

# Today's Lecture

- Admin stuff
- More basic Buddhist philosophy
  - Concluding Buddhist moral philosophy

# Admin stuff

- Are there any questions about the Third Assignment topics?
- Any questions or concerns about the Third Assignment?
- There is a talk by Prof. J. Thompson (Sociology) for the Gender and Society Workshop today at 4:00 p.m. (in UC 224A) entitled “Feminism and Female Serial Killing”.
- Here’s a great (read reliable) Buddhist web site:  
<<http://www.buddhanet.net>>
- I know some of you are really struggling with the Buddhist teaching of no-self. Don’t hesitate to come and see me about it, or email me about it. Do have a look at Reginald Ray’s discussion of rebirth in your *Course Pack*. He has a slightly different way of talking about *anatman* than I do.

# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- Where we left off (roughly):
- (1) An appeal to ‘the method of universalizing self-interest’ is at work in at least some Buddhist moral philosophy.
- This is just to say, if you could imagine someone acting towards you in an analogous fashion to how you are planning to act and you would (strongly) prefer that she would not so act, then you ought not to so act now.

## Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- (2) Judging what is conducive to, or hinders, our *spiritual advancement* (i.e. our pursuit of *moksha*) is also a way of judging the value of certain actions (and the principles of action that these actions instantiate).
- This can also include judging *what arises from the three root evils/poisons* - delusion/ignorance, greed/grasping and hatred/aversion (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.153, 172-73) (as they are themselves condemned because of their influence in perpetuating the cycle of rebirth and preventing enlightenment).

# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- “Restraint with the body is commendable. Commendable is restraint with speech. Restraint with the mind is commendable. Commendable is restraint in all [the senses]. *The bhikkhu who is restrained in all [the senses], is freed from all suffering*” (*Dhammapada* 361, translated by John Ross Carter, emphasis mine).
- “In all things be a master. Of what you do and say and think. *Be free*” (p. 96 of your *Dhammapada*, emphasis mine).

# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- “The fool is careless. But the master guards his watching. It is his most precious treasure. He never gives in to desire. He meditates. And in the strength of his resolve he discovers true happiness” (p.8 of your *Dhammapada*).
- “If you kill, lie or steal, commit adultery or drink, you dig up your own roots” (p.66 of your *Dhammapada*).
- “There is no fire like passion, there are no chains like hate. Illusion is a net, Desire a rushing river” (p.67 of your *Dhammapada*).

# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- (3) Judging *what does or does not harm* (i.e. cause suffering) or *cause unhappiness*, or *what brings happiness*, can also be a way of judging actions (and the principles of action that these actions instantiate). I think this method can be understood as a more restricted application of (2). I include it here in deference to those Buddhist scholars who would argue that it is a separate method.
- Both (2) and (3) are clearly *consequentialist* methods. That is to say, the *moral value* of an action or a principle of action is *determined by the consequences of* doing the action or acting in accord with the relevant principle of action.

## Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- “Whoever follows impure thoughts suffers in this world and the next. In both worlds he suffers and how greatly when he sees the wrong he has done. But whoever follows the law is joyful here and joyful there. In both worlds he rejoices and how greatly when he sees the good he has done” (pp.4-5 of your *Dhammapada*).
- “The fool is his own enemy. The mischief he does is his undoing. How bitterly he suffers! Why do what you will regret? Why bring tears upon yourself? Do only what you do not regret, and fill yourself with joy” (p.20 of your *Dhammapada*).
- “Look within. Be still. Free from fear and attachment, know the sweet joy of the way” (p.55 of your *Dhammapada*).



# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- (4) There is an appeal to what we can call ‘enlightened insight’ or ‘enlightened understanding’, for want of better terms.
- “If you wound or grieve another, you have not learned detachment. Offend in neither word nor deed. Eat with moderation. Live in your heart. Seek the highest consciousness. Master yourself according to the law. This is the simple teaching of the awakened” (pp.50-51 of your *Dhammapada*).

# Some grounds for deciding moral conduct in Buddhism

- “Silence cannot make a master out of a fool. But he who weighs only purity in his scales, who sees the nature of the two worlds, he is a master. He harms no living thing” (pp.71-21 of your *Dhammapada*).
- “The way is eightfold. There are four truths. All virtue lies in detachment. The master has an open eye. This is the only way, the only way to the opening of the eye. Follow it. Outwit desire. Follow it to the end of sorrow. When I pulled out sorrow’s shaft I showed you the way” (p.73 of your *Dhammapada*).

# Moral responsibility

- Now that we've a general framework for understanding some basic Buddhist moral philosophy, what are we to do with the notion of moral responsibility without a soul?
- This question arises from two others: (1) *What is the motive for* behaving well now if, from moment to moment, I undergo (sometimes significant) change? (2) *In what way can we say that we reap what we sow*, if we are changing from moment to moment?
- (1) has to do with the motivation(s) for being moral.
- (2) has to do with *karma*, and the idea that our (ongoing) lives reflect our own past and present actions.

# Moral responsibility

- (1) is a notoriously difficult question to answer. Just think about it. Why *should* we be moral? Surely we *can* get away with being immoral. So why go to all the trouble of being moral? Must acting rationally entail acting morally (when the action *has* moral value, that is)?
- The Buddhist answer lies in the suffering or dissatisfaction immoral actions generate or produce (either immediately following the action or some-time in the future).
- As I implied earlier, actions or principles of action are morally unacceptable in Buddhism (in the first place) if they cause, or give rise to, *dukkha*.
- Since Buddhists presume we do not want to suffer, they presume this is motive enough to be moral.

# Moral responsibility

- So, a Buddhist answer to (1) quickly leads to question (2). After all, the answer to (1) *crucially depends on* the karmic consequences of immoral action.
- Remember question (2): *In what way can we say that we reap what we sow*, if we are changing from moment to moment?
- Look at Nagasena's answer to King Milinda on this very question (see page 151 of your *Buddhist Scriptures*).

# Moral responsibility

- It is Nagasena's claim that it is the causal connection between, and within, births that gives our present and past actions their karmic import.
- Think of our present lives from a Buddhist perspective. We, now, are reaping the merit or demerit of actions done earlier in this life or an earlier birth.
- For the Buddhist, we can still make sense of the claim that when we acted in the past we *ought to have had* the consequences in mind for the future (which is our present). After all, these actions were not performed in a causal vacuum. That is, we knew at the time that they would be succeeded by effects brought about by our choices.
- What's more, this is our current *moral outlook* of our past actions, right?

# Moral responsibility

- The Buddhist now simply turns these outlooks on their head. IF, in the past, *we should have* been concerned about the *future* consequences of our actions (given that the result of such actions is what determines our lives in the *present*), THEN *we should be* concerned *now* about the *future* consequence of our actions. After all, our future self is no less important than our present self, and our past self is under no more of an obligation to us than we are to our future selves.
- This response is important because it does not depend on a soul when talking of moral responsibility.
- The question you need to ask yourself now is, does it succeed as an argument?