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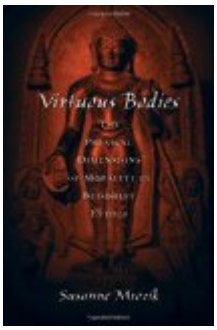


**Susanne Mrozik.** *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics.* Religion, Culture and History Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. vii + 184 pp. $65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-530500-5.

**Reviewed by** Barbra R. Clayton

**Published on** H-Buddhism (February, 2009)

**Commissioned by** Daniel A. Arnold (University of Chicago)

This volume in the American Academy of Religion's Religion, Culture and History series represents a welcome new focus on ethics in the relatively neglected *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Compendium of Training) of Śāntideva, which until recently has received far less attention than the other of Śāntideva's extant works, the famous *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Understanding the Way to Awakening). Moreover, while much work on Buddhist ethics is preoccupied with metaethical and comparative questions regarding the nature of Buddhist morality, or with normative and applied issues, Susanne Mrozik's treatment reflects a shift in recent decades toward attention to the material side of Buddhist traditions and distinctively centers on the role of the body in moral development. While a growing number of works in Buddhist studies have considered the body in terms of gender, sexuality, or the image and position of women, *Virtuous Bodies* takes the nexus between ethics and corporeality per se as its primary concern, and in so doing discloses a fascinating and important (and heretofore largely unnoticed) dimension of Indian Mahāyāna morality.

Mrozik's approach is informed by the thought of such theorists of the body as Michel Foucault, as well as by historical and anthropological work that has demonstrated a close link between physicality and morality in Buddhist and other South Asian traditions. Her premise is that ethical development in Buddhist traditions transforms bodies as much as "heartminds" (as she renders *citta*), and that these bodily transformations have been overlooked in discussions of Buddhist ethics. Mrozik's methodology is also informed by the thought of feminist scholars like Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz, from whom she takes a concern to reject a dualism of mind and body, instead assuming a notion of subjectivity that incorporates the body. Thinking through the implications of such an "embodied subjectivity" for Buddhist ethics, Mrozik insightfully deploys Foucault's understanding of "technologies of the self," suggesting that bodhisattva practices (meditation, confes-

sion liturgies, codes of ethical conduct and etiquette) be understood as "disciplinary practices individuals intentionally adopt in order to transform themselves into ethically ideal subjects," where such transformation consists of corporeal as well as psychic effects (p. 9).

Although Mrozik skillfully canvasses a wide range of Buddhist scriptures, the Compendium is her focus for examining the role of bodies in moral development, a choice based on several factors. For one, the Compendium comprises quotations from a vast array of Indian Buddhist sūtras, thus reflecting a wider Buddhist perspective on ethics and bodies than Śāntideva's alone. Insofar as the Compendium thus consists largely of quotations, it has been deemed less original (and therefore of less interest) than Śāntideva's more famous *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Mrozik argues that this is problematic, given the creativity involved in editing and commenting on such a collection, as well as the importance of the genre of compendia to medieval monastics, who probably relied more on such "handbooks" than on the *vinaya* (p. 12). She also notes that Paul Harrison's and Jens Uwe-Hartmann's ongoing work on a new English translation suggests that more of the Compendium may be original than previously thought. While their work remains incomplete, Mrozik prudently takes the text as a whole as representing a coherent vision of the bodhisattva discipline.

Mrozik aims to show that bodies represent a central concern of the Compendium. She argues in the second chapter that this is clear from Śāntideva's verse summary of the text, which indicates that the bodhisattva's discipline (*saṃvara*) consists of giving away, protecting, and purifying and increasing, respectively, one's "bodied being" (*ātmabhāva*), goods (*bhoga*), and merit (*śubha*). She argues that thus translating *ātmabhāva* as "bodied being," rather than as "self" or "person," conveys the Compendium's use of the term as referring to the physical body, and also to "one's whole person ... the entire complex of body, feelings, and thoughts" (p. 23). The expression "bodied being" serves her purpose of "illuminating the corporeal dimension of ethical ideals" (p. 24). Insofar as *ātmabhāva* is the focus of twelve of the Compendium's nineteen chapters, she can propose that most of the bodhisattva training is focused on embodied being.

While I am generally persuaded by the case for this somewhat awkward rendering of *ātmabhāva* (which Mrozik admits evades satisfactory translation), I would question whether a focus on *ātmabhāva* really does consistently entail a focus on *body*, as Mrozik sometimes implies. Mrozik does convincingly show that bodies represent an important and overlooked aspect of the Compendium's account of the bodhisattva discipline--that, for example, a significant theme in the text is a bodhisattva's turning his body into "something for the enjoyment of all living beings," as reflected not only in stories of animals enjoying the flesh of a bodhisattva's corpse, but also in the human pleasure said to be experienced at the sight of a monk's refined comportment and calm demeanor (p. 19). But as Mrozik herself allows, the twelve chapters on protecting and purifying "bodied being" actually stress cognitive and affective factors: to protect and purify *ātmabhāva* is primarily to avoid or eliminate sin and defilements (*kleśa*), which is in effect to say that it is to purify *thought* (*citta*) (pp. 23, 28, 29). This suggests that if there are instances where it refers exclusively to the physical body, *ātmabhāva* refers mainly to the cognitive-affective aspects of person. By neglecting to scrutinize the latter instances, or to fully contextualize the development of the body in the context of the person as a whole (how exactly does eliminating *kleśas* transform the body?), Mrozik may overemphasize the corporeal dimension of the bodhisattva discipline.

Mrozik is in a rather difficult position here, and she is aware that there are complex philosophical and translation issues in play; how, for example, does one highlight corporeality without

reifying a mind/body dualism, particularly when translating for a cultural context that is itself steeped in just such a dualism? It is important to consider in this regard that although Śāntideva and other Indian Buddhists may not have upheld an absolute mind/body dualism of the kind that has arguably predominated in the West, they clearly took mind and body to be distinguishable and even separable--as reflected, for example, in the pair ***nāma-rūpa***, and in the idea of a conscious-continuum (***citta-saṃtāna***) that persists after the body dissipates, sometimes continuing in states altogether without form (***arūpadhātu***). In the section "What Are Bodies?" Mrozik does note disjunctures as well as parallels between medieval Indian and modern Western views of the body, but her work particularly piques interest in the nature of mind-body relations, and it would be good to hear more about the difference between Western and Buddhist conceptions of this.

The third chapter advances one of the most illuminating themes of the book: the idea that bodhisattva bodies have transformative effects on other beings. Mrozik contextualizes the discussion within the broader Mahāyāna tradition, particularly with respect to the doctrine of the ***nirmāṇakāya,*** which has it that advanced bodhisattvas can manifest an infinite array of physical forms to meet the needs of beings. She argues that this concept is implicit in the Compendium, which teaches bodhisattvas how to increase their merit through recalling the capacity of bodhisattvas to heal, please, attract, and even liberate sentient beings with their various and sometimes fantastic forms. She also draws on the Compendium to show how the various ways of "enjoying" bodhisattva bodies have positive physical and moral effects. According to texts gathered by Śāntideva, touching, eating, or even lusting after bodhisattva bodies can have salutary influence; animals who eat bodhisattva bodies will be reborn in higher levels, for example, and the woman who desires the male bodhisattva Priyaṃkara will become a man. In this connection, Mrozik discusses the Compendium's stress on monastic etiquette and deportment in the context of a broader Buddhist perspective in which the physical appearance of monks, bodhisattvas, arhats, and Buddhas has the power to elicit pleasure (***prasāda***), convert, and morally transform others. But she also points out that bodhisattva bodies are transformed ***by*** others, and that in this way the ***saṅgha*** functions as place of "communal ripening" (p. 54). Mrozik thus shows how the Compendium blurs the distinction not only between physical and moral but also between the ethical "agent" and "patient" (p. 54). She suggests that the Compendium in this way "pushes contemporary body theory beyond the limits of an individualistic perspective, since its primary interest in body is in the kinds of physical and moral effects bodhisattva bodies have on others," and argues that this idea of the community's role in creating moral beings represents an aspect of medieval Indian Buddhist views of the body from which contemporary audiences might learn (p. 34).

The fourth and fifth chapters treat what Mrozik identifies as two different ways of talking about bodies in Indian Buddhist literature. The more familiar "ascetic discourse" negatively characterizes the body as "impermanent, foul and without any intrinsic and eternal essence" (p. 83). This is in contrast to a positive "physiomoral" discourse on bodies, which assumes and "underscores the inextricable link between body and morality"--a notion perhaps most clearly reflected in the idea that a Buddha possesses the thirty-two physical marks of a "great man" (***mahāpuruṣa***), which are considered the karmic effect of lifetimes of meritorious deeds (p. 6). This connection between corporeality and morality is not only reflected, however, in Buddha bodies; a being's realm of rebirth, the presence or absence of physical disability, health, longevity, beauty, sex, sexual orientation, and social status are all "markers of both past and present moral character" (p. 70).

Conversely, bodies are also the condition *for* moral development in various ways, and Mrozik cites examples from the Compendium and other texts to show that progress along the path to Buddhahood requires certain "forms" of favorable rebirth.

Turning to characteristically ascetic discourse in chapter 5, Mrozik persuasively argues that the purpose of this discourse is similarly to produce bodhisattvas with the ability to transform others. This is the kind of discourse that includes various meditations and contemplations on the body--on its impermanence and foulness, for example, and on the emptiness of the aggregates and elements that constitute it. Meditations on the foulness of the body typically depict women as especially disgusting and dangerous sources of suffering, which Mrozik interestingly claims would have been as shocking to Śāntideva's contemporaries as it is to modern readers. Mrozik argues that insofar as they particularly aim to undermine male lust as an instance of attachment to self-gratification, ascetic discourses should be understood relative to the celibate male monastics for whom they were primarily intended, and whose bodies were taken to benefit others.

On her reading, the two types of discourse about bodies exemplified in the Compendium, although in tension, are reconcilable; ascetic discourses have the effect of "materializing" celibate bodhisattvas and ultimately Buddhas, who are then described in terms of a physiomoral discourse in which the excellence of their virtues is expressed physically as beauty. This reveals a "productive paradox," whereby "the bodhisattva who learns to regard his body as impermanent, foul, and without intrinsic and eternal essence, gets the most virtuous body of all: the irresistibly beautiful body of a buddha" (p. 116). This analysis resonates with Reiko Ohnuma's study of gifts of the body in Indian Buddhist literature, which supports Mrozik's view that it is wrong to assume that the prominence of ascetic discourse means that South Asian Buddhists ascribe little value to bodies; on the contrary, ascetic discourse serves to produce "virtuous bodied beings" who are valued for their moral and physical qualities (p. 116). Though the ascetic discourse in Buddhist texts represents bodies as ultimately without value, its aim, too, is thus to produce "the conventionally valorized virtuous bodies of buddhas and bodhisattvas" (p. 111). This warrants Mrozik's conclusion that virtues "have both physical and moral dimensions"; they are "as evident in bodies as in heartminds," which is finally why "we can speak of virtuous bodies and their opposite" (p. 115).

Ethical theories have been critiqued by feminists and others for tending to assume a supposedly generic and universal subject that is really implicitly male, and for consequently failing to note the significance of human and bodily differences. Employing a hermeneutic of recovery, Mrozik suggests in her final chapter that the Compendium usefully offers a contrastive moral perspective that takes bodies, and bodily differences, seriously. While I can agree with her conclusion that Śāntideva's text may generally offer "a useful corrective to ethical discourses that efface the fact of human difference," I am more convinced by the results of her hermeneutically "suspicious" stance, which questions the universalistic claims of Mahāyāna Buddhist texts (pp. 127, 126). One of the strengths of her work is that it raises troubling questions for Buddhist ethicists and feminist scholars and practitioners of Buddhism; as Mrozik stresses, the aim of the bodhisattva discipline is finally to create the body of a Buddha, which is always male--and at least in the Compendium, the one female bodhisattva body is a karmic danger, not a benefit, to the male monastics who would be attracted to it. While "the bodhisattva who recognizes the worthlessness of his body produces a body that has great worth for others," that body is in the end always a male body (p. 105). Female and other "non-normative" bodies--disabled, transgendered, those of the un-

derprivileged--are not valued because they signify a deficit of virtue.

What lies behind the connection between physicality and morality is karma. It seems to me, then, that contemporary feminist Buddhist scholars have the rather daunting task of scrutinizing and querying not only the nature of Buddhahood, but karma theory as well. To that extent, I would echo Mrozik's concern with the "gendered nature of the bodhisattva ideal," and I am left unsure of just what we can learn from these texts about valuing bodily differences, unless it is a negative lesson (p. 124). Should contemporary Buddhists, in particular, embrace the view that bodies reflect virtue or a lack thereof? Feminists and advocates for the disabled, as well as the more "ordinarily bodied" among us, would surely hold that bodies can hide virtues as much as they can reveal them. I am not sure, however, that Mrozik's hermeneutically suspicious moments go far enough to query the ethical problems that the notion of "virtuous bodies" raises.

Nonetheless, there is much to admire in *Virtuous Bodies*. Mrozik has taken on a unique topic in examining the role of bodies in moral development, and she argues convincingly for the importance of corporeality in the bodhisattva path. She demonstrates that this path is understood to create not only certain kinds of moral beings, but also the particular types of bodies that signify their morality. These "virtuous bodies," moreover, have physical and morally transformative effects on others. Attention to this corrects the mistaken view that bodies are not significant in South Asian Buddhism. *Virtuous Bodies* opens up a fascinating dimension of Śāntideva's text and of Buddhist traditions more generally, and it is to be hoped that we see more of this kind of exemplary work in future.

**Citation:** Barbra R. Clayton. Review of Mrozik, Susanne. *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics.* H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews. February, 2009.

**URL:** https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23879