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## Buddhism, Biology, Bioethics

The Contemporary Relevance of Early Buddhist Reflection  
on The Nature of the Human Person

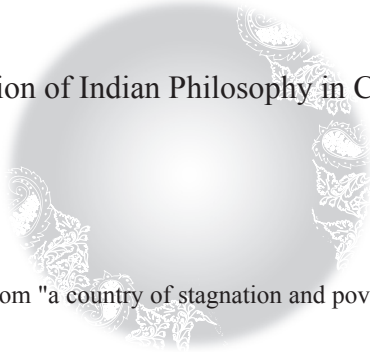
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# The Center for the Study of Contemporary India, Ryukoku University

## The Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India



The image of India has recently shifted from "a country of stagnation and poverty" to "a country of great power" as a result of its growing economic strength.

India has realized this remarkable economic development primarily because of its relatively stable "democratic" politics. What interests us is that the norms and morals that maintain the Indian economy and politics reflect traditional Indian thought and philosophical concepts such as *Satya* (truth), *Dharma* (morality or duty), and *Ahiṃsā* (nonviolence), which have been formed during India's long history.

Our project attempts to integrate the knowledge and materials on Indian philosophy and Buddhism accumulated during the 370-year history of Ryukoku University with the new findings of contemporary India studies, focusing on the "Living Tradition of Indian Philosophy in Contemporary India". To that end, we opened the Center for the Study of Contemporary India (RINDAS), in collaboration with the National Institutes for the Humanities, for five years from April of 2010 through March of 2014.

Unit 1 Politics, Economy and Philosophy of Contemporary India

Unit 2 Social Movements in Modern India Across Borders

RINDAS Series of Working Papers : Traditional Indian Thoughts 11

## **Buddhism, Biology, Bioethics**

*The Contemporary Relevance of Early Buddhist Reflection on The Nature of the Human Person*

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## Buddhism, Biology, Bioethics

*The Contemporary Relevance of Early Buddhist Reflection on The Nature of the Human Person*

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In my previous papers (No.9 and No.10 in this series) I showed the idea of retrieval, and recommended that we understand modernity as involving transaction with the ancient tradition rather than a rupture from it. Here I want to apply these ideas in a concrete and specific case. I will be arguing that in early Buddhist discussion of human subjects there is potential for a flexible conception of the political individual compatible with Buddhist denial of self as a fixed metaphysical category.

In her 2012 BBC Reith Lectures, her Nobel acceptance speech, and in her address to both Houses of Parliament in Britain, Aung San Suu Kyi has announced her conviction that Buddhist values can inform a programme of political action aiming at democracy and human rights, this in sharp contrast with the opinion that democracy and human rights are western values falsely representing themselves as universal values, and also in opposition to the idea that an appeal to Buddhist theory adds little or nothing to established ethical conceptions. What is envisioned, rather, is a distinctively Buddhist articulation of the conceptual fabric within which talk of rights and democracy is intelligible. My aim as a philosopher is to begin an evaluation of that ambition, and I will end by arguing that the project is indeed a viable one, a contemporary political project resourced through a situated retrieval of ancient ideas.

Many of the issues involved are also those which are at stake in cross-cultural discussion about bioethics. According to the widely employed guidelines of Beauchamp and Childress 1994, bioethics is constituted by four ethical principles: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Aksoy and Tenik 2002 assert that “these principles are universal and applicable in any culture and society; they have always existed in different moral traditions in different ways.” Others have argued, conversely, that, in emphasising the rights of the individual, they neglect community values, intersubjective relationships, and the structure and organisation

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of health care systems. Still others have suggested that cultural traditions vary in the emphasis placed on one or other of the four principles, greater weight given to patients' decisional agency in Europe and the United States, more emphasis on the physician's ability to judge what is in the best interests of the patient in Buddhist and Confucian societies. Worries about paternalism tend to favour autonomy, considerations about expertise favour beneficence. The possibility I am interested in is that Buddhist discussion of the notions of self, person, and individual will lead to a reformulation of the defining principles of bioethics and a reworking of concomitant ideas about rights, respect, and responsibility.

### Identification and Nonself

What then is it for a human subject to exercise autonomy? And how fundamentally is the idea of autonomy related to the category of the person? The work of the philosopher Harry Frankfurt has been extremely influential in recent discussion of these questions. Frankfurt famously defines autonomy as being in a position to act on a motivation with which one identifies (Frankfurt 1971). There are psychological states which, although they motivate one to act, are in some sense alien to one; examples include the reluctant drug-user, driven to take the drug but disowning their desire, and more generally, cases involving obsessive-compulsive disorders, manias, phobias and addictions. More severe examples are found in the clinical literature on schizophrenia, where patients report having ideas and desires that are as if inserted, and which they do not regard as being their own thoughts, as well as the dissociation effects experienced in abuse patients. These are not cases of external coercion but of internal distress and conflict. Frankfurt's concept of identification provides a point of contrast: "The decision determines what the person really wants by making the desire on which he decides fully his own. To this extent the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, constitutes himself. The pertinent desire is no longer in any way external to him. It is not a desire that he 'has' merely as a subject in whose history it happens to occur, as a person may 'have' an involuntary spasm that happens to occur in the history of his body" (Frankfurt 1988: 170). To identify with a state is, he sometimes says, to be "wholehearted" about it, to "have a stake" in it. For Frankfurt the will consists in one's first-order effective desires, and the distinction between willings that are one's own and willings from which one is alienated has to

do with the presence or absence of a second-order desire that one has the first-order willing.

A cardinal principle in early Buddhist philosophy of mind is the thesis that there is no self. I propose, first of all, that we should understand this claim as stating a policy not as describing a fact, a policy that goes back to the Buddha's celebrated declaration, in the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, that it is a mistake ever to identify oneself with any of the mental happenings in one's mind:

"Volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*) are nonself. For if, bhikkhus, volitional formations were self, they would not lead to affliction, and it would be possible to have it of volitional formations: 'Let my volitional formation be thus; let my volitional formations not be thus.' But because volitional formations are nonself, volitional formations lead to affliction, and it is not possible to have it of volitional formations: 'Let my volitional formations be thus; let my volitional formations not be thus'."<sup>1</sup>

The same formula is repeated for each of the five *skandhas*, the constituent mental processes that make up the stream of consciousness. None of these is self, because with respect to none of them is there the possibility that they are under one's governance. Martin Adam has argued in an excellent paper (Adam 2010) that we can find in this passage a Frankfurtian distinction between first-order and second-order desires. Intentions and willings (*cetanā*) are a sub-class of "volitional formations" (*saṅkhāra*). Adam says that "the Buddha would probably not have disagreed with the following assertion famously attributed to Schopenhauer: "A man can do what he wants, but not want what he wants"" (2010: 251). It would follow from this reading that what the Buddha is saying is that ordinary human beings are alienated from the motivations, preferences, and intentions that move them. As states of alienation, they are associated with "affliction" or distress. Adam observes that there is in Buddhism a conception of levels of human accomplishment, with *sekhas* or trainees in the middle and fully-accomplished *arahats* at the top, and he makes the reasonable point that we might read this as implying the idea that freedom of the will is an acquired trait. As I would put it, the idea would be that identification with one's motivating desires is a skill: one comes, by way of the practices of the eight-fold path,

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<sup>1</sup> SN<sub>1</sub> 22.59, III: 67 §§ 8–9: [8] *saṅkhārā anattā. saṅkhārā ca hidaṃ bhikkhave attā abhavissaṃsu. na yidaṃ saṅkhārā ābādhyāya saṃvatteyyum. labbhetha ca saṅkhāresu "evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu evaṃ me saṅkhārā mā ahesunti"*. [9] *yasmā ca kho bhikkhave saṅkhārā anattā tasmā saṅkhārā ābādhyāya saṃvattanti. na ca labbhati saṅkhāresu "evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu evaṃ me saṅkhārā mā ahesunti"*. Translation SN<sub>2</sub>.

to be disalienated from one's motivations, with full "whole-heartedness" the defining characteristic of the *arahat*.

How, though, are the terms "self" and "nonself" being used here? The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* provides a necessary condition: that if some mental state is self then it falls within the domain of conscious control. To deny that the *saṅkhāras* are self is to affirm that they are not produced or eliminated by conscious acts of will. "The *saṅkhāras* are not subject to control" (Adam 2010: 251), one reason being that it is a mistake to read the idea of a *skandha* as being that of a personal-level psychological state, such as an existing desire or wish; rather, each of five kinds of sub-personal psychological activity are held jointly to constitute a human psychology. So I prefer to translate the *skandha*-terms *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃskāra* and *vijñāna* as 'registering', 'appraising', 'stereotyping', 'readying' and 'attending', processes or elements in whose joint operation conscious engagement with the physical environment consists, rather than, as 'matter', 'feeling', 'perception', 'formation', and 'consciousness' (see further Ganeri 2012a). Then one of the points the passage from the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* is making is that no sub-intentional mental state or process is self, and the reason is that these processes are not the kinds of thing that can fall under conscious command.

There is certainly evidence in the early canon (cf. Kuan 2009) that the application of the concept *self* is restricted by a further criterion; roughly, that the self is the *agent* of thinking, the *author* of one's thoughts. We need then to distinguish, in early Buddhist usage, between a aggregate and an agential conception of self, the aggregate self consisting in the collection of mental states that fall within the reach of conscious command, the agent self consisting in the author, producer, or agential cause of that class of states. More exactly:

[AGGREGATE SELF]  $x$  is **aggregate self** iff  $x$  is that of which there is conscious command.

[AGENTIAL SELF]  $x$  is **agent self** iff  $x$  is that *in virtue* of which there is conscious command.

Insofar as the notion of agential self implies a form of agent causation irreducible to process causation, it is firmly denied in the Pali canon that anything within the reach



of one's psychology satisfies this more demanding condition; and with that claim many contemporary philosophers and neuroscientists will concur. Our question is whether this Buddhist denial of self—agential or aggregate—is compatible with a recognition of the notion of a person.

## Persons and Individuals

Frankfurt's original aim in developing the theory of identification and alienation was to argue against P. F. Strawson's influential notion of a **person**. The Strawsonian concept of a person is the concept "of a type of entity such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics.. are equally applicable to a single [thing] of that type" (Strawson 1959: 101–2); that is, as an entity to which both P-predicates and M-predicates truly apply. Frankfurt rejects this animalist conception (which also corresponds to the Cārvāka concept of *puruṣa*) in favour of the view that the term "person" is rather "designed to capture those attributes which are the subject of our most humane concern with ourselves and the source of what we regard as most important and most problematical in our lives" (Frankfurt 1971: 6); and he uses the terminology of identification to speak of these attributes (Moran comments: "As I understand it, in the activity of 'identification' someone determines what shall be part of him as a person" (Moran 2002: 214)). Personhood is thus fundamentally tied to one's profile as a valuing being, with what is important to one as an individual, with what one is committed to in a wholehearted way.

The important point to observe here is that commitment to this Frankfurtian conception of persons does not necessarily entail commitment to a notion of self, in either of the two Buddhist isolated uses of that term, because the distinction between identification and alienation need not coordinate with the distinction between what falls under conscious command and what does not. There will therefore be ways to elaborate the concept of person which are not self-invoking if what determines one's preferences, values and commitments is independent of one's conscious control.

## Identification: From Critical Evaluation to Affective Response

Frankfurt's analysis of free will in terms of higher-order desire has been found deeply problematic, however, and probably leads to an infinite regress. An analysis of the distinction between identification and alienation that seeks to dispense with a hierarchy of desires has recently been put forward by Laura Ekstrom (Ekstrom 2005). What seems right about Frankfurt's analysis is the idea that when we rise above our basic impulses, and form attitudes towards them, attitudes for example of acceptance or disdain, this is something that requires an active involvement. As Ekstrom puts it, "a desire for having another desire is apparently not the sort of state that arrives unbidden" (2005: 49). That indeed echoes the sentiment of the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, when it declares that wills of the form "Let my volitional formations be such: let my volitional formations be not such" do not just arise. Rather than cashing out the idea in a hierarchical manner, though, the new idea is that we allow a role for evaluative reasoning in desire-formation at the bottom level. Ekstrom uses the term "preference" for a desire formed by a process of critical evaluation, an evaluation informed by the agent's conception of the good. She says:

On my view, these attitudes of preference are central to autonomous agency. This is the case, I argue, because it is reasonable to conceive of the self as constituted by an aggregate of preference and acceptance states, along with a certain capacity. Suppose we use the term "acceptance" to mark the mental endorsement of a proposition formed by critical reflection with the aim of assenting to what is true... [Then] it is this faculty for evaluative reasoning that I view, together with an aggregate of preferences and acceptances, as constituting a person's moral or psychological identity. Since the relevant attitudes represent what a person reflectively wants and what he believes when aiming at truth, we might call the collection of preferences and acceptances of a person's psychology his *character* (2005: 54–5).

The role of the critical faculty is that "it enables us to subject our motivations to scrutiny in the light of what we accept, and so come to view certain attitudes as genuine reasons for acting and deliberating in certain ways" (2005: 54), and to be a "capacity for forming and reforming the character" (2005: 55). Though happy to describe this aggregate of preferences and acceptances, together with the capacity for critical evaluation, as "self", Ekstrom is adamant that "the view does not commit us to the existence of an agential power to cause events in such a way that is not reducible to purely event-causal terms, nor does it require commitment to a trans-empirical Self or a Cartesian mind" (2005: 54). It is a view compatible with the Buddhist denial

of agent selfhood, conceived of as the inner thinker of my thoughts; at least, so long as the rather obscure notion of a faculty, left unexamined by Ekstrom, does not itself reintroduce agents. Her use of the term “self” to describe her view is consistent with Buddhist usage, however, for the application of the faculty of critical evaluation is certainly a way to bring one’s desires and attitudes under conscious control: Ekstrom’s self is an articulation of the Buddhist idea of aggregate self. A *kusala saṅkhāra* might be thought of in Ekstrom’s terms as the preference of such an agent whose conception of the good is that it consists in activities conducive to *nirvāṇa*. However, what is not clearly present in the Buddhist account is anything analogous to an evaluative faculty, a conscious capacity to form and reform the designated set of states.

A passage in the *Mahāli-sutta* seems to describe the mechanism by which the formation of character does take place:

If, Mahāli, these volitional formations were exclusively pleasurable, immersed in pleasure, steeped in pleasure, and if they were not steeped in suffering, beings would not experience revulsion towards them. But because volitional formations are suffering, immersed in suffering, steeped in suffering, and is not steeped in pleasure, beings experience revulsion towards them. Experiencing revulsion, they become dispassionate, and through dispassion they are purified. This, Mahāli, is a cause and condition for the purification of beings; it is thus that beings are purified with cause and condition.<sup>2</sup>

I read this passage as saying that the process of rejecting alienated desires is more automatic rather than consciously evaluative: one feels *repulsed* by alienated desires, the disgust breaks the hold of the desire, and one is eventually freed from inner conflict. The sequence is presented as causal rather than judgemental. The idea of a critical evaluative faculty responsible for “forming and reforming one’s character” introduces the idea of a aggregate self, of states as falling or not falling under conscious command. Ekstrom is therefore right to describe her theory as an account of the self, more specifically, it is an account of the aggregate self, and it is clear from this passage that early Buddhism rejects it.

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<sup>2</sup> SN<sub>1</sub> 1.2.1.8, III: 70: *saṅkhārā ca hidaṃ mahāli, ekantasukhā abhavissaṃsu sukhānupatitā, sukhāvakkantā, anavakkantā dukkhena, nayidaṃ sattā saṅkhārasmiṃ nibbindeyyuṃ, yasmā ca kho mahāli, saṅkhāresu dukkhā dukkhānupatitā dukkhāvakkantā anavakkantā sukhena, tasmā sattā saṅkhāresu nibbindanti, nibbindaṃ virajjanti. Virāgā visujjhanti. ayaṃ kho mahāli, hetu ayaṃ paccayo sattānaṃ visuddhiyā. evaṃ sahetu sappaccayā sattā visujjhantīti.* Translation SN<sub>2</sub>; cited in Adam 2010.

The key to understanding the passage, I believe, lies with the word “revulsion” or “disgust” (Pali: *nibbinda*; Skt: *nirveda*). Disgust is an emotion elicited by the appraisal of something close at hand as potentially contaminating, and manifested in a pulling away or aversiveness (see e.g. Curtis et al. 2011, linking disgust initially with disease avoidance). Though largely involuntary, there would be no such emotion without an unconscious ability to appraise as potentially contaminating things in one’s vicinity. One feels disgust at one’s unwholesome motivations, and one can feel moral disgust as well, a threatened contamination of one’s orientation towards the good. In describing the unwilling drug-user, Frankfurt says that he “hates his addiction” (1971: 12), while Ekstrom actually says that “the [alienated] desire arrives unbidden, and he finds both it and its intentional object disgusting” (2005: 47). To find something disgusting is not to find it wanting in a deliberative, evaluative process, which can issue at best in the judgement that it is offensive. The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* gets it exactly right: emotional disgust and not conscious judgement is what is involved in alienation; one’s response to inner conflict and disowned impulse is not that of sober negative judgement but of revulsion.

There is then a distinction in early Buddhism between identification and alienation, grounded neither in higher-order desires nor in critical evaluative practice (“conscious control”), but in affective emotional response. The conception is privative, in the sense that there is no positive affect associated with the states one identifies with; this class, the class of “preferences” in Ekstrom’s terminology, is simply the exclusion class of the states towards which one feels disaffection.

So I propose to understand the early Buddhist position as follows. There are states which elicit an attitude of disaffection: one feels disgust. A state *not* falling into this class is one that one identifies with, where, however, identification has no positive content or phenomenology, but consists just in the non-existence of disaffection: that is all there is to being “wholehearted”. The pragmatics of presupposition in ordinary language prevent the use of a term of singular reference to denote this counter-class, and it is to be spoken of only through such cumbersome constructions as “that which is not alienated” or the “exclusion of what is other (*anyāpoha*)”. The “not” here, however, isn’t that a negative existential but rather a way of making an affirmation negatively; we are picking out the states we identify with by specifying what they

aren't. In Sanskrit parlance, it is a *paryudāsa* not a *prasajya* negation. The concept of a person in early Buddhism is a negative one: it is indeed the concept of the aggregate of "those attributes which are the subject of our most humane concern with ourselves" but only by being the concept of the aggregate of attributes concerning which there is no disgust. No active principle binds these states together, and there is nothing I can point to as the essence of me. It is the view that there is no positive phenomenology of ownership, no sense of ownership, no sense of self, and nothing that it feels like for a thought to be deeply one's own: identification is without phenomenological character. All there is to being the person one is is the absence of disaffection. The concept in play is a "silent" one, and entirely without the positive phenomenology for example of the Advaitic witness consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

### Biological Identity and Buddhist Nonself

There is a very striking parallel between early Buddhist theory of mind as just articulated and an influential theory about the individuation of biological organisms. The immunologist Frank Burnet proposed that insofar as the immune system can distinguish between pathogenic and autologous material, it presents a criterion of identity for biological individuals. Burnet strikingly employed the terms "self" and "not-self", and his account has been described as a theory of "the biological notion of self and nonself" or of "the immune self". Burnet's central claim is that immunology is "founded on this intolerance of living matter to foreign matter" (1949: 60), for:

It is an obvious physiological necessity and a fact fully established by experiment that the body's own cells should not provoke antibody formation... An animal's own red cells are non-antigenic. This is not due to any intrinsic absence of antigenic components; the same cells injected into a different species or even into another unrelated animal of the same species may give rise to active antibody production. The failure of antibody production against autologous cells demands the postulation of an active ability of the reticulo-endothelial cells to recognize 'self' pattern from 'not-self' pattern in organic material taken into their substance. (Burnet 1949: 85-6).

Biological individuals are distinguished by *tolerance* to autologous material, tolerance consisting in the failure of the immune system to react to an antigen. What is striking is that immune tolerance is a privative conception; as Tauber (2010: 9-10) puts it,

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<sup>3</sup> I thus disagree with the interpretation of early Buddhism provided in Albahari 2006. Indeed the phenomenology of *ahamkāra* is, from a Buddhist perspective, a mode of alienation.

From this perspective, the foreign is destroyed by immune cells and their products, whereas the normal constituents of the animal are ignored (“tolerated”)... Tolerance, the negative image of self (or that which is absent in the space of immune recognition), became the central motif of understanding immune reactivity.

Again, “tolerance refers to the immune system’s ‘silence’ to potential targets of destruction” (ibid. 15). Pathogens and allografts are attacked by immune cells; normal cellular material is tolerated in the negative sense of being invisible to the immune recognition system. In Burnet’s theory, then, the body’s own matter, that is to say, the biological self, consists in whatever does *not* elicit immune reactivity.

The analogy with early Buddhist theory is evident: the function there effected by the twin processes of appraisal of something as potential contaminant and the reaction of disgust is encoded at the biological level in the recognition of pathogens and in immune response. Burnet’s immunological account of the boundaries of a biological organism mirrors the Buddhist account of psychological integrity. The use of an idiom of self and nonself enables a variety of immunological phenomena to be brought under a single heading: nutrition (transformation of nonself into self), protection, infection, autoimmunity, tolerance, and self-surveillance (Tauber 1999: 528). Autoimmunity, for example, the misidentification of self as nonself, consists in the body’s treating its own matter as toxic. The analogy I am highlighting implies that to each of these phenomena there is a correspondence at the level of human psychology. What corresponds to autoimmunity, for example, is the phenomenon of inserted thought, when a subject, usually someone suffering from schizophrenia, fails correctly to identify their thoughts as their own but regards them as alien intrusions. What corresponds to self-surveillance are the subdoxastic processes of monitoring and comparing preference and acceptance states, as articulated in such Buddhist notions as *mano-vijñāna* and *manas*. Indeed, several of these issues have clear antecedents in developments in later Buddhist analysis: the emergence of a theory of repository consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) in the Yogācāra thinkers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu; the role of cognitive skill (*upāya*); the problem of the individuation of streams of consciousness (*santāna*), handled in detail by Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti; interactionist ideas about the reach and limits of dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*) in the writings of the Madhyamaka thinkers Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, and their eventual dismissal of the explanatory value of the idea of well-bounded individuals *in toto*.

So the deflationary notion of self in the biological outlook is a fundamentally privative one, a “negative image”. “The self,” as Tauber (2008: 227) puts it, “might be better regarded as only a metaphor for a ‘figure’ outlined by the immune system’s silence, that is, its non-reactivity. That figure is inconstant and modified upon certain conditions”. And in early Buddhist theory we can identify an analogous deflationary notion of person, as the boundaries of psychological integrity that are silent to the affective system’s triggering of disgust at what is appraised as psychological contaminant. As a negative image, the person clearly has no agential causal power, nor can it be reified; it is not the agential self. Insofar as it consists in the absence of cognitive and moral disgust, one might want to say that there is something pure or even good about the self so conceived. It has, however, nothing in common with the penumbral consciousness of the Upaniṣads, still less with the witness consciousness of Sāṃkhya or Advaita Vedānta. Indeed it has nothing to do with conscious control; and that is why it is preferable to use a language of the person as moral individual rather than selves to speak of it. Because there is no such thing as perfect health, the biological individual is better viewed as a mutually constituting equilibrium between antigen and autogen. Similarly, while the idea of psychological contamination implies that of a state of psychological purity, a human being is better viewed as a more or less stable dynamical balance between identification and alienation. A state that is appraised as contaminative in one context may not be so in another; a state so appraised may trigger aversive behaviour in some situations, not in others. There is no stable core (identified-with states) surrounded by states owned only in some more superficial way (alienated states), but rather a shifting equilibrium between the two. That is to say the human being is ecotonal, its boundaries an inconstant site of dialogue with its broader environment. A “purification” model of human development is replaced by an “ecotonal” model, according to which “instead of a theory grounded on self/nonself distinctions, models of the immune system would be built on an ‘open’ architecture to fully represent the dynamic and dialectical relationship characterizing an organism engaged in its environment” (Tauber 2008: 241). To formulate questions about mind in the above way is to adopt what has been called the “biological outlook”, an outlook that, in contrast with the reductionism of a “chemical” point of view, expresses an “interest in the living organism in its totality,



its activities, and the definition, integrity, and negotiation of its boundaries” (Tauber 1999: 531).

## Conclusion : Buddhism, Bioethics and the Rights of the Individual

Identification has no positive phenomenology; there is nothing it feels like for a state to be one’s own. This is a reflection of the fact that autonomy is a negative liberty, a freedom from, and firmly distinguishes autonomy in Buddhism from individualism, either Enlightenment or Romantic. Free will, likewise, is a negative concept, not the calling card of agent causation but the absence of coercion. This notion of person is distinct from the idea that the person is to be identified with the maximally connected causal stream of *skandhas* (the *skandha-santāna*), or else with the *pudgala* as an inexplicable phenomenon emergent on the stream. Neither idea, it seems to me, can articulate what is essential to the idea of a person, which is that it delimits the moral identity of the individual. That two mental episodes stand in the same causal stream does not of itself explain how there can exist relationships of, for example, regret or hope, between them. What is required is a theory of persons in which personal identity is underwritten by a conception of the good.

I have argued that notions of the person and the individual are available in early Buddhism, notions that are compatible with the denial of aggregate or agential selves. That perspective commends a revision of the four constitutive principles of bioethics, replacing the first two, autonomy and beneficence, with a single one: that of respect for the individual who is acting with motivations that are wholesome and beneficence towards the individual whose motivations are alienated. For it seems reasonable to say that beneficence, although paternalistic, is justifiable when the patient is acting on motivations which they do not endorse, and not justifiable when the patient is acting on motivations they identify with. The physician can intervene to prevent the drug-user from acting on his ground-level desire, without violating his autonomy, because with respect to that desire the drug-user is not free. So I agree with Askoy and Tenik that the principles of bioethics are universal, and in particular that it is wrong to think there is disregard for autonomy in the Buddhist tradition. And it seems to me that of the various theories of identification and alienation on offer, the



early Buddhist analysis in terms of affective appraisal makes better sense of the distinction than hierarchical desire or faculty-based approaches. More generally, this point seems to me to confirm the intuition that lies behind the claim that notions of human rights, autonomy, respect, and democracy permit of a distinctively Buddhist articulation (on this see further my 2012b).

I end with these sentences from the Nobel Lecture of Aung San Suu Kyi, delivered on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, 2012: “The Burmese concept of peace can be explained as the happiness arising from the cessation of factors that militate against the harmonious and the wholesome. The word *nyeun-chan* translates literally as the beneficial coolness that comes when a fire is extinguished.” Aung San Suu Kyi importantly and rightly sees no incompatibility between the negative character of early Buddhist theory and an endorsement of concepts of democracy, autonomy, and human rights. In this she articulates a distinctively Buddhist modernity.

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