

sort of secular, materially-based tradition. So that's why I think the biggest impact of psychotherapy-

00:02.33

TAPE BREAK

00:02:59

NEW PANEL START

CHRIS KELLEY

00:03.12

If people could take their seats please. Once again, we're gonna have pink cards for you to write your questions on. So, if you need a blank card, just-

00:03.27

TAPE BREAK

CHRIS KELLEY

00:03.41

So, we're now in our final official panel, panel four- or panel five - Ethics. We will have a short panel after this, which will be sort of summary, reflections with a few of our participants.

00:03.59

And that will only be an hour. So, it won't be the full two hours that most panels are. Meditation appears to be able to provide analytic and therapeutic tools for individuals to

understand and develop their own minds. However, according to Indo-Tibetan Buddhists and other traditions, development of one's own capacities is simply a preliminary to ethical engagement with others.

00:04.27

Similarly, certain philosophers within the European phenomenological tradition, such as Emmanuel Levinas and his interlocutors, have highlighted the interface between epistemological questions and ethical ones. This session will build on earlier panel discussions to explore the intersection of theories of knowledge about the mind, meditational and other practical modalities for engaging with the mind and ethical questions about how conscious individuals can or should relate to each other.

00:05.00

Ultimately, conscious individuals do not exist singularly, but rather under conditions of relationship and interaction. I'd like to turn things over in a moment to our moderator, Evan

Thompson. If you were here on Saturday then you are familiar with him and perhaps you're familiar with him before attending the conference, but I'd like to just give him a proper introduction.

00:05.27

Evan Thompson is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He works in the areas of cognitive science, philosophy of mind, phenomenology and comparative philosophy. He received his- a BA in Asian Studies and his MA and PhD in Philosophy from the University of Toronto.

00:05.45

He's a co-author with Francisco Varela and Eleanor Rosch of the groundbreaking book, "The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience" - one of the first books to explore systematically the relationship between Buddhist philosophy and cognitive science and to argue for the embodied approach in cognitive science. Thompson is also the author of "Color Vision: A

Study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Perception.”

00:06.12

His new book, “Mind In Life: Biology, Phenomenology and the Sciences of Mind,” will be published at Harvard University Press in 2007. I’d like to now turn things over to Professor Thompson. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

EVAN THOMPSON

00:06.33

Thank you, Chris. It’s a great pleasure to welcome you back to our final thematic panel on a very important subject, the subject of ethics. This subject has been really implicit throughout the earlier panels and I’m hoping that now, in its explicitness, we’re going to be able to close circle and revisit some of the issues that have come up so far in the other panels, but from an explicitly ethical and normative perspective.

00:07.03

If we’re squinting up here it’s because this is a very luminous panel. It’s not particularly

blissful up here, it's actually quite hot, but perhaps the sun will go behind some clouds eventually. It's my pleasure to introduce our target essayist, as he or she has come to be known. And, Jay Garfield is a Professor of Philosophy on three continents. I think, maybe the only Professor of Philosophy on three continents.

00:07.35

He's at the Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, the Department of Philosophy at the University of Melbourne and closer to us here, the Department of Philosophy at Smith College. Jay.

JAY GARFIELD

00:07.49

Ok.

APPLAUSE

00:07.53

So, I'm the final target for the day and I seem to be well illuminated, though I can't see any of you, so it's kind of like facing a firing squad. Sunglasses? No, then I won't be able to read.

00:08.04

This is a no-win situation. I'm just gonna stand like this, ok. But, so, first I just wanted to once again, on behalf of, I think, everybody who's been participating in this thank Chris and Annabella for running a fabulous conference, the Fetzer Foundation for making this possible, Bob Pollack and the CSSR for making all of this happen. It's really been a terrific conference. I've learned a lot. I'm guessing that probably at least one other person may have learned a lot, too. So thank you, all of you, for making this happen.

00:08.35

So, anyway, I'm gonna talk about Buddhist ethics and before I start, I wanted to give two other bits of personal thanks and that's to Bob Thurman and Mark Siderits because I realize they're the two people I've learned the most about Buddhist ethics from. So, if anything I say sounds vaguely familiar, I have shamelessly ripped them off.

00:08.53

And the last thing I wanted to do is to apologize that I'm kind of at the tail end of an Indian cold, so if I start coughing, just direct all the compassion to other people in the audience, because I- trust me, it doesn't feel nearly as bad as it sounds. It'll be much worse for you than it will be for me.

00:09.13

As Alan emphasized, very often in the Buddhist tradition, especially in the Tibetan tradition, we think of ethics as an important preliminary practice before attaining meditation insight and other realizations, but as Thubten Jinpa-la pointed out, we also think of ethics as the goal of practice.

00:09.30

And so, there's a sense in which we come full circle. We work our way up to ethics as we've been doing in this workshop, but also, ethics forms a kind of foundation for any serious practice and any serious contemplation. So, I have been also asked to say that assuming that we

all attain ethical perfection this afternoon,
we're gonna re-begin the entire program
immediately following this panel from scratch.
They don't call it cyclic existence for nothing.

00:09.56

So, my- I'm not going to read the whole paper.
It's all available on the Web. I'm gonna be kind
of jumping around in it and skipping parts in
order to try to stay on schedule. So, first
part's called Ethics and Interdependence.
There're two temptations to be resisted when
approaching Buddhist moral theory. The first is
to assimilate Buddhist ethics to some system of
Western ethics.

00:10.18

And that's usually done to some form of
utilitarianism or some kind of virtue ethics. The
second is to portray Buddhist ethical thought as
constituting some grand system resembling the
systems of meta-ethics that populate Western
philosophy. In Buddhist philosophical and

religious literature, we do find many texts that address moral topics.

00:10.38

However, we find very little direct attention to the articulation of sets of principles that determine which actions, states of character or motives are morally virtuous or vicious and no articulations of the kind of familiar sets of obligations and rights that we come to expect from Western ethical theory.

00:10.55

This is not because Buddhist moral theorists were not sufficiently sophisticated to think about moral principles or the structure of ethical life. And it's not because Buddhists theorists think that ethics isn't important enough to do systematically. It's instead because, from a Buddhist perspective, there are simply too many dimensions of moral life and moral assessment to admit of clean moral theory.

00:11.17

Buddhist ethical thought has instead been concerned with understanding how the actions of sentient beings are located and to locate those beings within the web of dependent origination or pratitya samutpada. This web of dependent origination's quite complex and so there's a lot to be said. And so, as a consequence, Buddhist ethicists have had a lot to say. But the web is also untidy and so what Buddhists have had to say resists easy systemization.

00:11.42

There's last- one last temptation to resist and that's to see the various Buddhist philosophical and religious traditions as constituting a homogenous whole. As many people have emphasized today, Buddhism's a really big place and there's lots of stuff said and we're not gonna try to cover the entire ground. I'm going to confine my remarks to one strand of Buddhist moral thought - that beginning with the articulation of the four noble truths at Sarnath and running through the anti-intellectual work of Nagarjuna, in

Ratnavali, of Chandrakirti and Madhyamakavatara and Shantideva in Bodhicharyavatara.

00:12.13

I've always been known as an anti-intellectual and so, thanks David. So, I hope I'm gonna be able to show that this strand of Buddhist moral thought represents a reasonable alternative way of thinking about a moral life - one that can engage Western moral theory in a profitable dialogue by being close enough to be talking about the same subject matter, but by being different enough to actually have something to contribute to bring to the table on its own.

00:12.40

Thinking about the good from a Buddhist perspective begins from the first principle of Buddhist metaphysics - the fact of thoroughgoing interdependence. Every event, every phenomenon is causally and constitutively dependent upon countless other events and phenomena and in turn, is part of causal ancestries and constitutive bases of countless other phenomena.

00:12.58

Moral reflection and action must take all of these dimensions of interdependence into account. To focus merely on motivation or on character or on the action itself or on consequences would be to ignore much that's important. Nagarjuna reminds us that to understand dependent origination is the same thing as to understand the four noble truths. In Mulamadhyamakakarika he famously says, "Whoever sees dependent arising also sees suffering, its arising, its cessation, as well as the path." I think Nagarjuna's right about that.

00:13.27

The truth of suffering sets the problem that Buddhism sets out to solve. The universe is pervaded by suffering and the causes of suffering. The Buddhists- the Buddha did not set out to prove this at Sarnath. He took it as a datum. One that is obvious to anyone on serious reflection, though one that escapes most of us most of the time precisely because of our evasion

of serious reflection in order not to face this fact.

00:13.51

The Buddha also assumed that suffering's a bad thing. If you disagree with that assessment, then moral discourse doesn't have any basis. Sometimes I have students who say, well maybe all this is suffering, but who cares. I like suffering. And my response is, well, then you don't need Buddhism. You don't have the problem that Buddhism is all about solving.

00:14.07

But if you kind of agree that suffering's a bad thing and if you think that on reflection there's a lot of it in the world, then you think that Buddhism has an interesting problem to solve. The Buddha then argued - popular bumper stickers and our Vice President to the contrary notwithstanding - that suffering does not just happen. It arises as a consequence of actions, conditioned by attachment and aversion.

00:14.29 Each of which, in turn, is engendered by confusion regarding the true nature of reality. Attention to the second noble truth allows us to begin to see how very different Buddhist moral thought is from most Western moral thought. The three roots of suffering are each regarded as moral defilements and are not seen as especially heterogeneous in character.

00:14.48 None of them is seen as especially problematic in most Western moral theory. And indeed, the first two - attachment and aversion - are each valorized at least to some context in some systems. Think, for instance, of Aristotle in this regard. The third - confusion - is rarely seen in the West as a moral matter, unless it's in a context where one has a duty to be clear about something or other.

00:15.09 But this is far from the way it's seen in Buddhist moral theory. Buddhism is about solving a problem. The problem is suffering. The three

root vices are vices because they engender the problem. The problem is that the world is pervaded by unwanted suffering. The diagnosis sets the agenda for the solution. The third truth articulated at Sarnath is that because suffering depends upon confusion, attraction and aversion, it can be eliminated by eliminating these causes.

00:15.36

And the fourth, which starts getting ethics spelled out in a more determinant form, presents the path to that solution. The eight-fold path is central to an articulation of the moral domain as it's seen in Buddhist theory and careful attention to it reveals additional respects in which Buddhists develop ethics in a different way than do Western moral theorists.

00:15.53

The eight-fold path comprises a correct view, correct intention, correct speech, correct action, correct livelihood, correct mindfulness and correct meditation. While many following the traditional Tibetan classification of the three

trainings focus specifically on speech, action and livelihood as the specifically ethical content of the path, in fact that is much too narrow.

00:16.14

The eight-fold path identifies not a set of rights or duties, but a whole set of areas of concern, of dimensions of conduct and the path, in all of its eight-fold complexity, indicates the complexity of human moral life and the complexity of the sources of suffering. To lead a life conducive to the solution of the problem of suffering is to pay close heed to each of these many dimensions of conduct.

00:16.37

Our views matter morally. It's not simply an epistemic fault to think that material goods guarantee happiness, that narrow self-interest is a most obvious rational motivation or that women are incapable of rational thought. These views aren't just irrational, they're morally problematic.

00:16.52

It's not only what we do that matters, but what we intend, as well. Intention grounds action even when it misfires and it matters to us who we are—to who we are and to what we become, what we intend to do. And we could spell this out in detail for each of the eight dimensions. The eight-fold path which represents the earliest foundation of Buddhist ethical thought must always be thought of precisely as a path and not as a set of prescriptions.

00:17.17

It indicates areas of concern, not specific duties. It does not involve a calculus of pleasure and pain. The account of the good is far more abstract, far more distant from sensation. Moreover, the doctrine is consequentialist only in a rather thin sense. I mean, Mark Siderits has pointed out, correctly, there's something deeply consequentialist about Buddhist ethics. But it's not a kind of consequentialism that you find in Western ethics. It's a different version.

00:17.41

The consequence that matters is liberation from suffering. Not some particular set of mundane experiences. There's no boundary drawn on the eight-fold path that circumscribes the ethical dimensions of life. There's no distinction between the obligatory, the permissible and the forbidden. There's no distinction between the moral and the prudential. Between the public and the private, between the self-regarding and the other-regarding. Instead, there's a broad indication of a complexity of the solution to this very deep problem of suffering.

00:18.07

Part two - action, theory and karma. The term karma plays a central role in any Buddhist moral discussion. It's a term of great semantic complexity and must be handled with care. Most centrally, karma means action. Derivatively, it means the consequences of action. Given the Buddhist commitment to the universality of dependent origination, all action arises from the

karmic consequences of past actions and all action has karmic consequences.

00:18.31

Karma is not a cosmic bank account on this view or a calculus of rewards and punishments in this or some other life. It's an entirely misleading way to think about karma. It's simply the natural, causal sequeli (ph) of any of our actions, whether they're actions of physical actions, vocal actions or cognitive actions. Karma accrues to any action, simply in virtue of causal interdependence and karmic consequences include those for oneself and for others, as well as both the individual and collective karma.

00:19.01

There's nothing mystical about this, there's nothing cosmic about this. This is just the fact that what we do actually has consequences. Think about it for a minute. And what we do is the consequence of other things that have happened to us. Think about that for a minute. Karma's not a crazy doctrine. Buddhist action theory approaches

human action, and hence ethics, in a way slightly divergent from that found in any Western action theory.

00:19.20

And it's impossible to understand moral assessment without attention to action theory. Buddhist philosophers distinguish in any action the intention, the act itself - whether it's mental, verbal or non-verbally physical - and the completion or the final state of affairs resulting directly from the action itself. If I intend to give \$10 to CARE, hand over the \$10 to a CARE worker who then uses it to bribe a policeman, then official karma accrues from the intention. Beneficial karma from the act, but non-beneficial karma from the completion.

00:19.50

If I intend to steal your medicine, but instead pocket the poison that had been placed on your bed stand by your malicious nurse, thereby saving your life, negative karma accrues from the intention, but positive karma from the act and

the completion. And so forth. It's just causation. There's not reward or punishment, here.

00:20.05

Note, as well, that the relevant kinds of karma include the impact on my character and on that of others, as well as the tendency to reinforce or to undermine generosity or malice and the degree to which action promotes general well-being. There's hence attention both to virtue and to consequence here and attention to the character of and consequences for anyone affected by actions.

00:20.26

We cannot in this framework, then, ask whether a particular action is good or evil simpliciter. Nor can we ask what our obligations or permissions are. Instead, we ask about the states of character reflected by and consequent to our intentions, our words and our motor acts and their consequences. The fact that a terrible

outcome ensues from a good intention does not make that outcome morally acceptable.

00:20.47

Nor does a good outcome somehow cancel malicious intent. They're all in play, they all have consequences, they all have explanations. Each component of action has consequences and reflects morally relevant features of its genesis. Motivations that appear to be immoral but prudential, are on a deeper analysis from a Buddhist standpoint, simply confused. There's no kind of nice boundary between the moral and the prudential for this reason.

00:21.12

Nor is there any limit to the domain of the ethical. Karma is ubiquitous, interdependence is endless and so, responsibility - as His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, constantly reminds us - can only be thought of as universal. Part three. Virtue, consequence and obligation.

00:21.27

We can now see that Buddhist moral theory is neither purely consequentialist nor purely areteic nor purely deontological. Elements of each kind of evaluation are present, but there are no- there's no overarching concern for a unified form of moral assessment. Suffering is both caused and constituted by fundamental states of character, including preeminently egocentric attraction, egocentric aversion and confusion regarding the nature of reality and our place in it.

00:21.54

Hence, the cultivation of virtues that undermine these vices is morally desirable. Suffering is perpetuated by our intentions, acts and consequences. Hence, attention to all of these is necessary for its eradication. Our own happiness and suffering are intimately bound up with those of others. Hence, we're responsible for others and obligated to take their interests into account.

00:22.13

But Buddhist ethics is not simply an amalgamation of Aristotle, Mill and Kant into some kind of incoherent jumble. Instead, it represents a distinct moral framework addressed to problem-solving that takes action not to issue from a free-will bound by laws, but from a dependently originated, conditioned continuum of causally interdependent psychophysical processes. It takes the relevant consequences of action not to be pleasure and pain – conceived of as introspectable experiences of persons – but to be states of sentient continua of genuine suffering that to which- which conduces to suffering, genuine liberation or that which conduces to genuine liberation.

00:22.53

Whether or not those happen to be desired or detested or experienced as desirable or detestable by the sentient beings imputed on the basis of those continua. So we're not kind of looking sensations, experiences and desires here in a kind of calculus of consequences, but rather

looking at suffering in a very broad and very deep sense and liberation from suffering in a very broad and deep sense when we pay attention to consequences.

00:23.16

That's why I say it doesn't look like Western consequentialism. The worst thing you can do is look at Buddhist moral theory and say this is Western ethics being pursued in a slightly different language. It really is a somewhat different framework for thinking about things, but it's a framework that has something to tell us.

00:23.31

The relevant categories of assessment, the relevant considerations and deliberation are unified by a distinct overarching vision of the complexity of ethical life, by a distinct overarching vision of the purpose of moral reflection and moral cultivation, and by a distinct overarching vision of the nature of

agency and the nature of life. If we fail to attend to this framework, we see a patchwork.

00:23.52

When we attend to the framework, we see a unitary alternative way of taking up moral life. Finally, Buddhist moral theory takes the relevant virtues to be cultivated to be those that conduce to the alleviation of suffering. The adumbration of those virtues begins in the Pali literature, but it's addressed most completely in the Mahayana tradition, as developed in such texts as Bodhicharyavatara and Madhyamakavatara.

00:24.13

I'm now gonna turn to an examination of the Buddhist moral psychology developed in this Mahayana tradition. So, part four - Bodhisattva path and Buddhist moral psychology. Ahem - excuse me. There's nothing special about the suffering of any particular sentient being that gives it pride of place in moral consideration.

00:24.30

And this is one of the fundamental insights of Buddhist philosophy - my own suffering doesn't play any special role in my moral calculus, nor does yours, by the way. I hate to break this news to each of you. But rather, suffering is a perfectly general phenomenon and the more you look around the world, the more of it you see. And all of it turns out to matter just as much from a moral point of view.

00:24.51

It's an important fact about human beings in particular, but more generally about any beings with sufficient sentience to have moral standing that their cognitive, affective, and motivational states are linked inextricably with those of indefinitely many others in a vast causal nexus. For present purposes, let's just focus on the case of the social animals we know best - homo sapiens.

00:25.11

Our happiness, suffering and moral progress depends at all times on the actions and attitudes

of others, as well as on their welfare. If others cooperate and support our projects and our development, success is far more likely. If their attitudes are hostile, happiness and progress are both difficult to obtain. If we know of others weal and woe, we are either motivated to celebrate or to regret. Celebration of others' welfare benefits both ourselves and others.

00:25.36

Schadenfreude is not only detrimental to those around us, but ultimately through undermining the relations that sustain us to ourselves, as well. Similarly our own actions - mental, verbal and physical - have endless ramifications both for our own affective and moral well-being and for that of those around us. These are just natural facts. This is just, you know, plain old empirical reality. To ignore them is to ignore the nature of action, the nature of our interdependence and the relevance of action and causal interdependence to our moral, psychological and social lives.

00:26.06 Confusion regarding- excuse me - I promised you I'd cough. Confusion regarding the nature of reality in the moral realm manifests itself most directly in the grasping of one's self and of that which is most- which most immediately pertains to oneself as having special importance and justifiable particular motivational force.

00:26.25 In the Buddhist literature, this is referred to as the two-fold self-grasping, involving the grasping of "I" and of being mine and issues directly in the moral- the apparent moral duality of self and other where somehow my own considerations have more prima facie weight than considerations relevant to somebody else.

00:26.43 Such duality is what leads to the apparent distinction between prudential and moral concern that plays such a major role in Western ethical theory and action theory. The distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding acts and the

distinction between those to whom one owes special regard and those to whom one does not. All of these are taken by Buddhist philosophers to be utterly spurious and in general, to conduce to a view of the world that's kind of- that I always characterize as the world of me, et al.

00:27.10

A view that's not rationally sustainable once one sees that it's equally available and so equally unjustifiable for any moral subject. This is a point that Bob made very forcefully yesterday. If I try to see the world as kind of Jay, et al., it becomes immediately apparent that everybody else has got the same right to that one and moral life kind of collapses.

00:27.30

It's for this reason at bottom that this kind of fundamental metaphysical confusion is at root moral delusion and not simply an epistemological problem. That's just really important to nail down there. This is a moral problem, not just an epistemological problem from a Buddhist point of

view. In the Mahayana, moral attention is focused on the cultivation of a set of perfections or virtues, including those of generosity, patience, propriety, effort, meditation and wisdom. Once again, this list might seem odd to a Western ethicist in virtue of the inclusion of such prima facie non-moral virtues as those of effort, meditation and wisdom on the same list as generosity, patience and propriety.

00:28.11

Once again, though, attention to the focus of Buddhist ethics on solving the problem of suffering and attention to the role of inattention, failure to develop insights and traits of character that are cultivated in meditation and ignorance of causes and maintainers of suffering, the relevance of all of those to suffering itself should dispel this initial sense of oddness.

00:28.33

Excuse me. It's also important to recognize that this Mahayana revolution as it's sometimes

called, it's not really a revolution. It's not an abandonment of the more basic framework of the eight-fold path, but rather an enrichment and a refocus. The eight-fold path remains a central guide to the domains in which the perfections figure. And the perfections are manifested in the propensity to perform cognitive, verbal and physical actions of the kind assessable in the familiar framework of Buddhist action theory.

00:29.01

The framework of the perfections, hence only represents an approach to morality more focused on states of character than on their manifestations as the fundamental goals of moral practice. The most important innovation in Mahayana moral theory is the instatement of compassion as the central moral value and the model of the Bodhisattva's compassionate engagement with the world as a moral ideal.

00:29.23

Chandrakirti begins his wonderful text Madhyamakavatara by saying a compassionate mind,

non-dualistic awareness and the aspiration for enlightenment are the causes of the Bodhisattvas. However, chief among these is compassion. Like nurturing a seed with water, in time it ripens the causes of the victors. So I praise compassion above all else. The compassionate issue is not a passive, emotional response and not a mere desire that everybody kind of be happy.

00:29.52

Instead, it's a genuine commitment manifested in thought, speech and physical action to act for the welfare of all sentient beings. It is in this most sophisticated flowering of Buddhist ethics, with the anticipation of such moral theorists as Hume and Schopenhauer in the West that Buddhist moral theory makes its closest contact, I think, with Western ethics.

00:30.10

Compassion in this tradition is founded on the fundamental insight the Buddha announced in Sarnath, that suffering is bad, per se, regardless of whose it is. To fail to take

another's suffering as seriously as a motivation for action as one's own is itself a form of suffering and is entirely irrational. Compassion often, you know, one way of putting this is there's two ways of suffering when somebody else is suffering. Either you can suffer because they're suffering or you can fail to suffer because they're suffering, in which case you suffer from being an asshole, right?

00:30.42

Compassion, hence, is the wellspring of the motivation for the development of all perfections and the most reliable motivation for morally decent actions. Compassion is also in this view, the direct result of a genuine appreciation of the emptiness and interdependence of all sentient beings. Once one sees oneself as non-substantial and existing only in interdependence and once one sees that the happiness and suffering of all sentient beings is entirely causally conditioned, egoism ceases even to be rationally motivated.

00:31.14 And the only rational attitude one can adopt towards others is the compassionate one. Chandrakirti continues in this beginning of Madhyamakavatara - "I prostrate to this compassion arising for all living beings, who have first generated self-grasping through thinking I, then attachment to things through thinking being mine, so that they're driven around like a water wheel."

00:31.32 So the idea is that once you begin to see that the suffering of sentient beings and one's own suffering is driven by the force of this delusion, attachment and aversion into this kind of endless helplessness the only rational approach is a desire to alleviate that suffering and its causes.

00:31.49 Compassion is the ground of all of the perfections. The enabler of the pursuit of the path. It's fundamental to Mahayana ethics that one cannot adequately cultivate the perfections

or pursue the path successfully without a foundation in compassion. Excuse me. This is a point made emphatically by Shantideva in *Bodhicharyavatara*, as well as in our own time by people like the venerable Thich Nhat Hanh when he asserts that all Buddhism is engaged Buddhism.

00:32.16

Now, while the Mahayana schools- Let me just one more sentence on that. On this view, on the Mahayana view, Buddhist practice can never be a retreat from, but is always a committed active engagement with the world. So the idea that somehow Buddhist moral practice requires retreat, I think is fundamentally at odds with everything going on in Mahayana ethics. Well, the Mahayana schools of Buddhism put special emphasis on the role of compassion and ethics.

00:32.40

It's certainly also the case that the Shravaka accounts of Buddhist ethics, as well, including those of contemporary engaged Buddhists in the Theravad tradition, including followers of Dr.

Ambedkar in India, emphasize the social import of the four truths and the social articulation of the Buddha's path. Ambedkar in particular argue that suffering is social in character, that its causes- Oh good, because I'm right there- that its causes are political and economic, that its alleviation requires social action to remove those causes and that each stage of the eight-fold path is thoroughly social in nature.

00:33.13

Venerable Bhikkhu Buddhadasa in Thailand argues that without social engagement, the Buddha's path makes no sense at all. While some have argued that these interpretations by engaged or socially active Buddhists distort the essentially personal message of the Buddha, it's clear both that this is a reasonable and frequently developed reading of Buddhist ethics and one that however socially oriented, retains the fundamental Buddhist ethical outlook.

00:33.37

Ethics is about solving a problem. That problem is the pervasiveness of suffering. That suffering is rooted in confusion, attachment and aversion that fabricates the independent, unique and especially valuable ego and the special relations of some things to that ego. The solution to that problem on this view, like any other Buddhist view, requires the extirpation of these roots.

00:33.59

So whatever your views about Buddhism as personal versus social, when you look at it from this abstract ethical framework, engaged Buddhism is Buddhism. Compassionate engagement requires one to develop upaya, or skillful means, in order to realize these objectives. Compassionate attention, intention is only genuine if it involves a real commitment to action and to the successful completion of action.

00:34.22

It's in the domain of upaya that Buddhist and Western ethics converge in practice. And it's in this domain that each can learn from another. So,

I just want to do two quick paragraphs about upaya and the junction. Often, the best way to ensure that minimal human needs are met, for instance, is to establish rights to basic goods in legal frameworks. To enshrine those rights in our collective moral and political practice. Often the best way to ensure that human dignity is respected is to enshrine values that treat persons as individual bearers of value and to construct constitutions that reflect that.

00:34.54

Often, the best way to ensure plenty is to develop social welfare policies and often the best way to develop flourishing citizens is to articulate in education a robust theory of human virtue. Western moral theorists have been good at each of these things. Liberal democratic theory in a framework of human rights has been a very effective device for the reduction of suffering, though hardly perfect or unproblematic.

00:35.16 So is utilitarian social welfare theory. And Aristotelian, Humean, Schopenhauerian virtue theories have been immensely useful in moral education.

00:35.24 These Western articulations of the right, the good and the decent provide a great deal of specific help to anyone seriously engaged in the Bodhisattva path. On the other hand, Buddhist moral theory provides a larger context in which to set these moral programs and one, perhaps, more consonant with a plausible metaphysics of personhood and action and with the genuine complexity of our moral lives.

00:35.46 To the extent that our world is characterized by omnipresent suffering, to extent that that's a real problem and perhaps the fundamental problem for a morally concerned being, Buddhist moral theory may provide the best way to conceptualize the problem in toto. But Buddhist moral theory and Western moral theory can meet profitably when

we ask how to solve that problem in concrete human circumstances. And it's in concrete human circumstances that we live our lives and in which we must solve it. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

EVAN THOMPSON

00:36.21

Thank you very much, Jay, for that very stimulating and fast-paced presentation. Very good - finished on time. Our first respondent is Professor Edith Wyschogrod. Professor Wyschogrod has been the Croghan Visiting Professor of Religion at Williams College, a guest Professor of Philosophy at Villanova and is currently the J. Newton Rayzor Professor of Philosophy and Religious Thought at Rice University.

EDITH WYSCHOGROD

00:36.47

Emerita.

EVAN THOMPSON

Emerita at Rice University.

EDITH WYSCHOGROD

00:36.51

Ok, thank you. I'm going to speak about the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who's not exactly

a household word. He is, in many ways, a successor of Heidegger. He belongs to the phenomenological tradition and the story in brief, is what was lacking in Heidegger, according to many, was an ethics, for reasons too complex to go into.

00:37.23

But Levinas is seen as supplementing that defect. Don't read the word supplement in Derrida's sense because Derrida means by supplement, cannibalized and that is not what I mean. What I want to do is to show the ways in which Levinas's thought would be augmented by - not supplement by, not replaced by, but augmented by - an encounter with Buddhism.

00:37.54

Heidegger had written a bit about Zen. Not awfully much, but enough for us to know about his acquaintance with it. Now, no such reference occurs in Levinas. Now, I fully agree - thank you, better? I fully agree with Jay Garfield's warning against reverting to the practice of

setting up East-West parallel claims by laying out columns, as it were, of resemblances that swallow up one conceptual or the other.

00:39.30

Still, if benefits are to accrue, we must begin by identifying some affinities. Good. Ok. Ok? Y'all hear me? Ok. All those here from Texas, I say y-apostrophe-a-l-l. In responding to Jay I hope to address two issues in the philosophy of Levinas, especially the account of self and his ethics of solicitude for the other.

00:39.00

Each of which, as I've said, can be augmented by appealing to a Buddhist analysis of consciousness, the skundas (ph), and especially the depiction of the Bodhisattva. I shall be eclectic, I shall pillage texts from different aspects of the tradition to do this.

00:39.20

Now, I am trained in philosophy, especially phenomenology and I'm not trained in Buddhist- I'm an amateur in two senses. In the sense of

being a lover of that tradition and in the sense of not controlling the languages. So, when I pronounce things in an odd way, it will be as my Hungarian speaking family speaks English, so please forgive. Um, ok.

00:39.45

Levinas- for Levinas philosophy is, what he calls, an egology. An egocentric philosophy focusing on the ego or subject. Egocentrism is expressed in the pursuit of material pleasures, the exercise of power, exploitation of persons and resources relying on both empiricist and rationalist accounts of cognition.

00:40.13

Levinas is not arguing for an epistemology of irrationalism, but for a way of undermining rationality's egological outcomes. Now, what is he do? He appeals to the sheer existence of the other person. When I see the other person, the other - with a capital O - impacts upon the self and undoes this egological structure.

00:40.43

It's incumbent on the self to surrender itself in the interest of the other. You can think of this as a kind of radical altruism. I prefer thinking of egology in terms of popular culture as the Miss Piggy view of the self. Those of you who have been schooled to that particular cartoon will know exactly what Miss Piggy means when she says "moi," and that's what Levinas is opposing.

00:41.13

The relationship between the other - I'm citing a Levinas scholar here - between the other and me reveals an asymmetrical relation which precedes every possibility of choice or decision. The tension between this asymmetry and the economy of the ego's enjoyment of the world is, for him, unfolded in analyses of all the topics of 20th century philosophy -

00:41.42

freedom - Continentally construed - language, the body, sensibility, emotion, work, history, love, death and many consequences for a radical transformation of philosophy are made explicit.

00:42.01

He is in debate with Heidegger against Heidegger's account of being, arguing instead for what he calls the primacy of metaphysics, which he interprets as ethics. Ethics before ontology or being.

00:42.21

In our relation to the other person, I am addressed by a being who's absolutely exterior to mine and whom I experience at the appearance of the face of the other. I don't experience the face as a form, but as an absolute negation of my power.

00:42.45

Levinas is aware that we may enter into relationships with others based on power, chicanery, deception, physical violence, but if we do so, then the face has not appeared as a face. We have not discovered the other in his otherness. We have not experienced what he calls, the nudity of the other's look. The primary

phenomenon upon which all other forms of shame are based.

00:43.19

Our powers are paralyzed before the appeal of the other's defenselessness. We abandon the will to power. We will not to will. Fast forward to a text - and again, I appeal to the apology that my Hungarian friends offer when mispronouncing - Machimanikaya (ph), book one, eight. And I argue that this is a strong parallel, but would also helpfully augment Levinas's account of self in that context of the egology.

00:44.10

An uninstructed ordinary person is not wisely reflecting if he thinks in the past was I, was I not and what was I. What was I like? Having been what, what was I? Or if he thinks in the future - will I be? Will I not be? What will I be? What will I be like? Having been what, what will I be?

00:44.37

Or if he's subjectively doubtful now in the present and thinks - Am I? Am I not? What am I?

What like? Whence has this being come? Where going will it come to be? To one who is thus not wisely reflecting some speculative use may arise as though it were real and true and I'm skipping now.

00:45.08

Simply by self am I aware of not-self. Simply by not-self am I aware of self. The ordinary uninstructed person is not free from yes, birth, aging, dying, grief, sorrow and the like. In sum, as we have all noted, she/he is not freed from suffering.

00:45.36

Now, moving along with Levinas, suffering and its alleviation are absolutely crucial in Levinas. And here to appeal to Buddhist doctrines would further Levinas's account. I will not read any account or citation of the four noble truths - we've heard them over again here, but an appeal to the four noble truths would help to unveil the way in which suffering arises.

00:46.17

And that account is really not present in Levinas's philosophy and one would like to see more there. In fact, what Levinas appears to be advocating could be expressed in the following way - every man and woman a Bodhisattva. Now, when I visited with Levinas what I noted - I sort of was spying out what he had in his bookcase, schronk (ph) as it was known, novels of Dostoyevsky, whose accounts of suffering and responsibility was central to- from the literary standpoint to his depiction of responsibility.

00:47.07

And if- he's not alive anymore, but were he alive, I think I would present a gift in the French sense of no return of a copy of some Buddhist texts. Ok. I'm going to skip a bit. The notion of the following text could have been written by Levinas.

00:47.36

All that mass of pain and evil karma, I take in my own body. I have resolved to save them all. I must set them all free, for all beings are caught

in the net of craving. And there are a number of epistemological texts that I could appeal to, but I shall not do that. I shall instead, very quickly, go to the doctrine of karma.

00:48.09

Clearly, there could be nothing in Levinas that would replicate in any way or parallel the notion of karma as that which accrues to any action and one which explains how action arises from the consequences of preceding actions.

00:48.34

Now, I would argue that not only for Levinas, but for the phenomenological tradition as a whole, the account of the weight of history in Hegel, in Heidegger suggests affinities to the notion of karma.

00:48.53

A very quick allusion to a text - shall we say- this is Levinas speaking, not me. Shall we say that the world with all its sufferings and failings weighs on the ego because the ego is a free consciousness? And in sum, what he is after

- I won't go through the whole thing - is that history is a weight upon us that we cannot escape.

00:49.32 The historical- we are hostages to history. We cannot avoid the consequences of our collective karma and we all collectively pay the price for our collective karmic actions.

00:50.01 There's much more that I would like to say, but I just had my time notice.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:50.06 Thank you very much.

APPLAUSE

Our next respondent is Gareth Sparham. He was a Buddhist monk for many years - from 1973 to 2001 - and now teaches Tibetan language at the University of Michigan.

GARETH SPARHAM

00:50.32 Ok and thank you very much to the organizers for organizing this conference and- Again, thank you very much to the organizers for organizing this

conference and in particular, for including me amongst the distinguished speakers and panelists.

00:50.56

I'm particularly happy to have been approached to say something about ethics or about morality. And perhaps if I might begin with a slight history of myself coming here. And that history is one of a great deal of uncertainty about the morality of it. About being associated with it. In other words, I come here not feeling it self-evident that we're engaged in a morally supportable act.

00:51.35

And I'm very pleased to have seen some suggestions in the comments of some of the earlier participants. I'm thinking perhaps more of the tone of the notion that somehow there's something perhaps to be opposed. Even if it's framed in philosophical terms, epistemological terms - nevertheless, there's something to be opposed. I responded to that.

00:52.10 I- somehow I sort of came to it that yes, that is something that one wants to keep in mind. It's not self-evident that we are engaged, either individually or as a collective, as a group here, in a moral act.

00:52.28 In an act which is, if it were to be looked at by others later on when they look at what we're doing in a sober fashion, as a an act which is good, beneficial or at least not harming. And in particular, I responded to Thubten Jinpa's comments that in particular to give a voice to another.

00:52.53 Not another in some small, little sense, but another as much as we are another to some other talking, perhaps, to some of the ideas which are starting to come out here in this ethics panel. So, I begin with that.

00:53.14 And I'm very pleased indeed to- having come here to feel that, you know, I'm really pleased to

have come here and I do feel that it'll be judged as a decent act. And there's some form to it.

There's some form to it. First, Owen's - how do you say - choice of a particular text to begin with. And to take seriously a text not from our own traditions, but from another tradition.

00:53.52

And to critique it, no problem, but to take it seriously - I found that as a form, it's good. Second, that in this situation that we find ourselves, we have opposition. And hence, we have people who are opposing - in inverted commas, opposing - who are together attempting to somehow deal with that reality. And so, the form of it therefore, makes me feel at ease.

00:54.30

Perhaps, I'll just read a few of the comments I made and then what I want to do in the rest of the time that I have here is take Jay's remarks as a point of departure, just to try to put across how- how to say- an integrated ethics is

very inherent in the whole, let's say, project,
which is called Buddhism.

00:54.58

I'll just read a few remarks. I say that my worry initially was because I was participating in a colonialism of knowledge. Marching into the knowledge of another culture to expropriate it and call it my own, just leaving destruction in my wake.

00:55.16

But, as I said, participating over these days here in this very material, lofty hall - and there's something I think special about the actual venue in which it's happening. It could happen in another place - it would not necessarily be so moral. But here, why? Because this is not the sort of thing that happens in this kind of place.

00:55.39

And hence, that itself makes me feel more at ease about what I'm doing. And second, I like the thought of that goddess that Dr. Thurman

introduced us to. I really do feel that the presence of Sophia or Alma Mater, Pragnya - call her what you will - here, is a good sign. So, I also- that also makes me feel a little bit at ease.

00:56.13

If I might talk about myself for a moment, I also couldn't see why I personally would be invited to speak on morality. I don't see anything particularly in myself. In fact, I would say if you look at my earlier history perhaps I would not be arrested, but it would not be, I think, a particularly exemplary history.

00:56.35

So, on that level, I don't think that's why I was invited. (Off-mic conversation). Yes, exactly. So I think, and indeed no doubt, the reason I was invited was because I did a little work on ethics, on morality. And it was published a few months ago and since my publisher's here I do want to sort of put in a pitch for it, if I might.

00:57.05

So, this is a book on tantric ethics and out of that work that I did, I'd like to focus in on one particular part of the presentation and it will inform the remarks that I make in the time that remains to me.

00:57.27

So, here there are three terms, if you will - let's just call them terms. They do have Sanskrit names, but we don't need to bother ourselves with them. Now, these three terms together present an ethics.

00:57.52

And I'd like to try to put across here how they fit together and I think it's a very real contribution which meets back to a lot of the issues that have been coming up about first person narratives, about mind and reality and certainly, the larger questions, I think, which - the larger issue which was there when this conference was put together, such that a panel -

even the last panel - was framed in the language of ethics.

00:58.30

So, if I just say- Now, the first heading under which I want to talk about ethics here. I'm going to talk about the three of them to try to get at them because they are kind of difficult to get at in terms of the technologies which are appropriate to each and the domain of the technologies.

00:58.51

And, obviously, I'm using technologies in a pretty wide sense, but I hope it will be understandable. So, I'd say that in- for the first morality, the technology of meditation- and don't forget that this is ethics. In other words, this is- what we're talking about what would come under the heading of morality here, and so, first there's the technology of meditation and hence, it's for an individual. It's not for a society.

00:59.24

Meditation and the technology of meditation- I use the word technology because it's to be used by a person in order to get to a particular effect and it's not in some way inherent in the person. It is a technology. And so, the technology of meditation. And we've already seen that there's a great variety of technolo- have to say there are many techniques or there is much which constitutes the technique which I'm calling meditation here.

01:00.01

And what is this technology aiming at? The well-being of the person. And I think it's obvious how this is moral. First, going back to what Jay was saying that just to alleviate suffering anyway is moral and one's own suffering as much as anybody else's is important to alleviate.

01:00.27

But more than that, in a social sense because we're, I think, so habituated to thinking somehow of morality in social terms. It is also moral to apply the techniques or the technology of

meditation to make sure that one remains happy, balanced, in a deep state of well-being because first of all, if one's not those around one worry greatly about oneself.

01:00.59

One's mothers. I have to say mothers and fathers for their children, spouses for their others. And then in a slightly larger context, if you take a group, the- If a group is upset by a person who's not having well-being, that group gets out of balance. That itself can affect wider groups and so forth.

01:01.24

So, it is moral therefore - and I think the Buddhist texts understand it as moral, in that sense. It's not somehow- how to say- It's not as though in a Buddhist text that morality is one part of the discussion, meditation is another part of the discussion, epistemology another. No, it is unified and in this sense, to look after oneself by the utilization of meditational techniques is not just a moral act and you may or

may not do it, but if you wish to, indeed, be an ethical and moral person, one should take good care of oneself.

01:02.10

And that's not just the physical. Now, what about the technology? Are they only - because the physical-mental divide has come up again and again - no. Clearly, we all know that there are physical yogic postures. I even think that the medicine, as Thubten Jinpa and others were talking about, about-

01:02.31

TAPE END

MIND & REALITY

DAY TWO - TAPE 6 of 7 - PANEL ON ETHICS

TAPE START

GARETH SPARHAM

00:00.00 -if you wish to, indeed, be an ethical and moral person, one should take good care of oneself.

00:00.08 And that's not just the physical. Now, what about the technology? Are they only - because the physical-mental divide has come up again and again - no. Clearly, we all know that there are physical yogic postures. I even think that the medicine, as Thubten Jinpa and others were talking about, about-

*****START NEW MATERIAL*****

00:00.30 -psychiatry and the kinds of- how to say- technologies which are used for well-being, there's no reason these should not be included in meditational technology. But clearly, mainly, it

has to be Samadhi, it has to be the different technologies that we get from other cultures.

00:00.51

We- there's just not that much in this culture - the technology for personal well-being. It's not a particularly important thing here. It's just- doesn't seem to be important to people. And so, I think we have to look to other cultures to really discover that technology.

00:01.11

So, passing on from that- The domain, of course, then is the personal. It's not the social. That technology's domain is on each of us as an individual. Incidentally, if- in the tradition this would be called the morality of vows. There we are.

00:01.35

Sambara-sila. So, the two more moralities which have to be put in here in order to get a feeling for the integrated moralities- So, the second one is the one I think it's easiest for us to get to. This is the one we always think of as the domain

of the moral. In other words, society. The fact that some are hungry and that we have to apply techniques or technologies to alleviate that hunger.

00:02.05

All of the different technologies which we come up with in order to alleviate all of the problems in the world - as we call it. This is absolutely an integral part of any moral system. And it's obviously there in Buddhist literature when you look at it.

00:02.29

Now, what about the technologies? I think here, these are the technologies in particular that we associate with science. They're tremendously important and perhaps this is why the Dalai Lama is so positive about science and the role that it has to play.

00:02.47

So, I won't talk more about that. I think that's self-evident, but I'd like to finish with a far more complicated aspect of this morality. And I

hope you'll stay with me. I have a friend -
Georges Dreyfus - I'm not sure if he accuses me
or perhaps a better way to put it is praises me,
I like to think, for uncommon views. So, anyway,
please bear with me if my attempt to put across
this aspect of a full presentation of morality is
problematic.

00:03.26

First, the technology. So, the technology - if I
use the traditional words - is prajna upaya,
which is to say wisdom and method. Now, what does
that leave us with? So, perhaps I might go back
to the lady who is gracing the steps of this
university and she does embody, she does embody
wisdom and at the same time, she is an Alma
Mater.

00:03.59

So, what is the Alma Mater? It is the University.
And what is in the University? It is all
knowledge, by definition, in that sense. And she
both embodies it as a ground and as the knowledge
of the ground. And in that sense, one can talk

about the feminine, if you will, or wisdom or prajna.

00:04.28

And these, don't forget, are the technologies, part of the technology for a third necessary part of a full explanation of morality. This is from the Bodhisattvabhumi, the Sila chapter. It's a basic- It's not the highest morality presented in the Buddhist texts, but it is a standard, well-known morality, which just is there.

00:04.53

It's a complex language in a sense, but still, it's just trying to formulate an ethical language. And I think it has something to give us. I have a few moments left, do I? Just a moment or two. So, what's the- That then is the ground or wisdom and it is not passive. It is not something you trample on.

00:05.17

It is not to be trampled on, but nevertheless - and I'll end with this remark - there is something else with it. And I think we all

respond to it exactly how we want to articulate it. I certainly could hear it in the wonderful presentation you were giving. Jay has referred to it.

00:05.41

It has many words, perhaps logos if you want a more common word. Bodhichitta is the word that the Dalai Lama would probably bring in. It's an active principle. How it relates in this- how to say- how it relates ethically is complex, but at the end of the day you do have a vision. People do come with a vision.

00:06.09

It may be small, it may be large, but at the end of the day you want a vision which does incorporate all in well-being and you need some way to get to it and these then are required for the final, perfect- how to say- well-being of all. Without that, you wouldn't have a full ethics.

00:06.31

So, those three then, together are a presentation of Buddhist ethics. And I'll leave it there.
Thank you.

EVAN THOMPSON

Thank you.

APPLAUSE

00:06.47

Our fourth and final respondent is Professor Robert Pollack, who is Professor of Biological Sciences, Lecture and Psychiatry at the Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, Adjunct Professor of Science and Religion at Union Theological Center- Seminary, excuse me, Adjunct Professor of Religion at Columbia University and Director of the Center for the Study of Science and Religion here at Columbia University. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

ROBERT POLLACK

00:07.18

Thank you. Jay comes to work on three continents. I come to work on four planets. I want to begin by thanking Jay Garfield for sending in his essay to the conference in time for me to have a chance

to think about my response in advance of this afternoon's session.

00:07.39

In his talk he gave me a door through which to go from my understanding of our place in nature to his. He said - and I'll quote from his talk - "The truth of suffering sets the problem that Buddhism sets out to solve. The universe is pervaded by suffering and the causes of suffering. The Buddha did not set out to prove this, he took it as a datum. One that is obvious to anyone on serious reflection, though one that escapes most of us most of the time precisely because of our evasion of serious reflection in order not to face this fact."

00:08.18

I find a lot to agree with here. Suffering is an obvious datum, all right, and denial and repression of it certainly informs our lives and the lives of most of our colleagues. But I cannot say I'm wholly through that door. As a scientist of the old-fashioned sort, not a social

scientist, not a philosopher scientist, just a biologist, I cannot help but note that Professor Garfield's paper lacked a full recognition of that aspect of suffering that seems to me central to our place in nature.

00:08.54

That is, the eventual mortality of everything. From each of us to our species, to the universe as a whole. So, rather than attempt to speak to the ethics of Western science in a general way, I thought I would, instead, lay out for us today the ethical consequences of this inescapable data point.

00:09.17

Because we are all part of the one species whose members have demonstrable self-awareness of individual mortality and an equally demonstrable capacity to modulate that self-awareness through denial and repression, we all share the primary and initial tasks of acknowledging this central fact of the mortality of others and ourselves and

of then finding meaning in our acts despite these facts.

00:09.46

The ethical question then becomes - has Western science anything at all to contribute to these primary tasks. And if so, how may science best contribute? Here are two clear negative responses from past generations - one from a great scientist, the other from a great humanist.

00:10.07

First, quote, "What I am really interested in is whether God could have made the world in a different way. That is whether the necessity of logical simplicity leaves any freedom at all." Second quote. "Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question. The only question important for us - what shall we do and how shall we do it."

00:10.33

The first quote is from Einstein, the second is from Tolstoy. They're examples of the convergent fact that in the West - absent a Buddhist

perspective - serious scientists and humanists, people of deep religious conviction and people for whom religion is so much detritus to be swept from the temple of human accomplishment are equally unshielded by science from the fact of mortality and the deep issue of meaning it raises.

00:11.06

What ethics then can we get from Western science? The absence of purpose, the impossibility of perfection, the centrality of individual mortality - I will call these the natural design of life. It's my contention that the materialist reality of this natural design built - as it is on mortality - nevertheless permits all of us, but especially the scientists who best understand it, to choose to act, not to do harm, but to do good.

00:11.41

This, by the way, is why as an article of faith intelligent design is truly powerful and deeply troubling. As science, it is meaningless. Nothing

in nature supports it, nothing in nature demands it, nothing we can do will either prove or disprove it. But as a belief, it distracts us all from acts we may - as individuals, but more importantly as families, faiths, nations and species - perform in this world to diminish the catastrophic consequences of natural disaster and human cruelty.

00:12.15

Our origins in nature do not merely permit us to act to diminish suffering, they also guide us whether or not we first trade the Western tragic sense of our own individual mortality for a Buddhist interdependent perspective. Our data tell us, for instance, that all life is related.

00:12.36

The tens of millions of kinds of living things, which can have fertile offspring with each other, we call them species. All share common ancestry. But the price of this ethically rich fact of common descent comes in the cold notion that each

species must have a finite lifetime for new ones to emerge from old.

00:13.01 Species are not the stable entity they seem to be. Each is transient. As variant individuals in each species jostle with each other for food, sex, space and a fighting chance for their offspring, some will survive and others not. In time a species will change as a result and eventually- and a species' lifetime can run for many millions of years or even be much shorter.

00:13.27 It will either die off as a species as it is pushed aside by other species invading its ecological turf, or it will be supplanted in that turf by a new species emerging from a minority of its members.

00:13.40 That is why either replacement or simple disappearance is the certain fate of all species, including our own. The two notions of common descent and species mortality were well laid out

by Darwin and confirmed by others immediately thereafter. But it took another century for another unintuitive insight to complete today's Western scientific understanding of the origin of species.

00:14.10

The fact that inherited change in a chemical called DNA could accomplish much of what the Darwinian idea of common descent and origin of species required. When copying errors generate new sequences of DNA text that happen to encode enhanced survivability in the offspring of a species, a new fertile population may emerge from an existing species.

00:14.38

The problem is that while this scientific explanation of our origins permits our individual choice to act ethically on behalf of a suffering individual, so as to alleviate that suffering, such acts, such ethical acts must emerge in spite of our data, not because of them.

00:15.01 These data tell us instead that our species with all our appreciation of ourselves as unique individuals within it is simply the transient, meaningless result of the sifting out of viable texts from a set of randomly generated typos.

00:15.18 The methods and strategies of science have thus brilliantly succeeded in explaining how we got here and where we are going next and the explanations seem to leave absolutely no door into a natural justification for ethical behavior. A mutation just happens to land in the sperm or egg that will make one individual and not another. Intentionality is neither necessary nor even demonstrable.

00:15.48 This most successfully defended null hypothesis of science has been so amply confirmed that there's no longer any reason to doubt it. Worse, our data also tell us that the living world, ourselves included, is intrinsically imperfect and intrinsically imperfectible. It changes, but

even the changes that make each of us individually unique and interesting to each other are, in the end, meaningless differences in our DNA, creating the differences among us toward no purpose beyond the possible improvement in the survival of one or another particular version of DNA over time.

00:16.31

And even that imputation of purpose to the data may be unjustifiably teleological. I am not exaggerating the seriousness of this problem. Scientific insight into the meaninglessness of DNA-based life is not simply missing meaning. It is the demonstration that a satisfactory, elegant explanation of the workings of this aspect of nature actually conflicts with ethical undertakings.

00:17.02

There is no evidence of eschatology in nature, nor any sign that greater meaning and purpose will one day be drawn from these data, but with one exception. The reality of the faith and hope

that like our ethics, do emerge in our minds despite the absence of scientific evidence in their support.

00:17.25

Honest scientists know their limits. Newton excused himself from the task of finding meaning in his discovery of the laws that govern the movement of stars and planets by saying, "I have not been able to deduce from phenomena the reason of these properties and I do not feign hypotheses."

00:17.47

Unless we force science to do just what Newton did not deign to do and simply articulate our wishes as if they were in the data, though they are not, we must accept the tragic, meaninglessness and purposelessness of our presence on earth as the verdict of testable science.

00:18.07

That said, the fact that we find within ourselves the capacity to choose on any grounds at all, but

especially on irrational grounds against judgment, against data, against survival, against reason, even against death, choose to learn to remember to teach and to act in one way and not another can return meaningfulness to us.

00:18.34

In Western religious terms then, it is the God-given inexplicable reality of free will that allows us to accept an idea or not. How then, does a particular ethical stance emerge from within those of us Western scientists who are religious, but who accept the natural world as Western science finds it? Not by data.

00:19.02

But by acknowledging the felt necessity of responding to these facts with acts of loving kindness. That felt necessity can and does emerge in a wholly Western context, as well. Even as we still see ourselves as distinctive, tragically separate individuals. The ethics of science in the West may be said then, to emerge as a

reaction against the data that describe the natural world.

00:19.35

But this should not be surprising. Western sciences and in particular, medicine and the life sciences are themselves profoundly unnatural human activities. If we were to surrender medicine and all other manifestations of our capacity to understand nature and use that understanding for our own purposes, it would allow us as a species to be less intrusive, more natural for sure.

00:20.05

But we know from ecology and from environmental science that all other primates alive today, especially those whose body size approximates our own, have a species size in the hundreds of thousands of individuals and a life expectancy of 35 to 40 years, no more.

00:20.26

That would become our fate, as well. Compare that to the current situation - life expectancies can

be doubled to 80 with current science and technology. And our species now numbers in the high billions. And you can see the true and unimaginably high cost of any serious attempt to move away from science, back to our natural place in the natural world.

00:20.51

Who among us are prepared to see 99 out of a hundred people we know, disappear. And 99 out of a hundred of those disappear and then 9 out of 10 of those. Who among us is so naïve about statistics as to think we would be one of the survivors of such a culling?

00:21.10

And if we were, who would be satisfied to live no longer than it may take to get tenure? Pain, suffering, the unreasonable maldistribution of good and bad fate – these are the stuff of natural design. The visible expression of the random genetic variation which provides nature with the eerie capacity to produce some living thing that will survive any contingency.

00:21.42

To work against these aspects of life, while still clinging to the importance of one's acts is the Western way to work against nature's deepest mechanisms and also to work against the meaninglessness of these mechanisms. This raises the question that is the subject of my own current work - if we are convinced we must forswear the dream of returning to nature, how can we hope to redirect the powers of science and technology that got us here to help our species reach a sustainable equilibrium with ourselves and the rest of nature.

00:22.22

I feel a sense of urgency here that may well be alleviated by a better understanding of our interconnectedness. But perhaps should not be so alleviated. We can be sure that social policies based on natural design will always consign innocent people to suffering whenever we do not use our capacity to choose to act with loving kindness.

00:22.47

In our country today, racism has always been and remains an all-too-common behavior and the choice to steer clear of it is a good example of the sort of act that makes one a full human being. The natural evil of Katrina forced us all to see the consequences of decades of earlier failures to act out of loving kindness.

00:23.11

The failure to properly evacuate and care for the beleaguered citizens of the Gulf Coast was only lastly, a failure of government efficiency. It was initially the predictable outcome of decades of persistent racism - the intentional dehumanization of the population of that area whose ancestors had come from Africa most recently as slaves at the hands of others whose African ancestors had first stopped over in Europe some tens of thousands of years earlier.

00:23.45

To place this Western notion of urgency and obligation to care for the suffering of others as

individuals singled out by evil intention in a larger Western religious context, I turn in closing to two great Christian ethicists of the just past century.

00:24.05

First, from the writings of the martyred German pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quote: "Christianity has adjusted itself too much, much too easily to the worship of power. It should give much more offense, more shock to the world than it is doing. Christianity should take a much more definite stand for the weak than to consider the potential moral right of the strong."

00:24.32

End quote. Thirty years later, forty years ago, right here in New York, up the block from where we sit, Dr. Martin Luther King addressed this issue of ethics and science by extending the meaning of a foundational Western religious text from the personal to the social and political.

00:24.54

Speaking at Riverside Church one year to the day before he was assassinated, he said, quote: "A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day, we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway."

00:25.36

True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. The question of ethics as an aspect of science in the West then becomes a simple one. It is how can Western science contribute to this restructuring. Thank you.

APPLAUSE

EVAN THOMPSON

00:26.09 Thank you very much. What I'd like to do now is to offer Jay the opportunity to respond to the respondents and then we can take it from there.

JAY GARFIELD

00:26.28 My responses will be very brief. I would agree that the potential for dialogue between Levinas and Buddhist sources is huge. I've always found Levinas very inspiring and Levinas's moral insights, I think, are ones that deserve to be brought into more contrib- more dialogue with Buddhism than they have been in the past and so I thank you for that.

00:26.59 Gareth, you're right to be bringing out all of the richness of the Buddhist ethical tradition that I managed to omit. And of course, there's a great deal more to be said and your work in tantric ethics says a great deal of it, as well. It's probably unreasonable for any of us here to think that in this panel we're going to explore all that is valuable or important in Buddhist ethics and so, it's good that there's a number of

people up here talking as well as a number of important experts in the audience who will very soon, I expect, supplement what we've said here.

00:27.39

And one remark to Bob Pollack, whose talk I found extremely rich and utterly consonant in spirit with much of what I see in Mahayana ethics. You're right that I certainly didn't attend to mortality as much as one might have and as much as one would have had I been spending a good deal more time developing a Buddhist analysis of suffering. The only thing I can say in defense of the tradition is there is no dearth of talk about death in Buddhist ethics or Buddhist morals. Only in my talk, for which I apologize.

00:28.21

But, fortunately, you supplemented that and filled that necessary void. I do think that you've succeeded in pointing out one of the interesting differences and a deep and fascinating one that probably deserves a lot more thought than we'll have time to give it today

between Semitic and Buddhist ways of taking up with ethics and the problem. That is, I've characterized a Buddhist approach to thinking about moral theory as one that sort of takes the fact of suffering as the primary problem.

00:29.01

And you've correctly adverted to the way that the Semitic traditions tend to take up the problem, fundamental problem of ethics as seeing purpose in the face of purposelessness as the fundamental moral problem. And those are really different ways of seeing the moral landscape and they're both very deep ways of seeing the moral landscape.

00:29.23

And, probably had I thought more deeply, more carefully and with more intelligence than I have, I would have thought of framing it that way. But I didn't - I'm not that smart. And, so I thank you for seeing that way of framing the contrast, which I think might be a very fruitful way of

thinking about how Semitic and Buddhist ethical theory can come into dialogue.

ROBERT POLLACK

00:29.50 Maybe we'll just have another conference.

JAY GARFIELD

Alright. That's a good plan, yep. But, I think we should give a chance for people in the audience to have a say.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:30.02 I have a number of questions on cards here and the first question I'd like to begin with is very simple and straightforward in its formulation, but I think it's actually a very important question and one that's particularly important to come out from the different angles of the different traditions and ways of thinking that are represented on the panel.

00:30.26 And the question is - what is the distinction between ethics and morality. And maybe it would be good to begin with Jay's thoughts on that from

the perspective of the target paper and then we can move on.

JAY GARFIELD

00:30.44

The word ethics has a Greek root, *ethicos*. The word morality has a Latin root, *morales*. And they translate each other, so one difference is one is Greek in origin and one is Roman in origin. Many people would use these entirely interchangeably. Sometimes ethics gets used in a special way when it can join with things like professional ethics, medical ethics, business ethics.

00:31.09

Nobody ever talks about business morality. Or medical morality. But anyway, I think that that's a very specialized use and I guess I've heard people try to create a distinction between the semantic ranges of these words where one of them is supposed to have to do with high theory and one's supposed to have to do with particular-

00:31.31 But I've heard different people draw that distinction in different ways and I guess I've lost track of it completely.

EDITH WYSCHOGROD

00:31.38 Yeah, Levinas does address this question. Ethics, for him, is the primordial relation to the other. Ethics is capital E. Now, the moral life in his thought refers to a level that he calls justice. That is, with the advent of the- of another person, the other - the other with a capital O - is a dyadic relation and that's what founds capital E, Ethics.

00:32.13 But, he understands very well that there are not just two and as soon as a third emerges you have a need for small m, the moral life, which he generally designates as justice. Now, it's that level at which I would argue Kantian ethics comes into play.

00:32.36 Namely, the notion of the universal and the juridical dimension in life without which you can't have a just society. End of story.

ROBERT POLLACK

00:32.47 Can I contribute?

EVAN THOMPSON

Go ahead.

ROBERT POLLACK

00:32.51 Jay's kind remarks to me, actually I think, provide a slightly different answer than the fact that one is Greek and one is Latin. I think absent any eschatology, they collapse to the same meaning, but in an eschatological context where there is another world and your place in it will be determined by your actions in this one, then the gleanings from revelation drive a moral position and the choices you make in the absence of eschatology are the ethical ones.

00:33.20 That's why professional eth- professional choices append to ethics and not morality and religious choices append to morality and not ethics. If you

collapse eschatology, they collapse to the same meaning.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:33.35 There's a question up here in the front.

ROBERT VAN GULICK

00:33.39 One brief comment about the Semitic, Indo-European contrast. I mean, I think part of it may be coming from the fact that one has a historical dimension. The Semitic, there usually is a whole notion that there's a history and one of the things you've been emphasizing in the Buddhist tradition is the cyclical nature. Obviously, if you're thinking of this as having history - what Hegel called the problem of history - then obviously, you've gotta know what the purpose of this is.

00:34.01 It always has a direction. So, I think that's a very deep, basic cultural divide. I wanted to ask Jay, particularly, how he could relate what he had to say to what we heard also in- from other people, like Mark Siderits, about the absence of

the self because I approach this as an outsider and I want to understand how the kind of compassion and the social dimension connects together with the notion that the self is illusory and that craving and aversion are versions of ignorance.

00:34.30

And so, how do you sort of strike the balance between the fact that suffering seems to be real with the notion that the self is unreal?

JAY GARFIELD

00:34.39

Yeah. That's a very good question. And gosh. No, no, no, no - just trying to figure out whether it's the very short version, the very long version or the middle. We'll take the middle path version here. What - I should do the very long one? Ok.

00:35.00

The- Here's one way to put it. One of the fundamental ideas in a Buddhist account of suffering is the origin of suffering in a very particular kind of ignorance. Now- or confusion,

as I prefer to translate it. I like confusion better. Because when you get a gloss on this form of confusion, it's not just an absence of knowledge, but rather the superimposition of a false picture on something to which that picture doesn't apply.

00:35.36

So, it's actually more like error than it is simply the negation of knowledge. And the superimposition and question that is the most fundamental one that lies at the root of suffering is the superimposition of the fundamental reality and importance of a self and that which pertains to the self or belongs to the self as having some kind of a fundamental reality in nature.

00:36.04

Now, Buddhist metaphysics is grounded, as well, in this notion that we haven't talked about much - though Mark mentioned it, but only in passing - this notion of two truths. A conventional truth and an ultimate truth. Now, different Buddhist

schools parse out the difference between and the relation between these two truths very differently.

00:36.26

But, for now, one way of thinking about the kind of confusion to which I just diverted is this - it can take the form of seeing something which is merely conventionally true, which is merely nominally true, as having an ultimate reality or an ultimate truth. Now, the moment I do that with respect to myself- So a person is something that's got a kind of conventional reality and here, the easiest kind of model for those of us who were kind of raised in this part of the world is to think of Hume for a minute.

00:37.04

And to think of Hume on a good, sophisticated reading of the treatise, where we want to say that it is- in a perfectly good factionalist sense, persons are conventionally real. We have a whole set of conventions, passions, acts of the imagination that constitute a conventionally real

self, but that doesn't mean that on analysis we find something that exists substantially as a self, as the theater in which the ideas occur.

00:37.33

Alright, our reality is reality like the church. Now, the misapprehension that takes self and other to exist substantially and to be substantially different that is what then on this analysis allows me to draw a distinction, say, between prudential and moral concerns. Concerns that are rational for me to have versus concerns that are optional. And allows me to act in ways that appear to be conducive to my own well-being. And antithetical to the well-being of others.

00:38.12

But which in the end produce suffering not only for others and to me because of interdependence and so forth. As there are two ways to suffer: you can suffer from somebody else doing something to you, you can suffer from being an asshole, right. And they're both ways of suffering. It

sounds glib, but it's- there's a deep insight there.

00:38.29

Now, suffering doesn't have to attach to alternately real persons because when we look at what the bases of imputation are for persons, those bases are continua of causally connected psychophysical processes. And suffering, like any other mental state or mental episode, is a momentary phenomenon. Though it can be a very frequent momentary phenomenon in one of these continua.

00:38.57

So, you don't need to get persons in order to get suffering going, but one good way to get suffering going is to take- that is you don't have to have ultimately existent persons to get suffering going, you maybe have to get persons just to have that psychophysical continua. But one really good way to get suffering going in psychophysical continua is to act in a way that's

grounded in taking those psychophysical continua to be a hell of a lot realer than they are.

00:39.24

And so taking the interests of a particular one of those to be a hell of a lot more important than it is. So, a kind of Humean or quasi-Humean metaphysics of personhood is consistent both with seeing suffering as a real phenomenon – indeed an omnipresent phenomenon – and as one that doesn't necessarily attach to ultimately existent persons, but one that's bound up with a particular way of mistaking these continua for something that they're not.

00:39.53

Now, as a kind of longish footnote to this – which I won't utter, but will simply mention – I could write a longish footnote that would point out that when we look at Hume's account of the relationship between the moral passions and the conventions with regard to the self, we could now proceed to develop even deeper parallels.

00:40.14 And if then we continued and looked at Schopenhauer's "On the Basis of Morality," we would see an even deeper parallel in the Western tradition. Does that help at all?

ROBERT VAN GULICK

00:40.26 Yeah. To put it very bluntly, I'm very (unintell) how a Buddhist from an ethical perspective decides between choosing- between trying to help somebody overcome their ignorance and overcome their cravings and their aversions, as opposed to actually helping them. I mean, when they're sick or when they're hungry or such. I mean, obviously, you want them to do both and I'm trying to understand the interplay between those two. That's- so-

JAY GARFIELD

00:40.50 Oh, that's a much harder question, of course. So- and that requires- that's a detailed question about what the best thing is for this person to do at this particular time. Here's one way to look at it. Suppose that I thought that you suffered from a conceptual confusion about a

particular Buddhist text and from gall bladder stones.

00:41.12

I'd want a surgeon to come in to take care of the latter problem, but I might be happy working on the former problem, though we probably wouldn't do them at the same time, right. And it might sort of depend on how we could schedule the surgery and the seminar which one came first and which one came second. That's not real deep, but-

EDITH WYSCHOGROD

00:41.30

I'd like to address that question. I think we have not distinguished between what counts as alleviation. Let me give two examples. Take the Catholic Worker Movement. You directly feed the poor. You live with them. I need not go into detail about the charitable works within groups of that kind. That's the immediate alleviation of suffering.

00:42.00

Now, the second modality, which is the one that raises questions is more or less in the mode that

Bob raised in talking about Bonhoeffer. And I think of my own very good friends, the survivors of the White Rose Movement - the sister of Sophie Scholl and so on. And they were political protestors. Do they count as alleviators of suffering insofar as they anticipated suffering as a result of the actions of others who were implicated in a politics likely to cause suffering?

00:42.41

Now, where are the lines of alleviation to be drawn? I'm raising the question. I'm not offering an answer.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:42.51

I think we have Alan who wants to say something and then Stephen over here who wants to say something.

ALAN WALLACE

00:42.57

I'd like to make a response to a comment you made, Jane- Jay. And that is when you equated Buddhism with engaged Buddhism and said at one point - I paraphrase - there is no place in

Buddhist practice for retreating from the world. You can imagine, probably I don't need to say anything at all, but I'll say something anyway. I think that Western civilization has been impoverished by the fact that with the rise of science, with the rise of the Protestant movement we lost so much of our Christian and Jewish contemplative heritage.

00:43.27

I think that's a tragedy for us, frankly. And it wasn't necessary, but that's what happened. So, the Protestant ethic kind of took over – you're not doing anything good unless you're doing something out there in the world. I think of a statement by the Dalai Lama. He was asked once, His Holiness, do you ever feel lonely. And the response that I've heard was, no, I never feel lonely. I always feel engaged with others.

00:43.50

And so, I think there's a profound role in the Buddhist practice for temporarily withdrawing from active engagement in society, but one may do

that in the most altruistic and compassionate way, as the Dalai Lama suggests, even when you're in solitude. Even if that lasts for 20 years. And I've known yogis, Tibetan contemplatives who spent 20, 30 years in solitude. When they withdraw, it's not simply an escapism. It's not for selfish purposes. It's not I've had it with the world.

00:44.14

But a temporary withdrawal in order to bring about profound transformation in order to reengage much more effectively. So, I think when we look at the history of Buddhism, really in multiple traditions - Theravada, Zen and so forth - very frequently, if not invariably, those who have had the greatest impact and are most beloved centuries after their passing away are those who have temporarily withdrawn for altruist motivations and then returned and made an extraordinary contribution to the world that might otherwise had been impossible.

00:44.44 Final comment, Pascal. His statement I can only paraphrase, but the trouble with modern man is our inability to sit quietly in our chambers - I think is very, very germane to this.

JAY GARFIELD

00:44.54 I have absolutely no quarrel with that. I'll reread what I said, that was that Buddhist practice is never a retreat from, but always a committed engagement with the world. I consider altruistic retreat practice to be a form of committed engagement. Just as, you know, if you imagine that the young person who goes to a particular place sees a horrible disease afflicting a population - what's the right thing to do, to sit there with absolutely no skills and commiserate or to go to medical school and do something about it, right?

00:45.26 You often have to retreat in order to engage. What I was warning against was a popular view of Buddhism as something that involves a solitary kind of quest that lacks any serious engagement

with the world. So, if I were- if I was taken to disparage the contemplative life, I apologize for having given rise to that misapprehension.

ALAN WALLACE

00:45.52

I'm sure that's not the case.

JAY GARFIELD

Many of my best friends and teachers have been long-term contemplatives.

ALAN WALLACE

00:45.55

I'm sure that's not the case. I just wanted to be explicit and now it is. Thank you.

ROBERT POLLACK

00:45.58

Can I- Could I ask you both- Can I ask both of you, then, whether there is any different ethical burden in Buddhist terms to confronting the kind of what I think in the West is called the natural evil of say, the sick kids who need a doctor and so, one goes to medical school and the human evil of willful cruelty, which does not require one to learn about nature, but rather to see an unnatural act emerging on the bad side of things

as the unnatural act to act with loving kindness is unnatural.

00:46.42

How is the contemplative choice justifiable in the face of the bad behavior of other people as opposed to the problems of nature?

JAY GARFIELD

00:46.53

Do you want that one Alan or do you want me to take that one? I think that one of the crucial conceptual constructs in Buddhist theory is the construct of upaya or topka (ph), skill and means. Different people are endowed with different skills. There's a reason that I'm not a doctor. I was terrible at organic chemistry.

00:47.16

And that's just not a way in which I would ever be able to make a contribution. I know lots of people who can't do philosophy, some people who can't meditate well, people who aren't good engineers. And then, fortunately, there are people who are good at each of these kind of things. One of the things that I think it's

important for anybody to do is to figure out where you can make a contribution.

00:47.40

Not all of us are going to make contributions in all domains. Some of us are fortunate enough to be able to make contributions in many, but boy, those people are few and we admire them for it. But I think that that's just always a hard personal choice and a hard kind of question about self-knowledge to know what you can do successfully and where you'd better step aside and let somebody who's actually got the skills do the job.

00:48.05

I don't perform surgery.

ALAN WALLACE

00:48.08

Could I add a footnote to that?

JAY GARFIELD

Yeah.

ALAN WALLACE

00:48.10

And that is we have in Christianity, be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect. And he's

not, I think, addressing particular people with special skill sets or talents, but an overall orientation for all humanity is to strive for perfection, whatever your particular skills or talents may be. And I think we have something similar to that in Buddhism, most explicitly in Mahayana Buddhism of the Bodhisattva ideal.

00:48.30

Whether you have a natural proclivity for music, for engineering, for gardening or child rearing, the overall- the desire of desires - going back to Augustine, of the spiritual life being really a prioritization of desires - the desire above all desires is to achieve spiritual perfection, spiritual awakening in order to be of greater service to all beings.

00:48.49

And I think that is kind of the overall gestalt for all Buddhist practice. Within that, on an upaya level, some people are gonna be better at engineering and other people are better at teaching or meditating and so on.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:49.01 I think Stephen had a question.

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

00:49.03 Yes, I'd like for Jay, in particular, or any of you to continue to dwell on this topic. In the yogic literature- In the yogic literature and I take it also in Buddhism, there's a real tension between Sanyasa and social ethics. So much so that when a person takes Sanyasa, the family will weep, consider the person lost to the world and so on.

00:49.36 And two ways that I've heard the tension resolved in favor of Sanyasa is, one is, you all have been saying that you cannot really help another until you have improved yourself. And so, this would be motivation for recognizing a duty of self-development. And this makes some sense, though it shouldn't be- I don't know- glibly waved as an excuse for social irresponsibility, as I take it is really the whole point of your remarks.

00:50.17 But, a second justification is then that the particular santana of which my or your present moments of consciousness, feeling, et cetera are involved in have a- have greater causal power for the, what I would call, future moments of myself and - in the conventional sense - and you- future moments of yourself. And so, we have a special responsibility when it comes even to alleviation of suffering-

00:51.02 -to secure our own reduction of suffering before those of others.

JAY GARFIELD

00:51.20 Question I'm tempted just to hand this one back to Alan, too.

ROBERT POLLACK

Good idea.

JAY GARFIELD

00:51.24 Good idea? Yeah. And maybe I will invite Alan to comment on this, as well. But, look at- there's always in any tradition that recognizes multiple levels of social engagement and multiple levels

of moral engagement, going to be tensions between decisions to act on one level versus another. As Alan correctly said, the kind of ruling moral motivation - in especially the Mahayana tradition, but I think really in Buddhism quite generally - is Bodhichitta, the altruistic aspiration to attain awakening for the sake of all sentient beings.

00:52.04

But often, the local route to that global goal involves much more local action than renunciation of all worldly practices for pure spiritual- for pure spiritual practice. Another way of looking at that is many people within the Buddhist tradition see engaged Bodhisattva action as involving the purification of very mundane altruistic action as Bodhisattva action, as a vehicle for the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom towards the attainment of awakening for the sake of sentient beings.

00:52.44

So, this is one way of resolving that tension - to say that, you know, Sanyasa in this framework can be very much a kind of locus, samvrti (ph) kind of- set of actions. That's ok, too. And that's- and all of this is to say that there are multiple strategies for thinking about this tension within the tradition. One is to say, look, maybe the best thing to do is long-term retreat before one acts. Another thing to do is to say to forego one's own long-term retreat because one sees more skillful and more useful things to do in the world immediately.

00:53.21

Another is to actually retreat by engaging in worldly beneficial action. And the tradition has certainly got examples of each of these - canonically and probably in our very own lifetime. So, you're right that there's a tension, but I don't see deep resolution problems and I see multiple paths to resolving that tension in thinking about one's own moral life. Alan, did you want to say more about that?

EVAN THOMPSON

00:53.56 Anne has a question, comment.

ANNE KLEIN

00:54.00 Just in the spirit of sometimes voicing what the tradition itself has to say, I just mention that from some perspectives, certainly within the Tibetan tradition, there is not necessarily this discrepancy between retreating and helping the world, but the prayers and practices themselves at the very time that they are practiced are considered to be a benefit.

00:54.24 And that may seem quite esoteric from many points of view, but perhaps it is something that someday in the 30,000 years from now, science would like to investigate.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:54.36 Georges. Wait until you get the mike, though.

GEORGES DREYFUS

00:54.40 I think there is a real danger of simplifying things because I think there is a real tension between responsibility to oneself and the

responsibility to others. And you find a lot of articulation of that tension in the Vinaya, which prescribes a number of duties that monks have towards others.

00:55.00

So I think it would be greatly simplified- in a way, in the minor perspective, you're right - there is a solution and it's full Buddhahood. Because Buddha is described as having achieved perfection for oneself as well as perfection for others. So, in the minor perspective, you would say that tension remains until you're a Buddha, which is obviously a solution. But it's not underestimating the degree to which there is a tension in the tradition.

JAY GARFIELD

00:55.29

I agree completely. I want to acknowledge that there's tension, and also strategies for addressing and resolving the tension and multiple ways of understanding each, yeah.

EVAN THOMPSON

00:55.38

Jinpa.

THUBTEN JINPA

00:55.40

This is a question for both Jay and Professor Pollack, as well. One thing that has always puzzled me is, you know, discussions of ethics often sort of, you know, turn towards, you know- we pay kind of- we pay acknowledgement to the fact that ethics is a social phenomenon, you know, ethical action is a social act and it's in the context of society and others.

00:56.09

And particularly Levinas brings out the centrality of the recognition of others in one's understanding of ethics. But then when the discussion proceeds, it always turns on some kind of individual's intention, action and consequences and so on. And then also, if you look at individuals, you know, I mean apart- maybe there are a few exceptions, but everyone would like to believe that they are good.

00:56.38

They would like to act in a beneficial way. Everyone would probably agree that compassion is

important. But somehow this value never gets fully translated on the societal level. So, I'm just wondering whether any of you on the panel have given thought on how this could be done.

00:56.59

I mean, you know, particularly with reference to Martin Luther's quote that you cited. It's very powerful, but how can we- you know, what is missing in this step from individual to the society, you know. What kind of mechanism should there be that would translate from this good intentions on the level of individual to society?

EDITH WYSCHOGROD

00:57.23

Oh, I'm sorry. Please go ahead. Well, in- again, I don't want to keep appealing to the philosophy of Levinas because my own position is not always a Levinasian one, but Levinas speaks of proximity. That's his term. There are two modes of engagement with the other.

00:57.46

One is that of the teacher, which is pedagogical. The teacher is magisterial and sees the other as

on high. The other is proximity - the neighbor, the one who is close to me. The analogy there I would say is to tactility. You almost touch the other.

00:58.10

There is a transformation through the impact of the other. Let me use an analogy that Levinas might not like very much, but in the history of epistemology there is a view of sensation and one place where you can find it, where it's really fun to see is in the play called, "Molly Sweeney" - not "Sweeney Todd," "Molly Sweeney" - where a blind woman gains her sight.

00:58.44

And the question is does she when she ceases to use touch, transfer her identification of objects - a solid sphere or a solid box - to the visual. Now that's a puzzle that was undertaken by John Locke, who in turn got it from a French philosopher Molyneux. It was Molyneux's puzzle.

00:59.10

In any case, the answer is no. A pedagogy is required, pedagogy which will show her the difference between a box and a sphere. And I think that is, in a sense, what Buddhism provides that is absent in, as much as I admire the Levinasian notion about territory, there is not a pedagogy attached to the impact of the other and that is, I think, something I would like to see happen.

ROBERT POLLACK

00:59.48

Jinpa. I think the path to an answer comes in disagreeing with the premise. You would say everyone would agree that everyone wishes to behave well, but I would say no. I would say the suffering we see as a data point is the consequence of - to use Jay's technical term - a large number of assholes in the world.

01:00.08

People who choose not to alleviate suffering, people who choose either out of selfishness or stupidity or whatever the reason, not a path that alleviates suffering. And so then, the burden on

those who wish to choose that is not that they have to find the way to be the first one in agreement, but rather they have to find the strength to disagree with what is the large cultural premise that is there's something wrong with you if you act this way.

01:00.35

And I think that would be my first answer. That one must have the courage of one's convictions - a problem raised by the absence of genuine consensus on what is right. Second, and this will come from that portion of the five books of Moses which I happen to be in the position of having read just yesterday. On the second time that God tries to get the Israelites to accept the commandments at Sinai - the first having led to the Golden Calf disaster -

01:01.07

the people now somewhat cowed by that failure are given a second chance and they say as a people, we will do and we will hear. And there's a paradox in there. The first time and all other

times we will hear and we will do is what one does when one takes instruction. But here, what is said is we will do and by doing, we will gain the capacity to hear.

01:01.29

That is what Bruce calls I would- for some reason obscure to me a Protestant notion. It seems to me a deeply Western notion that you act and you learn by acting, rather than contemplating first and then choosing to act. So, then I give you complimentary answers. The first is the choice to be has to be a minority choice in this world.

01:01.49

And second, the choice to be has to be followed by a choice to act because that's my tradition.

EVAN THOMPSON

01:01.57

We've reached our time. I would like to give Jay the opportunity for a last word, as our target-targetist, if you'd like to take that.

JAY GARFIELD

01:02.09

The only thing I'll do is add one more piece to the answer to Thubten Jinpa-la. Two more pieces.

One, you know a lot more nice people than I do
and I would agree that-

ROBERT POLLACK

01:02.19 That's another answer.

JAY GARFIELD

01:02.21 But the third thing that I would add- I would
agree with everything that Robert just said, but
the third thing that I would add is humans'
capacity-

01:02.28 ***TAPE END***

MIND & REALITY

DAY TWO – TAPE 7 of 7 – PANEL ON ETHICS, CLOSING PANEL

TAPE START

JAY GARFIELD

00:00.05

-so even those who honestly do want to do good are unbelievably capable of self-deception and so, actually not acting on that motivation, but on another or just on making really dumb mistakes. I've never- I mean I- you wouldn't believe how stupid people are.

ROBERT POLLACK

00:00.29

And on that note.

EVAN THOMPSON

And on that very cheerful note. Let me just say there's been a slight change in schedule. What we're going to do is not take a break. We're going to invite Paul Gailey and the closing panelists up onto the stage to make some closing remarks and then probably end-

00:00.48

TAPE BREAK