

Barbra Clayton. *Moral Theory in Śāntideva's Sikṣasamuccaya: Cultivating the Fruits of Virtue*. New York: Routledge, 2006. xv + 165 pp. \$170.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-34696-2.

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Making Sense of Śāntideva's Ethics

This concise and informative work constitutes a worthy contribution to the growing field of scholarship on Buddhist ethics. Clayton has carefully studied an important primary text by one of the most significant figures in Indian Buddhist history, the great scholar and poet Śāntideva. Her results help to expand our knowledge of ethical thought in the Mahāyāna. They also help advance the discussion of Buddhist ethics beyond the flawed theoretical framework established by Damien Keown.

The *Sikṣasamuccaya*, or *Compendium of Teachings*, is one of the two extant works of Śāntideva, a Mahāyāna author of the seventh century CE. Śāntideva is most famous for the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*), which pervasively influenced the Buddhist traditions of Tibet. Since the *Compendium* consists primarily of quotations from a range of Mahāyāna sūtras, it is not typically regarded as displaying any interesting degree of originality. It lacks, moreover, the stunning poetic beauty that shines from every page of the *Introduction*. On the other hand, as Clayton points out, many of the sūtras quoted in the *Compendium* have been lost in Sanskrit and are fully extant in no other language; thus, the *Compendium* is a source of great historical value. Moreover, many of the themes discussed in the *Introduction* are canvassed also in the *Compendium*, so that a study of the latter work can give us much information about the sources of the former. The insights into the *Compendium* that Clayton provides thus represent a significant contribution to our developing understanding of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Clayton's first chapter contains a helpful and sophisticated discussion of the book's methodology and of the role of ethics in Buddhism. She emphasizes that Buddhist writers do not separate ethics from other topics in the way many Western thinkers do. Clayton's second and third chapters put Śāntideva in his historical context and summarize many of his ethical teachings. The points made here are likely to be familiar to those who have studied Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, but they are presented clearly and in a well-organized way, and these chapters would be very useful to students and to anyone with limited knowledge of the subject.

The fourth chapter of the book offers a careful, intelligent, and interesting discussion of the Sanskrit terms *kuṣala*, *puṇya*, and *la*. Throughout the book, and especially in this chapter, Clayton makes a number of illuminating remarks about translation issues. Perhaps her most important contribution in the chapter relates to Śāntideva's understanding of the role of *puṇya* in the spiritual path. This term is usually translated as "merit," but is rendered in this work by the term "karmic fruitfulness." As Clayton points out, Śāntideva maintains that even at very advanced stages of the spiritual path, practitioners continue to generate *puṇya*, which they then use for the benefit and happiness of others. This view contrasts with the position of the Theravāda tradition, which holds that enlightenment involves going beyond both *puṇya* and its opposite, *paṇa*. Clayton convincingly relates this difference, which she may be the first to clearly point out, to the conceptual innovations the Mahāyānaists needed to develop in order to make sense

of a bodhisattva path that lasts as long as cyclic existence itself.

In her final chapters, Clayton makes a praiseworthy attempt to relate the concepts and categories of ? ? ntideva's form of Buddhist ethics to those of contemporary Western moral theory. She notices some of the important ways in which ? ? ntideva's ethical views approach theories in the consequentialist tradition. Indeed, she concludes that "the morality of the Mah? y? na Buddhist would look very much like *act utilitarianism* once the bodhisattva is at a level of spiritual development where the *telos* of universal happiness is the sole focus of his behaviour" (pp. 114-115). But having made this point, Clayton then rejects a consequentialist interpretation of ? ? ntideva's thought.

In part, this is because Clayton's conception of consequentialism is too narrow. She accepts Keown's clumsy definition of utilitarianism as a view which defines the right independently of the good (p. 112). On the contrary, though, utilitarianism first defines the good as pleasure and the absence of pain, and then defines the right action as the one which produces the most good on the whole. It is clear that what Clayton actually wants to express with this formulation is that, in Buddhism, right actions are not merely a means to bring about the features that make lives go well; instead, right actions are intrinsically related to human flourishing. On her interpretation of ? ? ntideva, when we characterize what a good life is like, we will include the performance of good actions. While it is true that most contemporary moral theorists would not characterize a view that has this consequence as "utilitarian," there are forms of consequentialism—rights consequentialism, for instance—that can accept this kind of claim about the relation between the right and the good. The distinction between consequentialist and other moral theories needs, then, to be characterized in some other way. One possible approach speaks of three possible ways of responding to objective value. Once we have recognized that which has objective value, consequentialism tells us to promote it; deontology tells us to respect it; and virtue ethics tells us to embody it. If this is the way we distinguish these views, then once we see how central the promotion of the welfare of all beings is to ? ? ntideva's ethical outlook, we will be led to classify him as some kind of consequentialist, whether or not he is appropriately characterized as a utilitarian.

Given her understanding of the meaning of the term, Clayton rejects the idea that ? ? ntideva is a utilitarian.

Fortunately, Clayton is not tempted to adopt Keown's suggested alternative, namely that we should compare Mah? y? na ethics with situation ethics. Her conclusion is, instead, that ? ? ntideva's view is a form of virtue ethics, though one with important utilitarian elements. In particular, on her interpretation of the ethical theory of the *Compendium*, advanced bodhisattvas are committed to "a weighing of consequences in terms of the benefit for sentient beings, and an effort to maximize these benefits" (p. 113). Once they have traveled a sufficient distance down the path, then, spiritual practitioners will begin to behave as if they were act-utilitarians. It is evident, however, that in its advice to those at lower levels of spiritual development, Buddhist ethics does not advocate unconstrained maximization of the good, and instead recommends that practitioners strictly follow enumerated ethical rules and precepts while cultivating a range of virtuous states of character.

Clayton offers some valuable remarks (on p. 114) about the distinction between living up to a motive and living up to the *telos*, or defining purpose, of that motive. For example, if one's motive is compassion, then living up to that motive means acting out of compassion; living up to the *telos* of that motive means acting effectively to relieve the suffering of sentient beings. According to Clayton, ? ? ntideva's ethical theory moves closer to utilitarianism by emphasizing the former over the latter. Although this distinction helps a great deal in clarifying the development of thought that led to ? ? ntideva's ethical perspective, it does little for our understanding of the coherence of that perspective. Clayton does not explain how ? ? ntideva is able to combine ideas that Western thinkers would regard as specific to virtue ethics with others that are specific to consequentialism into a coherent view.

Making ? ? ntideva's ethics come out coherent is not at all impossible, if we draw on the resources of recent work in Western ethical theory. There are various theories that focus on character while deriving their norms ultimately from the importance of the welfare of all beings. We might consider an indirect form of consequentialism which has nothing to say directly about actions, but instead tells us to cultivate those states of character that will produce the happiness of ourselves and others. Another approach would be character consequentialism, which takes virtuous states to be part of what constitutes the well-being that moral agents should try to promote. Or a consequentialist theory could be partly self-effacing. While remaining fully consequentialist at the theoretical level, such a theory could claim that if everyone were

to try to follow consequentialism, the best consequences would not be produced. Instead, such a view could say that while most people should attempt to follow a simple set of moral rules of thumb, a few people should know and understand the real truth about ethics, which is consequentialist in form. If we draw on these possibilities, either individually or in combination, we may be able to do a better job of explaining the theoretical coherence of

Buddhist ethics than Clayton is able to.

Clayton's scholarship is thorough and her methodology is basically sound. It is to be hoped that further studies with the same approach, and perhaps even greater sophistication, will continue to appear. This kind of research could lead to an even better understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics, both in terms of its own categories and in its proper relation to ours.

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