV sees the framework of human rights as having a solid foundation in his Buddhist ethical framework.

It is, in his view, introduced as a means to extending care to others, not as an expression of primary autonomy (see also Garfield 1998). The Dalai Lama XIV puts it this way:

> A sense of responsibility toward all others also means that, both as individuals and as a society of individuals, we have a duty to care for each member of our society. . . . Just like ourselves, . . . people have a right to happiness and to avoid suffering.
>
> *(169)*

And in *Beyond Religion: Ethics for the Whole World* (2011), he writes:

> We have a universal declaration of human rights, and awareness of the importance of such rights has grown tremendously. As a result, the ideals of freedom and democracy have spread around the world, and there is increasing recognition of the oneness of humanity.
>
> *(ix)*

Understood this way, we ascribe rights to others as a way of ensuring public policies and interpersonal behavior that supports the extension of benefits to them, prevents harm, and recognizes human equality, each manifestations of the *brahmavihāras*. The Dalia Lama XIV makes much the same point in *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight* (70 ff.) and in *Perfecting Patience* (2018), where he writes, "one aspect of compassion is to respect others' rights and others' views" (6).

Mohandas K. Gandhi argued that the core of moral engagement lies in the conjunction of the commitment to avoid harm, and the achievement of self-mastery (*swaraj*). He also insists that public moral engagement involves the practice of representational action to demonstrate the moral status of unjust policies (*satyagraha*, or insistence on the truth). A practitioner of *satyagraha* not only behaves in a way that comports with ethical standards but does so in a public way to challenge injustice and does so nonviolently. This practice hence not only constitutes but also *represents* in a public forum that in which ethical conduct consists and the injustice of the institution against which *satyagraha* is launched. This adds an important social dimension to ethics, one missing in much of traditional Buddhist ethical thought, which focuses more on the individual perfection of one who has renounced society. The Dalai Lama XIV, as I have noted, was deeply influenced by Gandhi's life and writings. This leads him to emphasize the social face of ethics and the importance to ethical practice of the avoidance of harm.

A recognition of the importance of social engagement has led the Dalai Lama XIV to become a leader – along with the Vietnamese Zen monk the Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh and the Thai lay Buddhist activist Sulak Sivaraksa – in the *Engaged Buddhism* movement, a movement that has translated Buddhist ethics into a program of social reform (Hanh 1987; Queen 2000; Queen and King 1996). Buddhist ethics in this tradition positively enjoins social action on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, on behalf of social justice, and for the benefit of the environment. Engaged Buddhists reinterpret the basic Buddhist precepts, which are all expressed in negative terms – enjoining refraining from killing; from harsh, idle, or deceptive speech; refraining from intoxication; refraining from theft; refraining from sexual misconduct – in positive terms. They come to be understood as enjoining the protection of life; the use of speech for social good (including representational action); cultivating awareness of social wrongs; working actively for the redistribution of wealth and income; and protection of the vulnerable against exploitation. The Dalai Lama XIV has actively promoted this understanding of Buddhist ethics, once again confirming both his Indian sensibility and his modernist approach to ethical theory.

Engagement with Science

The Dalai Lama XIV's modernist approach to Buddhist philosophy has also been amply in evidence in his approach to science. He has been committed to taking modern science seriously for some time. The primary vehicle for his engagement with science has been the long series of dialogues sponsored by the Mind and Life Institute beginning in 1987 and continuing to the present day. These dialogues bring together groups of senior monastic scholars, including the Dalai Lama XIV, with Western natural and social scientists and a few humanities scholars to provide context. These dialogues have brought the Dalai Lama XIV into close interaction with physicists, biologists, neuroscientists, and psychologists. These conversations are not idle exchanges of interest but serious explorations of the relevance of modern science to Buddhist philosophy and doctrine and of Buddhism to problems in modern science. Many have later been distilled into books summarizing the interactions (Begley 2007; Dalai Lama 1997; Davidson and Harrington 2002; Goleman 1990, 2003; Harrington and Zajonc 2006; Hayward and Varela 1992; Houshmand, Livingston, and Wallace 1999; Kabat-Zinn and Davidson 2012; Louisi and Houshman 2009; Singer and Ricard 2015; Zajonc 2004).

The Dalai Lama XIV argues that science is a partner to Buddhist philosophy, and Madhyamaka philosophy in particular, at both the conventional and the ultimate levels. Following the Geluk tradition, he is committed to the view that there is a robust sense in which conventional truth *is* truth and that the conventional world is *real*, even if only conventionally. This entails that there is a determinate truth about how things are conventionally, even if they are ultimately empty of any intrinsic nature. Moreover, in this view, all phenomena are dependently originated and so can be explained causally and have their identities only in a network of causal, mereological, and conceptual interdependence. As a consequence, an analytical investigation into the composition of natural phenomena, and into their causal relations and theoretical contexts, should lead to a deeper understanding of their conventional nature. The Dalai Lama XIV is convinced that modern science provides the best possible avenue to such analytical investigation and so into the deepest understanding of conventional truth.

But this has implications for ultimate truth as well. Since, in this tradition, the two truths are regarded as extensionally identical but intensionally distinct, with emptiness taken to be identical with interdependence, any investigation of interdependence is also an investigation into the nature of emptiness, revealing just how and why things lack intrinsic identity. Moreover, the demonstration by scientific exploration that everything in the world is in fact interdependent in these ways, and so lacking in any essence, reinforces the Madhyamaka claim that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic nature.

In the domain of physics, this dialogue has generally focused on three implications of quantum mechanics and general relativity. The first is thoroughgoing interdependence. This is suggested by phenomena such as quantum entanglement. The second is lack of determinate nature suggested by the probabilistic character of quantum measurement and the uncertainty principle. The third is the mind-dependence of physical reality, suggested by the dependence of the collapse of probabilistic wave functions on measurement. All of these ideas are homologous with central doctrines in Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka metaphysics.

In the life sciences, the Dalai Lama XIV has emphasized the interdependence of living things as demonstrated by ecology and the close connection between mental and physical phenomena. Neuroscience, he argues, provides deep evidence of the efficacy of meditative practice and of the link between the cultivation of awareness of one's own cognitive states and of the nature of mental processes and the development of salutary moral properties such

as care, friendliness, and lack of egocentricity. He has argued that cognitive neuroscience and Buddhist meditative practices are a natural pairing as tools for understanding fundamental conscious processes and affective response. He has been particularly interested in the neuroscience of affect and has argued that results in this area demonstrate both the natural arising of spontaneous affect as a consequence of deep insight into the mind and the benefits of positive affect for other domains of human functioning and health. This extended philosophical engagement with science, and the epistemic authority the Dalai Lama XIV grants it, is yet another mark of his modernism.

Conclusion

The Dalai Lama XIV is one of the most influential contemporary Indian philosophers. He draws effectively on the classical Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition and on modern Indian and European philosophy. The synthesis he achieves in metaphysics, the philosophy of religion, ethics, and political philosophy represents a distinctive voice in contemporary philosophy: a classically grounded modernism that brings Buddhist thought into dialogue with modern science and philosophy.

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