

Cultivating Compassion

Going Beyond Crises



Edited by
Juewei Shi, Suzanne Franzway, and Stephen Hill

With the assistance of Grace Ewart

Peter Lang

The massive disruptions caused by climate change, the Covid-19 Pandemic, war, and ever-rising inequalities have presented the world with challenges across social and economic life, health and education, policy, politics, and community life. Compassion is a central Buddhist value and practice but is also essential to our survival. Defined as feeling genuine concern about the suffering of others and, critically, coupled with a commitment to attempt to alleviate or prevent it. The desire and commitment to help are what differentiates compassion from similar emotions like empathy and sympathy. Compassion demands the courage to turn toward suffering with clarity and skilful means. Hence, we have the Buddhist recognition that compassion is inseparable from wisdom, in the analogy of the two wings. This book is titled, *Cultivating Compassion: Going Beyond Crises* as it is rooted in this perspective while presenting different approaches which aim to advance our understanding of the questions and dilemmas posed by the current global crises and the cultivation of compassion.

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This book is dedicated in loving memory to the late Venerable Master Hsing Yun, who devoted his life to promoting Humanistic Buddhism, with its humanitarian spirit and goal of social responsibility, across the world. With an incredible record of achievement for this one life, Venerable Master Hsing Yun opened the compassion, wisdom and power of Buddhist teachings to the everyday life of all, not just Buddhists. May your legacy live on and your teachings continue to inspire us.

Contents

List of Figures	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
Foreword	xvii
Introduction	I
PART I Contemporary Buddhist Reading of the Crises	II
JUEWEI SHI AND GRACE EWART	
1 A Humanistic Buddhist Response to Crises through MettāVerses	13
STEPHEN HILL	
2 From Self to Our Shared Humanity	29
LEN FISHER	
3 Compassion and Kindness as Tools for Transformation	47
JONATHAN PAGE	
4 A Humanistic Buddhist Approach to the Contemporary Climate Crisis	59
JANE WANG	
5 Buddhist-Informed Humanistic Responses to Gender-Based Violence	81

JADE HUTCHINSON AND ALEXANDER TRAUTH-GOIK	
6	Social Connection in the Attention Economy: Cultivating Compassion on Commercial Social Media 101
PART II Enriching Compassion in Times of Crises 123	
IAIN SINCLAIR	
7	Compassion, Belief and Macrocompassion 125
BEE SCHERER	
8	<i>For the benefit of all ...</i> : Towards Reading the Dharma for Practices of Diversity and Celebration 141
GAWAINE POWELL DAVIES	
9	Compassion and Beyond: How Can Buddhism Help Address Contemporary Crises? 157
MEG HART	
10	Bodhisattvas in Action: Turning Crises into Sacred Leadership 171
GAWAIAN BODKIN-ANDREWS, SHANNON FOSTER, AUNTY FRANCES BODKIN, UNCLE JOHN FOSTER, UNCLE GAVIN ANDREWS, AUNTY KAREN ADAMS, UNCLE ROSS EVANS, JADE FOSTER-GUADALUPE, BRONWYN CARLSON, AND JOANNE KINNIBURGH	
11	Resisting Genocide through D'harawal Relatedness: Understanding the Appin Massacre and the Story of How Wiritjiribin the Lyrebird Came to Be 181

PART III Paths of Compassion	207
NADINE LEVY	
12 Teaching with Heart: Reflections on Compassionate Pedagogy in Higher Education	209
KWONG CHAN AND LINDA HUMPHREYS	
13 The Role of Humanistic Buddhism in Improving the Response of Modern Medicine to Contemporary Challenges	221
JONATHAN MAIR	
14 Transcending Cultures East and West: Ethnographic Research Methodology as a Path of Compassion	235
LINUS LANCASTER AND ASHERAH WEISS	
15 Hopeful Monsters: Can Art Build Empathy? A Sculptural Exploration of Social-Emotional Macroevolution	251
TINA NG	
16 Walking the Paths of Compassion Amidst Conflict	267
CECILIA B. MANIKAN	
17 Abundance from <i>Dukkha</i> : The Pandemic from a Third-World Perspective	283
Notes on Contributors	299
Glossary	309
Index	313

Figures

Figure 3.1.	Feedback between individuals and institutions (Hébert-Dufresne et al. 2022). Reproduced with permission.	49
Figure 11.1.	The seven principles of indigenous storywork (adapted from Archibald 2008).	186
Figure 11.2.	A sacred pathway of the D’harawal (kindly compiled by Bangawarra (2022) for the Circle).	201
Figure 13.1.	The notice-make sense-action (NMA) model of structured reflection (Humphreys 2023), adapted from Driscoll’s ‘What Model’ (Driscoll 2007).	226
Figure 15.1.	A Hopeful Monster.	251
Figure 15.2.	Seventh-grade monster based on the creator’s eating disorder.	256
Figure 15.3.	Entrance to the Hopeful Monsters exhibition.	260
Figure 15.4.	Abandoned warehouse used as an exhibition space for 150 Hopeful Monsters.	261
Figure 15.5.	Hopeful Monsters on student-made armatures at the exhibit.	264
Figure 15.6.	Another Hopeful Monster with the words ‘I’M FINE’ stitched across a black mask covering its mouth.	266
Figure 17.1.	Local FGS nuns traversing rivers and mountains to reach out to typhoon victims.	291
Figure 17.2.	Local FGS Abbess Venerable Miao Jing heading relief operations in the Visayas.	292

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Juewei Shi
Suzanne Franzway
Stephen Hill

Foreword

It is a real joy to see this special anthology of worldwide contributions arising from the *Eighth International Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism* in print. The theme of the 2021 Symposium, 'Humanistic Buddhist Responses to Modern Crises,' drew together timely humanistic responses to the disruptions brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. The founder of this symposium series, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, envisioned a forum for scholars and practitioners to exchange ideas about how scholarship can reinforce the practice of the Dharma in daily life and vice versa. This book bears testimony to that vision.

Crises have become almost a 'normal' part of people's daily life and conversation. In the *Sattasuriyasutta* (or *The Sermon on the Seven Suns*) of the *Anguttara Nikāya* (also known as the *Numerical Discourses*), the Buddha is said to have taught about the appearance of seven suns in this world. Can you imagine living in a world with seven suns where even the deep and vast oceans are dry, and lofty mountains are smoking due to forest fires? This discourse reminds us that the nature of this world is impermanent and that climate changes greatly.

While we may not see seven suns in the skies, many people are familiar with droughts or the fear of such. In 2021, Taiwan suffered a water shortage which resulted in much inconvenience for its residents. In July 2022, 2,000 cattle died in Kansas, USA, due to its 40 degrees heat. During the same month, a heat wave in Spain and Portugal caused the death of 1,000 people. In the past, many people ignored news about global warming such as the melting of Antarctic and Arctic ice basins and icebergs, as well as rising sea levels. However, these days more people are aware of climate change endangering the safety of humanity. Environmental degradation is bringing in its wake droughts, floods and suffering. The alarm bells that scientists have sounded can no longer be ignored.

One of the things we can do now is slow down climate change. Fo Guang Shan has provided 100 hectares of land to plant 30,000 to 40,000

tea trees in its headquarters in Taiwan. In the future, not only will there be tea to drink but also greater awareness of planting trees as a form of green public welfare to slow down the ecological crisis.

The compelling nature of impermanence, as seen in the environment, reminds us of the urgent need of Buddhist practice (*saṃvega*): to reduce suffering and increase happiness, and to achieve liberation. Many countries value freedom and liberation, but liberation should start from the individual's mind.

Buddhist practice is often directed towards awakening because it is believed that an awakened person will know what to do for the benefit of the self and others. Awakening is directed towards seeing the truth of the nature of existence. This truth is expressed in the Four Noble Truths, which the Buddha is said to have taught at the Deer Park in Sārnāth, India? These four truths are commonly articulated as life is suffering, the cause of suffering is desire and grasping, liberation from suffering is possible by eliminating passions and the way to emancipation is by practising the Noble Eightfold Path.¹

The suffering that stems from today's crises highlights the need for a practitioner to perceive their afflictions clearly. Buddhist teachings such as *The Commentary of the Hundred Dharmas* states that our mind contains greed, hatred, ignorance, arrogance and doubt (also known as the five fundamental afflictions).² To eliminate any or all of these mental states and suffering, one must be aware of how these are caused.

Afflictions arise from the six sense organs (of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and consciousness) and their associated sensory objects. Through contact by the sense organs with the sensory objects, desire and grasping are produced for objects we 'like' or 'want'. As a result, feelings of pain arise, when the desire cannot be met, or pleasure when it can be met. With pain,

1 These eight practices are right views, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

2 Fo Guang Shan. (2023). *Mahāyānaśatadharmaparakāśamukhaśāstra* (Dasheng Bai Fa Ming Men Lun) 大乘百法明門論 [*The Commentary of the Hundred Dharmas*], NTI Reader, <https://ntireader.org/taisho/t1614_01.html>.

vexation and hatred follow; with pleasure, greed appears. Hence, further desire and grasping follow that perpetuates this cycle of rebirth.

This force of craving for desirous objects and aversion for objects of displeasure is so strong that one cannot stop even if they want to. Buddhists call this the strong pull of karma. We may not be able to see the power of our greed when we have no shortage of supplies. However, on a day without water, one can clearly see the strength of one's thirst and what it may cause one to do. As long as we are alive, people cannot disregard the six sense organs and the six sensory objects.

Buddhists believe that the life of the Buddha has proven that liberation from these sensory attachments is possible. The Eightfold Path advocates starting with the right view. Right view is an understanding of the workings of karma, or the causes and consequences of actions in this world. In *The Sermon on the Seven Suns*, the Buddha also teaches that everything is impermanent, unstable, and insecure. He goes on to say that liberation can only be obtained when craving for existence is annihilated. Followers can work diligently at experiencing, observing, and contemplating the truth of impermanence, as Prince Siddhartha (the Buddha) did.

The teaching of the Four Noble Truths also reminds people that there can be no liberation when they are not awakened. Being busy all their lives will only increase the troubles and wrong views of the unawakened. Instead, one should aim for self-transformation to transform the world. By observing the various changes in the body and mind, a practitioner can realize the impermanence of the world; by recognizing that we cannot control the change, one can be liberated from unrealistic expectations. With fewer expectations, one can be happy and at ease.

Hence, instead of running away from suffering, practitioners welcome suffering as the source of liberation. Venerable Master Hsing Yun says, 'through frustration, we gain insight'. Buddhists who wish to attain supreme wisdom should know that such wisdom does not arise from thin air, but from meditating on our experiences of troubles and suffering. While the common reaction of many people is to avoid contact with others, the Venerable Master urges that the best place to practise is among sentient beings. The best model is that of a Bodhisattva, or a being determined to achieve enlightenment by liberating others.

To liberate others, the bodhisattva is also a model of compassion. A person who studies Buddhist teachings but does not practise compassion is still an ordinary person entrapped in their sensory bondage. It is only when one 'suffers with' others that bodhisattvas truly see others as themselves. With a compassionate heart, a bodhisattva does not consider adverse relationships as obstructions or enemies. When the mind is in harmony with this wisdom of interdependence, both the body and mind can then become free and liberated. The Bodhisattva's practice is able to liberate others, and the self is liberated at the same time. This is why Buddhahood is said to be attained by following the way of the Bodhisattva.

Buddhism teaches one to eliminate greed, anger, and ignorance. By practising the Dharma, one is immersed in a bodhisattva's state of being – benefiting self and others, as well as enlightening self and others. I hope that this book will stimulate your interest in exploring compassionate ways to liberate yourself and others from the sufferings of an imperilled world.

Most Venerable Hsin Bao
Chief Abbot
Fo Guang Shan
12 September 2022

Introduction

The massive disruptions caused by climate disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic, massacres, wars and ever-rising inequalities have presented the world with challenges across social and economic spheres, health and education, policy, politics, and community life. Compassion is a central Buddhist value and practice but is also essential to our survival. Defined as feeling genuine concern about the suffering of others, compassion is importantly coupled with the wish to alleviate or prevent that suffering. The desire and commitment to help are what differentiates compassion from similar emotions like empathy and sympathy. Compassion does depend on a degree of empathic resonance, if only a sense of common humanity. It demands the courage to turn toward suffering and the clarity and skilful means to alleviate it. Hence the Buddhist recognition that compassion is inseparable from wisdom, as in the analogy that compassion and wisdom are the two wings of a bird. This book is titled *Cultivating Compassion: Going Beyond Crises* as it is rooted in this perspective and presents a range of different approaches which aim to advance our understanding of the questions and dilemmas posed by the crises and the cultivation of compassion.

This book has developed from presentations made initially at the online Eighth International Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism that was held in late 2021. The first seven symposia were convened in Fo Guang Shan, Kaohsiung. The eighth symposium was to be held outside Taiwan in 2020, but the pandemic brought all travels to the Nan Tien Institute, Australia, to a halt. When it became clear that travel to Australia might not resume for the rest of 2021, plans were made to host the three-day symposium online. Not only was the symposium sent out of Asia, but it also went into cyber space.

Organized by the Nan Tien Institute in Australia and Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan, the theme of the eighth international symposium was 'Humanistic

Buddhist Responses to Modern Crises'. There were major crises building in the world at that time, ranging from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, rising numbers of refugees and displaced persons, growing awareness of racial and gendered violence, and sharp increases in wealth and social inequalities. However, a range of transformative potentialities were also emerging. This symposium was designed to explore and develop some of these through encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue, and stimulating innovative understandings and practices. Premised on the value of humanistic Buddhist approaches to contemporary crises, it brought together a wide range of scholars and practitioners from around the world who prepared pre-recordings of their presentations. Participants and presenters in the live sessions were able to preview and fully engage in discussions which facilitated a rich variety of thoughts, responses, and questions.

The editors subsequently invited the symposium presenters to further develop their arguments in light of these discussions and ground them in their diverse contemporary Buddhist readings of compassion and emerging paths for going beyond crises. The book's authors explore the possibilities of creative practices of compassion, loving kindness and other Buddhist values for cultivating cooperation, resilience, choice of action, and the long-term sustainability of all of humanity.

Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教) itself grew out of crises. Humanistic Buddhism traces its roots to the legacy of Master Taixu (太虛 1890–1947) in his development of new approaches to 'Buddhism in the Human Realm' (*rensheng fojiao* 人生佛教). During the chaotic Republican period (1912–49) in China, reformist Buddhist movements sought to 'affirm their religious tradition as an enduringly valuable part of the Chinese cultural heritage' and present themselves as an 'effective challenge to Christian missionaries' (Pittman 2001: 2). Taixu's visionary albeit unsuccessful proposals to reform traditional Buddhism (which focused on funerary rites and future lives) produced a soteriology or doctrine of salvation and stressed active engagement with the crises of the world, as part of a way to recover the original Buddhist ideal. In more recent times, several notable Taiwanese Buddhists promoted Humanistic Buddhism worldwide. They include Master Yinshun (1906–2005), Venerable Master Hsing Yun (1927–2023), Master Sheng Yen (1931–2009), and Master Cheng Yen

(1937–), among others. While each claims to have been influenced by Taixu, they also have developed their own unique interpretation. Nonetheless, they share some fundamental teachings: to cultivate selflessness, generosity, and compassion by working through real-life challenges (King 2020: 56). Hence, Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes the Bodhisattva ideal (to alleviate the suffering of all beings) of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition by encouraging practitioners to be bodhisattvas in the human realm (*renjian pusa* 人間菩薩). Several authors in this volume reflect directly on this bodhisattva aspiration amidst the challenges of the day. Crises provide opportunities to practise the bodhisattva path, that is, to attain the highest level of development for the benefit of all beings. From Taixu's teachings, spiritual liberation as the highest ideal on the Buddhist path is experienced 'in the very act of reshaping unjust and oppressive social, economic and political realities' (Pittman 2001: 296) to create a more truthful, virtuous, and beautiful society. To qualify as 'Humanistic Buddhism', the teachings used to transform the world must conform to the Buddha Dharma (*qili* 契理) and be adapted to current context (*qiji* 契機) (Travagnin 2020: 479).

Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes compassion as the means to liberate humanity from suffering. The Chinese classical belief that an educated person should be the 'first to worry about the world's troubles and last in enjoying its pleasures' has inspired many along this bodhisattva path (Long 2000: 70). But compassion is not only a Chinese virtue; it is a universal value. Humanistic Buddhism has grown out of its home base in China and Taiwan into the rest of the world. In this book, the cultivation of compassion is seen as a human practice that will help people to go beyond the current crises together, in order to relieve suffering. Based on this principle, Humanistic Buddhism is a dynamic phenomenon that is concerned with social engagement in the fields of culture, education, charity and religious cultivation under global, multifaceted and pluralistic modernities (Reinke 2020: 104).

At a time, when the concept of 'human' is radically challenged by posthumanism, transhumanism and antihumanism, why do the editors focus its readers' attention back on the human? It is important to note that such challenges (and their multitude of voices) are not against 'humans' but instead recognize that in the era of the Anthropocene

humans are interconnected with all other beings as well as the physical environment and the whole world (Ferrando 2020). The deconstruction of the ‘human’ invites the acknowledgement of the human species as a plural entity and encourages envisioning a future of inclusivity. It is in this context that Humanistic Buddhism joins the debates around contemporary crises, in particular highlighting the value of cultivating human compassion.

The book brings together a rich diversity of voices from across the world. Drawing on a range of perspectives from education, economics, and sociology to science and technology, the authors who are Buddhists, non-Buddhists, researchers, teachers, and community leaders contribute to our capacities to cultivate compassion individually and collectively, supporting humanity to go beyond the crises. The book also offers exciting new ways of seeing and practising *karuna* (compassion), *mettā* (loving kindness), inclusivity, and interdependence, and develops examples of the practical application of Humanistic Buddhism in areas such as education, health, law, culture, and community action. *Cultivating Compassion* offers contemporary Buddhist analyses of the global and local crises we face and highlights diverse paths of practising compassion in order to devise solutions and relieve suffering.

Structure of the book

The book is divided into three parts. The subject of the first section is contemporary readings of the crises faced in the early part of the twenty-first century. The second section examines the cultivation and the challenges of compassion in times of crises, while the subject of the final section is practical paths of compassion. Each section includes a mix of theoretical, practical and engaged chapters in order to frame the diversity of approaches to each subject. Readers are invited to explore the variety of inquiries across a number of traditional and secular Buddhist paradigms and to consider the positive albeit cautious messages from each author, based on their research and/or experience.

Contemporary Buddhist readings of the crises

The contributors to Part I explore the crises from several different approaches. Bookending this section are two chapters that introduce a novel idea. Juewei Shi and Grace Ewart propose the concept ‘MettāVerses’ (communities of unconditional loving kindness for all) as a humanistic Buddhist inner revolution to be taken into the public sphere following their analysis of the root cause of the systemic issues faced. Using a Buddhist lens, they argue that the broader crises of Covid-19 and climate disasters are a result of internal confusion of the true interconnected nature of reality. Hence, self-centred appropriation from the personal to collective levels lead to unsustainable situations. Jade Hutchinson and Alexander Trauth-Goik end this section by recommending ‘MettāVerses’ as the caring, compassionate and inclusive antidote to the dehumanizing effects of social media technology. While the use of social media is not recognized as a crisis yet, Jade and Alexander recognize how valued human social connections are increasingly commodified and that the addictive use of social media is a health risk. This important chapter invites awakening readers to reflect on ways to avoid impending crises.

Stephen Hill reminds readers that the Chinese expression of ‘crises,’ ‘weiji’ includes both danger and opportunity. His chapter shows how we can capitalize on contemporary opportunities through a refocusing of global economic and social agendas away from one based on self-interest to more local and community-focused ones. In another chapter, Len Fisher investigates how compassion can be a force for transformation in a world dominated by the pursuit of power, profit and individual self-interest. He suggests that the moral values of kindness and compassion, as expressed in the Buddhist concepts of mettā and karuna, have an important role to play by acting as enablers for social change. Both these chapters encourage readers to recognize that change must happen within the context of increasing interconnectedness in our global socio-economic-ecological world.

Two of the chapters in the first section expose specific calamities. Jonathan Page argues that climate change is the dominant crisis facing the world. He argues that humanity needs to accept the reality of this

overwhelming and unprecedented crisis as well as urgently respond. Page argues that Humanistic Buddhism can help individuals and institutions tackle this existential reality through its confrontation with the truth using the bodhisattva ideal and its experience in palliative care. Jane Wang offers her critical reflection on a less documented but equally pervasive global crisis – gender-based violence (GBV). Her chapter contends that a humanistic Buddhist approach to GBV, which prioritizes compassion, community and healing, can be developed to align with social justice values. Both Page and Wang effectively present new ways for Humanistic Buddhism to engage with contemporary crises.

The challenges of cultivating compassion in times of crises

Compassion is a universal value, yet the meanings and practices it invokes cannot be taken for granted as the authors in this section demonstrate. Iain Sinclair notes that the compassion felt by individuals has little potential to produce benefit on a global scale. He proposes the notion of ‘great compassion’ or macrocompassion, which reacts to the suffering of the whole world but remains anchored in personal experience. He goes on to argue that for its potential to be realized in these times, transcendent and materialist understandings of compassion need to be reconciled. Bee Scherer contextualizes those understandings within multiple modernities and post-modernities, with particular attention to marginalized forms of human embodiment with the view of de-centring certain types of human life (e.g. able-bodied, cis-gendered, heterosexual, male). Scherer proposes ways of inclusive readings of Buddhist scripture, utilizing impulses from Christian Liberation Theology and theological hermeneutics in dialogue with other contemporary emancipatory impulses found in intersectional feminism, Critical Disability Studies, and Queer Theory. Traditional Buddhism’s focus on individuals and their suffering is also the starting point for Gawaine Powell Davies, who argues that its values and sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of individual behaviour can and need to be applied at the collective level. Perhaps most important is the

understanding of interdependence. Powell Davies suggests that Buddhist perspectives can make a difference if we bring them to life in stories and artworks; use them to analyse the human causes and chaos of climate change and other crises.

The next two chapters turn to the understandings and practices of Australia's First Nation peoples in facing the challenges of crises with wisdom and compassion. Meg Hart finds that First Nations' wisdom, and its later multi-cultural tradition, has unique and enlivening possibilities to reimagine itself and offer a vision of enlightened society to the world, if we choose. She explores the rich sources of wisdom and compassion that Indigenous Australia and the Buddhist ideal of the Bodhisattva offer us to tell a story of greater inclusivity, harmony, ecological consciousness and flourishing for all life. Just how vital such shifts are is powerfully demonstrated by the example of the Appin Massacre and the story of how the Wiritjiribin, the Lyrebird, came to be, recounted here by Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, Shannon Foster, Auntie Frances Bodkin, Uncle John Foster, Uncle Gavin Andrews, Auntie Karen Adams, Uncle Ross Evans, Jade Foster-Guadalupe, and Bronwyn Carlson. Before sunrise, on the 16th of April 1816, at least 14 D'harawal and Gundungurra warriors, mothers, fathers, and children were killed in what is now known as the Appin Massacre. This chapter explores the Appin Massacre from the lens of not only D'harawal Elders and Knowledge Holders, but that of the deep learnings gifted through the D'harawal Ancestral Dreaming Story of how the Lyrebird came to be. In doing so, the chapter reveals how the Massacre and associated hostilities could have been avoided if D'harawal ways of relatedness and responsibility had been acknowledged and respected.

Practices of compassion

In Part III, we connect the notions of cultivating compassion, and compassion's power in times of crises, into current practices in our everyday world. Nadine Levy demonstrates the emergence of the 'pedagogy of compassion' in health and social education over the last ten years.

Nadine shows how ‘teaching with heart’ and ‘heartfelt listening’ offer kindness and an ethical response to human suffering so that real human contact becomes an entirely valid object of academic enquiry, thus offering enormous power in guiding students towards a more compassionate fulfilling personal and professional life. Kwong Chan and Linda Humphreys’ chapter then takes compassion into their practice in professional education in medical care. Kwong and Linda use their MaRIS guiding system (Mindfulness, affective Reflection, Impactive experiences and a Supportive Environment) in medical education to promote self-awareness in clinical behaviour through being present in any situation and truly listening. Evidence of success is shown through an increase in student competence, in particular, in sensitive patient-centred communication. Tina Ng’s chapter is also grounded in personal experience of practices of compassion in her work as a lawyer and mediator in the field of relationship conflict. Drawing out the qualities of Guan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion, she offers several examples that illuminate the possibilities of practices of compassion even in the fraught atmosphere of the court room. At a time when interpersonal conflicts seem to be rapidly on the increase, this chapter provides practical and effective insights into the value of cultivating compassion.

The idea that we should transcend the distinction between self and other to be truly compassionate is challenging under any circumstance. Jonathon Mair explores an affinity between Humanistic Buddhism and Social Anthropology which, he argues, could offer mutual advantage. The strength of the link is particularly reinforced by the methodology of social anthropology, which requires living with the people under study in their communities rather than observing them from outside. The resulting understanding of the social construction of knowledge at community level can be of benefit to both social anthropology’s progress as well as Buddhist practice and engagement in building paths to compassion around the world.

The ‘hopeful monsters’ project described by Linus Lancaster and Asherah Weiss likewise offers an example of education meeting this challenge. This is an ongoing sculptural project the authors started with young art students in Northern California in 2019. It addresses issues in trauma-informed teaching by asking whether or not we can facilitate greater

practices of empathy and compassion as part of education. This project draws out the repressed feelings, the hidden monsters, in the children's emotional lives, and offers an effective demonstration of the power of compassion to deal with crises, with creativity as the medium.

Finally, we come to Cecilia B. Manikan's telling of the story of how Filipinos are coping and surviving amidst the devastation wrought by the current twin forces of the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change in an impoverished country. Starting with a single woman and her bamboo cart stocked with food and other essentials, the compelling plea to 'give what you can. Get what you need' spread rapidly across the country, all driven by local communities rather than government or aid organizations. Manikan shows the remarkable abundance of the finest human qualities that know neither fear nor defeat, a rich harvest of compassion and generosity, forbearance and resilience, deepened when people trust and rely on one another for strength and refuge. The power of true compassion to go beyond crises is a fitting conclusion to this book.

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PART I

Contemporary Buddhist Reading of the Crises

I A Humanistic Buddhist Response to Crises through MettāVerses

Introduction

Humanity is currently facing a multitude of crises that have been produced by our actions towards one another and the way many have shaped their relationship with the natural world up until now. We as humans have a duty to interrupt our lives, examine the causes of problems, and search for collective solutions if we are to solve these crises and mend this relationship. Humanistic Buddhism offers a solution – the practice of *mettā*, otherwise known as unconditional loving kindness, to develop wholeness. To reinforce this practice amidst selfish tendencies, communities known as MettāVerses will need to be established.

Interrupting our lives

In 2014, the then President of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), Laurie Zoloth, asked her membership of 10,000 religious studies scholars to interrupt their lives and start again (Zoloth 2016: 24). She was referring to the report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change announcing profound impacts for people and ecosystems globally. Zoloth urged scholars and theologians to rethink their studies of the sacred texts, which were not written for an unstable world faced with disasters such as climate change (Zoloth 2016: 5 & 23). She also predicted a time when scholars would no longer be able to fly to their annual meetings. As it

turned out, in 2020, the annual meeting of AAR was forced to go online, like many other conferences worldwide. Covid-19 interrupted everyone's lives around the world.

The Covid pandemic has had a much wider reach than just academia. German engineer and economist Klaus Schwab initiated the Great Reset through his controversial World Economic Forum, whose strategic partners consist of 100 of the richest and most powerful companies in the world (World Economic Forum 2022). Schwab maintains that the pandemic presents a 'rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine and reset our world' (Schwab 2020).

As profits, power and benefits drive the agendas of political and business leaders, resulting in the cruelty and injustices prevalent in the world, Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875–1961) points to the crux of the problem. In *The Symbolic Life*, Jung wrote, 'Indeed, it is becoming ever more obvious that it is not famine, not earthquakes, not microbes, not cancer but man [sic] himself who is man's greatest danger to man, for the simple reason that there is no adequate protection against psychic epidemics, which are infinitely more devastating than the worst of natural catastrophes' (Jung 2014: 98). The psychic epidemics that Jung refers to have been accelerated in a time where masses of people are caught up in unwholesome mental states such as greed, hatred and delusion.

Buddhist teachings place much emphasis on the mind. A popular Buddhist text, *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, begins with the following (Buddharakkhita 1985: 23):

Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.

Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow.

The root of many human problems, like anthropogenic climate change, lies in the minds of individuals and collectives. Hence, it is not only the external environment that needs to be interrupted to solve these crises.

Our minds, whether individually or collectively, represent a fertile internal environment that also requires moral attention.

Unfortunately, the mental attention needed for moral inquiry is now a scarce commodity. Internet addiction is positively correlated with more severe symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (Wang et al. 2017). Former executive editor of the *Harvard Business Review*, Nicholas Carr, argues that the way we use the internet to quickly access and churn out information has changed our brains to become impatient and shallow data-processing machines (Carr 2010). What emerges is superficial thinking that impedes the ethical thinking needed to resolve major crises. With every passing day, we lose both attention and time to address these issues at a fundamental level.

A Buddhist analysis

Explaining the arising and cessation of experiences: Dependent co-origination

Buddhism offers a philosophical and psychological analysis of the moral landscape confronting humanity. In the opening of the Eighth International Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism, Fo Guang Shan's founder Venerable Master Hsing Yun said that Prince Siddhartha became the Buddha because he was awakened to the Law of Causal Conditions (Hsing Yun 2021). This law accounts for the arising of all worldly phenomena due to a complex network of causes and conditions. Conversely, the Buddha observed that any phenomenon can only cease upon the absence of causes and conditions. Hence, this law is also known as dependent co-origination. This term implies that multiple conditions must co-exist to enable an effect or a phenomenon to occur. This effect, in turn, becomes the condition for something else. Therefore, this world is dynamic and in constant flux, or impermanent. In addition, it shows how all worldly things (whether tangible or intangible) are interdependent or empty in nature. In this way, the plight and goodness that are described

in the preceding section can be explained by the presence and absence of the appropriate causes and conditions.

Dependent co-origination applies to all things big and small. At the root of the issue of our poor behaviour towards each other is delusion. By that is meant ignorance of this law which shapes the nature of all things. This delusion causes a cycle of suffering to flow through planetary life. Buddhists generally believe in and describe the beginning-less and endless cycle of existences (births and deaths) as *samsāra*.

Tracing the root of identity construction in consciousness

The cause of suffering in *samsāra* is what American Buddhist philosopher Jay L. Garfield calls 'primal confusion' (Garfield 2019: 129). This intrinsic confusion about the nature of reality relates to a person's perception of their self and relationship to the world. It leads to an individual's perception of themselves as existing intrinsically, and the rest of the world as being outside and independent. The next question to answer is: Where did this concept of independence or 'self'ishness come from? Since perception is involved, we should look at cognition. As sentient beings, we are constituted by how we respond to and interpret our experiences which come through our sensorium. The sensorium is constituted of a person's sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thought. Consider each of these sensory consciousnesses as a 'seed'. Some schools of Buddhism believe that these seeds are stored in a continuous consciousness stream. When the appropriate conditions arise, these seeds manifest and the consciousness erroneously perceives the manifestation as something intrinsically 'my' or 'mine'. Hence, the concept of a separate self is mistakenly formed. Not only do we not recognize that any feelings or thoughts that arise are not intrinsically mine, we also tend to grasp or appropriate physical objects or ideas that match what we already know (in the storehouse consciousness). This results in a subtle shaping of our identity around what we possess (Lusthaus 2014: 1). We then build up a conventional identity of ourselves based on a projection and reflection of what is in our storehouse consciousness. Buddhists believe that it is only with deep

insight into the true dependent co-origination nature of these psycho-physical processes that one can realize that our identity is nothing more than a social construct (Garfield 2022: 23).

What is the problem with this primal confusion? According to American Zen Buddhist teacher and activist David Loy, people are uncomfortable with knowing that their sense of self is constructed and, hence, empty (Loy 2018: 104–5). As a result, such people feel an inner sense of lacking and wish to fill the void with something acquirable. Individuals become dissatisfied and that discontentment leads to a wish to feel ‘whole’ again. The famous Descartes’ ‘I think, therefore I am’ can be rewritten as ‘I want, therefore I become’ using Buddhist parlance. Such afflictive dispositions to grasp at what we consider necessary for successful identity creation brings about the pattern of cyclic causality, not only within the individual but also collectively. *Saṃsāra* is created when people want more, more and more: never contented with what they have and angry when the craving cannot be satisfied.

For example, if we grow up in a classroom that rewards individual achievements, then we will learn to grasp at high marks. Students are further conditioned to develop a sense of self that is separate from other people and things. If the society that the graduate enters further encourages independence and free will (both of which are intrinsically unreal), the person will become increasingly more selfish. However, if our teachers reward teamwork, then we will learn to build our image around partnership. Hence, our beliefs cause us to embrace certain intentions, which, in turn, result in consequent actions that further feed into our consciousness for the next cycle. As we forge our identity and meaning of the world in our own image, we inevitably also devote our lives to pursue and cling on to it.

Extending the confusion into society and the environment

Capitalist societies encourage individuality, which is like spinning a cocoon and trapping ourselves in it. If a person believes that ‘I’ am the centre of ‘my’ universe, then ‘I’ will make moral choices that I believe will result in the greatest good to me or to my community of interest. In a

society that values independence and measures success by material assets, I will slowly but surely alienate myself from any threats to my security. I will also support systems that I believe will assure my continued success using my privilege. Based on the preceding analysis from a Buddhist lens, a person's identity arises from their interaction with these systemic forces, whether they are on the privileged or under-privileged side of the system. They get entangled by this complex but integrated network of forces built on a misguided sense of a separate and egoistic 'self'. The picture emerging is a world filled with many cocoons, each trying to occupy as much estate as possible, even where there are insufficient resources to sustain this cycle.

Anthropogenic climate change is a result of this individualistic cycle of grasping. Through a capitalist lens, our relationship to the natural world is seen as separate. Our current economic growth model exists under the assumption that there are unlimited natural resources for us to consume (Chelstowski 2012: 91). The more we use, the more corporations profit, and hence, businesses encourage individuals to buy more to fulfil their sense of lack. This feedback loop results in continued destruction of the environment. Logging, deforestation, mining for rare minerals and fossil fuel exploration are acts undertaken under the assumption that the Earth has unlimited resources. This cycle of grasping is not only accelerating climate change but also creating a wedge between humanity and its inherent connection to the environment. In contrast, interconnectedness fosters a moral obligation to care for and nurture the environment. When we as human beings feel a personal connection to the natural world, we are more likely to empathize when it is in danger, acknowledge the risk of collective suffering, and act (Hoot and Friedman 2010: 90).

Loy cautions against this collective sense of separation from other tribes and the natural world and a collective obsession with so-called progress at all costs (Loy 2018: 112). There is collective greed, hatred and delusion. Coupled with the identification of 'our' country, ethnicity, gender, religion, or social status, separatist notions become the norm. Evolutionary biologist Charles Darwin observed that natural selection favours tribes with a high degree of fidelity, obedience, collaboration, and courage (Darwin 1871: 132). Institutions establish systems of self-preservation, very often at

the expense of others in a competitive world. Dualisms abound and are made more powerful with technology. American Buddhist scholar Peter Hershock uses the term ‘karmic accelerator’ to describe how digital technology takes human karma (including its values and intentions) and applies them at machine scale to return them to humans (Hershock 1999: 9).

Dependent co-origination teaches that nothing originates from itself, but everything is dependent on other things for its creation, existence and demise. By this interdependent model, the assumption that ‘I’ am the centre of ‘my’ universe in the preceding example is inherently flawed. Independence, so highly valued in many societies today, will inevitably lead to suffering because it represents ignorance and a questionable moral landscape that results in inequitable distribution of scarce resources. The late Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term ‘interbeing’, based on the Buddhist teachings of dependent co-origination to help people understand that the nature of all things is about interconnectedness.

Interrupting the cycle with the power of generosity

Dependent co-origination can point the way towards a solution to the cause of suffering in *saṃsāra*. According to this Law, the root cause of existence is ignorance, which leads to faulty concepts of reality (Stefon 2012). These in turn provide the structure of knowledge in a person’s consciousness that become conducive to their physical and psychological identity. This identity causes the sensorium to activate when in contact with the external world. This contact results in a feeling that, if favourable, leads to strong thirst for the object perceived. With that craving arises grasping which sets in motion the ‘becoming’ through the birth, ageing, death and other forms of afflictions in the individual. The passage below from the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* indicates how the Buddha has cautioned against harbouring this wrong view, from which it can be difficult to extract oneself.

This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise.

But this generation delights in worldliness (i.e. sense pleasures and the thoughts of craving associated with them), takes delights in worldliness, rejoices in worldliness. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, specific conditionality, or interdependent arising.

And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, Nibbana.

From *Majjhima Nikaya 26 Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*

There are two points to interrupt the cycle of *samsāra*: the point of ignorance and the point of grasping. To break the point of ignorance requires knowledge of dependent co-origination at a very deep level. Meditation, contemplation, and reflective practices to observe how our consciousnesses work are conducive towards such realization. In the preceding passage, it is said that realizing this truth to destroy craving is difficult.

Hence, practitioners can turn to the other cycle-breaker, that is, the point of grasping. The antidote to the habit of appropriating is to give. While most people believe that wholeness can be acquired with possessions, Buddhists know that wholeness or completeness is to be obtained from making boundless affinities. In the context of this chapter, wholeness is defined as being unconfused, unfragmented and unalienated. One way to attain such a state of wholeness is through unconditional giving. Hsing Yun, in the Symposium opening remarks mentioned earlier, encourages his listeners to make good affinities with other people by serving and helping them (Hsing Yun 2021).

Mutual success, as illustrated by the parable of long spoons in heaven and hell, is the best antidote to conditioned selfishness. Imagine hungry beings in hell invited to a feast. Each guest is given a long spoon and a table filled with food. Instinctively, each guest reaches out for their favourite food with the long spoon but try as they may, they cannot put the spoon into their mouth. Hence, the guests get angrier and hungrier as energy is dissipated in snatching at the most delicious morsels, but no one is fed. In heaven, the same feast takes place with hungry heavenly beings also sitting around a table with a long spoon each. However, they know how to cooperate by feeding one another their favourite pieces. Everyone leaves the table happy and satisfied. Mother Earth has offered human beings such a

feast. The storehouse consciousness of each human is the long spoon. In this storehouse are seeds of cooperation and kindness as well as selfishness and anger. Depending on the choice made, the individual can move towards either heaven (wholeness) or hell (fragmentation).

MettāVerses

The Humanistic Buddhist value of mettā (Loving kindness)

In Buddhist terms, *mettā* means unconditional loving kindness. Loving kindness is the alleviation of suffering through the act of giving. In *A Blueprint for Life*, Hsing Yun defines acts of loving kindness as ‘selflessly serving and assisting with wisdom,’ and ‘giving charity without expecting anything in return’ (2008: 73). Unconditional loving kindness is extending friendship to all, as we recognize the interconnectedness that we share with one another and the Earth (Salzberg 2011: 78).

Mettā is a cycle-breaker to the cause of our grasping as human beings. Grasping results from the fear associated with our perception of an independent self, along with our exploitative relationship to the world. *Mettā* assuages this fear as it offers humanity a choice to be responsible, as opposed to being pushed by the cycle of karmic forces. When we, as human beings, break out of our individual cocoons and extend ourselves to assist others through *mettā*, we place ourselves in a position of sufficiency. As opposed to a position of lack, a position of sufficiency implies we understand that we have ‘enough’. When we position ourselves this way, we are less likely to get caught in unwholesome mental states such as greed, hatred and delusion. This is because we no longer need to grasp to fulfil our sense of self and become ‘whole’. *Mettā* is thus the solution to our internal crises that have caused the external problems we face today, such as environmental degradation and pandemics (Shi 2021).

In using *mettā* to restore the internal, and thus external, environments, we as human beings need to make sure that our actions are powered by generosity, not self-interest. We give, not for the feeling that giving offers, but

because that is the right thing to do for our communities and our common humanity (Hsing Yun 2008: 72–3). Luckily for human beings, it is in our nature to respond to the needs of others without wanting something in return (Kohn 1989). A study by psychologist Ervin Staub in the 1970s shed light on how children who had less of a desire or need for approval were more willing to share their lollies than those who had a higher need for approval (Kohn 1989). Studies like this show that when we can act from a position of sufficiency, we are powered by generosity to help others. When people are able to wholeheartedly give to others and the natural world, then they will not endanger this fragile ecosphere.

Interconnectedness and cooperation

Another step towards restoring our internal and external environments is to deeply realize that we are all interconnected, and to use this wisdom to form affinities with one another. Our world exists because we can rely upon one another, be it for food, clothing, transport, or housing (Hsing Yun 2021). Dependent co-origination shows how everything in existence is dependent on other things for its creation, existence and demise. Once we acknowledge that we are interconnected, we can see that making good affinities with one another is the key to mutual success, and the antidote to selfishness. An effective way of forming affinities is by serving and helping others, especially in the form of communities.

It is within our nature to cooperate. Humans invented social institutions to govern what is acceptable across our behavioural practices (Tomasello 2009: xi). Our social institutions involve norms and rules that shape how we organize and interact in matters like marriage, trade and leadership, and most of us agree to follow these rules to conform within society (Tomasello 2009: xi–ii). Further, acts of cooperation and kindness come so natural to human beings that they often go unremarked (Mackay 2021: 43). These acts take form in care work, volunteering, or donating food, clothing, money, or time to an important cause or individual in need. With this, cooperation sets human beings uniquely apart from other species.

Bringing it altogether: MettāVerses as communities of practice

As a result of our cooperation, humans form communities. A community consists of a group of people who may unite over a number of reasons, including common interests, experiences, professions, history, or geographical location. Communities are important as they provide a sense of belonging to their members. They also help us overcome the collective greed we have created as a species, by giving us an opportunity to realize our interconnectedness and cooperate with one another (Mackay 2021: 3). As with the parable of long spoons in heaven, communities provide us with the seeds of cooperation and kindness.

Communities of Practice (CoP) are groups of people with differing levels of expertise, coming together to attend to ill-structured problems through collaborative learning in an environment of safety and trust (Johnson 2001: 45). The notion of CoP was first put forward in 1991 by Lave and Wenger as a social learning theory, that is, learning takes place among people as they conduct joint activities in a CoP (Hanenda 2006).

Breaking the cycle of grasping through the generosity of *mettā* requires effort. Hence, a community of like-minded people with the same learning and practice goal can come together to encourage one another and develop strategies to break the self-centred habit together. Such communities practising *mettā* are known as MettāVerses, a term first introduced at the Eighth International Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism in November 2021. Imagine many tables of heavenly beings feeding one another with their long spoons. That is the MettāVerses. The power of the gift of unconditional loving kindness is what will enable others to feel secure and the benefactor to confirm a position of sufficiency. The mindsets of security and sufficiency together can enable a practitioner to pause and exercise mindfulness, looking deeply into one's perception and cognition to recognize the emptiness and interconnectedness of all phenomena. This insight can then help practitioners to interrupt the cycle of greed, hatred, and ignorance. If compassion is the removing of suffering, then loving kindness is the path that enables compassion to remove the fundamental cause of suffering. MettāVerses are an engine to propel such action.

Nan Tien Institute's CoP conducts weekly 30-minute Sunday check-in sessions as a form of MettāVerses. Global practitioners develop the habit of a mindful pause and enter a safe space to review the conditions that may have caused dissatisfaction and be open to possibilities from others along the path. In the exchange of loving kindness, individuals give and receive much-needed support. Being present, deeply listening to one another, offering words of encouragement, and volunteering to operate the event each week are all gifts of *mettā* that are sincerely appreciated by participants.

Conclusion

And what is the path to the retinue of the High Divinity? Here a bhikkhu (or Buddhist monk) abides with his heart imbued with loving kindness extending over one quarter, likewise the second quarter, likewise the third quarter, likewise the fourth quarter, and so above, below, around, and everywhere and to all as to himself; he abides with his heart abundant, exalted, measureless in loving-kindness, without hostility or ill-will, extending over the all-encompassing world. While this heart-deliverance of loving-kindness is maintained in being in this way, no action restricted by limited measurement is found there, none persists there.

From the Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 99

Wholeness arises from a capacious heart to hold others. If one can hold all others, in every direction, with unconditional loving kindness, that then is true boundless wholeness. The crises that humanity currently face are perfect opportunities to interrupt our lives. The Buddhist Law of Dependent Co-origination reveals that the world we live in, including ourselves, is made of a complex interconnected network of conditions. Ignorance of this nature of reality results in humanity's self-centred appropriation from a position of lack. The Humanistic Buddhist value of *mettā* offers a choice to be responsible and to make wise collective decisions. Knowing how primal and ingrained humanity's selfish tendencies are, Communities of Practice, such as NTI's CoP, help to harness group support for the development of positive virtues. MettāVerses is then the

Humanistic Buddhist response to take this inner revolution into the public sphere with unconditional loving kindness for all. We realize that these are ideal conditions, however, we believe establishing MettāVerses can be the basis for all practical approaches in mending our relationship with one another and the natural world.

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STEPHEN HILL

2 From Self to Our Shared Humanity

Introduction

Whilst mutual care and humanity live within all societies – particularly at the community level, the dynamic of global economics now sets a surrounding global frame for our social relations, values and actions, even the criteria by which we judge ourselves and others. The dynamic of this economic frame is self-interest, and the result is increasing concentration of power and global inequality reinforced by a political ideology of so-called neoliberalism promoting a free market.

Meanwhile, the planet is pillaged for wealth, modern urban living is guided by isolation and ‘showing’ off through possessions, and human values are co-opted, such as love into ‘having’ rather than ‘giving’.

A self-focused future is unsustainable. Covid-19 both deepens this wider crisis and triggers opportunity to change. As in the most common English translation of the Chinese expression for ‘crisis’, ‘*weiji*’, we confront both *danger* and *opportunity* in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis.

As this chapter shows, what we find when we explore the opportunity when everything is thrown in the air is that the power to heal our fractured society lies in the depth of our humanity. So, the core question becomes ‘how do we turn the “frame” for our humanity – currently dominated by self-interest economics – the other way around, so the “frame” for our economic relations becomes our humanity?’ The power of our humanity is deeply expressed in the values of Humanistic Buddhism – trust into agreements, community, sharing and care into living and relations with others and our environment.

This chapter moves on to demonstrate how we can capitalize on this ‘opportunity’ through refocusing global economic and social agenda – towards

the ‘local’ and community, building capacity, long-term creative thinking, attention to sustainability, and applying Humanistic Buddhist values to everything. Shaping a new economics, ‘Humanity Economics’, that can handle crises through human action, and sustainability through cooperative relationships, is *compassion!*

Rise of the rule of the self

Mainstream neo-classical economists, in general, and unquestioning participants in the economic system, do not seem to realize how close they are to the abyss – partying on in the excitement of stock market gambling, powering global influence for separate economic advantage, living the profits-supported ‘good life’ ... whilst the luxury bus in which they travel together is carrying them, and us, towards an un-crossable precipice – absolute limits to growth-based economic enterprise. (Hill 2022a: 4)

Increasingly, the world *is* waking up. Recent dramatic impacts of climate change are rubbing it in our faces: tropical level temperatures in the UK, unprecedented floods and fires in the US, Australia and elsewhere, evidence of ice caps rapidly melting, oceans rising and species disappearing are all triggering awareness of climate change. Jonathon Page has given us an excellent summary of the problem in his chapter in this book: ‘profligate over-consumption of materials and energy and the generation of waste’ which is ‘vastly in excess of the regenerative and assimilation capacities of the ecosphere’ (Page 2023: 60).

Change is starting to happen. The United Nations is paying particular attention. Antony Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, calls the very clear scientific evidence of climate change ‘a Code Red for Humanity’ (IPCC 2021; Slezak and Timms 2021). But there is not yet full revolution in the social dynamic which is causing these threats, and time is running out.

At heart is the *self-focused* rather than *sharing care* of our global economic system over the last 300 years. Its dynamic was first observed by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations*, originally published in 1767, as an

‘invisible hand’ which harmonized resource allocation through trade by *selfish* economic agents:

... by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain; and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest, he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. (Smith 2005: 364)

Smith therefore saw self-interest as at the core of emerging capitalist economics, but still sought balance of altruistic good against the self-interest dynamic which he recognized as the driver of the economy – though this altruistic good was an unintentional by-product. Indeed, his concern with the morality of the economic system he described was a life-long challenge for him. As I have noted previously in *The Kyoto Post-COVID Manifesto for Global Economics*:

Before he wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith had written another book, ‘*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*’, in which he emphasized the need for ‘empathy’ or ‘sympathy’ and ‘suppressing selfish behaviour’ if a ‘peaceful state of the market’ was to be attained. He continued to pay attention to this ‘Moral Sentiment’ concern and continued to revise the book from its initial publication in 1757 right up until his death. (Hill 2022b: 6)

Adam Smith’s caution was well judged. But what Smith was unable to see back in the late eighteenth century was how powerfully the self-interest dynamic of the market would impact on wider morality as it increasingly dominated not just within economic exchange but across society as a whole. This market dynamic developed a tight ideological grip over the twentieth century, in particular when ‘neoliberalism’, or ‘free-market capitalism’, an idea brought into the mainstream in the nineteenth century, was then relied on as response in recovering from the 1930s Great Depression – favouring free-market capitalism, deregulation and reduction in government spending and control. The market’s self-focused dynamic matters now not only in contracts and purchase of goods and services, but more fundamentally because it then becomes the cultural

'frame' within society and around social exchange that sets the limits of what is accepted and taken for granted – an 'organising dynamic' of human relations generally, as noted by Mark Carney, former governor of the Bank of England (Carney 2020a). The assumed dynamic of following free-market rules then can penetrate very deeply into social morality to the point where people following the rules may not even see how badly they affect others. Quoting Carney again:

When bankers become disconnected from their ultimate clients in the real economy, they have no direct view of their impact. Before this crisis (the 2008 implosion of the world banking system), traders began to see the numbers on their screen as a game to be won, ignoring the consequences of their actions for hundreds of millions of mortgage holders and company borrowers. (Carney 2020b)

But let me be clear. Our *sharing humanity* is not extinguished – particularly at the community level where people interact directly with each other and can demonstrate their genuine care for each other. In some national cultures, religious-based practices and values may fundamentally structure daily life. Buddhism, as example, can be central in peoples' lives – via different forms, in Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Japan and the tiny, very remote Himalayan 'happiness-oriented' kingdom of Bhutan. Some more remote indigenous communities still remain only marginally influenced by the exchange dynamic of international economic relations. Indeed, across all societies, people may demonstrate immediate genuine care for each other as was the case when Covid-19 impacted on the Philippines in 2020, seriously limiting access to food for a considerable number of the poorer people. Starting from a single woman, Ana Patricia Non, who could see clearly, a local-community-based movement, the 'Community Pantry', exploded across the country to share, and is discussed in Cecilia Manikan's chapter fourteen (Manikan 2023). Meanwhile, even in modern business, movements are emerging to counter the negative products of unquestioned self-interest, such as the circular economy total-recycling initiative, which emerged out of Europe and is now spreading worldwide (Kosir 2022). Even so, we must not forget, as Hugh Mackay observes, 'we used to live in a society. Now we live in an economy' (Mackay 2007).

As I emphasized earlier, it matters then that the economic self-focus dynamic therefore ‘frames’ our daily lives, our connectedness with others, and morality, in ways we may not notice¹ – and this is a source of great wealth for those in control. For example, in many new housing estates in countries like Australia or the US it is economically more efficient, and therefore of greater profit for the developers, to build separate dwellings lined up along the street and *pay no attention* to building social connectedness or community-enhancing space. Maintaining separateness, even between neighbours, is good for business too as it fosters a need to ‘show off’ our self through (purchased) status symbols rather than humanitarian inter-subjective strength and wisdom and care.

Furthermore, self-interest increasingly lies behind contemporary communication through the role that has emerged over the last few decades of social media in relating to others, and social media is driven by profit for the owners – of Facebook, Amazon, Google, Twitter and so on – across the whole world, even into interactions in very poor countries. Truth suffers as assertions do not need to be accompanied by prior tests but are valued by ‘viral’ explosions of interest – the number of ‘hits’ they receive, the more the better for business profit. Viral hits are a measure of popularity rather than reality and are very likely influenced by what people *want* to believe, particularly when backed by concerted media hype. So, as invented in 2017 by counsellor to US President Donald Trump, Kellyanne Conway, ‘alternative facts’ now exist though a total self-contradiction (NBC 2017).

Meanwhile, *love* is turned into its opposite – into possession. *Having*, for example, a large number of Facebook friends or a relationship where we *possess* the other – under legal contract, rather than *giving* care without looking for payback. Or *advertisements for personal products* selling *self-fantasy* – recapturing youth and a positive appearance as age otherwise starts to make us look old.

Gawaine Powell Davies observes a critical consequence in chapter 9 of the present book. With our humanity buried beneath a shelter of self-focus, the institutions we have created feed this system. *Responding to the*

1 For a more developed account of the following summary points, see Hill (2022a: 7–9).

interconnected rapidly exploding environmental and human crises we now must deal with 'is made more difficult when our social, political and governance functions are *not fit for purpose*' (Powell Davies 2023 – my italics).

Confronting inequity and disadvantage

What most impedes the ability to make change happen towards a truly sharing, compassionate society is that the self-focused dynamic of global economics intrinsically produces massive inequality, a thin minority of the *most* wealthy and powerful. Its moral dynamic is to make the system even *more* beneficial for the very, very few, supported by the 'free-market' illusion that *anyone* can succeed – even though one needs capital, connections and knowledge to even get in the door. And then those at the top, by various controls, call the shots, further securing their competitive advantage.

As examples:

Oxfam International concluded in 2017 that *eight men* control as much wealth as 50 per cent of the rest of the world's people (Oxfam International 2017). Three, 'just *three* giant American Asset Managers: Blackrock, Vanguard and State Street ... [control] nearly US\$11 trillion in assets under management' on the US stock market (Fichtner et al. 2019 – emphasis added). And that includes 90 per cent of America's largest corporations, thus exercising coordinated power over the decisions of the whole stock market (Fichtner et al. 2017; Fichtner et al. 2019). Most significantly, when wealthy corporations are in control, even the present Covid-19 pandemic is more a source of profit than of difficulty and loss for the wealthy. As of 27 November 2022, 646,050,236 people have caught the Covid-19 virus worldwide and 6,636,032 have died – though with reporting shortfalls in poor countries in particular, these figures could be considerably higher (Worldometer 2022). Yet it was reported earlier, in 2020, that thirty-two of the world's largest companies stood to see their profits jump by US\$109 billion *more* in 2020 compared to 2019 (Gneiting et al. 2020). As owners

and shareholders of large corporations, the ten richest men doubled their fortunes during the first two years of the Covid-19 pandemic from \$700 billion to \$1.5 trillion – at a rate of \$15,000 per second. Meanwhile the Covid-19 pandemic has caused the incomes of 99 per cent of humanity to fall – forcing 160 million more people into poverty (Berkhout et al. 2021; Oxfam 2022a).²

Elon Musk, co-founder and CEO of Tesla, and Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, the first (and, previously first, then second, now fourth) richest men in the world, are leaders – with Musk having a current 2022 net worth of US\$191.2 billion, compared to Bezos's US\$116.8 billion³ – though their relative place in the hierarchy of riches keeps changing as their market investments fluctuate. Bezos *was* the richest person on earth within the last two years, and guess where a large proportion of his recent wealth came from. The share price of Amazon, his company, jumped 76 per cent because of the increase in online shopping along with lockdowns and isolation caused by Covid-19 until late 2020. US\$92 billion in only five months – from 18 March to 20 August 2020, an increase in wealth which *capitalized on the Covid-19 pandemic*. Meanwhile, Musk's shares and Space-X valuation took him into the lead by 2022 (Dolan et al. 2020; Moskowitz 2022). We still need to see where Musk's 28 October 2022 takeover of Twitter will leave him on the billionaire wealth stakes – particularly after responding to negative feedback from shareholders. He offered his retirement as chief executive two months later on 21 December 2022, conditional on someone he approved coming along to replace him. This is still, however, a show of the power of the mega-mega rich to control so many others based on their *personal* judgement.

And where is Jeff Bezos while the world desperately suffers? Launching into space on 20 July 2021 to 'play' in his 'New Shepard Rocket Ship' and

2 The Oxfam estimates are based on World Bank projections and earlier research by the World Bank and Centre for Global Development. The report was released 12 April 2022, ahead of the spring meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. See also Hardoon (2017) and Oxfam (2017).

3 Forbes (2023).

inaugurate a multi-multi-billion-dollar tourist industry for the mega rich. In response to criticism, he declared just after he returned to earth:

We need to take all heavy industry, all polluting industry and move it into space, and keep Earth as this beautiful gem of a planet it is. (Rincon 2021)

Do you know, that doesn't seem all that realistic when by 2050 we could need three earth planets' worth of resources just to produce what we need and get rid of the rubbish (Pond and Butler 2021)! Meanwhile, whilst 8.6 per cent of the world's people barely survive on less than US\$1.90 per day, Jeff Bezos was making US\$8.9 million per hour. His employees, such as dock workers, have to work for US\$15.00 per hour, or US\$20,000 per year. He thanked them along with all Amazon employees, for the funding for his trip into space. I guess he was not feeling too guilty about making more than a half million times more per hour than these US\$15 per hour Amazon employees whose labour was funding his extra-terrestrial play (Hoffower 2019).

There could be no better signal of the massive inequality which follows from this self-focused world order when, below where these space rockets play, 860 million people live in *extreme poverty* with incomes less than US\$1.90 per day (up from 689 million less than a year ago), a population number which has been additionally driven by the twin forces of price-inflation due to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the economic crisis caused by Covid-19. *Meanwhile*, a new person has become a billionaire every 26 hours since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic (World Vision 2021; Oxfam 2022b; DownToEarth 2022).

Green shoots for change

If, however, we reverse the observation I reported earlier from Hugh Mackay about living in an economy now, and seek to move back out of an economic frame and *see* through the alternate lens focused on our humanity rather than self-interest, we can start to see real possibilities for change.

(1) A lesson from human communities which survive long-term:

Here, we find the long-term stability of several thousand years of T'ai chi influenced Chinese history and culture anchored in the critical importance of *balance* within the all-encompassing sphere of heaven, earth and person – which are constantly emerging and transforming – thus the need to harmonize community life with environment *long-term*, and escape being taken hostage by self-interest, in particular, in achieving *harmonization over time* with both community and environment (Hill et al. 2022).

Extending much further into long-term human history, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait people have, as the National Indigenous Australian Agency (NIIA) demonstrates, actively and successfully managed their lands and waters for over 60,000 years by harmonized indigenous practices (2022).

(2) The alternate power of our humanity:

Our source for renewal has always been there. Chinese T'ai-chi Society and Australia's First Nation People lived it, and Adam Smith at least glimpsed its edge when exploring his ethical concern with his 'hidden hand' observation in his 1757 *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith 2009) – our Humanity – caring, sharing – valuing each other rather than just *me: harmonization!* Our goal instead of a *self*-driven economy and society, has to be to build into *all* relationships, including economic, the power of our humanity expressed as in the values of Humanistic Buddhism – trust into agreements, community, sharing and care into living and relations with others – including economic – and nurture into our environment. Authenticity and integrity into our actions. As I observed recently as basic principle 2 of the original *Kyoto Manifesto for Global Economics*, Our 'humanity' is 'what we *can* be as a human race, empowered, fulfilled individuals, whose own identity and meanings are deeply woven into caring and sharing with others across our separate cultural worlds' (Hill 2018a: 297). 'Economic activity must be built with

human spirituality as its centre, not as an accidental or marginalized by-product' (Hill et al. 2018: 528).

(3) Signs of hope:

Now comes the good news. We may have already started on this path – stimulated by recognition *within the culture of economics itself*. Already the traditional singularly economics-focused indicators of welfare, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) have been sidelined in the United Nations by the 'The World Happiness Report' – which graduated onto the world stage in 2012 out of long-term use in the tiny Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.⁴ OECD, the Organisation of Economic Development, is now following suit – moving on from narrowly constructed economic indicators to a broader field of wellbeing indicators – including sustainable and social progress, household income, inequalities, economic and subjective wellbeing including 'trust' and 'social capital' (Stiglitz et al. 2018). Add to this, *value* in the post-2000s economy is increasingly drawn from creativity, the individual, and the supportive nurture of their community (Denniss 2020).

Most importantly, traditional Japanese industry is bringing into the present day a practical demonstration in their '*Sanpo-Yoshi*' or *Triple Win* Concept – of a more human and caring economic strategy which works. Practised originally in Japan's seventeenth to nineteenth-century Edo period, when newly emerging Omi Shonin itinerant traders needed to establish an advance reputation of *trust* in order to arrive as strangers to communities and succeed, sellers, buyers and society are treated with equal

4 The United Nations General Assembly stimulated the new perspective on welfare to take off in Resolution 65/309, July 2011, 'Happiness: Towards a Holistic Definition of Development', which called on Member States to measure happiness and include it into public policy. This initiative was then followed by the first UN High Level Meeting, 'Defining a New Economic Paradigm: The Report of the high-Level Meeting on Wellbeing and Happiness', chaired by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and Prime Minister of Bhutan, Jigme Thinley. See, UN General Assembly (2011) and UN High Level Meeting (2012).

care to maintain harmony. Support for the local community and responsible use of nature are basic, and, in particular, *trust* is essential – all towards *harmony* (Yagi and Yamash'ta 2022).

So, already in place and spreading, we find economics based on *trust* and *care*. The objective is that *everyone benefits*. But then we come to the clincher. Perhaps surprisingly, the Covid-19 pandemic may be a game-changer that helps to make this transformation to more humanitarian values happen. We can take heart from the most familiar translation into English of the Chinese word for 'crisis', '*weiji*', which was introduced in the opening to this chapter. *Weiji* means both 'danger' and 'opportunity'. Everything is thrown into the air and is open to change. Green shoots of potentially major reform are already emerging. Hugh Mackay says this well, reflecting on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as early as May 2020:

This is an opportunity to reflect – perhaps to rethink our values, reset our priorities and reconsider the ways we approach our relationships, our work, our institutions. How should we respond to this heightened sense of our interconnectedness? (Mackay 2020)

Major world economists are also tuning in. Economists Paul Collier and John Kay conclude in their July 2020 book, *Greed is Dead*, 'as the world emerges from an unprecedented crisis we have the chance to examine society afresh and build a politics beyond individualism' (Collier and Kay 2020). Dr Mark Carney, who I quoted earlier, now an environmental economics consultant to the United Nations, carries his 'economics as organising framework for humanity' philosophy forward into UN interventions where he emphasizes that in developing our future now, 'we need to act as an interdependent community, not as independent individual' (Carney 2020a; Carney 2020b).

Finally, the source of economic value in the two thousand and twenties is no longer led by heavy fire-breathing industry as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but increasingly by individuals, creativity, and the nurturing community which surrounds them (Denniss 2020; Hill et al. 2022). A humanity revolution can only come from where the people are together – *communities*.

At core, the power of each other

This is where you and I come in, building the economy of *our* community – building humanistic values of mutuality and sharing, care, *trust*, concern for *all* – into the ‘local’ rather than let our economic and social lives continue to be dominated by impersonal self-serving rules from distant elites. Then we can make what we do in *our* community spread.

(1) *Personal action*: Here, the words (and life) of Indian Sage, Mahatma Gandhi, are inspiring: ‘You must BE what you want to change’ (Gandhi 2021). To which I would add Hugh Mackay’s support in the concluding words of his recent book, *The Kindness Revolution*:

If we dare to dream of a more loving country – kinder, more compassionate, more cooperative ... more inclusive ... more harmonious ... there’s only one way to start turning the dream into reality: each of us must live *as if* this is already that country. If enough of us live like that – and, in turn, demand that our elected representatives embrace those same values and aspirations – change will come. Revolutions never start at the top. (Mackay 2021: 245)

(2) *Social context and community*: With sharing at the centre of what our humanity means, we need to pay attention to strengthening the community – by taking initiatives to engage people in sharing, bring in resources to support enterprise and creativity, and remember, as Hugh Mackay (2021) stresses, kindness is the currency of daily life. At the centre of transformation is compassion – for those around us. Also, we need to reflect more broadly and pay attention to expanding what works locally to other communities through demonstration and bringing others in to visit.

I am not talking just from theory, but as part of my previous United Nations responsibility in Jakarta, Indonesia, through the 1990s and 2000s. As one example, we worked with a number of communities on the islands of Jakarta Bay and in the city, and local markets, to gain their commitment to recycling and nature sustaining practice. Our greatest success was with the people of the urban village, Banjarsari, to transform it through full community participation and training, from a low income heavily polluted area, into what became Jakarta’s official ecotourism site – with health, art and plant-related businesses and up to 250 visitor groups a year

from across Indonesia and beyond, spreading the word to other communities (Hill 2018b).

The circle of wholeness

At the centre of the transformation towards a compassionate, harmonious, sharing society that I am arguing for is ourselves and the local community. The most powerful way we can throw off the shackles of our current global self-interest-based global economic frame, is to take the advice of Mahatma Gandhi and Hugh Mackay and BE the change, live as though this *is* our world and build the power of sharing into our own surrounding community.

I see then that moving from ‘the world of self’ to *creating* the ‘world of our humanity’ is a transition into what I call ‘the circle of wholeness’, otherwise what could be called ‘compassion-in-action’ (Hill 2022b). I see that the circle of wholeness represents the full power of our existential being as social human persons – inclusivity of our full sharing and care for others, of guidance from the many domains of human knowledge connecting in overall harmony, with caring and knowledge held in relationship by the ‘circle’s’ central point, or ‘focus’ – integrity and trust. At the centre of the circle therefore is our humanity’s truth – action based on *compassion*. As leader of the Fo Guang Shan Humanistic Buddhism Movement, Venerable Master Hsing Yun reminds us, not for a deal but as a gift anchored in honesty and integrity:

Loving-kindness and compassion
are like a priceless passport
a person may own nothing
but no matter where they go
happiness and safety will follow. (Hsing Yun 2019: 90)

Loving kindness and compassion: these are the values of Humanistic Buddhism, and for that matter, are at the core of most contemporary religions and humanity’s spirituality – the future platform for The New Economics.

To circle back to the starting points of this chapter, the impoverishment of our humanity and even the very real spectre of the extinction of the human species due primarily to the products of a self-interest-based economy, I only need to add as guide to an alternate future, the wise words of the Dalai Lama XIV:

Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries.

Without them, humanity cannot survive. (Dalai Lama and Cutler 2019)

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LEN FISHER

3 Compassion and Kindness as Tools for Transformation

Introduction

How can we transform current socio-economic systems, where the ‘free market’ is founded on the pursuit of individual self-interest, to a state that gives priority to cooperative care and support for each other and for the world as a whole?

It is a problem that was recognized by Adam Smith, originator of the concept of the free market (Fosier 2013). As pointed out by Stephen Hill in chapter 2, Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776), often quoted in support of the greed creed, was the second book in a trilogy about how societies should work. In its predecessor, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith specifically argued against this creed. ‘Concern for our own happiness [i.e. self-interest]’, he said, ‘recommends to us ... concern for that of other people [and] the virtues of justice and beneficence ... of which the one restrains us from hurting, the other prompts [us] to promote that happiness’ (Smith 1759: 262).

Smith warned that markets based on the rational pursuit of self-interest pose special dangers for the poorer classes, unless guided by such an overarching moral stance (Fosier 2013). But how can that moral stance be introduced into a market-based economy, with cooperative care and support for each other, as a basis? Here I argue that the virtues of loving kindness and compassion which lie at the heart of the Buddhist philosophy, as expressed in the concepts of *mettā* and *karuna*, can be used as tools to drive the transition when viewed through the prism of modern network theory (Fisher 2009).

As expressed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun (2021), ‘loving kindness and compassion are forms of wealth common to all beings ... Loving kindness means bringing happiness to others, and compassion means alleviating the sufferings of others; upon seeing others in pain, one is willing to remove their sufferings and give them joy’.

Hsing Yun’s description of loving kindness and compassion is remarkably similar to Smith’s portrayal of the effects of justice and beneficence, in both cases leading to cooperative care and support for each other. Unfortunately, in the market context, this essential juxtaposition of market and morality has been overlooked or ignored by most modern free-market economists and politicians. Many economists leave considerations of the wider society out of their economy-targeted equations, while the attention of most politicians is often focused on stimulating economic benefits for immediate economic advantage.

The situation *has* to change, especially with the recognition by scientists and others across a whole spectrum of disciplines that morality is a central issue in dealing with the many threats that the world now faces.

As pointed out by my colleague Anders Sandberg, a senior research fellow at Oxford University’s Future of Humanity Institute, and his colleague João Fabiano (Sandberg and Fabiano 2017), humanity’s inability to cooperate on an international scale has become a major concern. Philosophers Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu (2008) have argued that we are not equipped with the right set of traits and morals to solve this problem, and that we have a moral imperative to pursue moral enhancement – that is, the improvement of our moral dispositions.

According to Nick Bostrom (2014), head of the Future of Humanity Institute, this is a philosophical problem with a deadline. *Guardian* columnist Jill Lepore (2021) argues, along the lines of Adam Smith, that what’s needed is nothing less than a new social contract – a position that directly aligns with Stephen Hill’s call for change in Chapter 2. There is no need to labour the point. For anyone with eyes to see, transformation is now not just an option. It is a necessity (Lepore 2021).

It is easier to state the problem than it is to solve it. How are we supposed to pursue ‘moral enhancement’? How are we supposed to generate

a ‘new social contract’? The Buddhist nun, Venerable Thubten Chodron (2022), in line with other Buddhist activists, argues that compassion, often paired with loving kindness, is not only suitable for practitioners holding a Buddhist worldview but also possible and beneficial for anyone wishing to cultivate it in a secular context. I argue in this chapter that the moral values of *kindness* and *compassion*, as expressed in the Buddhist concepts of *mettā* and *karuna*, have an important role to play by acting as enablers for social change.

That change must happen within the context of increasing interconnectedness in our global socio-economic-ecological world. An important recent study (Hébert-Dufresne et al. 2022) makes this point specifically when it shows that changes in our individual behaviour and in our group (institutional) behaviour are linked in a *feedback loop* where each feeds off the other:

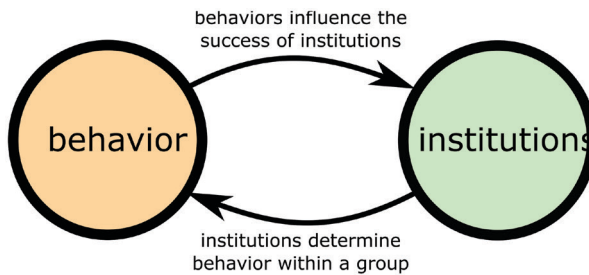


Figure 3.1. Feedback between individuals and institutions (Hébert-Dufresne et al. 2022). Reproduced with permission.

But things will just go around and around, like a whirlpool below a rock in a stream, unless some new factor is introduced to change individual behaviours, institutional values, or both.

That factor is us. As the cognitive scientist and social critic Noam Chomsky has pointed out, ‘the way things change is because lots of people are working all the time, and they’re working in their communities or their workplace or wherever they happen to be, and they’re building up the basis for popular movements’ (Jones 2020).

Hébert-Dufresne and his colleagues (2022) have added an important level of concrete detail to Chomsky's vision with their discovery that there is a critical threshold for the rate of transmission of change, above which change takes off. I argue here that *mettā* and *karuna* may be seen as tools to help us reach that threshold by catalysing, promoting and enabling trust between connected individuals within our social networks. To quote Chomsky once again, 'I think of love as something strong and that organizes itself into powerful, direct action' (Jones 2020).

The network of the world

Change needs to travel through our social networks. So how can we view those networks, and what do we know about the processes involved?

Some Buddhist traditions describe the interconnectedness of the world through the beautiful metaphor of Indra's net. The net is infinitely large, with a multifaceted jewel at each junction, and each jewel is placed so that it is reflected in all of the other jewels.

The jewels are ourselves, and every other member of the world, living and non-living. Everything is connected to everything else. Everything interacts with and ultimately affects everything else. Nothing and no one is isolated.

The modern science of complexity also uses the image of a net to understand how our increasingly interconnected world functions (Veidlinger 2018). The individual members, like Indra's jewels, occupy the junctions. The links between them represent interactions. Some members may have many links – such members are called *influencers*. Others may have just a few, or even only one.

Scientists call the resultant network a *complex adaptive network*. It is *adaptive* because the nature and strength of the links can change in response to circumstance. Links may become stronger or weaker, or change in character. New links may form, and old links may disappear. This can

lead to incredible and often unpredictable *complexity* in the arrangement and nature of those links.¹

When an action elicits a reaction, which then stimulates a further action, we call the overall process a *feedback loop*. Our global networks are full of such loops. They are one of the reasons why it can be impossible to predict the behaviour of the network as a whole. But we don't need to understand the details here. All we need to know is that our *actions* can affect the nature and strength of our *interactions*, and that feedback loops play a very important part in determining how things turn out.

This doesn't just apply to our immediate neighbours. There can be long-range, knock-on effects that travel from vertex to vertex along cord after cord until they affect something in the distance that you are not directly connected to, or even aware of.

Complexity scientists ask two deceptively simple questions: how do networks evolve and change as a result of interactions between their members and what can individuals do influence the outcome?

There is a huge amount of work going on as scientists, philosophers, economists, social analysts and others seek answers to these questions. The answer to the first question is that it is literally impossible to predict the long-term future of our social, economic and ecological networks, because cause and effect become so entangled that they are impossible to disentangle (Helbing 2011). The answer to the second question is that there is, nevertheless, still quite a lot that individuals can do if they go about it in an insightful way.

As an example of the complexities involved, we may consider the Brazilian rainforest (Liu et al. 2015). At one level, it provides an important reservoir for carbon capture and species habitats, and hence has obvious potential effects on climate change and biodiversity. But it goes further than that. The deforestation provides land for soybean production, most of which goes to China. If that trade stopped, China would turn elsewhere. 'Elsewhere' in this case means sub-Saharan Africa, and this is where things start to get complex. Land clearance for more agriculture at the edge of the Sahara produces dust that gets blown all the way to Brazil and the

1 For a more detailed discussion see Fisher (2009).

Caribbean. In Brazil it actually *improves* forest productivity. But in the Caribbean it contributes to the decline in coral reefs. This now affects China and Brazil, because both of them have invested heavily in Caribbean tourism.

The world is full of such examples, which defy traditional logic. The intertwined effects are simply too difficult to untangle, and it can be impossible to predict how a small change in one part of a system may affect other, distant parts. This means that the top-down planning and control on which most current political systems are based just can't work. We need to find other ways to influence our future – ways that we can use as individuals, and as small groups of individuals; ways that are based on the reality of complex interconnected networks, rather than the hopeful and outdated dogmas of politicians and classical economists.

Modern network science offers two such approaches. One involves interacting with people who think very differently from ourselves, or whom we don't know. The other involves support and love for those who do share our beliefs. Both approaches can benefit from the values of *mettā* and *karuna*.

The power of the gift

How can we reach people who think very differently from ourselves, or whose values we do not know? Network scientists speak of the role of influencers and spreaders in influencing opinion (Nature 2021), although one problem with spreading new ideas is that people are increasingly deriving their information from limited sources with whose attitudes they agree (Raza 2021). Logical strategies are being developed to slow or block the resultant polarization, but there is a long way to go in adopting such strategies (Axelrod et al. 2021). *Mettā* and *karuna* offer a different opportunity – one that recognizes the power and value of human feelings. According to the insightful Dutch complexity scientist Marten Scheffer and his colleagues (2021), there has been a 'marked shift in public interest from the collective to the individual, and from rationality

toward emotion' so that 'societies may need to find a new balance, explicitly recognizing the importance of intuition and emotion, while at the same time making best use of the much needed power of rationality and science'. The public may thus be more ready to embrace the emotions of kindness and compassion than used to be the case.

One effective approach where these values come into play is what Stephen Hill and colleagues (2022: 342) call 'the power of the gift'. The power of the gift refers to situations where one offers something freely, with no thought of or interest in reward. Stephen relates it to *metta*, and has listed many examples from his experience as a United Nations ambassador (2022). Let me also offer an example from my own experience. Long ago, I was attempting to make science accessible and freely available to non-scientists by showing how scientists think about everyday problems. In fact, I tried to use physics to work out the best way to dunk a biscuit in a cup of tea (Fisher 2002).

The story made the newspapers, and I received a letter out of the blue from boy called Chao Quan – a 12-year-old schoolboy at an inner-London comprehensive. He thought that my equation was wrong, and asked me to send him some biscuits for noticing this.

My gift to him, an action of both of *mettā* and *karuna*, was a letter where I explained the science more fully, and an apology that I had eaten all of the biscuits. Twelve years later I received an email from that same schoolboy, saying that my letter had changed his life and given him the confidence to go forward with studies in science. The email was addressed Oriel College, University of Oxford. I still get a tear in my eye when I think of that story. But there is more. Chao is now a doctor in Hong Kong, where he is leading a research team studying the sort of incipient diabetes that I now have. So it is possible that my actions may come back to benefit me through a long, complex and totally unpredictable circular route. Kindness and compassion, *mettā* and *karuna*, were all that it took to establish this circular chain of consequence. Chains of consequence and the routes that they take were the subject of a study by the Australian network scientist Duncan Watts and his American colleague Steve Strogatz (1998). If we only rely on passing things from nearest neighbour to nearest neighbour, then it can take a long time for a message to travel any (social) distance. But

Watts and Strogatz found a way around this. They called it the ‘small world’ model. It caused a revolution in the way that we think about networks.

What Watts and Strogatz did was to take an ordinary network and add just a few extra long-range links between distant parts. This meant that information, effects and influences could be shared through just a few steps, so long as one of those steps is the long-range one.

Communicating with distant ‘others’

All we need to do is to think of ‘long range’, not in terms of distance between neighbours, but in terms of distance between *beliefs*. It means that an important route for initiating change lies in making an effort to establish long-range links with people who think and act differently from ourselves. To take our Brazilian rainforest example, active support for the indigenous peoples of the rainforest, who live such different lives, could be essential to the preservation of that environment.

As experienced workers in the field have pointed out, such support should not be offered from a position of superiority, or it is likely to be rejected. Instead, we should listen and learn with humility to what indigenous knowledge has to offer (David-Chavez 2022), and offer Western science via ‘the power of the gift’ – an example of *mettā* and *karuna* in action.

Support and love for those who share our beliefs

The Buddhist values of *mettā* and *karuna* are not the province of Buddhism alone. Many societies and social systems, such as Humanism in the West, share them. But, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, they are not only to be valued for their moral virtue. They have a strong role to play in helping to bring us to the tipping point where transformation can begin to travel through and permeate our social networks.

Mettā and *karuna* are especially important in providing mutual support when we are trying to reach a critical mass of people (Hébert-Dufresne et al. 2022), who in Chomsky’s words ‘are working all the time’ for change (Jones 2020). They can provide support and encouragement for those

who are already enlisted, and help to enlist those whose attitudes reflect our own. It is those moral values that we wish to transmit, but only when a critical mass of individuals is reached does it become feasible to use them to generate a transformative force from below.

Interactions between groups of people (known technically as *higher order* interactions) are known to contribute significantly to the evolution of collective behaviour (Battiston et al. 2021). In particular, *binding moral values gain importance in the presence of close others* (Yudkin et al. 2021). This wonderful discovery closes the loop between the logic of networks and the spiritual values of *mettā* and *karuna* that characterize Buddhist practice.

The practical message is to get involved in groups – both those with whom you share values, so as to strengthen those values, but also with groups those whose attitudes you hope to change.

The importance of such transformations is especially important in generating equality – a notion that is itself a natural outcome of *mettā* and *karuna*. But the transformation will not be an easy one. As pointed out by Marten Scheffer and his colleagues, inequality is a natural outcome of chance processes, and it takes positive steps to overcome it:

‘In a globalizing world’, they argue ‘wealth will inevitably be appropriated by a very small fraction of the population unless effective wealth-equalizing institutions emerge at the global level’. (Scheffer et al. 2017)

The positive steps must begin, I suggest, with *mettā* and *karuna*, both among those who share our attitudes, and freely offered to those who do not. Cooperative care and support for each other and for the world as a whole begin with us as individuals, but must eventually permeate the world to which we all belong.

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4 A Humanistic Buddhist Approach to the Contemporary Climate Crisis

Introduction

The looming presence of the climate crisis now confronts humanity with utter inevitability and lethality. The accumulation of increasingly precise scientific knowledge on climate change over recent decades has induced more anxiety, reticence and political paralysis than expeditious correction of the underlying behaviours. A careful examination of the latest data confirms our predicament to be dire, with no realistic possibility of salvation. Those culpable, predominantly in the global North, have condemned all humanity, north and south, plus innumerable other innocent non-human species, to a bleak future. Even in this parlous environment, Humanistic Buddhism has very much to offer and can contribute greatly to the processes of psycho-spiritual adaptation, the development of substantial, if temporary, ecological recovery and the establishment of a culture of compassion, social harmony, equality, equity and courage; through the promotion of *Bodhicitta* and related pro-social activity, both locally and globally.

The intimate relationship of Humanistic Buddhism with the environment dates back to the original teachings of the Buddha, and indeed that relationship was essentially one of unity, humanity as interconnected with the world.

Humanistic Buddhist deep ecology

The Buddha's actual teachings confirm the deep respectful relationship of humanity with the 'natural world' within which it resided. Amongst many other examples recorded, the *Ahina Sutta: By a Snake* (AN 4.67) states: 'may all creatures, all breathing things, all beings, each and every one, meet with good fortune. May none of them come to any evil' (Thanissaro 2013). The *Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8) contains:

Whatsoever living beings exist, without exception, whether weak or strong,
whether tall and large, middle-sized, or short,
whether very subtle or very gross, whether visible or invisible,
dwelling far away or not far away, whether born already or not yet born,
may all beings be happy in themselves. (Olendzki 2010)

Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (second century CE) writes: 'the essential nature of all bodhisattvas is a great compassionate heart, and all living beings are the object of her compassion' (Nagarjuna and Pandita 1994). Contemporary Buddhists have built on this teaching as we confront the global challenges of our times. In about 1965, during the 'American' (Vietnam) War, the late Thich Nhat Hanh described this unity with nature as 'interbeing'. His book *Interbeing*, in its 4th edition, presents his fourteen precepts to guide conscious and ethical behaviour, with collective awakening and long-term global change as an expression of this ontology (Hanh 2020). Although Joanna Macy's original work began in the 1970s, her prolific writing has included the landmark *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Planetary Renewal* (Macy 2016). As Stephanie Kaza writes in the foreword:

At times and in places it has seemed the earth could not withstand the degree of damage inflicted upon it by its human inhabitants. Joanna Macy offers a visionary yet pragmatic leadership in facing the emotional pain of this assault. . . . She urges us to 'come home again' to the world as both self and lover, to feel the way we are all actually connected in the very real material exchanges of air, water, flesh and heat.

The vision of a sustainable future will require a ‘burning patience’, a willingness to be completely present to the larger whole, and *active hope*. (Macy 2016: 7–8)

The American Buddhist philosopher David Loy has written copiously on the Buddhist response to the evolving climate catastrophe beginning essentially with ‘Indra’s Postmodern Net’ in 1993, and, most recently, *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*, also called *Buddhist Teachings for the Precipice* (Loy 2019a). Loy writes: ‘the most fundamental principle of ecology – the interdependence of living beings and systems – is a subset of the most fundamental principle of Buddhist philosophy, that nothing has “self-existence” because everything is dependent on other things’ (2019a: 7). During this same period, Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown wrote on Buddhism and ecology. *Buddhism and Ecology* begins:

Dharma, for Buddhists, is the sacred law, morality and the teachings of the Buddha. ... Our birth and existence are dependent on causes outside ourselves, inextricably linking us with the world and denying us any autonomous existence. ... compassion for others (human and non-human) should be as natural and instinctive as compassion for us and our own bodies. (Batchelor and Brown 1994: ix)

Building on this work, Daniel Henning of the Buddha Dharma Education Association wrote *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology*, a 170-page heuristic school curriculum containing such questions as:

- The Buddhist view of ‘one world’ means that it is home to all known life. Do you experience this ‘oneness’ directly? How? How do you expose youth to this ‘oneness’? (Henning 2002: 7)
- Who do you know who lives ‘in harmony with nature’? Do you? (Henning 2002: 10)

As momentum grew, a UN Day of Vesak Conference on ‘Buddhist Approach to the Environmental Crisis’ (Dharmakosajarn 2009) produced twenty-three papers, including one by Padmasiri De Silva, in which he describes the multidimensional ethical concerns amenable to Buddhist practice, namely globalization of the crisis, impact on future generations and involvement of non-human species.

He also draws upon the *Aggañña sutta* (DN 27) together with the *Cakkavattasihanada sutta* (DN 26) to portray the consequences of immoral behaviour comprising human greed (*lobha*), human aggression (*dosa*) and ignorance (*avidya*) as contributory to the climate crisis, but amenable to spiritual intervention.

In 2013 a remarkable constellation of eminent eco-Buddhists, including Thich Nhat Hanh, David Loy, Joanna Macy, Wendell Berry and Susan Murphy, crafted *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (ed. Vaughan-Lee 2016). This collection of essays demonstrates the deep connection between the present ecological crisis and the general lack of awareness of the sacred nature of creation, but does reveal the possibility of a healing spiritual response. In June 2013 the *Dharma Teachers International Collaborative on Climate Change* met at Spirit Rock, California. This group of twenty-eight, mostly Theravāda teachers, developed sixteen Dharma principles that directly applied to the issue of climate disruption (One Earth Sangha 2013), including reverence for life; the ethical imperative that all beings matter; interconnection and interdependence; renunciation, simplicity (live more simply); opening to suffering as a vehicle for awakening; Buddhism as a social change agent; and love is the greatest motivator. The final two principles are very clear:

Principal 15: The sangha – and other forms of social support—are essential: the reality of climate disruption is a profound shock to many people;

Principal 16: The Bodhisattva: the figure of the Bodhisattva is a unifying image of someone who is dedicated to cultivating the inner depths and to helping others, is an inspiring figure for our times.

This collaborative went on to issue ‘the Earth as Witness: International Dharma Teachers’ Statement on Climate Change’:

- Climate change is the most serious issue facing humanity today.
- As shocking and painful as it may be, we must recognize that without swift and dramatic reductions in fossil fuel use, global temperatures will rise close to or beyond 2 degrees C.

- This increase will lead to injury and death for millions of people worldwide and the extinction of many of the Earth's species.
- Millions more will experience severe trauma and stress that threaten their physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing. (International Dharma Teachers 2014)

In October 2021 a virtual Dharma teacher gathering took place, comprising more than 100 teachers of all lineages. Kristin Barker, of One Earth Sangha, spoke powerfully on discovering and developing our own Ecodharma:

Climate change is here. Even if we are able to reverse course and begin repair, enormous suffering for human and non-human communities cannot be avoided in the near term. Both individuals and communities are increasingly challenged by the fear, grief, and even aggression that comes with encountering this difficult reality. ... (W)e as a teaching community, by developing essential qualities such as courage, calm, compassion, and insight, can support ourselves and one another in discovering, developing, and sharing our own unique eco-dharma. (IWDTG 2021)

After thirty years of detailed analysis of the ecological credentials of Buddhism, and discovery of the nature, complexity, interactivity, biological magnitude and lethality of the climate crisis, together with its profound psycho-spiritual impact on all humans, the question must be asked: have we done enough, as individuals, in small groups or collectively as Buddhists, to try to reverse, delay or mitigate this impending disaster, or, at least, prepare the citizenry for what may lie ahead? Can we even imagine what that may mean?

What is the state of current knowledge about the climate crisis?

This looming catastrophe is indeed a complex matter and a 'wicked' problem, that is, a problem of existential significance, complex with many interconnected elements, dynamic with accelerating non-linear

behaviour, largely unknowable and thus unpredictable, largely of our own creation and impacting disproportionately on the most innocent and vulnerable worldwide, and even within our own country.

The climate crisis is fundamentally a consequence of ‘overshoot’, that is a profligate over-consumption of materials and energy and the generation of waste, including CO₂, largely by the global North, vastly in excess of the regenerative and assimilative capacities of the ecosphere, currently by a factor of 1.7 (Rees 2019). The richest 8.5 per cent of the global population (earning over US\$35,000 per annum), comprising about 630 million people, were responsible for about 50 per cent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report (Assessment Report, AR6) Working Groups II and III (WG II and WG III Reports) were published in February and April 2022, totalling more than 6,000 pages of dense detail (Shukla et al 2022). They assessed four themes: impacts, adaptation, vulnerability and mitigation of climate change.

Unfortunately, these documents shed little new information of value and created no potent guidance to rapidly advance the global response to this crisis. As others have observed, many vital parameters were not highlighted in the recent IPCC documents (Spratt and Dunlop 2022). The parlous state of the numerous tipping points (see below) requires great emphasis as central to the four themes and to the designation ‘catastrophe’. There was concern for GDP *growth* (which relates to GHG emissions) but no real support for a dramatic reduction in consumption by the global North to stimulate the vital reduction in GHG emissions.

Mitigation means lessening the degrading effects of the climate crisis, usually through technological ingenuity. Adaptation means accommodating to a new human experience through moral, social, economic and political adjustments. The focus on adaptation and mitigation is important, but disappointingly underfunded (by the global North), and perhaps reflects the dawning realization that the climate crisis is now truly irreversible.

Any hope of mitigation or adaptation, or transiting out of social collapse, will require all the cognitive and emotional resources we have – minds and bodies all working with knowledge and in acknowledgment, and in concert. (Schenck and Churchill 2021: 500)

The reports do not focus specifically on the dishonourable behaviour of countries in the global North in not meeting commitments made in Copenhagen in 2009 to contribute to US\$100 billion annually to support climate adaptation in poorer countries (Timperley 2021a), nor the continuing incomprehensible financial support of coal, gas and oil conglomerates, again by wealthy governments, including Australian governments paying \$11.6 billion of fossil fuel subsidies in 2021–2 and committing \$55.3 billion for future such subsidies (TAI 2022). Worldwide, US\$500 billion are given annually as subsidies to fossil fuel corporations by fifty-three countries, with a cost to society exceeding US\$5 trillion annually when their social and environmental externalities are included (Timperley 2021b). In 2021, Australian emissions from coal amounted to 4.04 tonnes of CO₂ for each person, the highest in the world, ahead of South Korea at 3.18 and China at 3.06 (Readfearn 2022).

The true scale of the accelerating ecological crisis

The majority of indicators of ecosystem health and biodiversity now show rapid decline (Bauman et al 2022). The catastrophic consequences of the climate emergency are now witnessed regularly (current repeated wildfires in the USA, Europe and Siberia); alarming record temperatures on many continents (most recently in South Asia, Spain, UK and north-east USA); unprecedented flooding in Australia, the Philippines, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Malawi, South Africa; increasing Atlantic hurricane intensity (with nineteen expected this season); and unremitting drought directly affecting fifty-five million people annually. The annual global deaths due to excessive heat is some 25,000 (Zhao et al. 2021). Higher temperatures are also enabling the spread of vector-borne diseases, such as West Nile virus, Lyme disease, malaria and dengue fever, as well as water-borne diseases like cholera.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 2022) anticipates that 274 million people will need humanitarian assistance and reports some 30 million internally displaced

people due to the effects of climate change, in addition to 20 million international climate refugees. By 2050 a potential sea level rise of 50 cm will impact 800 million people, disproportionately in tropical Asia, Pacific Island communities and the Torres Strait Islands (Hooijer and Vernimmen 2021). Two billion people currently struggle to meet their daily needs for clean water, related to the increased salination of irrigated farmland, the evaporation caused by increased heat, loss of aquifers and frequent flooding of coastal areas (World Health Organisation 2019).

Tipping points

Climatic tipping points imply irreversible change (Lenton et al. 2019). Sea ice is now melting in an accelerating fashion, losing its ability to reflect light, and is soon to disappear entirely during summer months, perhaps by 2030, decades before previously anticipated. This will likely lead to the release of vast quantities of seafloor methane, also arising from melting permafrost (containing as much GHG as all other sources), which in turn has arisen sooner than predicted by climate models. In Greenland and Antarctica, glacial loss is also accelerating, with tipping points possibly already crossed. The risks associated with tipping points increase disproportionately as temperature increases from 1°C to 2°C and becomes high above 3°C. The world is currently completely unprepared to envisage, and even less deal with, the consequences of catastrophic climate change (Spratt and Dunlop 2019).

Governmental ineptitude

The reasons for this dangerously inadequate activity by governments in the face of increasing existential risk are not well understood but likely include:

- ‘Scientific reticence’; a self-censoring process by scientists, editors and publishers (including the IPCC) when dealing with truly unpalatable data (Brysse et al. 2013);
- Neither the IPCC nor any other international agency has any power of enforcement;
- ‘Psychic numbing’ (Bhatia et al. 2021), together with organized and reinforced denial and distraction;
- The pervasive narcissism and power sensitivity of many politicians may obscure the world beyond their immediate locus of control (Cichocka and Cislak 2020).

Higher levels of maturation in our ‘leadership’ would allow some spiritual progress; seeking equality, order, stability and peace; promoting truthful discourse and righteous living; enabling others to flourish; and becoming aware of the world as a complex, sensitive, interactive, interconnected biosphere. Since our leaders have access to the best climatological and psychological advice, their inaction over decades is bewildering. They will now preside over likely progressive societal collapse and massive loss of life. There is no real possibility of technological salvation. The ‘climatastrophe’ is now insuperable and will follow a trajectory determined by physical laws oblivious to human preferences.

Necessary conditions for the governance of global climate catastrophe

The necessary governance to thwart a global climate *catastrophe* (defined as adversely affecting tens of millions of people, or costing trillions of US dollars) must take into account its sensitive dependence on initial conditions, variability in scope, severity and probability, and ideally attempt prevention, delay or mitigation (Fisher and Sandberg 2022). There are strong arguments for giving high priority to existential risks, even those with relatively low probability. The threshold for response should be defined, even with a minimal and incomplete set of systemic high-quality

risk data, with rigorous monitoring and modelling of a dynamic, unpredictably evolving, non-linear system, with numerous positive and negative feedback loops. Flexible adaptability is required to manage periods of deep uncertainty and newly emergent phenomena. These necessary capabilities are Buddhist in nature. There are no current institutions able to confront true climate catastrophes.

Transformative climate science has become a well-evaluated second-generation system to address high-end climate change (Tàbara et al. 2019). The approach is somewhat Buddhist in nature, accepting the current bewildering complexity, with no obvious solution, then stepping back, applying clarity, wisdom and visualization, then following the 'eightfold path', noting interconnections, anticipating the 'hindrances', living with impermanence and uncertainty, but aware that a true transformation is possible.

Our moral failure

The dusk has started to fall with respect to climate change and so the owl of Minerva (wisdom) can spread her wings, to rephrase Hegel (1820). That is, wisdom is achieved only in hindsight when *reality has completed its formative process and made itself ready*. Amongst the brilliant science we can see missed opportunities. There has been moral failure, individually, collectively and repeatedly. The history, scale and consequences are profound. Now is the time to account and atone, to our ancestors, to the young and other vulnerable souls, to each other and to future generations, if any. What is our threshold for individual action? Perhaps when the threat to our children's health and lifespan exceeds our own complacency and comfort. There must be recognition, repair, regeneration and reparation. The need for planetary palliation is also urgent, and we should focus on all species, in addition to our own.

We can be guided by Buddhist ethics (Javanaud 2020). We can practise the *lojong* teachings of mind training, refining and purifying our motivation and attitude in progress towards *Bodhicitta* (the awakened mind)

and becoming a bodhisattva. This practice includes *tonglen*, the experiential exercise of ‘sending and taking’, and energetic post-meditation engagement with the suffering world, employing both compassion and skilful means, recognizing that ‘talk does not cook rice’. *Tonglen* reflects our intimate interconnection with others – we breathe in the suffering of others and breathe out our heartfelt compassion to them; we are directly ‘exchanging self and other’. We employ the six *pāramitās*: generosity, morality, patience, joyful enthusiasm, concentration and wisdom.

We can still demonstrate our capacity for selflessness by systematically and individually reducing our carbon footprint by Buddhist renunciation. We must cease GHG-emitting activity, enhance eco-recycling, begin active transport (walking and cycling), insist upon much smaller eco-designed homes, green cities (to counter heat islands) and begin the regeneration of all debilitated ecosystems.

Degrowth

We should strongly support the process of degrowth, a broad humanistic philosophy with origins in the nineteenth century, but further defined and applied in 1970s France, in the Club of Rome’s ‘Limits to Growth’ of 1972 and in Buddhist economics from 1973 (Shi 2018), before a more widespread endorsement and association with other socio-political movements such as anti-racism, indigenous activism and feminism. Degrowth aims for a planned, coherent policy to reduce ecological impact, reduce inequality, improve wellbeing and a self-determined life in dignity for all. This includes deceleration, time welfare and conviviality.

Currently degrowth is an important and comprehensive solution to the disastrous *overshoot* paradigm of the global North, and challenges the ongoing violent, patriarchal, colonial hegemony and its associated poverty, servitude and shortened survival in the global South (Hickel 2021). Essentially the vast disparity in the GHG footprint between global North and South must be corrected. The mechanism of degrowth is disputed

with the North reluctant to reduce the current level of consumption to a sustainable 20 per cent of the present level. Degrowth does not accept sustainability as an immediate goal, nor the IPCC use of Sustainability Development Goals nor the various green deals which still depend upon actual economic growth and globalization, and suggest that economic growth can be decoupled from resource consumption.

Our duty to protect the vulnerable

We have abrogated our fundamental duty to protect the vulnerable, particularly the unborn (Pacheco 2020) and children (Sanson et al. 2019); the latter are already aware of the climate crisis with experience of eco-anxiety (Wu et al. 2020) and climate grief (solastalgia), as are adults (Cunsolo and Ellis 2018; Moratis 2021). A recent unanimous ruling of the Australian Federal Court confirmed that the Australian Government does *not* owe the country's children protection from harm caused by climate change (Peleg 2022). An earlier German decision, however, declared the opposite.

Climate change as spiritual practice

There has been much wise reflection in the realm of psycho-spiritual support. 'Climate change as spiritual practice' is a powerful approach, teaching the impermanence and fragility of our lifestyle and our way of seeing the world (Eisenstein 2022). As the Great Climate Disruption gets underway, it brings us right to the razor's edge of this precious present moment. No past. No future. Just what is here now.

If we look at hope through the lens of Buddhism, we discover that wise hope is born of radical uncertainty, rooted in the unknown and the

unknowable (Halifax 2021). Wise hope requires that we open ourselves to what we do not know, what we cannot know. It also demands that we open ourselves to being perpetually surprised. Wise hope is not seeing things unrealistically but rather seeing things as they are, including the truth of impermanence as well as the truth of suffering – both its existence and the possibility of its transformation, for better or for worse. Wise hope also reflects the understanding that what we do matters. Roshi Joan Halifax (2018) suggests a contemplative practice to cultivate compassion that she calls G.R.A.C.E.

- G – Gathering one’s attention; meditate on the breath.
- R – Recalling one’s intention, to be of service; locate one’s heart; why am I here?
- A – Attuning to *one’s self* (grounding); tracking one’s momentary thoughts, emotions, physical state; locating biases, even if unconscious, and attuning to *the other(s)* with empathy (physically, emotionally, cognitively); resonance with another; we extend our subjectivity to include the other.
- C – Consider what will really serve: motivation, feelings – in one’s experience in the moment; dropping down into openness and not knowing.
- E – Engagement – action or no action; deeply pro-social.
- E – Ending – gratitude, self-compassion, pause; completion; equanimity.

As she says, ‘Nowhere to go, nothing to do ... Lost and found in the moment ... Just practice this ... Maybe here is where we find wholeheartedness and our true freedom’ (Halifax 2018: 197).

Alternative suggestions for cultivating compassion to enable us to go beyond the crisis of global climate change are also offered by medical ethicists, for example, in the form of maxims (Schenck and Churchill 2021). Maxims are ancient guides to meditation, to help control inner discourse, in an effort to render it coherent. They are especially useful in times of moral crisis and major cultural change. They have stood ‘the test of times of

scarcity and hardship, of social disruption, of natural catastrophe' (Schenk and Churchill 2021: 501).

Maxim 1: Work hard to grasp the immensity

What has just happened? There may be a new sense of 'right and wrong', a moral nihilism, which may allow us to get to the end of ordinary hope, then on to radical hope.

Maxim 2: Cultivate radical hope (open, wise or active hope).

The kind of hope that reappears after optimism has died is hope that can be relied on.

First, we must own our grief and anger. Second comes the realization that blaming ourselves and others doesn't help. Only when one reaches a certain level of despair can new resources of hope emerge, in oneself and in the new world in which one finds oneself. What is called for is a faith in a possible future, however improbable, embedded in action totally oriented to the situation. For example, consider the central virtues of the hope that emerges beyond optimism: being kind, not abandoning people, behaving with integrity. The key is knowing that there is almost always room for something positive to be done.

Maxim 3: Have a line in the sand.

Know what you will do, and what you will not. Know that there are some things you will not do, some modes of living you will not embrace. Know that there are lives worse than death. Be prepared to die.

Maxim 4: Appreciate the astonishing and unique opportunity.

Cultivating gratitude: what could be more important? Appreciate the opportunity you have to accompany humanity in this extraordinary transition and to be present to the earth and the biosphere at this time. Be amazed at the interconnectedness of things and the astonishing complexity of nature. Appreciate that there is anything at all, and that we have witnessed it. Think small, alongside thinking very big.

Maxim 5: Train your body and your mind

Meditate. Breathe. Develop the physiological capacity to deal with despair. Despair isn't just psychological. Travel beyond ego not just the cognitive limits of ego, but the emotional and physiological limits of ego. In moral distress and burnout use the power of mindfulness meditation, yoga and bodily practices to mitigate and eventually assimilate trauma of all kinds. A useful advanced skill is the capacity to shift timeframes – to the vast cosmic then to earthly (daily/hourly) then to mindfulness (present moment). Training body and mind to cope will be essential to survival and to whatever sort of human flourishing is possible on a vastly depleted planet.

Maxim 6: Act for the future generations of all species

Speak for those without voice: the poor, the future generations, and other species. Speak for the forests, the seas, the mountains. Cultivate deep interconnection with all life and the world, a sense of trust and solidarity, involving mutuality and reciprocity. This insight is the foundation for the

basic compassion involved in the focus on equity, distributive justice and the acknowledgement of the gross unfairness that those who have contributed the least to the carbon catastrophe will bear the brunt of the approaching chain of disasters (adapted from Schenck and Churchill 2021: 502–8).

Deep adaptation

However, like many other thinkers and practitioners, Schenck and Churchill mount very strong warnings about the severity of the global crisis:

Adaptation and collapse have begun, albeit in slow motion. Unfortunately, the numbing has begun as well ... but our greatest moral threat will likely be the creeping normalization of catastrophe ... maxims are, in significant part, about keeping morality itself alive in a catastrophe. (Schenck and Churchill 2021: 508–9)

And yet, as other authors in this book also demonstrate, we see possibilities opening up. The wonderfully rich concept of ‘deep adaptation’ has emerged, accepting that societal collapse is now likely, inevitable or already unfolding, and encouraging resilience, relinquishment, restoration and reconciliation (Bendell 2018). Meditative reflection on the end of times, or eschatology, is a major dimension of human transformation, and the total sense of loss is an extremely powerful experience for many people, which may include loving kindness, creativity, transcendence, sorrow, fear, anger, depression, nihilism, apathy and acceptance. It is critical that the truth of our circumstances is presented in an age-appropriate way with compassionate support. Likewise, with the expectation of universal distress, there are many other compassion-based strategies for specific demographic groups (children, adolescents, parents, the elderly, the chronically ill, the disabled and so on), in various cultures, and new approaches will undoubtedly emerge (Loprinzi et al. 2010; Read 2017).

Can Buddhism meet the climate crisis?

Our task is to do the very best we can, not knowing what the consequences will be – in fact, not knowing if our efforts will make any difference whatsoever (Loy 2019b). Ultimately, however, they are our best openhearted gifts to the earth. Finally, we must attend to the psycho-spiritual assault upon humanity with the knowledge that our precious and unique biosphere is morbidly ill, and accept our own substantial individual and collective responsibility with self-compassion and, perhaps, an appropriate restorative bushland ritual. What legacy shall we leave? Perhaps some evidence of our best nature, our great achievements, representing each micro-culture throughout time. Who will ever witness our legacy? Perhaps only the Earth herself.

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JANE WANG

5 Buddhist-Informed Humanistic Responses to Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

Gender-based violence is a pervasive global crisis with known health, economic and social impacts and costs (Morrison and Orlando 2004; European Institute for Gender Equality 2021; The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children 2009; National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control 2003). It has also been linked with some of humanity's most pressing global issues, such as climate change (United Nations [UN] Women 2022) and the Covid-19 pandemic (UN Women 2021).

Sexual abuse in religious communities has gained much media and public attention. Abuse within Catholic (Yocum 2013: 85), Jewish (Lusky-Weisrose et al. 2021: 1088) and Muslim communities and institutions (Hassouneh-Phillips 2001: 939–41) illustrate the underlying gendered dynamics and vulnerabilities. The pervasiveness of gendered violence across religious traditions hints at interconnections with broader patriarchal systems, ideologies and cultures. This pervasiveness is not the focus of this chapter, however, I make note of it to situate the problems of sexual abuse in religious contexts within the broader social problem of gender-based violence (GBV). Henceforth, the term GBV will be used rather than sexual abuse to acknowledge this interconnection and to be inclusive of the multiple manifestations of gendered violence within religious communities.

Recently, survivor-led efforts, such as the Buddhist Project Sunshine, has highlighted several cases of sexual and psychological abuse perpetrated by Buddhist teachers and leaders (Russell-Kraft 2019: para. 1–2). Survivor

and community accounts illustrate a significant amount of collective trauma alongside the personal trauma experienced by survivors. In an open letter penned by former students of Sogyal Lakar, founder of the international Rigpa sangha (or community), they shared how the abuse was supported by community-wide complacency, including their own, and resulted in a loss of faith in the Buddha's teachings (the Dharma) (Standlee et al. 2017: 7–9). Their account illustrates that their personal experiences of abuse and trauma are inextricably linked with collective experiences and has significant implications for wellbeing and safety in the sangha.

Buddhists are seeking to respond to GBV occurring in their sanghas in a way that reflects and honours the Dharma. However, these sanghas must also acknowledge the largely Western, yet culturally diverse, context in which they operate. The interchange of Buddhist and Western ideas can be seen in the responses from Western Buddhist teachers to GBV occurring in Buddhist communities. This chapter will examine two of these Western Buddhist responses and discuss the implications and benefits of them. Special attention will be paid to the Buddhist interpretation of compassion embedded within these responses which, I believe, can improve supports for GBV survivors in Buddhist sanghas.

Background

Gender-based violence in Buddhism

GBV is not a new occurrence within Buddhism. According to Langenberg (2015: 283), even the highest regarded female tantric consorts were subject to exploitation or abuse, such as being traded between male lamas without consent. In more contemporary times, advocates for gender equality in Buddhist societies have noted how Buddhist teachings can both enable and prevent GBV. According to Khuankaew (2007: 179–80), a self-identified Buddhist feminist, the doctrine of *karma* has been commonly used to victim-blame and justify GBV with claims that abuse and violence is a result of bad *karma* accumulated in past rebirths. On

the other hand, Khuankaew (2007: 176–83) uses fundamental Buddhist teachings like the Four Noble Truths as a framework to identify and address the causes of GBV, such as patriarchal ideas in Buddhist traditions.

In the Western context, high-profile cases of sexual abuse and abuse of power by Buddhist teachers and leaders have occurred within several well-established international Buddhist organizations, such as Shambhala and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahāyāna Tradition (FPMT). These cases have intrigued researchers to investigate the dynamics that enabled the recent abuse in Western Buddhist sanghas. However, what these recent cases highlight is a pattern of sexual, physical and psychological abuse within American sanghas that has existed since the 1980s across all Buddhist traditions and perpetrated by both Asian and American teachers (Gleig 2019: 86).

Some researchers argue that Buddhist discourses and ideas, in addition to Western discourses, are instrumental to enabling GBV (Buckner 2020; Iris and Anders 2019). Buckner (2020: 135) claims that some Western Buddhist teachers use concepts of non-duality, equanimity and right speech alongside Western ideas of psychology and legal rhetoric to silence victims, abscond perpetrators' accountability, and uphold a gendered hierarchy in the Buddhist sangha of 'Against the Stream'. Iris and Anders (2019) argue that concepts of 'crazy wisdom' and 'guru devotion' are modern Buddhist neologisms that serve to isolate and coerce victims, and to silence and intimidate survivors from speaking out. Bell (2002: 232) argues that discourses about the teacher-student relationship in some Buddhist traditions can support an organizational culture of charismatic authority that enables sexual abuse. In short, Buddhist discourses impact the dynamics of GBV in several ways, including justifying GBV with Buddhist teachings (Khuankaew 2007: 179–80), encouraging community secrecy and silencing (Buckner 2020: 128–30; Baker 2018: para. 32–40) and enabling the misuse of spiritual authority to perpetrate abuse (Iris and Anders 2019: 11). These dynamics are compounded by a lack of perpetrator accountability and genuine responsibility by sangha leadership (Condon et al. 2018: para. 4–9).

These dynamics highlight several important aspects of GBV in Buddhist sanghas that are important to note. Firstly, while most of the publicized incidences have been sexual in nature, it is not the sexual activity

that defines it as GBV. Rather, it is the unequal power distribution that underscores the relationship between a (predominantly) male teacher or leader and the lay practitioner and student. This unequal power status is awarded to the male teacher not just for their spiritual achievements, but because institutionally and culturally, male students and teachers are positioned above female teachers and students (Tsomo 2004: 5–7). It is the power imbalance within the gendered relations and hierarchies of the sangha which enables many forms of GBV, including physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse.

These dynamics are also intergenerational. Shambhala International, for example, has had three of its leaders accused of various forms of gendered violence (sexual, physical and psychological abuse) including its founder Chogyam Trungpa, his successor Osel Tendzin (Bell 2002: 231–4) and its current leader, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche (Littlefair 2019). In Zen traditions, allegations against Eido Shimano have spanned a forty-year teaching period (Gleig 2019: 87) affecting numerous students. Therefore, GBV in Western Buddhism is intergenerational, which underscores its collective impacts and need for collective responses. Thus, while specific incidences or teachers may capture mainstream attention, underpinning causes and conditions are in actuality intergenerational and community centred. It only makes sense for the responses to be likewise.

A hermeneutic of Buddhist-informed humanistic responses to gender-based violence

Hermeneutics of Humanistic Buddhism and Western Buddhism

Before exploring humanistic responses to GBV in Buddhist sanghas, I first want to provide a brief background on Humanistic Buddhism and Buddhist hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation, the implications of particular interpretations and the processes through which interpretations are

validated and popularized (George 2020: para. 1). The study of Buddhist hermeneutics is the study of interpreting Buddhist discourses, concepts and ideas and the impact different interpretations has upon Buddhist traditions. The hermeneutics of Buddhist modernism is a clear illustration of this. According to McMahan (2012: 160), Buddhist teachings and practices become Westernized and modernized through frequent exchanges with major Western discourses and practices of modernity in the age of globalization.

Humanistic Buddhism is one such interpretation that emerged from Buddhist modernism. The origins of Humanistic Buddhism are traced back to the modern Chinese Buddhist reformist efforts of Taixu (Zhe 2013: 36). Taixu proposed a modern Buddhism focused on 'human life' and 'this world' rather than the afterlife or otherworldly affairs (Zhe 2013: 36). He called this modernist adaptation 'Buddhism for human life' (*rensheng fojiao*) or 'Buddhism for this world' (*renjian fojiao*) (Zhe 2013: 36). Crucial to Taixu's conception is a Buddhism that is concerned and engaged with social welfare and seeking to build a 'Pure Land on Earth', a realm free of suffering and full of the Dharma, through the social work of lay Buddhist communities and social reforms based on Buddhist ethics (Zhe 2013: 37). Taixu's notion of Humanistic Buddhism is therefore underscored by key hermeneutical shifts which stressed enlightenment in the human world through the betterment of human society, and Buddhist practice as encompassing social service and education (DeVido 2009: 414). Modernist notions of 'reform, process, and moral universalism' and social responsibility therefore became central to Buddhist discourse (Zhe 2013: 37).

Taixu's teachings have inspired notable contemporary Buddhist masters like Thich Nhat Hanh and Venerable Master Hsing Yun. Their respective takes on a Buddhism for this world and for human life – Engaged Buddhism by the former and Humanistic Buddhism for the latter – continue to emphasize social service, enlightenment through human life, and a Pure Land in this world (Ji 2006: 58; DeVido 2009: 438). Humanistic interpretations of Buddhist teachings on compassion and dependent origination have been promoted by both lineages. Hanh and Hsing Yun advocate social action based upon the understanding of the interdependence of all sentient life (Ji 2006: 75; Hanh 2008b: 35) and a compassionate vow

to relieve the suffering of all sentient life. Importantly, systemic expressions of human suffering such as war, poverty, inequality and environmental degradation are included in this humanistic interpretation of Buddhist teachings and practice (Ji 2006: 70–5; Hanh 2008a: 18–19). Engaged Buddhism and Humanistic Buddhism both also stress everyday human life as the most opportune for Buddhist practice (DeVido 2009: 437; Yun 2018: 2–3). Inspired by the ideas of *renjian fojiao* and *rensheng fojiao*, Engaged Buddhism and Humanistic Buddhism, therefore, reinterpret key Buddhist teachings and concepts such as compassion, dependent origination and Pure Land to address contemporary social issues affecting human life in this world. In short, Humanistic and Engaged Buddhism illustrate a contemporary Buddhist hermeneutic based upon humanism that seeks to respond to pressing global crises within modernity, such as inequality and climate change.

Towards a humanistic hermeneutic in responding to GBV: Findings from a critical discourse analysis

I now turn my attention to investigating some of the responses to GBV in Buddhist sanghas offered by some Western Buddhist teachers. My aim is to uncover the humanistic hermeneutic that underpins these responses by analysing their interpretations and applications of compassion with regards to GBV in Buddhist sanghas. I do this through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of five Western Buddhist teachers who have been vocal about GBV in Western Buddhism. They are Lama Tsultrim Allione (Vajrayana), Lama Rod Owens (Vajrayana), Lama Justin von Bujdoss (Vajrayana), Ethan Nichtern (Vajrayana) and Roshi Joan Halifax (Mahāyāna).

CDA aims to reveal the underlying discourses that shape our social structures, relations, institutions and identities (Fairclough 2012: 9). The results from the CDA will be presented thematically. Each theme is a shared idea between teachers, however specific interpretations of compassion will be discussed in greater detail within each theme. Thus, the findings highlight the similarities across Western teachers' responses, as well as the differences resulting from their respective Buddhist training and sociocultural background.

I. *Compassion as social action and ethics: speaking out about GBV in sanghas*

Most of the Western teachers emphasize two components of compassion: that it is action-oriented and that it is vital for one's ethical and spiritual development. Interestingly, there is often a collective focus to compassion, which is framed as reducing collective suffering of a society and/or community. According to Halifax (2011: para. 12), the issue of GBV '... as Buddhists ... we all share this karma, and we must share the correction process as well. Compassion tells us that, and we have to not only listen but as well to act'. This collective focus reflects a humanistic hermeneutic by promoting social action and a compassionate regard for the interdependence of sentient life; the suffering of those effected by GBV is shared and is thus a shared responsibility. Putting compassion into practice therefore means to intervene and prevent GBV.

A specific response to GBV purported by the teachers is to speak out about the dynamics of GBV or specific events. The teachers draw upon Buddhist ethics to legitimate this as a practice of compassion. Von Bujdoss, for example, frames 'right speech' to mean 'speaking from a place of compassion and loving' so to 'hold systems accountable' (Owens 2017). Similarly, Nichtern (2018a) supports '[bringing] your voice, your fierce compassion, and your protest further into the community'. The emphasis on *social* action for *collective* improvement reflects a humanistic hermeneutic because it emphasizes social engagement and responsibility as integral to Buddhist practice. As Owens (2020: 171) pointedly states, '[Buddhists need to] take responsibility for [their] part in this violence and disrupt it'.

This humanistic hermeneutic also enables teachers to align Buddhist ethics with a Western notion of social justice, which aims to address social inequities created by dominant and oppressive institutions (Young 2011: 3). According to von Bujdoss (2019: 131), 'as [Buddhist] practitioners, we need to take responsibility for ourselves and expand classical Buddhist ethical systems to address sexual ethics and ethics around undoing ... patriarchy...'. Nichtern (2018b: para. 3) also implies a social justice discourse by advocating for centring marginalized voices of GBV victims. In the responses analysed, therefore, Western teachers align Buddhist ethics and Western

social ethics. The practice of compassion is therefore to speak out about GBV and to address institutional enablers like patriarchal ideologies and systems. This practice is legitimated as both a spiritual practice in terms of a Buddhist discourse of ethics and as secular social activism according to a Western discourse of social justice.

The only teacher that did not frame her perspective on GBV using Buddhist ethics was Allione. Allione's teachings emphasize the esoteric practices of Tantric Buddhism (also known as Tibetan or Vajrayana Buddhism), particularly deity and mandala visualizations. Allione's responses to GBV will be discussed in the other two themes.

2. *The transformative potential of compassion: compassion facilitates a capacity to bear 'witness' to the experiences and trauma of GBV*

This idea that compassion facilitates an openness to working with strong and difficult emotions, like anger and shame, recognizes the impact of trauma for GBV victims/survivors. This perspective is shared amongst some of the Western teachers affiliated with the Vajrayana (or Tibetan) tradition. Allione and Owens describe compassion as enabling individuals to confront traumatic experiences in a safe manner. According to Allione (Study Buddhism 2019), 'If we can confront [the abuse] and hold *Bodhicitta* for the victims, and also for the perpetrators ... then [it] really let things come out and to say what your experience is...'. When Owens (2020: 171) shares his own experience confronting a former teacher accused of sexual abuse, he said that compassion helped him '... begin to articulate my hurt' so that the 'pain [became] a mirror for myself so that I begin to know what I need to do to get free from suffering'. This perspective of being with trauma reflects a humanistic hermeneutic because it recognizes human emotions and experiences as a part of Buddhist practice rather than as a barrier. In doing so it normalizes human emotions, just as von Bujdoss does when he claims that responses to GBV should include anger, wisdom and compassion (Owens 2017). Not only does von Bujdoss normalize human emotions, like anger, he also implies a spiritual potential for wisdom and compassion that lies within the human realm.

The concept of ‘fierce compassion’ is specifically used by the Western teachers analysed to describe how compassion facilitates empowerment even in the face of a traumatic experience. Drawing from Buddhist ideas about the impermanence of Self, Allione (2018: 15) describes ‘fierce compassion’ as the capacity to protect or transform one’s Self through beneficial rather than harmful boundaries from the ego and others. Allione (2018: 18) advocates for the practice of the five *dakinis* (deities that embody ‘fierce compassion’) to turn the anger and shame of survivors into sources of wisdom and empowerment that can be directed at tackling patriarchal ideologies and systems.

The idea of ‘fierce compassion’ reflects both a humanistic and feminist hermeneutic. By connecting the personal Buddhist practices of ‘fierce compassion’ (such as *dakini* practice) with the social aim of challenging the patriarchy, Allione implies that personal situations and practices are political acts which can contest oppressive societal conditions. This is the feminist standpoint of politicizing the personal that underpinning trauma psychology. In other words, trauma is a political issue and trauma survivors are empowered to consider their experiences within the social and political contexts of the patriarchy (Brown 2017: 503, 511).

‘Fierce compassion’ is also promoted as empowering victims/survivors to make meaning of their experiences on their own terms. As Owens (2020: 39) describes, his Buddhist practice of loving kindness helped him to cultivate ‘a self-compassion that has actually begun to disrupt these deeply internalized feelings of being unloved, unheard, unseen, of being devalued’. This interweaving of feminist discourses to validate rather than pathologize victims/survivors’ stories, with a humanistic discourse that stresses human experiences and emotions as central to Buddhist practice, is another way compassion is uniquely interpreted in relation to GBV.

3. *The wisdom of compassion: Seeing GBV from a place of wisdom and compassion engenders more nuanced perspectives and responses.*

The teachings of Western Buddhist teachers on compassion and openness are intricately connected with the Buddhist notion of wisdom. Wisdom, or ‘pure view’, is a central idea to all Buddhist traditions and refers to the

capacity to see and understand the true nature of reality and to act in accordance with this realization (Gethin 1998: 80–1, 83). According to Buddhist doctrine, wisdom is necessary in order to be liberated from suffering (*nirvana*).

In the responses analysed, the Western Buddhist teachers each offer a different interpretation of wisdom as it pertains to GBV. Their teachings are also primarily directed at other *sangha* members as witnesses and bystanders. For example, in the context of witnessing GBV being perpetrated by a teacher, Owens interprets the wisdom of *sunyata* as the capacity to ‘see and relate to my own complexity [towards that experience] and hold that complexity with honesty and compassion’ (Owens 2020: 171). In other words, the wisdom of *sunyata* – emptiness of reality – allows Owens (2020: 170) to engender a compassionate regard of GBV that supports an understanding of the interpersonal complexity inherent of the experience, that: ‘at one extreme [the former teacher] changed my life, and at the other extreme he harmed other people. Both are true, and they are much more true together’. This realization and compassionate regard leads to compassionate action, according to Owens, as one neither victim-blames nor viscerally condemns the perpetrator. Instead, with compassion and wisdom, Owens (2020: 171) is able to ‘continue to love my teacher and my community, though I am hurt and angry at the same time’. This response reflects a humanistic discourse by highlighting how the complexity and tension within human relationships can be the grounds for developing wisdom and compassion.

For von Bujdoss and Nichtern, the wise and compassionate response is to address the broader social structures that enable GBV, within the sangha and society at large. This means addressing the ‘blind patriarchy’ which, according to Nichtern (2018a) ‘... creates the shielding for [Buddhist] leaders to profess certain values while straying far from those values themselves’ and impacts the organization, student and the teacher. However, Nichtern (2018a) also argues that the social problems of ‘Western democracy and capitalism ... are also [the sangha’s] *actual* problems: The legacy of slavery, racism, misogyny, sexism, sexual violence, homophobia...’ because it is situated in this very social context. The practice of compassion is not just limited to addressing problematic structures within sanghas but to also

address other social structures which enable GBV broadly. Nichtern and von Bujdoss' emphasis on social engagement in this-worldly concerns clearly reflects a humanistic Buddhist discourse. Yet they also align a Buddhist humanistic discourse with a Western social justice discourse by claiming that modern social movements enable sanghas '... to organize and respectfully – with love for our teacher, our tradition and all beings – demand change *within* our own community' (Nichtern 2018a). In other words, contemporary social justice movements, such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, have the capacity to generate wisdom and compassion.

Alternatively, Allione emphasizes the Dharma itself as wisdom. She promotes the idea that '... the Dharma is yours ... It's not that the teacher who you're disappointed in...' (Study Buddhism 2019). This notion of 'the Dharma as yours' empowers victims/survivors and other affected sangha members to heal with the Dharma rather than to discard it. Moreover, it humanizes the teacher by stressing their humanity 'as a human being ... they're not the Dharma'. In doing so, the power differential between the teacher and student is minimized, spiritual authority is externalized from the teacher, and both teacher and student are perceived as suffering beings deserving of compassion.

A humanistic shift in addressing GBV: benefits and implications

The responses of Western Buddhist teachers that have been analysed and presented in this chapter demonstrate a humanistic Buddhist interpretation of compassion which emphasizes social action and ethics, frames human experiences and social crises as a source for spiritual practice, and the Dharma as the wisdom which both guides and reveals itself through the human experience. The responses highlighted in this chapter also indicate an integration of humanistic Buddhist discourse with Western discourses of social justice and feminism. In such a framework, GBV is seen as an opportunity for social action and change and an opportunity

for Dharma practice and community-building. In other words, this perspective focuses on community healing, collective responsibility and empowerment.

I believe that the benefits of Buddhist-informed humanistic responses to GBV are two-fold. The first benefit is the alignment of religious teachings with secular Western ideas. This approach does not discard the Dharma in addressing current social issues but rather highlights its relevance. This enables survivors and affected communities to draw upon spiritual and secular resources to address GBV. As research into GBV occurring in religious and immigrant communities demonstrates, religious and cultural discourses and practices can be sources of support for victims/survivors (Bent-Goodley 2005: 200; Hassouneh-Phillips 2003: 686–8), despite being enablers at times. Moreover, members and leaders of religious communities have the power to prevent GBV by reinterpreting religious teachings and discourses to critique rather than justify or enable it (Westenberg 2017: 76; Choi and Cramer 2016: 19). Thus, religious teachings and discourses are important for the development of positive interventions to address and prevent GBV. The responses from Western Buddhist teachers analysed in this chapter indicate that the Dharma can be helpful in addressing GBV. This benefits victims and survivors who may still desire to remain engaged and committed to Buddhist teachings and practices – that is, their spiritual life – yet perceive it also as a source of trauma or tension. Rather than discarding the Dharma, the responses of Western Buddhist teachers analysed offer humanistic interpretations of Buddhist teachings in which compassion becomes central. In this way, Western Buddhist teachers create a safer way for victims and survivors to engage with the Dharma that is more empowering and compassionate.

Buddhist-informed humanistic responses to GBV may also offer an alternative to conventional criminal justice responses and punitive legal measures. This is another benefit because the conventional criminal justice approach has been criticized for being incident-specific and offender-centred rather than considerate of victims/survivors' needs, such as their safety, being heard and providing input (Jeffries et al. 2021: 9; Van Wormer 2009: 108). Furthermore, conventional criminal justice approaches are focused primarily on punishment rather than healing (Van Wormer

2009: 107). Therefore, in cases of GBV, conventional justice responses in the West do not aim to empower victims/survivors or to rehabilitate perpetrators and change their behaviours (Jeffries et al. 2021: 9–10).

The Buddhist-informed humanistic responses to GBV analysed in this chapter are more akin to restorative justice, a movement to reform the conventional criminal justice system to be victim-centred and dialogue driven with reconciliation and healing as its core (Van Wormer 2009: 109; Jeffries et al. 2021: 10–11). Advocates for restorative justice argue that this approach can be particularly beneficial for GBV victims/survivors because it provides ‘a safe space where victims are given a voice, have opportunity to confront the offender, and have input into justice outcomes’ (Jeffries et al. 2021: 2). Communal restorative justice processes invite the broader community into a restorative dialogue not just about the violence and who was harmed, but how to heal and move forward from it as a community (Beck 2012: 383). According to Beck (2012: 384), communal restorative justice processes view the whole community as a victim and therefore engages community members to share their perspectives and experiences of the harm and to help shape community supports for healing and preventing future harm. These processes can transform a community by restoring a sense of interconnectedness and strengthening community supports, as well reducing future harm (Beck 2012: 388, 392).

The Buddhist-informed humanistic responses to GBV analysed in this chapter align with restorative justice approaches whilst remaining dialectically situated within the Buddhist framework. Using Buddhist interpretations of compassion, the responses are primarily victim-centred and aimed at collective healing. For example, the notion of ‘fierce compassion’ encourages victims/survivors to turn towards their inner pain and trauma and to meet it with compassion. This empowers them to make sense and narrate their experiences on their own terms, an empowering and healing process on its own. By connecting the personal practice of ‘fierce compassion’ with the broader social context, such as patriarchal oppression, victims/survivors are encouraged to perceive their personal suffering as a part of collective suffering. This wisdom facilitates social activism, without losing sight of their respective healing journeys. At the communal level, perceiving GBV occurring within a sangha as collective suffering engenders

a compassionate and collective will to address the underlying problematic gender relations, structures, and power imbalances as a matter of collective responsibility. Therefore, a humanistic interpretation of compassion frames GBV as a community-wide or society-wide matter.

The centrality of compassion to Buddhist-informed humanistic responses is a distinct contribution that can impact responses to GBV more broadly. Based upon the analysis presented in this chapter, I believe that the principles of Buddhist-informed humanistic responses – that is, Buddhist interpretations of compassion and humanism – encourages restorative AND compassionate practices to respond and address GBV. One way is by stressing a compassionate regard and response for victims/survivors and perpetrators. According to Owens (2020: 170), Buddhist teachings of wisdom and compassion enables one to perceive and hold two relative truths simultaneously: that ‘at one extreme [the former teacher] changed my life, and at the other extreme he harmed other people’. This requires sangha members to hold a compassionate regard for both the victim/survivor and perpetrator. What does this compassionate regard look like? It means not negating victims/survivors’ experiences and being open to understanding and meeting their needs for safety, empowerment and healing. It also means recognizing the significant interpersonal connections of the perpetrator to the community because of their often-senior positions within the sangha and spiritually meaningful relationships with other sangha members, without minimizing the harm they have caused. This deep insight into the relational and communal complexities of GBV encourages sangha members to consider responses supportive of the whole sangha. These responses would necessarily involve supporting the human potential of both the victim and perpetrator – the latter to be empowered, the former to be reformed and both to be healed. Such compassionate responses and practices are not about satisfying visceral feelings. As von Bujdoss states: ‘... dissolving [the sangha] ... throwing all the people who are responsible in jail has a visceral benefit to those who are angry in the moment. But is it wise and is it compassionate? Is it a reflection of what we’re actually all working towards?’ (Owens 2017). Instead, it is meeting the harm directly but also with compassion at every stage

of the healing process so that victims/survivors' needs are considered, and perpetrators are still held accountable but given an opportunity to reform.

Conclusion

The Buddhist-informed humanistic responses analysed in the chapter integrate Buddhist discourses with Western discourses to frame responses to GBV. Humanistic notions of social ethics and this-worldly liberation through addressing collective human sufferings underpin these responses, indicating a humanistic hermeneutic. This can be seen in the Western Buddhist teachers' responses to GBV occurring in Western sanghas; they emphasize compassion as social action, as transformation and as wisdom.

Such responses can be beneficial to GBV victims/survivors and the effected sangha. I discuss two specifically in this chapter. One is supporting victims/survivors to remain engaged with Buddhist practice and teachings as a source of spiritual support by reinterpreting and reassessing the Dharma according to humanistic interpretations. For example, the notion of 'fierce compassion' empowers victims/survivors to narrate their experiences accordingly and to prioritize self-compassion and their healing.

The other benefit is that they stress collective responsibility and community healing. The responses presented in this chapter are, in some ways, akin to restorative justice approaches that also aim to be victim-centred, reconciliatory and community-building. According to the Western Buddhist teachers analysed, it is the collective responsibility of Buddhists to respond to GBV in sanghas and to address the underpinning gendered ideas and structures. Some even argue that this collective responsibility extends to society at large so that addressing GBV and its enablers in society is a social responsibility for Buddhists.

Herein lies the distinction of Buddhist-informed humanistic responses to GBV – a humanistic interpretation of compassion as all-encompassing. This perspective enables compassionate practices which are not punitive or oppressive but supportive of the human potential to heal, reform and

empower. Moreover, it encourages an engagement with matters which effect society more broadly, such as GBV.

I conclude with thought-provoking claims that such Buddhist-informed humanistic responses exemplify how compassionate practices offer better supports for GBV victims and perpetrators. The responses also ambiguate the boundary between Buddhist sanghas and secular or non-Buddhist communities. In other words, larger societal and Buddhist communal problems are often interlinked, and spiritual spaces can be conceived as social spaces that intersect with others.

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6 Social Connection in the Attention Economy: Cultivating Compassion on Commercial Social Media

Introduction

Social connection – arguably our most valued possession – has been transformed into an object of commodification. Enabled by new technological affordances, the logic of our for-profit economic order has reached the final frontier of extraction – human consciousness and their interconnection. On the internet, social connection is rendered as behavioural data to serve hidden commercial practices and the accumulation of advertising revenue. Burgeoning profits ensure that the world’s largest social media companies remain thoroughly tethered to this logic of accumulation. Despite being in the throes of this new economic order and its manipulative techniques, humanity’s need for meaningful social connection remains a defining characteristic of our species. Alternative perspectives with an appreciation for our evolutionary story and ethical frameworks with a preference for sustainable social connection are necessary and undeniable. Accordingly, in this chapter, we use an evolutionary-Buddhist perspective to recapitulate the importance of social connection as fundamental to human life. From this position, we seek to understand key developmental components of social media as well as challenge the idea this technology is designed to satisfy our evolutionary disposition for social connection. Searching for a solution, we offer our preliminary thoughts on what a new ethical framework must account for moving forward.

To achieve this, we first outline the evolutionary-ecological perspective and draw on the concept of adaptation to characterize humanity’s

need for social connection. Second, we describe two great scientific innovations and two important shifts in social life that would later become instrumental in the design of social media and the technology's prevalence in society. Third, we discuss the history and development of 'surveillance capitalism', specifically the role this economic order plays in shaping the design and structure of commercial social media. Fourth, we turn to examine the evidence that argues social media facilitates a form of connectivity that ultimately harms healthy human development, connection and wellbeing – with impacts on both individuals and society. It is important to note, we limit our discussion of social media to Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, as these are among the top six most used social media sites in the world today (We are social and Hootsuite 2022). These platforms are driven by a shared imperative to maximize user engagement onsite, and much of the research we examine pertaining to the health effects of social media occurs through these platforms. Finally, from the ethical launchpad of *Mettā*, we draw on Humanistic Buddhist verses on care, compassion and inclusivity to explore strategies aimed at counteracting the dehumanizing effects of commercial social media technology. We argue that an ethical framework based in evolutionary-ecological logic and guided by Humanistic Buddhism can facilitate the realization of a tolerant, supportive coexistence on social media platforms. As social media becomes the leading medium of social connection, a humane understanding of the development and role of these technologies is needed to synchronize efforts and prevent the siloing of solutions to what is a multidimensional and complex problem.

An evolutionary-ecological perspective

Evolution is a selective process guided by natural laws and principles that govern the gene frequencies and development of organisms and biological systems over time (Gould 1979; Dawkins 1999; Dawkins 2015). Natural selection is the 'creative force of evolution'; generating random mutations in varied and emergent populations while selecting traits from among

those who survived to sexually reproduce their genes in the next generation (Gould 1979: 12). Creatures who overcame extreme odds and subtle changes in their environment to sexually reproduce, solidified segments of their experience and stored certain attributes in their genetic information. This dynamic evolutionary process gradually produced adaptations across many subsequent generations, with each standing a greater chance of surviving in their own environment and sexually reproducing their genes (Dawkins 1999: 2015). Whether it is primarily physiological or psychological, simple or complex, involves a cell or is subcellular, consists of an organ or an organ system, each adaptive trait has a functional role concerning something in the creature's internal or external environment (Keeton 1972: 598). Though adaptation implies an evolutionary advantage, certain traits are only advantageous if the environment in which the creature resides sufficiently resembles that of their ancestors (Christakis 2019).

Evolution is an elegant conceptualization of how 'the characteristics of living things change with time and that the change is directed by natural selection' (Keeton 1972: 585). A strictly Darwinian approach to evolution would not be concerned about change within an individual over their lifetime, but the change in genetic makeup and expression in the characteristics of populations over the course of many generations. This makes any attempt to understand human evolution difficult to grasp because our evolution is now wedded to a rapidly changing socio-technological foundation which, at its pace of change, defies current methods of analysis. For instance, there may be 'adaptive value so slight as to be undetectable' in today's online environments, and 'yet be great enough to result in evolutionary change, given the time scale on which evolution occurs' (Keeton 1972: 606). With advancements in epigenetics, however, we are now sensitive to changes in genetic information between a single generation and understand the characteristics in one generation to be the accumulative result of what happened to the preceding generation. To better understand how changes to humanity's experience in modern society may change their adaptive potential today and through time, we must also draw on an ecological approach. Ecology is a distinguished mode of thinking about extensive networks of organisms and environments, their dynamic relationship,

and their co-development (Keeton 1972: 635). Unlike evolution, which is concerned with the nature and development of interactions between the individual and features of their environment over many generations, our ecological approach will concentrate on how interactions occur today between people 'belonging to the same grouping' and across 'all populations' using social media platforms.

Social connection

Social connection is essential to our success as a species. Contrary to popular culture, the most significant creature in our evolutionary history was not the sabretooth tiger or the mammoth, but other humans (Christakis 2019). We, as social creatures, adapted means to maximize connection and cooperation as well as detect and minimize antagonism in social settings. Natural selection favoured those with strong social bonds because their traits and attributes made sexually reproducing their genes more likely (Williams 1966). With each successive generation, those qualities and properties which continued to promote personal relationships were passed down in our predecessors' genetic information. As beneficiaries, 'we carry within us innate proclivities that reflect our natural social state' which some suggest 'is primarily good, practically and even morally' (Christakis 2019: xxi). The genetic echoes of our success with social connection are expressed in our 'instinctive disposition to avoid isolation and to maintain proximity' with each other today (Cacioppo and Patrick 2009: 7). However, these adaptations for social connection like all others are predicated on the environment in which we reside sufficiently resembling that of our ancestors. Humans evolved in an ancient ecological setting – small tribes, intimate interactions, rare pleasures, and familiar faces – and considering humanity now resides in a radically different environment, aspects of our species are encumbered in the unknown territory of modern society. Outside of the ecological context for which we are adapted, 'problems arise simply when there is a mismatch between the level of social connection desired and the level the

environment provides' (Cacioppo and Patrick 2009: 23). We are made painfully aware of the importance of social connection when we feel rejected or are left isolated with insufficient means to meaningfully connect with others. This means that although our environment has changed dramatically, we continue to bear an ancient adaptation for social connection to survive and thrive.

Two insights

Drawing on our evolutionary-ecological perspective and with a renewed sense of the importance of social connection, we pause to consider two scientific insights. Insights which would later become instrumental in the design of social media and partially account for the technology's prevalence in society.

Behaviour change

The work of experimental psychologist Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1938; 1951; 1965) proved that manmade interventions designed to mimic natural selection could artificially reinforce naturally occurring behaviours in animals such as dogs and mice. In his notorious experiments with rodents, Skinner (1951; 1965) relied on sugary treats and electric shocks to strengthen or deter the animal toward or away from specific behaviours. Overtime, as long as the correct timing and ratio of satisfaction and discomfort was created, Skinner could condition rodents to reproduce a complex series of behaviours in the laboratory (Gray 2011). These newly discovered techniques in behavioural modification meant that the actions of any feeling creature, including people, were now susceptible to being conditioned, rapidly and beyond naturally occurring conditions like sexual reproduction or population size. Despite their promise and early achievements, these techniques relied on a controlled and carefully monitored laboratory setting to be effective. The scientist needed

to know what the animal was doing in each moment and how to change their environment to stimulate the desired behaviour.

Knowing where and what

The bridge between experiment and real-world practice in the science of behavioural modification was crossed in 1964 when physicist and electrical engineer Stuart Mackay led an ecological expedition to Ecuador to explore new possibilities in the long-distance transmission of computational information for conservation purposes. Mackay used telematic technology¹ to measure variations in the physiological state and behaviour of multiple reptiles in the Galapagos Islands – simultaneously and with stunning accuracy (Mackay 1998; Zuboff 2019). Mackay proved it was possible to monitor entire populations of unrestrained creatures in real time and alter their behaviour computationally from a distance, all without breaking their conscious awareness. This great scientific innovation soon made significant strides outside of ecological science. Commercial entities found ways to not just monitor but stimulate changes in human behaviour using a network of telematic devices – the internet (Zuboff 2019). Today, and in combination with behavioural modification techniques, telematics like those built into social media are increasingly used to survey and steer human behaviour for the ultimate purpose of selling products and services.

Two shifting trends

Over the course of the twentieth century, insights in behavioural psychology found their way into consumer industries where a distributed

1 Telemetry refers to the automatic recording and transmission of data from remote or inaccessible sources to an IT system in a different location.

network of technological devices could monitor and stimulate people to adopt desirable consumption habits. As a consequence, two important and interconnected shifts occurred in society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. First, commercial entities particularly in the technology sector shifted from using consumer surveillance to adopting surveillance capitalism, and second, in using their products modern humans shifted from making social connections to generating online connectivity. These shifts shaped the development of social media technologies like today's Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, and the lives of those social creatures who have come to depend on them.

From consumer surveillance to surveillance capitalism

Social media is an incredibly recent phenomenon in human history. However, the underlying logic of consumer surveillance that underpins this technology is of earlier origin. Over the course of the twentieth century, scientific insights into behaviour change found their way into consumer industries that were trending away from mass production toward specialized, branded products, which required much greater levels of public consumption. How to best seduce individuals to reliably purchase and consume more goods became the focus for advertisers competing for the money and attention of consumers (Beck 2003). Early in the twenty-first century, advertisers experimented with inserting promoted goods and services into the personal lives of consumers through the use of computers, encouraging people to accept surveillance as a way for advertisements to align with their individual characteristics, behaviour and interests (Turow 2006). In today's world of networked devices and infrastructures, an incredibly wide range of personal information about consumers can easily be extracted via bank machine transactions, social media profiles, smartphone location, point of purchase sales, online shopping, web 'cookies', credit applications, domestic and international travel, and many additional sources (Manzerolle and Smeltzer 2010; Michael and Clarke 2013; Lyon 2015). The term 'glass consumers' was first used by Lacey (2005) to draw attention to the fact that private commercial

actors with control over the means of surveillance can know so much about consumers and their preferences that the latter may as well appear transparent. It is the supremacy of consumer identity, and the equation of freedom with 'free choice', to choose between options on the marketplace underlying this identity, that defines individual participation in consumer surveillance.

Advertisements increasingly reflect personal preferences, and consumers can therefore never know if they are being treated fairly or offered the same products as others (Turow 2006: 304). As expressed by Palmås (2010: 349): 'Consumers only see their own micro-actions; producers have access to the aggregate flows of consumer desires [...] companies can fine tune their relation to consumers, reeling them in, keeping them away from the competition, while extracting the maximum profit from them.' In this way, individuals are effectively made to 'work' for the interests of particular companies. These companies sort consumers into finer and finer niches by collecting more and more personal information. This knowledge encourages the favouring of loyal customers through the provision of discounts and other offers, while those deemed to be of low economic value, such as one-time buyers, may be ignored altogether or offered services on unfavourable terms (Hall 2005: 157). Following the 2000 Dot-com crash that spelled the end for many early but unprofitable internet companies, the executive board at Google realized that 'data exhaust', a corporate euphemism for the information generated through user use of internet platforms, could be repurposed as a new commodity form and sold to advertising clients. Such data encompasses, for example, 'the number and pattern of search terms, how a query is phrased, spelling, punctuation, dwell times, click patterns, and location', alongside a vast number of other metrics (Zuboff 2019: 67). Zuboff links the changes described above to a new logic of accumulation and mass behavioural modification in the internet age she calls 'Surveillance Capitalism': 'a new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales' (Zuboff 2019: v). Instead of being focused primarily on observable behaviour in the physical environment, as Skinner's was, surveillance capitalism relies on the abstraction and extraction of human behaviour online to incrementally condition desired internal states congruent with

commercial objectives. This economic model has since been replicated by the largest commercial social media platforms such as Facebook, which has included additional metrics abstracted from the social interactions that occur on the platform.

From connection to connectivity

Prior to 2009, social media companies like Facebook primarily manufactured accounts to facilitate the ‘connectedness’ between users of those accounts – otherwise known as one-to-one connection (Dijck 2016). However, they have since learned that people leave traces of behavioural information through their interactions on the platform, and this information can be repurposed and purchased by those interested in directing future behaviour. Drawing on mass behavioural information across entire populations, companies like Facebook could readily employ Skinner-like techniques to structure and design their software technology. Instead of caged rodents or a Galapagos tortoise, modern humans are monitored and stimulated in a ‘digital enclosure’; an interactive and ubiquitous realm ‘wherein every action and transaction generates information about itself’ (Andrejevic 2007: 2). Companies in control of social media platforms no longer pursued ‘horizontal, networked, peer-to-peer communication’ (Dijck 2016: 16). Instead, such corporate entities seek to maximize ‘connectivity’ between users and networks of users to generate and monetize as much user-information as possible – otherwise known as one-to-many connectivity (Dijck 2016). By doing this, their private enterprise sought to ‘bypass social relations in favour of automated machine processes that compel the behaviours that advance commercial objectives’ (Zuboff 2019: 220). Much like an experimenter and their animal subject, the economic structure of social media is asymmetrical: the individual user of social media remains largely unaware of what information is being gathered, how that information is extracted, to what end is it being put to use, all the while having no input into the goals or objectives of people who own and operate the environment (Andrejevic and Gates 2014: 192). This shift from connectedness to connectivity financed

new technological designs to further leverage our dependency on social connection for commercial ends, leaving some searching in vain for what companies once promised yet have failed to deliver.

Social media among social creatures

Social media has become the most popular means of connection in modern society and indispensable to the way we work, socialize and play. For instance, in 2019, a study discovered that children in the United Kingdom under the age of fourteen spend nearly twice as long with devices (three hours and eighteen minutes per day) as they do in conversation with their families (one hour and forty minutes per day) (Pinkstone 2019). Among a cohort of 2,007 parents with children under 18 years of age, another study conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic discovered that the percentage proportion of children who spent more than four hours a day on devices doubled across every age demographic, including zero-to-four-year-olds (Ipsos and Global Myopia Awareness Coalition 2020). In 2021, the average daily time spent using social media was two hours and twenty-seven minutes while nearly half a billion users joined social media the same year (We are social and Hootsuite 2022).

It is important to note the aforementioned figures do not represent an entirely negative trend in social media use. Younger users may feel empowered through their access to detailed information about peers and strangers, while simultaneously forced into a strategic calculus regarding what information they should personally reveal, disclose or conceal to create connections with others and protect social boundaries (Tokunaga 2011; Marwick 2012). Social media subsequently allows individuals to participate in their own identity creation, a process which is necessarily tied to voyeurism, self-display and public performance (Silverman 2015). During the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns that occurred around the world, logging on to social media provided individuals with a vital source of expression, communication, community connection to family and friends, as well as an avenue to exercise and enjoy certain human

rights and fundamental freedoms at a time when physical contact proved untenable. Without disregarding these positive aspects of social media, society's growing dependency has raised questions about the quality of social connection online and whether this has mental health consequences, particularly among the young.

It is important to highlight that studies investigating the association between social media use and mental health problems amongst adults have produced conflicting results (see Haidt 2020; Allen 2020). The biggest point of contention is whether social media use is 'a risk factor' or merely an 'indicator' of mental illness. Another is concerned with whether usage patterns between active use (such as frequently posting) versus passive use (such as viewing but not posting) contributes to different mental health outcomes (Verduyn et al. 2015; Masciantonio et al. 2021). Nevertheless, structured by surveillance capitalism, social media are designed to generate connectivity between people and their devices. As a consequence, we bear the subtle but consequential opportunity cost; whereby time spent interacting on social media is time potentially lost pursuing in-person relationships. This detracts from our ability to socially connect even when another person is physically present. Recent studies show, for example, that smart phone use at group events undermines the benefits of the social interaction by offering individuals an easy avenue for distraction (Rainie and Zickuhr 2015; Dwyer et al. 2018), disrupting human capacities to feel emotionally connected, close, empathetic or share trust (Przybylski and Weinstein 2013). In essence, these 'tools of the mind amplify and in turn numb the most intimate, the most human, of our natural capacities' (McLuhan 2001; Carr 2020: 211). When we shape the technology to suit what we think we need, the technology in turn shapes us; we exchange our evolved traits and attributes for designed ones.

In addition to opportunity costs, mounting research suggests social media use does produce time, gendered and age dependant ill-mental health effects. Using social media when you're under the age of eighteen, female, and longer than five hours a day results in the greatest harm (Haidt 2020). Young people who score higher on tests of social media addiction are more likely to experience symptoms of mild depression (Sujarwoto et al. 2021), worse sleep quality, and lower life satisfaction (Buda et al.

2021). For instance, Arad (et al. 2017) find that users of Facebook aged eighteen to twenty-three are most susceptible to increased social comparison and decreases in happiness. Among adolescent females in the United Kingdom, Booker (et al. 2018) showed higher patterns of social media use at age ten is associated with declines in wellbeing thereafter (but not for males). Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) suggest these effects are pronounced for young females because they are particularly sensitive to reputational signals and expectations on self-image, and while using the technology they're exposed to an inflated amount of social feedback. If the feedback is consistently negative or unrealistic, the technology can insidiously and at times dramatically degrade their sense of social-worth and self-esteem (Bányai, et al. 2017). Studies looking at Instagram state that the longer female users spend on the platform, the more likely they are to be exposed to distorted images of food and how to react to eating food. As a result, there is a strong correlation between female users who spend long periods of time on Instagram and their development of an eating disorder like orthorexia nervosa (Turner and Lefevre 2017).

Despite these adverse effects being contested at times, the other side of this problem proves just as instructive. For instance, time spent away from social media does improve a litany of mental health outcomes for low to moderate users. In a landmark study of over 1,600 American adults who reported to be on Facebook for at least an hour every day, the researchers found that a one-month separation from Facebook (deactivating their account) led to a significant improvement in mental health including stabilization of emotional wellbeing, a felt reduction in loneliness, an increase in happiness, and a significant reduction in measures of political polarization (Allcott et al. 2020). Social media may provide ephemeral moments of connection, but on the whole they are considered unsustainable surrogates to satisfy our evolutionary disposition for human connection (Small and Vorgan 2008; Cacioppo and Patrick 2009; Carr 2020; Centre for Humane Technology 2022). In this section, we laid out the research on the nature of social media overuse and in particular its impact on children and adolescents. Drawing on our evolutionary-ecological perspective of social connection and grounded in Humanistic Buddhism, we suggest this evidence is enough for us to reconsider our relationship with social media using a new ethical framework.

A new *Mettā*-Verse?

The idea of *Mettā* as it is presented in Humanistic Buddhism may provide insights into how social media can work or could be fashioned for the purpose of care, compassion, and inclusivity – rather than to enhance user engagement with the platform in pursuit of profit maximization – and what this might mean for future populations. In this section we provide a point of departure for those concerned with the consequences of commercial social media discussed in this chapter to reassess how these technologies ought to operate and shape humanity. In the spirit of *Mettā*, the strategies articulated below are divided among the tenets of care, inclusivity, and compassion.

Care

The negative mental health effects associated with social media use impact people unevenly. Our first duty is to protect and care for the youngest and most vulnerable. Efforts in this direction have been initiated recently by the UK government which has introduced an ‘age-appropriate design code’ comprised of fifteen flexible standards that seek to ‘ensure the best interests of the child are the primary consideration when designing and developing online services’ (Information Commissioners Office 2022: 4). While a positive step, these standards do not ban or specifically prescribe companies to act. They also focus on online services in general, which as we have discussed in this chapter, diminishes the focus on social media as the online service which produces the largest harms to children. As it is presently designed to maximize user time onsite, social media is curating the experience of childhood. The opportunity costs associated with social media use, particularly for heavy users, means that children are being deprived of in-person occasions to develop vital social skills. Children need special safeguards and presently little scrutiny is brought to bear on users’ ages beyond a request to enter a self-declared birth date on sign-up. To negate the most harmful effects of social media use as it is currently

designed and operated, we argue it is imperative that companies, governments, and communities raise and enforce age limits for social media use to eighteen years.

Inclusivity

Second, we need to redefine social media as a public good. Until recently private industry has determined the form and function of social media in isolation, and in doing so, changed the course of human social interaction to align with profiteering. Whistle-blower scandals permeate the track record of the largest social media companies such as Facebook. Despite congressional hearings, its own pledges and numerous media exposés, Facebook has failed to address the multiple problems on its platform. Social media companies do not disclose information about their intended or actual influence, forcing scholars to try to de-engineer its impact afterwards. This means we don't entirely know the true extent of the impact of social media in general, or its impact on our evolutionary biology in particular. We need greater transparency into the decisions that are made behind corporate doors which impact how social media operates. This includes the programming of recommendation algorithms which remain the proprietary secret of social media companies.

These platforms need to provide more opportunities to connect lonely individuals or those at risk of ill-mental health and help them engage in physical social interaction. For example, once a user's time spent using social media exceeds a certain duration during the day, an additional design feature could alert the user of other friends in their network with whom they could meet up physically, facilitating in-person interaction and avoiding the negative effects of extensive time spent on social media. Such a design feature is not a question of technical feasibility but of commercial choice. Operating under the current profit incentives, design features that could enhance and encourage real world interaction are deliberately *not taken* to ensure maximum time on site. Redefining social media as a public good would help to broaden and localize decision-making, improving the quality and legitimacy of decisions concerning how to design social media to be

more inclusive and attentive to the real needs of individuals, and strengthening commitment to their implementation. While we cannot turn the clock back, we can return to this idea of internet technologies like social media being a public good.

Compassion

Social media exacerbates our innate negativity bias, elevating outrage and conflict over empathy and mutual understanding to maximize user time onsite. Facebook researchers have themselves proven that individual emotional states can be passed to others via social media, leading people to experience the same emotions without their awareness (Kramer et al. 2014). This means that the anger or contempt which is expressed by an individual on social media can infect the larger network. While social media's interface can and should be improved to provide more opportunities for conscious self-reflection and development of compassion, individuals can also contribute towards these ends by developing a mindful etiquette around their personal use of social media. If one reminds themselves before posting or engaging in debate on social media that they are dealing with real people behind the computer screen, this can help to foster a compassionate frame of mind and a more socially productive session. Developing compassion through using social media in a way that reflects the tenets of Humanistic Buddhism would mean never communicating in a way that could foreseeably cause suffering to others. Individuals could practice adopting the principle of charity, choosing to interpret their communications through social media positively rather than negatively. For example, after receiving a critical comment about one's post, the principle of charity could be applied to give the commenter the benefit of the doubt: 'this person is obviously having a bad day' and/or 'we are likely receiving information from different sources' and/or 'what does this comment teach me about how *not* to interact with others online?'. Having these principles and strategies appear at the top of a user's newsfeed periodically (e.g. weekly) could help remind individuals of their importance and gradually internalize a mindful social media practice.

Conclusion

Humans are biological beings outfitted by natural selection with an evolutionary disposition for social connection. However, our evolved intuition for intimate and meaningful moments of social connection is considered inefficient, unproductive, and invaluable when measured against commercial social media's profit-driven motives. If we are to acknowledge that an imperative to maximize user time onsite lies at the root of commercial social media and the attention economy, we must also come to terms with an uncomfortable reality. Given that the addictive qualities written into the design of the current major platforms have proven extremely effective, were proprietary companies to remove these qualities altogether their competitors would predictably leverage these same design features in new products.

As we have tried to illustrate in this chapter, social media is a risk factor for a litany of health problems, particularly for heavy users, young users and female users. Yet individuals also willingly engage with these platforms, partially because of their addictive qualities and monopolized status, but also because at one and the same time, social media does undeniably provide benefits to human social connection and identity formation. The comfort, convenience, efficiency and enjoyment social media delivers through a dopamine reward system proves too alluring, the consequences seemingly so unimportant in comparison, that once accepted social media has become normalized, forcing us to adapt to the *necessary order of things*. We must recognize that presently all users of social media are to some extent nudged herded, and conditioned in particular ways conducive to the interests of platform owners. Were these interests to change, top-down behavioural modification on such platforms would likely be reengineered to meet new ends, thus the challenge to individual autonomy remains. Moreover, if the ends of behavioural modification on social media are not directed towards profit maximization through user engagement onsite – what exactly should they be directed towards?

Social media functions as a powerful device to orchestrate and direct collective behaviour. Designing social media to encourage more off-site

interactions between people in physical spaces may help to satisfy our evolutionary need for real human connection, but how to do so in a way that generates enough profit for companies to remain competitive under the current economic order is unknown, hence present inaction. In this sense we circle back to arguments made by other authors in this book concerning the damage our current global economic order inflicts upon our evolutionary needs as human beings and the need for multidimensional change. In the words of Venerable Master Hsing Yun (2016: 158): ‘the present exists because of the past, and the future will exist because of the present’. As part of this change, we have attempted to highlight how actions guided by an evolutionary-ecological perspective, and the spirit of *Mettā* and Humanistic Buddhism, can light the path towards a brighter future and a new social media.

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PART II

Enriching Compassion in Times of Crises

7 Compassion, Belief and Macrocompassion

As the enormity of human-made global crises weighs more and more on our minds, we should first ask: how can we solve problems that we ourselves created? More to the point: what shifts in our consciousness need to occur for us to not make the same mistakes again? While the virtues of compassion are promoted to global citizens, the ordinary compassion of individuals is strictly limited in what it can achieve. The alternative that will be explored here is the all-encompassing vision of macrocompassion taught in the Buddhist religion. The question ‘Is global compassion achievable?’ (Ekman and Ekman 2017) can then be answered with a conditional yes. Key Buddhist sources on macrocompassion, which are brought together for the first time in what follows, show that it can develop even in those who are not awakened. On the other hand, the protocols for cultivating it do not fit easily into modern secular society, where it is arguably most needed.

Compassion and its limits

Before arguing that global crises can be addressed with global compassion, compassion itself needs to be defined. There are two discourses of interest: Buddhist philosophy of mind and the scientific literature. Across these discourses, compassion is understood as a social emotion that involves empathy and urgency. Neural correlates of compassion have been identified – ‘the brain that longs to care for others,’ for instance (Steven and Benjamin 2018). Compassion also involves action. Compassionate people are moved to respond to someone else’s suffering. They are willing

to give something to relieve suffering, showing commitment that is not present in empathy alone. It is increasingly accepted, as well, that compassion can be fuelled, refined and extended beyond a single flash of emotion (Bornemann and Singer 2013). We can then entertain the possibility of broadening compassion to its maximum extent, to encompass the suffering of all life on earth.

What kinds of behaviour can be classified as compassionate? Caring for others does not in itself necessarily involve compassion. Workers are obliged to look after those around them in many professions: medicine, nursing and policing, in particular. People are more generally compelled to care for one another through their social bonds. A duty of care of some kind undergirds many social arrangements. Love for family and friends may feel genuine, but it is often self-interested, from the perspective of evolutionary biologists (Kay et al. 2019). This kind of love lacks the potential to liberate, as it is tied up with attachment, according to Buddhists and neuroscientists (Gyatso and Chodron 2020: 105; Ulmer-Yaniv et al. 2022). Compassion, however, involves giving fresh and voluntary attention to the suffering of other sentient beings, over and above a duty of care.

However compassion may be described in terms of mental processes and states, a mind is needed to feel it in the first place. To describe organizations, societies, laws and so on as compassionate is imprecise. Unfeeling entities do not exercise compassion because they do not have subjective experiences. An expression such as ‘compassionate government’, for instance, which is common usage in English, does not exist in Buddhist scripture. Instead, we would hear about a compassionate leader of some kind – a ruler, a minister, an expert navigator, the head of a herd (Speyer 1895: 56, 132, 241). Compassion is the preserve of living, individual minds. And as compassion involves giving something to relieve suffering – time, energy, attention, expertise, material goods – it is also the preserve of those who are able to give, and is not a viable reaction to every situation of suffering.

The subjective, organic nature of compassion limits what society can demand of it. The limitations of our senses, our mental capacities and our resources make it impossible for everyone to show compassion to everyone else all of the time. The arising of compassion depends on the situation of the

observer and the situations of others. Compassion is always conditional and never flows on demand, even and especially when it is pressured to do so.

These, then, are the potentials and constraints of compassion:

1. Compassion is the urge to free living beings from suffering.
2. Compassion wants to give something to reduce suffering.
3. Compassion is an act of will; it cannot be forced.
4. Compassion is fomented in the mind; entities that cannot feel do not have or exercise compassion.

While compassion is often seen as socially elevating and virtuous, local acts of compassion do not necessarily add up to global benefit. Compassionate action may also be seen as partial, divisive and threatening to a social order, irrespective of its motivation. In environments with finite resources, the favouring of one group occurs at the cost of other groups. Overpopulation further erodes the value of compassionate acts by individuals. What is then needed for large-scale liberation is a crystal-clear holistic worldview, one that sees and acts far beyond the compassion of everyday life.

Macrocompassion: Definition and scope

The special experience of macrocompassion, literally ‘great compassion’, reacts to suffering on a global scale. While some religions encourage love for all creatures, if their notion of universal love depends on the idea of a creator god, their prospects for fostering a truly global compassion will be slight. By contrast, macrocompassion is concerned with nothing more or less than the whole pervasive reality of suffering. It is experienced not as a force from above but as a subjective state, albeit one that is not part of everyday awareness. It is also linked to transcendence of a different kind, which likewise complicates its applicability in secular society.

To date, the ancient ideology of compassion that embraces all sentient life has received little attention, even as the crisis of the ecosphere moves to

the forefront of global consciousness. Definition and description are once again needed. The term ‘great compassion’ translates a key term of Buddhist teaching, *mahākaruṇa*. It is a foundational principle of awakening accepted by all Buddhist traditions. The novel translation ‘macrocompassion’ is adopted here to convey the same notion.¹ Macrocompassion is to compassion what macroeconomics is to economics.

A significant early reference to expanded compassion occurs in the *Sūtra on the Four Congregations* (*Catuspariṣatsūtra*). The sūtra narrates how the Buddha, just after becoming enlightened, surveyed the world with his awakened eye. He saw people of various ages and dispositions ‘who would be lost if they should not hear the dharma’; then ‘a great compassion towards all beings arose in him’ (Kloppenborg 1973: 17). This is the traditional understanding of macrocompassion: sympathy for all beings in their varied states of stress, together with the urge to liberate them, as perceived by a mind at the point of awakening. The *Sūtra on the Four Congregations* belongs to a relatively ancient collection of scripture, the *Dīrghāgama*, and likewise, the association between great compassion and the teaching of an enlightened consciousness appears to have been around before the oldest sacred texts of Buddhism appeared.²

In the narrative of the *Sūtra on the Four Congregations*, the experience of macrocompassion gives rise to the teaching of the Buddha, then to the four congregations of monks, nuns, laywomen and laymen who seek awakening, and ultimately to Buddhism itself. Abiding in nirvana is not the endpoint of full awakening; the Buddha is the Buddha because he teaches out of compassion for others. The limitless resource of enlightened teaching is what Buddha gives to reduce suffering, and what he gives up in doing so is the everlasting solitude of nirvana.

- 1 Although Greek *mega-* (μέγας) would be a direct cognate of Sanskrit *mahan*, the prefix *macro-* (μακρός) conveys the needed sense of a birds-eye view. One of the alternative translations, ‘great commiseration’ (Obermiller 1931: 121), does not convey the sense of a will to action.
- 2 Pāli texts are found to have ‘corrected’ an established account of the newly enlightened Buddha deciding to teach because he was asked by the creator god Brahmā. The redactors of these texts were evidently uncomfortable with giving Brahmanical theism such a central role in the motivation for the Buddha’s teaching. Instead, Pāli texts state that he taught out of compassion (Arai 2018).

The global compassion felt by an awakened mind is said to take in all living beings and the whole world. Every type of sentient being – human, non-human, whatever is *sattva* or conscious – belongs in the macrocompassionate view. While humans might now dominate the worldwide tally of suffering minds, macrocompassion always covers the broadest range of sentient life. Included in this entirety are life forms at the margins of experience, such as extra-terrestrial life and disembodied consciousnesses.³ Today these kinds of life are seen as less ethically marginal as interest in astrobiology and artificial intelligence increases. However, the moral circle of macrocompassion never extends to non-sentient beings; it does not fret over the wellbeing of rocks, rivers or glaciers.

An unusual trait of macrocompassion is that it does not attenuate as it expands to encompass all life. As such, it does not meet with the problem of ‘compassion collapse,’ whereby ‘people tend to feel and act less compassionately for multiple suffering victims than for a single suffering victim’ (Cameron 2017). Macrocompassion remains evenly distributed or equal, *tulyam*, by virtue of its association with awakened consciousness (Pruden and de La Vallée Poussin 1991: 1145). The Buddha, while being moved by the plight of all creatures, great and small, is said to have remained attentive to the suffering people before him. Being ever conscious of suffering *en masse* does not stop the *mahākāruṇika* from tending to sick monastics, counselling distressed mothers and agitating against animal sacrifices.

Expanded compassion differs radically from worldly paradigms of benefit by including beings that do not happen to be suffering at the present moment. By contrast, much modern social activism aims to uplift needy groups by excluding or sanctioning groups designated as privileged. Worldly altruism is content to assign winners and losers in a zero-sum materialist game, unconcerned with the suffering of the losers. But in the macrocompassionate view, life has to be perceived as a totality, encompassing all grades and states of unhappiness, in order to see how the total sum of happiness is to be increased. In this view the meditator:

3 Macrocompassion specifically encompasses three realms including *rūpadhātu* and *arūpadhātu* (Pruden and de La Vallée Poussin 1991: 1144–5).

... has no thoughts of enmity or resentment towards sentient beings who are violent and immoral, based on great compassion [...]. (trans. Tatz 1986)

As such, it is not acceptable for an enlightened consciousness to disregard highs and lows in the welfare of a biosphere, or to causally isolate the haves from the have-nots. The degree of uplift always surpasses activist movements that prioritize one subset of humanity, however good their intentions for humankind as a whole may be.

Macrocompassion with and without religion

All-encompassing compassion is within reach of ordinary thought, even though it is also said to be the distinctive quality of an enlightened mind.⁴ The experience of this expanded compassion, however elusive, can then be included in practical discussions about altruistic behaviour. As the aforementioned *Four Congregations Sūtra* states, macrocompassion stirs a newly awakened Buddha to teach for the benefit of all living beings. But in the *Mahāvastu*, a discourse from about the same era, we hear that the bodhisattvas – beings who are approaching awakening – have access to macrocompassion as well. At a certain stage these Buddhas-to-be become ‘totally focused’ on it.⁵ In the absence of further information, it might be asked whether macrocompassion arises naturally in bodhisattvas’ consciousness as they approach nirvana. Alternatively, it could have been revealed to them by the Buddhas of the past, who act as the bodhisattvas’ teachers, according to the *Mahāvastu*.

4 ‘Great compassion is a conventional mental state’ (*saṃvṛtījñānātmikā mahākaruṇā*); Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, trans. Pruden and de La Vallée Poussin (1991: 1143).

5 ‘Of Bodhisattvas who do not lapse [...] There arises in them, my pious friend, a heart that is set on the great compassion’ (*Mahāvastu* trans. Jones 1949: 108; cf. ed. Senart 1882: 136).

At stake here is the question of whether macrocompassion can be incited in any way other than through access to an awakened mind – a very rare circumstance. If the worldview that embraces and liberates all life could only be cultivated within Buddhism, then it would be denied to everybody else, including those with substantial power to act. We would face the unreasonable prospect of burdening Buddhists alone with world-saving mentality and responsibility. Can the greatly compassionate bodhisattvas then be beings who have no inkling of the Buddha or the dharma, who do not need to know of awakening even as they progress towards it?

Past-life stories depict the bodhisattvas' compassion as untutored and intuitive, and as reaching a higher footing with each new birth (Speyer 1895: 19). To perform deeds of extraordinary benefit to others, they seek extraordinary mastery.⁶ The *Mahāvastu* goes further, asserting that all the discoveries of benefit to the world – medicine, science, writing, mathematics, metallurgy – are the *inventions* of bodhisattvas.⁷ Whatever might be made of this claim, it positions bodhisattvas within the tradition as figures defined by their altruism, who can outside the sphere of religion proper. This allows us to think of macrocompassion being fostered today, in the many settings and societies that lack belief in rebirth.

Developing macrocompassion: Traditional process

Macrocompassion is democratized in mature Buddhist thinking, shifting from a distant goal to a state that anyone can aspire to attain.

6 'Whatever branch of science or species of art they desire to know, they will in it surpass the wisest in the world' (*Jātakamālā* 14, trans. Speyer 1895: 125; cf. ed. Hanisch 2005: 125).

7 'All the remedies that are current in the world for the benefit and welfare of [beings] [...] All the sciences devoted to the ascertainment of truth which are known in the world [...] All the methods of calculating in the world, and all the forms of writing were invented by Bodhisattvas' (*Mahāvastu*, trans. Jones 1949: 107; cf. ed. Senart 1882: 135).

It is recognized that compassion for all beings is not just a property of awakening but also one of its causes. A common metaphor likens great compassion to the root of a tree, a ‘foundation of practice’ from which other virtues grow (Sakuma 2022: 82). It is understood to be built up by individual acts of altruism accumulated over many lifetimes (trans. Tatz 1986: 214). While the practitioner can work towards an all-encompassing experience of compassion, it is not necessarily expected to be fully achieved in one life. Practice takes place within the overarching framework of the bodhisattva path, which remains closed to persons outside institutional Buddhism. Nor is any specific guidance given on how to develop great compassion at this stage.

Having been enshrined as a generalized goal, macrocompassion is then made the focus of regular meditation. Kamalaśīla’s *Cultivation Process* (*Bhāvanākrama*) handbooks, the outcome of a famous debate in eighth-century Tibet, mark a turning point in the practice tradition. They position the development of macrocompassion as the first and primary step on the path to enlightenment. Kamalaśīla’s opponents in this debate had denied that altruism was necessary at any point on the path. They asserted that only Chan, also known as Zen, is needed for awakening.⁸ In response, the *Cultivation Process* shows that macrocompassion is the ‘predecessor’ and ‘starting point’ of awakening.⁹ It has to be developed at the beginning of practice; without it, practice has not begun. Kamalaśīla resolves the apparent paradox that macrocompassion is both a cause and an effect of awakening by explaining that macrocompassion is ‘*completely* grasped’ only by Buddhas. It is a state that is realized in degrees and is ultimately perfected at the point of awakening.

8 [Opponent:] Nothing should be thought, nor should giving and the other wholesome practices be performed. It is only with reference to stupid people that giving and the other wholesome practices are taught’ (*Bhāvanākrama* 3, trans. Ichishima and Olson 1979: 36).

9 ‘And it is also said in the noble *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*: “[...] the bodhisattva’s great compassion is the predecessor.” And it is said in the noble *Gayāśīrṣa*: “[...] the practice of the bodhisattvas has great compassion as its starting point” [...]’ (*Bhāvanākrama* 1, trans. Adam 2002: 117–18; cf. ed. Tucci 1958: 187).

The *Cultivation Process* goes on to set out a novel technique for growing compassion. Meditators first engage in a detailed appreciation of the universality of suffering. Its inevitability, its many disturbing manifestations, are contemplated. The realization that everyone experiences pain like our own sparks wide-ranging sympathy. The moral circle is expanded step by step. Strangers are to be regarded as objects of compassion, then enemies. Eventually, the meditator's mind should take 'the form of wanting to save from suffering all beings, like tenderness towards suffering children'.¹⁰ At this point, and this point only, the meditator is equipped with the motivation and the grounding to undertake calming and insight meditation.

Meditators do not have to affirm belief in Buddhism in Kamalaśīla's process. This may be because his Chan-master adversaries, likewise, showed little interest in educating their students in Buddhist doctrine. Instead, the *Cultivation Process* is pitched to those who seek 'all-knowledge'. This a more neutral and abstract expression of Buddhahood, which could also describe the endpoint of yoga practice. It is also interesting, from a modern secular perspective, that Kamalaśīla likens the various rebirth trajectories to mental states. To feel like hell is to go to hell; to be treated like an animal is to live an animal's existence.¹¹ This may be another concession to the low-belief environment of Tibet in the eighth century, where 'no Buddhists' existed at the time, in the view of outsiders (Tucci 1958: 112).

In short, with the revolutionary system of the *Cultivation Process*, anyone can develop macrocompassion. Kamalaśīla's approach became tremendously widespread beyond the time and place of the controversy in which it arose (Ichishima and Olson 1979: 22–3). Ratnākaraśānti, for instance, who was active in India over two centuries later, follows closely in Kamalaśīla's footsteps (Shiga 2018). His *Cultivation Process of the Perfection of Wisdom* condenses the compassion-expanding meditation into a single sentence of instruction:

Firstly, then, taking up a comfortable seat in any place agreeable to the mind, bending into the cross-legged pose, noticing that a being of the six rebirth trajectories is

10 Cf. trans. Adam (2002: 121), ed. Tucci (1958: 190); see also Gyatso and Chodron (2020).

11 Cf. trans. Adam (2002: 119), ed. Tucci (1958: 188).

suffering – with painful suffering, with the suffering of conditioning, with the suffering of change – one [thereby] endowed with macrocompassion should generate the awakening mindset. (ed. Matsuda 2019: 27)¹²

The *Cultivation Process* had many other effects on the framework of what is now called Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. These widespread impacts may in some way indicate that progressive meditation techniques were effective, at least subjectively, than modern secular discourse. But at this point it must be realized that the justifications for these practices given within the tradition do not align well with secular rationality. For instance, they ask us to accept that all-embracing compassion is logical because all beings have been the parents or children of the practitioner in past lives (Gyatso and Chodron 2020: 97). Furthermore, the stated goal of all-knowledge, of knowing everything that is knowable from an enlightened perspective, is not one that would find much support in modern meditation settings. There is still room to rethink the process of growing compassion into an experience of universal scope.

Contemporising macrocompassion practice

Today the techniques of fostering compassion for all beings continue to be practised in their traditional modes. People in most of the world now can visit a centre of Tibetan Buddhism – special priority is given to the *Cultivation Process* in the Gelugpa mainstream – and learn these practices. But before high hopes are placed in them, corresponding to their high ideals, it is necessary, if reductive, to point out that the spread of traditional macrocompassion meditation has hardly curbed the pillage of the ecosphere. Although these meditation techniques have only been globally available for a few decades, they have had few if any positive effects on the environments where they were well established. Deforestation in Tibet, particularly, has been attributed to the growth of Buddhist

12 My translation of an introductory sentence of Ratnākaraśānti's *Prajñāpāramitābhāvanākrama*.

institutions there, just as the urbanization and agricultural habits that travelled with Buddhism across the rest of Asia are understood to have had ‘earth-shattering environmental consequences’ (Elverskog 2020: 98, 105). Of course, macrocompassion meditations are concerned with responding to mass suffering, not with what is now conceptualized as ‘the environment’. It would then be apt to refresh these meditations by returning to their spiritual sources, guided by a modern awareness of biodiversity, climate change and human apex predation.

The ideals of global compassion, and their systematization in the *Cultivation Process*, have been receiving renewed attention from within the tradition. A major contemporary work by two leading lights of the Tibetan Gelugpa is *In Praise of Great Compassion* (Gyatso and Chodron 2020). The authors put forward a rich analysis – rare enough on its own within contemporary Buddhism – and also formulate, based on this analysis, new guidance on practice. This book and the multi-volume series it belongs to, the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, are remarkable exercises in scholarship, being written in learned English for global audiences without the support of the state or a university. The books in this series deserve more attention than they have so far received from the Western academy, given that they not only engage with primary sources in detail but also offer specific new guidance on practice. These two enterprises are also pursued by the secular Buddhist studies field and by secular mindfulness discourse, respectively.

On the one hand, *In Praise of Great Compassion* strives to uphold sectarian doctrine for modern audiences, and on the other it seeks legitimation for this doctrine through alignment with other Buddhist traditions. This is a difficult balancing act that exposes the hard edges of doctrinaire teaching. For instance, the authors contend that great compassion has to involve the understanding that sentient beings are ‘empty of existing’ (Gyatso and Chodron 2020: 197). The assertion that living objects of compassion have no real existence draws on advanced spiritual realizations that would not be intuitive for beginner meditators.

The authors also aim to show that the bodhisattva ideal has universality because, in their view, it can also be found in the Pāli canon and Chinese Buddhism. Finding common ground across these three traditions

is a difficult enterprise; many of their important scriptures simply do not exist in Tibetan translation. If the authors' implication is that the *path* of the bodhisattva is also present in the Pāli canon and Chinese Buddhism, in exactly the same way that it is present in the South Asian and Tibetan Buddhist mainstream, it is hard to see how that implication would be accepted in any individual tradition (including the authors' own). They remind us that even within Buddhism the practice of cultivating compassion lacks universality. The philanthropic potential of the few Buddhist traditions that recognize macrocompassion is clearly not the same as other forms of Buddhism, even if all go back to common ideas about the nature of Buddhist teaching. Likewise, the ersatz, despiritualized meditation that is promoted across contemporary mindfulness programmes for schools, hospitals and offices certainly does not facilitate the development of all-embracing compassion.

In looking at ways to foster macrocompassion today, it should be remembered that it manifests not just through formal meditation, but also as a general reflective process. A contemporary example is *Call Me by My True Names*, a 1976 poem by the late monk and social activist Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926–2022). The poem evokes a feeling of far-reaching empathy, in which none are overlooked so that all can be understood:

I am a frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond,
and I am the grass-snake that silently feeds itself on the frog. (Hanh 1993: 108)

Here the poet identifies with – sympathizes with – both the victim and the victor, the predated and the predator. From the perspective of worldly morality and the winner-and-loser dialectic of modern activism, this is a transgressive sentiment. The poem expresses, nonetheless, the standpoint of the great compassion that cannot isolate suffering from its causes.

Conclusion

While the scope of macrocompassion transcends many of the limitations of the materialist worldview, this same transcendent quality limits its

usefulness in secular contexts. The all-embracing experience of compassion is felt by a being at the point of awakening who reaches this point as a result of, and in full awareness of, the actions of past lives. There is no awakening that is not an escape from rebirth, that is not sympathetic to those who will be reborn. How then can macrocompassion complement worldly altruism – compensating for its shortfalls, countering its excesses – if it has to develop in a world that denies the possibility of rebirth? This is the question that modernizers now confront if they wish to realize the potential of the macrocompassionate vision.

Macrocompassion, encompassing all forms of human and non-human life, arises under conditions similar to those that give rise to ordinary compassion. Like compassion, it is a voluntary, situation-dependent experience, which does not flourish in forced amity regimes or compulsory education. The progressive meditation programmes of particular Buddhist traditions provide, at most, a bare framework for expanding compassion in modern secular settings, which do not accept traditional beliefs about the development of wide-scale compassion across multiple lifetimes. What is needed is a fresh search for the conditions that allow compassion to grow organically into macrocompassion among those who are ready for it to thrive. The development of such compassion-conducive environments informed both by traditional insights and contemporary empirical knowledge, while avoiding uncritical faith in either, remains a task for the future.

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8 *For the benefit of all ...* : Towards Reading the Dharma for Practices of Diversity and Celebration

Introduction

In the face of global crises, compassion as lived altruism promises to be an antidote. In Buddhist practices, the cultivation of compassion (*maitrī bhāvanā*, 慈心禪/觀) flows from a conscious turn towards an and altruism encompasses a baseline mental disposition of loving kindness that translates into constant motivation and focused, impartial application for the benefit of all. It is also prompted by the understanding of the core Buddhist concepts of impermanence (*anitya*, 無常) and non-satisfactoriness as the experience of disquiet or dis-ease (*duḥkha*, 苦) that accompanies all egoic/egotistic interpretations of reality.

The following chapter first looks more closely at the altruistic foundation of Buddhist practices by means of ‘philological ethnography’ starting with a literary vignette in order to introduce an old formula that is frequently employed in Buddhist literature to refer to activities of both the Buddha and of those following in the Buddha’s footsteps: ‘for the benefit of all’. Subsequently, the chapter asks the conceptual-applied question of how truly altruistic action for the benefit of all can translate into practices of liberation for marginalized groups in the context of contemporary Engaged and Humanistic Buddhism. This is evolvingly understood as ‘a Buddhism that is lived and practised in service of advancing the Human (experience and happiness in the) World (of birth and rebecoming: *saṃsāra*)’ (Scherer 2021a: 130–1).

An old mission formula

The *Book of Zambasta* (ed. Emmerick 1968), a popular doctrinal poem composed on the Silk Route likely in the seventh or eighth century CE in Khotanese, includes a prologue to chapter twenty-three, in which the translator defines their motivation as *for the benefit of all beings*.¹ In fact, the same quarter-verse (*pāda*) formula features no less than nine times throughout the text, underlining the universal altruistic motivation for dharmic (Buddhist) activity. Where does this notion stem from?

When we are asking what motivation Early Buddhist texts ascribe to the Buddha for teaching and sending out his monastics, we will find an old mission formula preserved in the foundational monastic codes (*vinaya*) of the Sthaviravāda, relevant to contemporary Theravāda monasticism. It can also be found in the *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda that is relevant for the living Tibetan monastic tradition. Here, in a short statement, the Buddha refers to himself as liberated² from all human and divine snares and extends this reference also to his monastics.³ He then addresses *saṅgha* (the monastic community) as follows:

Monastics! Go forth⁴ for the benefit of many people, the happiness of many people out of compassion for the world, to the enrichment, the benefit and the happiness of humans and gods.⁵

1 Z 23, 2d *sarva-satvānu hātāyā* (ed. Emmerick 1968: 342), reflecting the Sanskrit phrase *sarvasa(t)tvānāṃ hitāya*.

2 *mutta; mukta* 解脫 *jietuo*.

3 Pāli Vin. I 21-22 PTS (& SN 4.5) *Muttāhaṃ, bhikkhave, sabbapāsehi ye dibbā ye ca mānūsā. Tumbepi, bhikkhave, muttā sabbapāsehi ye dibbā ye ca mānūsā* MSV Vin. *mukto 'haṃ, bhikṣavaḥ, sarvapāsebhyo ye divyā ye ca mānuṣāḥ; yūyam api bhikṣavo muktāḥ sarvapāsebhyo ye divyā ye ca mānuṣāḥ*; Mvu. *mukto haṃ bhikṣavaḥ sarvapāsehi ye divyā ye ca mānuṣā*.

4 *caratha ... cārikam*: roughly 'walk around on the walk'; 'practice the practice', i.e., 'go forth' both as itinerants and on the taught way of life [*cārika*].

5 *Caratha, bhikkhave, cārikam bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam* Pāli Vin. I 22 PTS (& SN 4.5); the Sanskrit parallel in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vin. adds 'therefore' (*tato*) and formulates

In the Sanskrit *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (17 *Saṅghabhedavastu*), the formulation *for the benefit of many people* is particularly important and programmatic as it is placed into the context of the Buddha's first teachings, the *Turning of the Wheel of Dharma*.

The same formula also occurs twenty-nine times with slight variations in the *Mahāvastu*, a Sanskrit account of the Buddha's life in the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokuttaravāda tradition that includes material from the second century BCE onwards.⁶ Crucially, the Pāli collection of *Udānas* (Exalted Sayings) uses the exact phrase at the time directly preceding the Buddha's passing, when Ānanda missed the opportunity to ask the Buddha to remain in life, *for the benefit of many people ... and the happiness of humans and gods*.⁷

This phrase is hence used for imploring, for aspiration, and for sending out; it formulates *for the benefit of many* – and not *of all*. Does this point to an early exclusion from liberation for some beings?⁸ Does this detract from the universal altruistic attitude engrained in Buddhist teachings which could justify othering and exclusion? If we look at the contexts, the answer must be emphatically: no. Rather, the use of *many* directs the focus of the addressees both to the concrete wide aspiration, reach and impact of the Buddha's teaching and is, at the same time, a concession to the practical limits of any given individuals' capacity in a lifetime. Accordingly, in other contexts, the *Mahāvastu* explicitly refers to the happiness of/for all beings.⁹

'Let us move forward on our path ...' *tato bhikṣavaś cārikāṃ prakramiṣyāmo bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāyai arthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanuṣyāṇām*.

- 6 The direct parallel in the *Mahāvastu*, however, does not mention this motivation; *mukto haṃ bhikṣavaḥ sarvapāsehi ye divyā ye ca mānuṣā*; while admonish the monks to go forth (*caratha bhikṣavaś cārikāṃ*) the Buddha then talks of his own intend to go back to Urubilvā 'out of compassion for the ascetics' (*jaṭilānām anukampāya*) there.
- 7 Ud. 6, 1 *Jaccandhavagga*, p. 62. (Steinthal 2002).
- 8 Such a notion is developed in some Mahāyāna texts starting with the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (MPNS, 大般涅槃經 Dabanniepan-jing) with the idea that beings without any potential for liberation (*icchantikā* transcribed as 一闍提 *yichanti*) exist (but note that the various layers of the MPNS are also contradicting each other on this point); on the concept see Karashima (2007).
- 9 Mvu. 1, 87; 91; 97.

Similarly, in approximately the first century CE Sanskrit *sūtra Charming Description* (or: *Detailed Play*, sc. of the Buddha's Life, the *Lalitavistara*), that is based on the Sarvāstivāda tradition, the old phrase is used in four passages,¹⁰ but, for example, in the archaic poetic parts, Śākyamuni's resolve to go into homelessness is described as done *for the benefit of all beings*.¹¹

In fact, an old sung verse (*gāthā*) quoted in the fifth century Pāli *Suttanipāta commentary* elucidates:

The Buddha appeared in the world for the benefit of all living beings; the dhamma appeared in the world for the happiness of all living beings, the saṅgha appeared in the world as highest field of merit.¹²

This early shift from emphasizing the universal – rather than a pragmatically wide – focus of liberatory Buddhist activity is reflected in the genre of *Buddha Hymns* (*Buddhastotra*), which became very popular from the second century CE onwards in Sanskrit and Silk Road Buddhism.¹³

Indeed, the idea of benefiting all sentient beings features prominently in Mahāyāna scriptures where it forms a pith statement of aspirational *Bodhicitta* (*putixin*, 菩提心), that is the 'mind (focused on the full realisation) of enlightenment'; the various formulations of the Bodhisattva vow include the universal altruistic motivation for the

10 pp. 4; 37; 61; 293 Vaidya.

11 *sarvasattvabīhetoh* 26, 8 Vaidya, p. 300; in the prose sections, *sarvasattvabīh** ('for the benefit of all beings') as a motivation is explicitly mentioned another three times (pp. 79; 131; 141 Vaidya).

12 *Buddho loka samuppanno, hitāya sabbapāṇinaṃ / Dhammo loka samuppanno, sukhāya sabbapāṇinaṃ / Saṅgho loka samuppanno, puññakkhettaṃ anuttara Paramatthajotikā* Pj II, 291.

13 See, e.g., so formulations in Mātṛceṭa's *Śatapañcāsatka* 134 (c: *hitāya sarvasattvānāṃ*) and in his *Varṇābhavaṇa Stotra* (II, 48b) that hails (c *namo*) the Buddha as 'striving for the benefit of all beings' (*sarvasattvabītaiṣiṇe*), cp. Tocharian B *onolmets pontats kārtes {tā} alacu* 'O you who strive for the benefit of all beings' *Buddhastotra* THT 203 b2 (~ *onolmets pontamts kartseś alālycu*, *Buddhastotra* THT 204 a1); cp. also PK NS 54 a4 etc.; the various Tocharian (A and B) hymns, either translations or independent creations, attest to the popularity of the genre on the Silk Road.

Bodhisattva praxis as carried out *sarvasattvahitāya* ‘for the benefit of all beings’¹⁴ and similarly.¹⁵

For the benefit of all: Human World Buddhism

The old mission formula also features in the canonical *Linked Discourses* in Pāli and Chinese.¹⁶ The Indic phrase ‘Go forth’ (*caratha ... cārikam*) is rendered by *Samyukta Āgama* succinctly as follows:

汝等當行人間 rudeng dang xin renjian

[You should practice among humans (in the Human World)]

The motivation formula is given as follows:

多所過度，多所饒益，安樂人天 duosuo guodu, duosuo raoyi, an le ren tian

[for the liberation of the many, the benefit of the many, for the peace and happiness of humans and gods]

This admonishment to practice ‘among humans/in the human world (*renjian*, 人間)’ demonstrates ‘Humanistic Buddhism’, as it has come to be known (*renjian fojiao*, 人間佛教), has deep roots in the earliest layers of the Buddha’s dispensation. In the narrow sense, Humanistic Buddhism is a term employed in the twentieth century CE by Chan master Yin Shun (印順; 1906–2005) following on from the thought

14 e.g., in the bodhicitta litany found in the *Daśabhūmika* 十地經 (Ch. 6, § 9), R 44.14H (chin e.g., 十住經T. 286, 512b1 為利益一切衆生故).

15 See, e.g., the pertinent third chapter of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* which includes in every third verse (11 of 33) expressions for the liberation of all/all beings (*sarva-*; *sarvasattva*; *sarvadehin*).

16 *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN) and *Samyukta Āgama* (SĀ; translated into Chinese and, by and large, of Sarvāstivāda provenance): *Snares (of Māra Sutta): Mārapāśasutta* (2) SN 4.5; chin. 繩索 *shengsuo* SĀ 1096.

of the foundational Master Tai Xu (太虛; 1890–1947),¹⁷ who spoke of ‘Human Life Buddhism’ (*rensheng fojiao*, 人生佛教). *Renjian fojiao* as a recognizable movement in East Asia and, later, global modernity/ies began with an impulse of reform within Chinese Buddhism in the Republican Era (1912–49). It sought to redirect Buddhist engagement from a Pure Land emphasis of care for the dead – sometimes referred to as ‘funeral Buddhism’ – to the care of the living, trying to establish the ‘Pure Land in the Human World’ (*renjian jingtu*, 人間淨土). This Human World Buddhism as a marker of Chinese Buddhist modernities is now most widely known through the work of a younger generation of Chinese Buddhist leaders: Tzu Chi (Ciji, 慈濟) master Cheng Yen (證嚴; 1937–), Dharma Drum (Fagu Shan, 法鼓山) Master Shengyan (聖嚴; 1931–2009) and Fo Guang Shan (佛光山) Venerable Master Hsing Yun (Xingyun, 星雲; 1927–2023).

Among Taixu’s spiritual heirs features Zhao Puchu (趙樸初; 1907–2000) as one of the most influential Humanistic Buddhist leaders within mainland China. Zhao Puchu approached Buddhism as ‘rooted in the Human World, interfused in the Human World, and benefitting the Human World’ (*zhagen renjian*, 紮根人間; *yuan rong renjian*, 圓融人間; *zaofu renjian*, 造福人間; see Li 2017). Similarly, the Human World Buddhism as dispensed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan is rooted in a profound ethos of ‘service’ to the world (see Hsing Yun 2016: 72–83).

But in a wider and evolving sense, *renjian fojiao* can be taken in terms of a stream of contemporary Buddhism modernism that looks at social action or engagement for improving the conditions of beings and the alleviation of concrete and systemic suffering. In this way, Humanistic Buddhism aligns itself both with the foundational mission of the Buddha’s motivation and mission to be active for the benefit of as many as possible beings together with the contemporary Buddhist movements and initiatives that are, since the 1970s, commonly grouped together and referred to with the term ‘Socially Engaged Buddhism’. This term is attributed to Thiến (Chan, 禪) master Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–2022).

17 See Jones (2020).

Reading the dharma and living Buddhism: Action hermeneutics for embracing diversity

In the following, I will lay out some of the parameters that can guide Human World Buddhist service and action-dharma in relation to textual interpretation: liberatory hermeneutics and practices.¹⁸

Focused on aspects of subjectivity and belonging such as dis/ability, ethnicity, race, class, socio-economic power, gender, gender identity and expression, and sexualities, we need to look at the embodied experience of those who are subjected to discrimination and oppression. This includes the dis/abled, neurodiverse, BIMPOC (Black, Indigenous, Mixed-Race, People of Colour)/BAME (Black and Asian Minority Ethnicities), class-objekt, working class, the poor, women and LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, etc.) people. How can we (re-)read Buddhist texts for demarginalization and for celebration of our shared diversity?

Negotiating multiple modernities and post-modernities, global Buddhist traditions find themselves challenged to apply authoritative texts ('scripture') to contemporary contexts of Social Justice. In transnational and global contexts, Engaged Buddhist Thought and practice are often still linked to external impulses and transformations of Asian Buddhist traditions, which ignore the sustained modes of Buddhist social activism that continue to flow from established Buddhist communities in Asia – local, glocal and global.

The orientalist narrative of 'Western' / 'Global Northern' origin of Buddhist Social Justice work has also recently successfully been challenged in scholarship (Gleig 2021). Human World Buddhism has been providing unique impulses for Social Justice in the Chinese and wider East Asian Buddhist world and beyond.

A focus on what Hsiao-Lan Hu calls *This Worldly Nibbāna* (Hu 2011) mandates us to reflect deeply on the concrete experiences of pain, suffering

18 Due to the limited space, I will not go into details and case studies of liberation hermeneutics and would like to refer to some on my previous work such as on the *Lotus Sūtra* for illustrations, see Scherer (2019).

and dis-satisfactoriness (*dukkha-dukkhatā*), in particular of marginalized forms of human embodiment. This outlook is in line with impulses to de-centre (and dehegemonize) those forms of human life that occupy discursive positions of power and of epistemic superiority (such as able-bodied, cis, heterosexual, or male forms), as to find space for the silenced and suppressed forms of human embodiment. An important aspect of this liberatory work is applying hermeneutical strategies in aid of demarginalizing the multiple 'variable, atypical bodies'.

Whether we are living with disabilities, experiencing the world in neurodiverse ways, or are on the margins because of the way our body, skin, class, economic power, sex, gender, or sexuality is viewed, how can we read the 'word of the Buddha' (*buddhavacana*) for the provision of liberating space?

Marginalized bodies often encounter specific difficulties and sometimes hostility when practising Buddhism. This is often accompanied by reductionist readings of *karma* which often amount to *dharma-splaining*, that is utilizing simplistic rhetoric of Buddhist teachings to explain away experiences of behaviour and structures that cause suffering and, by doing so, placing the burden to bear the experience on an individual rather than on the perpetrators and the structures. This usually leads to the unhealthy trauma response of internalized dharma-splaining, or *spiritual bypassing*. These employments of Buddhism are forms of epistemic violence and serve to signal spiritual superiority.

As recent scholarship from North America demonstrates, anti-social justice voices with contemporary privileged Buddhist communities are getting stronger in correlation to growing ontological insecurities in times of transnational systemic crises that threaten the human world (Gleig and Artinger 2021).

Among alt-right and, in Ann Gleig and Brenna Artinger's terms, 'reactionary centrists' and 'performative transcendentalists', a specific commodification of Buddhist thought and concepts such as *emptiness*, *don't-know-mind*, or *No-Self* is strategically employed to counter the perceived threat to oppressive and narcissist privilege, mainly by affluent, white, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual males who fetishize and essentialize what they perceive Buddhism to be in aid of cementing their self-serving claim to societally and spiritually superior status.

In my own scholarship, I have concentrated on the marginalization of sex/gender/sexualities diversity and on those notions around physical and neural diversity that are often subsumed under the misnomer ‘disability’. I prefer to refer to these diversities as *variabilities* and *cripversities*.¹⁹

Such marginalization occurs through the various processes of Othering (Scherer 2020: 20–1). By Othering, in-groups (such as kin, ethnic groups, nations and worldview groups) exchange a feeling of belonging (existential or ontological security) with hard delineations of out-group borders (exclusion). This process of Othering can psychoanalytically be regarded as a strategy of creating order in the messy chaos of human life. However, more than just creating order, Othering produces hierarchies, privileges and ego-affirmation. In the Buddhist perspective, Othering can only be described as a mechanism of selfish ignorance: an egotism that closes the heart(-mind) and fosters disturbing emotions such as anger (aversion, rejection), craving (selfish desires), pride and jealousy. Othering essentializes and reifies difference (ontological essentialism) and splits up social belongings (onto-epistemological binarism/dualism). Both essentialism and dualism are contrarian to the Buddhist experiential, transformative path, which is based, among other factors, upon interconnectedness, No-Self and the non-duality of wisdom and compassion. That notwithstanding, the processes around what in the sociology of religions Max Weber has termed ‘institutionalisation’ and ‘routinisation’, in the case of Buddhist traditions, have always also entailed pragmatic delineations into in- and out-groups. These demarcations have followed the tendencies of social scripts to congeal, get rigid and fossilize.

For instance, when regulating participation in monastic life in relationship to sexual, gender and (neuro-)physical diversity and variability, we see that, for the purpose of such socio-pragmatic delineations, inherently instable socio-legal descriptors are employed, such as: the *paṇḍaka* (gender-deficient) and the *ubhatobhyañjanaka* (both-sexed), which both indicate gender non-binarities (*neither-nor* and *both-and*) (Scherer 2021b). Despite, and possibly because of, their semantic blurriness, those taxonomies can

19 *Variability* has been conceptualized by Chris Mounsey, see Scherer (2016: 247–8); *cripversity* is a term introduced by Doris Leibetseder, see Scherer (2020: 26).

and have become decontextualized and read as essentialized and stable categories in various pre-modern and modern Buddhist traditions. In this way, such essentializations end up superimposing unintended soteriological judgements on socio-legal pragmatics.

In the case of Buddhist approaches to variabilities ('dis/abilities'), we can observe how sometimes a soteriological good, such as the nibbānic experience of non- and trans-egoic integration, is, in the flow of an argument or narrative, put in ableist imagery and language (Scherer 2016); when essentialized, this imagery also creates oppressive hierarchies among variabilities.

At the same time, as mentioned above, elements of Buddhist soteriology such as *karma*, *emptiness* and *don't-know-mind* can be utilized to solidify social forms of privilege and function as spiritual bypasses. Using such concepts in social contexts for a mechanics of Othering usually takes the form of *proof-texting* one's own biases and privileges through reductionism (e.g. using karma as if individually essentialized and monocausal), spiritual arrogance (using pseudo-wisdom instead of compassion) and narcissistic dharma-bashing (*Meditate more! Repent more!*).

However, the real-life experience of *dukkha-dukkhatā* requires us to leave the intersectional concrete complexity of every case intact, asking a degree of spiritual maturity and compassion that precludes the impulses of self-gratification implied in the strategies of Othering. The discussed formula, *for the benefit of all beings*, urges us to rethink our egoic clinging to in-groups, privilege and marginalizing.

Which hermeneutical strategies can be found to counter oppressive proof-texting and how can we reconcile any apparent oppressive scriptural passages with the universally compassionate and liberatory impulse and orientation of Buddhist praxis (theory and practice)?

Human World and diversity-affirming readings of Buddhist scripture can utilize impulses from Christian (especially Latin-American Catholic) Liberation Theology and theological hermeneutics in dialogue with other contemporary emancipatory impulses found in intersectional feminism, critical disability studies and queer theory. For example, Christian liberation theologies foreground proactive exegesis and application in aid of the oppressed. The focus on 'the Jesus of the Poor' in *La Teología de la Liberación*

Latinoamericana, can be translated into a focus on ‘the dharma of the marginalized’²⁰ in Buddhist Constructive-Critical Thought (Scherer 2019).

What does this mean for Human World Buddhism? We noted above that Fo Guang Shan’s *renjian fojiao* understands itself as being rooted in a profound ethos of ‘service’. For such a service not to become self (in-group)-serving (e.g. by being only sinocentric), but to become truly universal, it must not only ensure the *localization* (bentuhua, 本土化) of the teachings but also proactively reach out to and work for the oppressed and marginalized.

Approaching forms of scriptural socio-legal or narratorial discrimination from a Buddhist Human World liberation ‘theological’ (dharmological) angle can start with the frank acknowledgement that temporal and contextual contingencies have always governed the formulation of the dharma and of the *vinaya*.

The five steps of Buddhist Liberation Hermeneutics

I have proposed five steps for rereading, re-grounding and resourcing Buddhist traditions for Social Action in the Human World (Scherer 2021b), on which I will elaborate here:

1. Reflexivity: what we need first is self-reflection, humility, knowledge, allyship and repentance. Not only do we need to become sensitized to the positionalities of others; we need to educate ourselves about our own blind spots, biases, comfort zones and privileges in relation to the oppressed and marginalized. We need to improve our epistemic repertoire around modern and post-modern identity markers and exercise respect for the agency of the oppressed (decolonial allyship). Rather than being seduced by

20 My translation.

simplistic ‘dharmic’ snap judgements, we need to exercise deep listening and sitting with the pain of marginalization.

2. Hermeneutics: flowing from empowered reflexivity, we need to find ways of *rereading* our Buddhist sources against any form of parasitic proof-texting that is festering in the hermeneutical process when we do not inject reflexivity, right intention (compassion) and epistemic complexity into our readings. A sharp tool of compassionate cutting through discrimination can be *disentanglement* of genre, context and epistemic horizon. A pragmatic socio-legal text in a contingent time and space does not make universal essentialist value judgements; nor does such a text produce stable categories of abjection. A narrative text is not formulating coherent worldviews, philosophy, normative ethics or clear-cut soteriology. The pragmatics of life and the poetics of contemplative literature are poor bases for continuing marginalization.
3. Conceptualization: as I have sought to show in previous research, liberation dharmology can draw from Queer and Trans Theory, Feminism, Critical Disability Studies, Critical Race and Postcolonial Theory for liberatory readings of key Buddhist concepts. The Ciceronian *Cui bono?* (‘who benefits?’) and the Foucauldian inquiry into the mechanics of power and regulation can become transformative tools of *re-grounding* our views on scriptural negotiation of marginalization. Our understanding of key conceptual elements of the Buddhist teachings (including No-self, dependent origination, karma) can greatly improve when the critical theoretical lens pierces new layers of complexity.

For instance, Buddhist Liberation theologians such as Venerable Chao-Hwei from Taiwan show the necessity to challenge doctrinal reductionism, for example, in relation to karma 業 *yè* (‘action,’ causality), when challenging systemic oppression. Challenging the weaponizing of simplistic views on causality enables us to avoid personal judgements and essentializations, reaffirming ‘that all re-becoming in Buddhism is without sameness, *continuity without identity*, wherein empirical subjectivities express karmic continuations of past possibilities’ (Scherer 2021b: 13). However,

the precious human body actualizes it always becomes fettered to Māra's snares (*pāśa* 繩索 *shengsuo*) that include the systemic building blocks of societal Othering entailed in ableism, racism, heterosexism and gender binary thinking. Yet those building blocks remain in themselves processual, ever fluid, and impermanent: they manifest in Buddhist traditions as *accessories* of the dharma, but are not the transformative teachings themselves, and therefore Buddhist social realities have to be challenged regularly by Buddhist soteriology. Nāgārjunian negative dialects can be joined by Derridean deconstruction, Foucauldian discourse analysis, critical disability studies, critical race theory, and queer theory to sieve out the social-contingent accessory layer from the *dharmatā* (常)法 (*chang*) *fa* – the (eternal) teaching. These (post)modern tools share with fundamental Buddhist thought of No-Self (*anātman* 無我 *wuwo*) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (緣起 *yuanti*) the need to challenge essentialism and to remind us of the 'performative' (in queer theory/Judith Butler's terms) nature of our negotiation of subjectivity and belonging.

4. Signification: by overriding the contingent reductionism at the heart of discriminatory readings of Buddhist thought we can focus on 'thought archaeology': the vastly complex and rich Buddhist traditions that are replete of unexcavated paradigms that can be made fertile for signification and resignification of non-hegemonic and diversity-affirming thought, narratives and symbolism. Whether it is a blind, diseased and impaired *arhat*, Avalokiteśvara (Guanshiyin, 觀世音) as a sex worker, the *paṇḍaka* protector in the Medicine tantras or the genderplay of Bodhisattvas, the wealth of queer, crip, outcast role models in Buddhist traditions points to a subaltern stream of Buddhist thought waiting to be fully activated for the Human World now (Scherer 2021b).
5. Application: to address the systemic suffering produced by marginalization we need to provide affirmative and inclusive spaces; different Buddhist movements and organizations have proactively worked to create dedicated queer, decolonial, variability-affirming

spaces. As a Tibetan and ecumenical Buddhist teacher myself I have focused more and more on offering dharma talks and retreats for what I lovingly call our Dharma Freak community. On the practice level many adaptations can be made for the convenience (skilful means!) of the marginalized: we un-/de-gender a meditational deity (e.g. by using the pronouns they/them in Avalokiteśvara meditations) or adapt meditation techniques of visual imagery to non-visual sensorial imagery. For example, instead of visualizing beams of light I offer my variable students the option to feel waves of healing warmth flowing through their body and beyond.

Conclusion

The oppressive proof-texting strategy of using the Buddha's Word falls at the first hurdle of deeper inquiry: the dharma is always appropriate means, transformative advice taken from contingent societal contexts. Oppressive structures were present in the Buddha's time and at the time of later commentators and interpreters; often the Buddha countered these scripts to the maximum degree skilfully possible at that time; where discrimination and Othering entered scripture, as noted above, they clearly are accidentals and accessories of the dharma, but not the dharma itself.

Coming back to Zhao Puchu's notion of Buddhism as *interfused with the Human World* (*yuanrong renjian*, 圓融人間). This interfusion, a key term in Huayan and Tiantai Buddhist philosophy, points to a deeply harmonious interbeing. The closeness of Buddhist *interfusion* with Daoist and Confucian 和 *he* (harmony) is further made explicitly by Fo Guang Shan's Venerable Master Hsing Yun in his concept of the five harmonies (*wuhe*, 五和) that he introduced in 2010 (Wu 2017). For Venerable Master Hsing Yun, harmony in oneself is followed by the harmony in the family and the wider harmony between humans – between other 'people and myself': *ren wo he*, 人我和; mutual *respect* (*jing*, 敬) is basis, process and result of this inter-relational harmony.

Respecting – or giving honour – to others is, indeed, the basis of interpersonal and societal harmonies. This asks of us to decentre and deemphasize both ourselves and our constructed in-groups, and, instead, to affirm and celebrate diversity.

Public Dharmology of Liberation does not change the dharma; rather it rescues the ‘eternal’ (*chang*, 常) dharma from the swamp of temporal power interests. Often the salvific and transformative teachings are so thoroughly interpellated with oppressive power structures that any *disentanglement* can seem an assault on the dharma.

Yet, when we are humble, mature and confident enough to draw our sense of ontological security from inner core virtues rather than from an anxiety that drives us to formulate oppressive normativities, our heart-minds can become open enough to love.²¹ As Buddhist virtues, trust and doubtlessness can help us to feel unperturbed by any acknowledgement of the discriminatory and excluding amalgam found in some Buddhist scripture so that we can separate the liberatory impulse from the injections of oppressive ego demands.

In this way, the Buddhist mission *for the benefit of all* can truly take shape in the Human World.

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²¹ Cp. Thich Nhat Hanh’s poem *Please Call Me By My True Names* (written 1978), that ends with the wish that *the door of my heart | could be left open | the door of compassion* (Hanh 1999: 72).

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9 Compassion and Beyond: How Can Buddhism Help Address Contemporary Crises?

Introduction

Compassion was a strong thread in Australia's response to Covid-19, especially in the earlier stages of the pandemic. We saw families looking out for each other, people caring for their neighbours and forming groups to help those in their community with no means of support. There was a sense of solidarity – 'all in this together' – and gratitude to those who provided front line services, often at great personal cost. This combination of trust, compassion and mutual support sustained us as we tested, isolated and practised social distancing while waiting for a vaccine, and legitimized the strong public health measures whose absence cost so many lives elsewhere.¹

As we look beyond Covid-19 to other emerging crises, can we hope that compassion will provide a path to a sustainable future? What can it contribute as we face the dangers of further pandemics, catastrophic wars, climate change and ecological degradation? How far can it help us address the systemic and structural issues that underlie many of these problems, and what else will be needed?

I will explore these questions in the context of Buddhist teaching in which compassion, although important, is only one element. Wisdom, ethics and practice are also seen as essential to successfully navigating the

1 In an article in the New York Times Damien Cave points out that had the US had the same per capita death rate from Covid as Australia, 900,000 lives would have been saved (Cave 2022).

difficulties of life. This exploration will help identify the potential contribution of compassion and suggest what else may be needed for us to find a path to a sustainable future.

After defining compassion, I will consider what it is about our emerging crises that makes them so intractable. I will then describe the contribution that compassion can make and suggest what else will be needed if we are to find a path to a sustainable future, finishing with a discussion of what movements like Humanistic Buddhism can contribute.

Compassion

Joan Halifax provides a ‘working definition’ of compassion: ‘the capacity to attend to the experience of others, to feel concern for others, to sense what will serve others, and potentially to be able to be of service to and benefit others’ (Halifax 2022). More mainstream definitions, as exemplified in the Miriam Webster dictionary, have a slightly stronger emphasis on responding to distress: ‘sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it’ (‘Compassion’ 2022), and Lickerman introduces a more personal note: ‘caring about another person’s *happiness* as if it were your own’ (2009).² In Buddhist terms it is the wish for others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

The key elements here are the sympathetic recognition of the person and their suffering together with a wish that this should not be so. Sometimes this may involve trying to do something about it (‘active’ compassion), while at other times it may not be possible or appropriate to do so. However, failing to act when this is both possible and appropriate would call the quality of compassion into question. It is an expression of an attitude variously described as loving kindness (*mettā*), benevolence or love (*caritas*). Buddhist teaching usefully highlights sympathetic joy (*muditā*), appreciation of the happiness of others, as the counterpart of

2 My emphasis.

compassion (*karuna*) and sees both as being sustained by a state of equanimity (*upekkha*), in which one can engage with the suffering or gladness without being knocked off balance. Taken together, these form a constellation of sympathetic engagement with others.

Most of us are compassionate at times and at others fall short of the Buddhist ideal of ‘universal’ compassion towards all beings. While there are practices to strengthen compassion and role models like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh to inspire us, for most of us our compassion has its limits, and is often directed most to those with whom we can most easily identify.

Problems, crises and contemporary challenges

What are problems and crises?

To understand what compassion may contribute we first need to consider the nature of problems and crises that we are facing. Problems are situations or questions that cause difficulty, stress or doubt. It may be something that has just arisen, or a pre-existing situation that has just begun to cause concern. What we see as making a system problematic may vary from person to person: what concerns me may not concern you or may do so for very different reasons. We may not even agree on the salient features of the situation, especially where emotion is aroused. Understanding others’ perspectives is a critical and often overlooked part of problem-solving.

The way a person thinks about a problematic situation is likely to reflect their interests and may constrain the solutions they will consider. Residents and town planners may think very differently about homelessness. To some, especially those who feel anxious about the homeless, it may be a matter of public order to be dealt with by the police. To others it may reflect a lack of mental health services or inadequate welfare payments, and so a matter for health or welfare services. The way the media report issues can have a strong impact on public attitudes, especially when they ignore

the complexity of a situation and call for 'law and order' responses. This can have a significant effect on the level of compassion for groups who are facing problems.

A problem becomes a crisis when it threatens to get out of hand, perhaps because of its scale, its potential impact or our inability to resolve it. Crises test our capacity to respond to problems and so can act as a canary in the coal mine: Covid-19 showed up gaps in the public health system, and recent floods in Australia highlighted problems with disaster response. A crisis can also be a turning point: it originally referred to the point in an illness where a fever might either resolve or become much worse. It is therefore an opportunity as well as a threat, albeit one that we often let pass.

Crises also highlight problems of equity. Those who are poorer, have less education or are part of a minority or stigmatized groups are often hardest hit. They may have fewer means to respond and be less able to advocate for their needs. Where crises call for urgent responses or powerful groups dominate some voices may not be heard, while prejudice may prevent us from recognizing the strengths that they do have, such as community solidarity. The marginalization of indigenous communities in planning for the environmental, economic and cultural usage of the Murray Darling basin is a current Australian example (Moggridge and Thompson 2019). The invisibility of the powerless is beautifully captured in this verse from Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Brecht 1968):

Denn die einen sind im Dunkel
 Und die andren sind im Licht.
 Und man siehe die im Lichte
 Die im Dunkel sieht man nicht.
 [For some are in the darkness
 The others in the light
 And you can see the ones in the light (my dear),
 Those in dark are out of sight.]³

3 My translation.

Contemporary crises

We face crises that include, in no particular order, climate change, mass extinctions, pollution, the risk of nuclear war, ecological degradation and growing inequality. We do not know how these will play out, but they may fundamentally change civilization as we know it. We are not the first to face such threats: early *Homo Sapiens* faced the Ice Age and First Nations people on several continents have confronted colonization. If their experience is any guide, we may be facing disruptions on a very large scale.

These emerging crises are particularly challenging because of the way they are linked. As the ‘doughnut’ model of economics illustrates, many of the problems we face are an expression of the way we are degrading basic systems those which support life on earth such as the air, the oceans and a stable climate, and in doing so threaten essential social foundations such as housing, equity, health and education (Raworth 2017). Apparently unrelated crises may have the same root causes, and one crisis can precipitate another, with climate change leading to crop failure, and then to war, mass migration and civil unrest. The ‘wicked’ problems this creates need to be tackled in concert, and at many levels from the local to the global.

Timeframes are also challenging. In a highly connected world problems can develop much faster than our ability to respond. We do not know how quickly the climate crisis will progress, and we cannot be certain where the tipping points will be and how soon we will reach them. This creates a quandary not unlike the Y2K crisis, where it was possible but not certain that a limitation in computer systems would cause many critical systems to fail when the date moved from 1999 to 2000. Now as then we cannot afford to ignore a potential crisis but cannot predict how it will play out, leaving room for all manner of unhelpful responses such as precipitate action, shallow reassurance and apocalyptic doomsaying.

Responding is made more difficult when our social, political and governance structures are not fit for purpose. Global problems cannot be addressed by national governance, and transnational structures are often weak and dominated by vested interests. Internally, most countries are

slow to redesign their social, material and political infrastructure to meet emerging challenges. Regulatory processes are often inadequate and can be captured by those whom they are supposed to regulate. The precautionary principle is honoured more in the breach than the observance, and serious damage can be done in the time it takes to ban, for example, a dangerous chemical.

Crises also hit us harder because we have pursued 'efficiency' by stripping apparent redundancies from our systems. Microsecond transactions can transmit financial crises almost instantaneously around the world. Maintaining low inventories may save costs in good times, but, as the Covid-19 pandemic showed, this is a risky strategy in an uncertain world.

The dominance of neoliberalism makes it much harder to deal with systemic challenges. Neoliberalism treats natural, individual and social resources as commodities that can be traded in markets for (often short-term) profit. Social and environmental damage is treated as an externality, and so is not costed. Where specialized markets are set up for social enterprises or environmental protection, these may be poorly designed and not reflect the dynamics of the social or environmental systems with which they are dealing – witness the separate trading of water and land in the Australian Murray Darling Basin, or the replacement in the interests of 'efficiency' of locally trusted social services with distant providers who do not know the community, for example. In these market transactions there is often no effective voice for those affected by decisions.

Finally, our own position in these crises is ambiguous. We suffer from climate change, but we also contribute to it in our lifestyles, our investments and the political choices we make. We are fundamentally conflicted. This is a difficult position from which to get a clear picture of the problem, let alone take action.

Taken together, the characteristics of emerging crises do not exclude a role for compassion in addressing them, but they do hamper it: they are so complex and develop so fast that there is little space for the human responses on which compassion depends. For such levels of complexity, compassion may be an indispensable companion, but on its own not an adequate guide.

The response: Compassion and beyond

*The road to any sustainable future will be a hard one.
What will it require?*

There are several different kinds of challenges here. The first is simply to survive and come through hard times. We must stay alive, deal with our personal and social distress, maintain hope and retain a sense of our identity and individual worth in the face of difficult circumstances. As Viktor Frankl (1963) learned from his experience in concentration camps, this requires us to make sense of what is happening. This can be particularly difficult for something as complex as, for example, mass migration, which has many causes and affects different people in many different ways. Compassion for ourselves and others has an important role to play here, building mutual understanding, strengthening bonds between people and providing motivation for mutual assistance.

A second challenge is how to deal with the impacts of the crisis. One person may decide to leave school to find a job, another to migrate, a third to stay and create a community movement. People living on a flood plain may face the need to move their town to higher ground. Compassion can ease the difficulty of making such choices by addressing the burden of grief and the overcoming the sense of isolation which can make decisions so hard.

A third is to address the causes of the crisis at whatever level we can: perhaps through community action, political engagement or research and development. Here a role for compassion is to create a sense of working for a common purpose – the prevention of suffering – and to overcome the divisions between those who have different understandings of the problem, different beliefs about possible solutions or conflicting views about who is responsible.

Thus, compassion can help with all these different types of challenges. However, it has its limitations.

First, compassion is subject to fatigue. Attention is limited, and the victims of one crisis are easily forgotten when the next one comes along.

Front line workers find themselves rationing their compassion to avoid burnout. It is precisely because we cannot sustain it ourselves that we are inspired by figures like the Bodhisattvas in Buddhism and the Lamed Vov in Judaism who bear witness to the suffering of the world. While there are practices that can strengthen compassion, it is wise to know one's limits and not to overstep them.

It can also be partial. As noted earlier, we are more likely to feel compassion for those with whom we can identify rather than those whose suffering is outside our experience. Here we may simply 'pass by on the other side', or adopt stereotypes which only serve to increase prejudice and marginalization. When we feel vulnerable, we may simply shut the doors of compassion. Again, it may be wise to know the boundaries of our compassion and be cautious in venturing beyond them.

Finally, there is the danger of falling into a sentimental rather than compassionate response to others' suffering, which can distract us from doing something about the underlying causes. Public displays of outrage or emotion often take this form: there is an outpouring of feeling that is not followed through, or a token response which sidesteps the issue. This is the inverse of compassion: instead of the suffering of others, the focus is squarely on one's own feelings and how to assuage them.

If compassion is important but fallible, and does not on its own provide a path to a sustainable future, what else is needed?

Beyond compassion

Buddhism recognizes the importance of compassion, but also emphasizes wisdom, ethics and practice. Where compassion begins with our experience of people's suffering, wisdom starts with understanding the world (ourselves included) and how it operates. They are sometimes seen as the two wings that enable a bird to fly. Practice then helps us develop the capacity for both, and ethics provides a framework within which to work.

Wisdom

Buddhist wisdom is concerned above all with learning to see the world clearly and understand how it works ('right view', one of the practices of the Buddhist eight-fold path). It asks why, despite our best efforts, our actions are often counterproductive. In Buddhist terms, this is attributed largely to the effects of 'greed' – pursuing our own interests without consideration of others, and 'hatred' – creating boundaries between ourselves and others and treating them as obstacles to our desires. These are sustained by 'ignorance' – seeing ourselves as entirely separate agents, unaware of how deeply we are intertwined with others – in practical affairs, for emotional support, even for our sense of identity. If we ignore this interdependence, we may find ourselves unwittingly working against our own and others' interests, creating difficulties in the moment and problems further down the track. There is a well-worn path from approaching the world in terms of our own interests, entrenching categories of mine and yours, friend and foe, and adopting images, judgements and stereotypes that justify our prejudices to creating a self-reinforcing world view whose basic assumptions are almost invisible. This is a recipe for ongoing conflict and discrimination, with little room for the wise action that is cooperative and inclusive rather than competitive and excluding.

Appreciating the dynamics of 'greed' and 'hatred' helps us see the human world more clearly and understand how even apparently well-meaning actions can have bad consequences. This is often seen in the failure of foreign aid programmes which are designed around the interests of the donor and treat local people as 'others' rather than partners.

Buddhism also invites us to look deeply below the surface at the causes and conditions that shape what happens. Familiar states of affairs can seem to have their own inertia: we expect them to continue more or less unchanged unless there is some obvious impediment. In this we are like the Ernest Hemingway character who went bankrupt in 'two ways. Gradually and then suddenly'. Buddhism looks below the apparently calm surface to the network of causes and conditions and asks whether they are stable or sustainable: if not, the surface calm is deceptive. Thus, we may unthinkingly remove an apex predator and then be surprised when a whole ecosystem

collapses. We imagine the compassion shown during Covid-19 will endure, but can it survive now that a vaccine makes the need for mutual support less apparent? If we look deeply, we will see not just the individual spikes in atmospheric temperature but also the cumulative pattern of changes, and beyond these the vast amount of CO₂ absorbed in the ocean, perhaps to be released at a later date. Each of these tells a different story about the present and suggests a different type of vulnerability.

Buddhist wisdom was originally concerned with people's liberation and escape from suffering, and so focused mainly on the actions of individuals.

The nature of contemporary crises means that this now needs to be extended to action at the level of organizations, communities and societies. Fortunately, it translates well: greed, hatred and delusion apply just as well at these levels. Greed is built into the assumptions of economics and the activities of capitalist markets, hate into the military, and our ignorance is reinforced by the world reflected in mainstream and social media (Loy 2019). Each organization has its interests, informal or codified, in constitutions and regulatory frameworks, and has its allies and competitors. Higher level rules mean that many institutions are constrained in their ability to act in the common good, as companies are obliged to preference shareholder over stakeholder value or the common good. This constraint becomes more rigid when aims are expressed in a narrow set of metrics – profit for a company, a budget deficit for a government or the number of grants and publications for a university – and these are incorporated into performance contracts. Particularly problematic are the investor-state clauses in some trade agreements that hinder governments in pursuing common good considerations such as environmental sustainability.

Finding structures, systems and processes for managing desire and affiliation so that they do not become entrenched in greed and hatred is one of the great challenges in preparing for emerging crises.

Ethics

Wisdom helps us look below the surface to understand the complexities of the world and of human behaviour. Ethics then provides the values

and the narrative which guide action. The paradigm which dominates in economics and politics and has infiltrated much of social life is often described as neoliberalism. This focuses on individuals and the choices they make to maximize their wellbeing. It values self-reliance, and it aims to maximize the success of the individual and/or his or her group as they see it. It has little room for social or communal activity except as an aggregation of individuals, and little time for social values such as solidarity except as they contribute to individuals' sense of wellbeing. The resources of the world are seen as commodities with no intrinsic value, to be exploited, traded and used by humans for their benefit. There is a duty of care to other humans, but with the expectation that they too will try to help themselves.

Buddhist ethics is different. It begins with a person who is a part of the world and whose wellbeing is inseparable from that of the whole. The aim is a flourishing life for all. Core values are care for all sentient beings and avoiding harm in an uncertain world, replacing 'greed' with generosity and 'hate' with love. A role model is the *Bodhisattva*, who works for the benefit of all and postpones his or her own reward until it can be shared with all.

The claim of Buddhist ethics is not just that it is in some way morally better to be concerned with the wellbeing of others but that this in fact leads to greater happiness all round: others may benefit from the good that we do, we have the sense of wellbeing that comes from a compassionate engagement with the world and collectively we have the benefits that come from collaboration rather than competition, and sympathetic rather than conflictual relationships. It is important that such claims continue to be tested at individual, organizational and community levels to provide support for new paradigms of individual and social behaviour.

Practice and capacity building

Taken together, compassion, wisdom and ethics provide a framework within which emerging crises can be addressed thoughtfully and

inclusively. The final element in the mix is developing the capacity to do so, at both an individual and a social/political level. This is partly a matter of personal characteristics – reflection, compassion, generosity – that have traditionally been developed through practices such as education, meditation and self-responsibility. It also requires forms of organization and ways of operating which enable these to be put into practice at all levels. This involves new ways of thinking and working: in an interconnected world ‘joined up’ thinking is required, and notions such as the circular economy will come into their own. Working inclusively and managing change will be crucial. New terms will be needed for paradigmatic neoliberal concepts such as ‘human resources’ and ‘consumers’.

We will also need to ensure that the scope and structure of organizations reflects the issues they are dealing with and the links between, for example, climate change and ecology, or water resources and national security, or public health and patterns of settlement and migration. We will need political structures that are capable of addressing wicked problems, and channels through which the public can have a real voice in issues which concern them. These are likely to be very different to the types of structures that have flourished under a neoliberal orthodoxy. Particularly interesting here is Elinor Ostrom’s work on the management of goods held in common (Ostrom 2010). She refuted the ‘tragedy of the commons’ – the widely believed idea that if goods held in common (such as shared grazing land) were managed collectively no one would care for them. In contrast to the neoliberal solution of bringing them under individual ownership and management, as in a regime of tradeable water rights, she identified many forms of effective cooperative ownership and management and described the principles on which these were based.

These structures will vary according to context. The law has very different requirements to journalism, but there will be commonalities. Sectors such as education, the media, and the arts will be critical for developing and disseminating new ways of thinking. Strategic planners and human resource consultants can help embed them in organizations. Well-networked

communities will also be needed to support strong community engagement and public support for necessary action.

This is where Humanistic Buddhism comes in, as one of several movements dedicated to applying Buddhist teaching to the contemporary world. Others include Engaged Buddhism, which brings a Buddhist response into the worlds of conflict and suffering, and Ecodharma, which applies Buddhist understanding to the climate and environmental crises. Humanistic Buddhism's focus on this world and its commitment to education and social action brings it face to face with emerging problems. Its education infuses teaching and learning with Buddhist principles and encourages students to take these out into their future work. It also has the scope for research and development to create Buddhist-inspired models of practice and the organizational structures that support them.

Conclusion

We began by asking whether compassion provides a path to a sustainable future. We have seen that as a response of the engaged heart it motivates us to relieve suffering and promote wellbeing and helps create the solidarity required for tackling difficult issues.

But like the heart, it has limitations. Compassion is susceptible to prejudice and a partial view of the world; it works best with those who are known. However, compassion is also prone to fatigue. To address the problems that we now face we also need a wise understanding and an ethical framework, with the support of practice and capacity building. Together these can lead us to a much deeper critique of our situation than compassion alone affords and provide at least suggestions as to how we should approach our emerging crises. Given the magnitude of the problems we face these approaches may not see us through, but at least they give a clearer understanding of what we are facing and how we might address it.

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MEG HART

10 Bodhisattvas in Action: Turning Crises into Sacred Leadership

Climate catastrophe, public health chaos, rampant inequality, abuse of the disadvantaged and the natural world – the crises that beset us today often seem intractable. Yet as Albert Einstein (2005), and later Thomas Kuhn (1962), pointed out, crises or discontinuities in the familiar, the known, can lead to revolutions in perspective and paradigm shifts in the way we interact with the world. Crises are dangerous, but they are also opportunities for change, possible catalysts for larger vision, renewal and redirection as the word ‘crisis’ (*krisis*, Greek) suggests. Akin to *weiji* (Chinese) it refers to danger as well as possibility. Crises give us the chance to reimagine ourselves, our place in the world and the kind of world we want to live in. Paradoxically, this uncomfortable experience may also help restore us to ways of seeing and being in harmony with life and reality that were much better understood by earlier human cultures.

Australia has unique and enlivening possibilities to reimagine itself, from bringing together its timeless and tested First Nations’ wisdom to the relatively recent emergence of Buddhist understandings (Flanagan 2018). This chapter explores what we might draw from the rich sources of wisdom and compassion that indigenous Australia offers us to tell a new, kinder Australian story, one of greater inclusivity, harmony, ecological consciousness and flourishing for all life. The chapter that follows is a personal reflection rather than an academic treatise on the subject as the question of renewal is uncertain and ongoing.

A statement from the heart of Australia

In May 2017, when 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates came together in the centre of the country for the First Nations National Constitutional Convention and offered us the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Constitutional Convention 2017), many non-indigenous Australians like me were moved and inspired – but unsure how to respond. The Statement ‘invited the nation to create a better future for all of Australia,’ taking a path to a fair and truthful relationship between all the people of Australia. What it called for – a voice to parliament, a treaty and truth-telling – was a prerequisite to the healing of our troubled nation and long overdue. It was an invitation to understand ‘sovereignty’ very differently, not as ownership but custodianship. Careful custodianship of the sacred connection between the land and the peoples is what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations have practised here for sixty millennia and more.

The Statement from the Heart is a gift, a call to engage at last in rigorous and respectful truth-telling about our recent past and our shared future (Reynolds 2021: 207). I printed it out, read it often, uncertain how I should or could contribute to this conversation so vital to Australia’s wellbeing and very survival. For this is not just about our colonial history but the reality of the present, our inextricable interdependency with each other and the natural world that sustains us all. As Dr Anna Poelina, scientist, Nyikina Warrwa Traditional Owner and a guardian of Mardoowarra, Lower Fitzroy River, WA said:

We are all indigenous to Mother Earth. ... In a time of climate change and climate chaos, we need collective wisdom and thinking to ensure intergeneration equity along with multi-species justice in recognising our non-human family; the birds, the trees, and importantly, rivers that have a right not only to live but to flow. (Poelina 2022)

As a student of Buddhism, I recognized resonances between the First Nations pathway to eldership and knowledge, and the Buddhist path of the Bodhisattva. Both are grounded in holistic relational reality, not binary or linear mindsets. Both share a vast view of our interdependency and the human potential for awake consciousness motivated by the

understanding of our mutual responsibility and reciprocity with each other and the Earth. To heal the world is to heal *all* our relationships with it and each other. The *Uluru Statement* makes it clear that a sane and enlightened society is only possible if we resolutely face our past and look to a fair and just future for all citizens. *Makarrata* – the coming together after a long struggle – depends on truth-telling, honest conversation about past events and future possibilities that respects all points of view, all stories and the sacred knowledge they enfold.

A different kind of leadership

This calls for a different kind of leadership to the hierarchical, top-down system we have been subjected to for many centuries in the West. It is leadership from the inside out earned through the cultivation of awake consciousness – our *Buddha-Nature* and sacred connectedness – and the capacity to encourage and inspire others and create unity.

I had read many books on leadership and been to many seminars when in 2018 I heard a talk that radically changed my way of thinking about what it means to lead, and about Australia's history. The talk was given by Dr Tjanara Goreng Goreng at the Art Gallery of NSW, drawing on her PhD thesis 'Tjukurpa Pulka The road to eldership: How Aboriginal culture creates sacred and visionary leaders' – and how they inspire and lead through what Robert Kegan called 'higher orders of consciousness' (Kegan quoted in Goreng Goreng 2018: 111).

Tjanara pointed out that for over 65,000 years, her people had lived sustainably and equitably on this continent, developing a sophisticated process for educating their children and nurturing leaders based on the fundamental principle of looking after each other and Country. What Buddhists might call the 'skilful means of compassion'. In the last 234 years, First Nations' peoples have experienced cataclysmic crises and endless trauma – invasion, dispossession, massacres, stolen children, disease, disadvantage, disrespect – yet they have produced extraordinary leaders and their culture and the law underpinning it is alive, strong,

enduring. It also has useful insights and innovations to offer modern-day Australia.

Tjanara also challenged the lens through which Europeans viewed Aboriginal culture – the previously dominant colonialist paradigm of leadership based on European military and institutional hierarchies of power and authority and written laws to enforce property ownership and succession. Then she unfolded the extraordinary wisdom of the Aboriginal paradigm of sacred leadership called Eldership:

Sacred leadership requires integrative thinking about the self, others and the world (which) inspires and motivates others to follow. It is about going beyond being egocentric and dependent ... to reach a higher order of consciousness. (Goreng Goreng 2018: 186)

Like all Aboriginal culture, Eldership is informed by the essential principle of looking after each other and the land and is grounded in timeless practices which include:

- *Kanyini* – the law of harmony, of unconditional respect for Life – the thread of connectedness, caring and responsibility that links *waltja* (family and kinship), *kurunpa* (spirit and soul in all things) and *ngura* (my Country or home) (Goreng Goreng 2018: 81).
- *Dadirri* – the deep listening that comes from being at home in the silence of Country, whether desert, bush or seashore (Goreng Goreng 2018: 174).
- *Tjungunghu* – the shared caring and restraint that ensures our anger or negativity is not transferred onto others or into the world (Goreng Goreng 2018: 174).

And perhaps most vital of all, *Country* – the land as teacher, nourisher, benefactor, source of ecological consciousness – and everything that sustains life.

Indigenous kinship systems embrace all life in Country, everything is connected, related and has a part to play in holding up the world. (Kwaymullina 2020: 8)

Presence that transforms people

Despite their experience of dispossession and disrespect, the Elders of this sacred kinship system embody deep respect, a capacity to be available to anyone, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and a presence that transforms people:

As he told them his story and the stories of how we lived as Aboriginal people in this world, the power, the forgiveness, his simplicity left many of them speechless. He was a sacred being, and he embodied it in his way of being and yet he did not make any issue of it. He was just being the way he always was with anyone, whether a child or a Prime Minister. (Goreng Goreng 2018: 40)

Tjanara went on to explain that an Elder is not elected or appointed but is a person who has attained a kind of self-mastery through:

... the practice of humility and in managing the ego in relationships ... the ability to resolve conflicts between people, communities and groups, the ability to create co-operation and unity, to judge wisely, to be tolerant and accepting of everything, to make wise decisions (to be decisive) and to have a way of knowing, being and doing where your qualities and values are lived in thoughts, words and actions consistently. (Goreng Goreng 2018: 201–2)

As Kummunara Randall observed quietly to Tjanara:

In our culture becoming an Elder can be likened to being on a path of enlightenment, as the Buddhists say. It took 45 years for me to not be angry and know about being peaceful especially with things I've done in my life and the way people treated us. (Goreng Goreng 2018: 104)

'A path of enlightenment' is a source of practical wisdom tested and re-tested over time. Australia is the beneficiary of two extraordinary wisdom pathways – its First Peoples' culture of caring and kinship as well as vibrant spiritual practices brought from its Asian neighbourhood. These traditions are grounded in relational reality, the fundamental reciprocity of care for nature and each other. They are pathways to become a fully conscious, awake human being, an elder or sacred leader, 'a person of high

degree'. Eldership, like enlightenment, cannot be bought or mandated, it is earned through years of 'fearlessly facing reality' with compassion. In Buddhism, this visionary path to sacred leadership is known as the way of the Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva in action: Leadership from the inside out

Volatile-Uncertain-Complex-Ambiguous – VUCA – has become the catchphrase for a world in crisis, but Shakyamuni Buddha pointed out over 2,500 years ago that the world has always been this way – impermanent and interdependent, ever-changing and intricately connected. What he also pointed out was that we ourselves have the power to navigate this ever-changing relational reality. It is called *Buddha-Nature* – the innate, awake consciousness that is the true nature of mind. The confused, unruly layer of mind can be tamed, the Buddha taught, so that its luminous, spacious cognizance is revealed and manifests as compassion in action. Then I suggest VUCA becomes Vision-Understanding-Compassion-Authenticity. This transformation is possible right here, right now – with the people in front of us and the relationships that so challenge us – using a unique method, the Bodhisattva path. 'Joyful participation in the sorrows of the world,' mythologist Joseph Campbell called it (Campbell and Moyers 1988: 203).

A bodhisattva is a brave person willing to grapple with the nature of reality: everything changes, nothing has lasting existence. Everything is the result of interrelated causes and conditions. Every being is a potential Buddha with a capacity for truth – the truth of the spacious clarity of their very own mind. 'Mind' here denotes the sense of heart-mind continuum, the inseparability of our whole being with the universe.

The Way of the Bodhisattva by the eighth-century teacher Shantideva (1997) is the definitive manual for this path of awakening. *Bodhicharyavatara*, as it is known in Sanskrit, is Shantideva's great ode to the marvel of *Bodhicitta*, the key to unlocking the mind's true and pristine nature. *Bodhicitta* (*bodhi*, awakening, *citta*, mind) – the wish to benefit all

beings by cultivating awake consciousness in oneself – is a motivation, a method and a result all in one. By generating a steady intention to benefit others, we ourselves become freer from confusion and suffering. Shantideva could not help singing bodhicitta's praises because its patient practice offers a vision of a wholly new alternative in the way we experience life and face its inevitable challenges and crises.

Being a bodhisattva is not about being a 'nice person', however, it is about being relentlessly honest, raw and truthful with ourselves. Bodhicitta is the alchemy we need for this daring practice, reminding oneself constantly that I'm here to free others from suffering by freeing myself from the confusion that comes from ignoring what I really am – a Buddha in the making. My skylike mind is only temporarily obscured by the clouds of doubt and delusion. For bodhisattvas-in-progress like myself, this requires a radical and regular shift in attention from 'me' to the other person, accompanied by a genuine wish for their happiness. With Bodhicitta, every action can be beneficial if we keep that big wish in mind. This is the logic of compassion. It is sometimes called 'enlightened self-interest': in wishing benefit to others, we are benefitted ourselves by the spaciousness of warm-hearted altruism. Kindness has a multiplier effect. However, Shantideva's (1997) method is not for wimps, he warned, it is rigorous and calls for:

- *Confession* or being utterly transparent with oneself, not with criticism but honest assessment: 'I made a mistake, now I know better ...'
- *Commitment* to work with our mind and its vexing confusions, to be 'a lover of what is', a realist.
- *Awareness* of how our dualistic thoughts limit and derail us and can become habitual – me/you, us/them, good/bad. This habit of binary thinking is our real enemy, not other people.
- *Vigilance* – mindfully watching how thoughts emerge and can cluster into fear and bias if we let them.
- *Patience* – the ultimate heroism and the antidote to the anger which arises from self-cherishing or the faulty view of ourselves as the centre of the universe.

- *Heroic perseverance* – the courageous refusal to give up on oneself and the tireless practice of putting everything that happens ‘on the path’, trusting that our Buddha-Nature is adamant, indestructible.
- *Meditation* – not just sitting on a mat, but staying conscious, kind and aware at all times.
- *Wisdom* – recognizing the grand view of enlightenment and seeing every problem, insecurity, ‘mistake’ as an opportunity for awakening.

And finally, remembering each day to dedicate the merit of our aspirations and efforts: may my efforts today benefit all beings (Shantideva 1997).

The practice of Bodhicitta can be a game-changer, a kind of secret superpower, the extraordinary way that expanding the focus of our attention from ourselves to a wider framework can have such a profound effect on our minds, our emotions and our behaviour. This radical methodology is always available to us free of charge if we are willing to make use of whatever we encounter in daily life to become more awake. Stuff happens, we react with emotion, yet that very reactivity can be transformed into the wisdom of compassion when we remind ourselves of our bodhisattva aspiration to reduce confusion and conflict in the world. It’s a big wish. As Michele Obama (2016) said: ‘when they go low, we go high’.

Going high is about having a big view of reality and a big vision of what is possible – kindness is possible, harmony is possible, peace is possible. Not easy, but possible. Like the Elder Kummunara Randall, becoming a bodhisattva is a work in progress for me, a daily act of self-leadership from the inside out, a lifetime project with advances and frequent setbacks, an act of joyous participation in life, even when life delivers uncertainty, change, challenge and sorrow – as it surely will.

‘Our every action, every deed, word and thought, no matter how slight and inconsequential it may seem, has implications not only for ourselves but for all others too,’ as the Dalai Lama wrote in *Ancient Wisdom, Modern World*. (1999: 41)

With each conversation, each thought, each action, we are making and remaking our world. Every one of us is a leader. Leadership is not just

a position conferred by an election or a succession plan. That old hierarchical model which operated in a unipolar world of entrenched power disparity is fast becoming obsolete in today's richly diverse, multipolar reality. Leadership is about becoming a person of high degree, a conscious participant in the complex, ever-changing, relational reality we inhabit. For over 60,000 years, Indigenous peoples lived this way, attuned to each other and the natural relationships that connected them. They educated their children and nurtured leaders based on the fundamental principle of care for each other, for Country and all life. The pathways to Eldership and the Bodhisattva path have sustained the quest to become awake, caring human beings for many generations of First Australians, Asians and others. This article returns to the question: what can we do now to incorporate those perennial practices of humility, restraint, patience and kindness into new ways of leading that inspire cooperation, consciousness and the wish for the wellbeing of all life on Earth?

Perhaps the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, which turns the crises of the past 234 years into hope for a better, fairer future, is showing us the way. It is not too late to come together, heal and make whole our country for all its peoples and for Mother Earth.

To be a fully realised individual
Is to be part of a collective
And to live in a way
That ensures all other life
Has the same opportunity
For self-realisation
So that all life
Can speak their languages
Follow their law
Live their culture-ways
Fulfil their role
Of caring for Country. (Kwaymullina 2020: 8)

May Bodhicitta, precious and sublime,
Arise where it has not yet arisen;
And where it has arisen may it never fail
But grow and flourish ever more and more. (Nagarjuna circa 200 CE)

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GAWAIIAN BODKIN-ANDREWS, SHANNON FOSTER, AUNTY
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II Resisting Genocide through D’harawal Relatedness: Understanding the Appin Massacre and the Story of How Wiritijiribin the Lyrebird Came to Be

This chapter is a collaboration between Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, D’harawal man and Indigenous Studies scholar, D’harawal PhD candidate Shannon Foster, Aboriginal scholar and Professor Bronwyn Carlson, and Joanne Kinniburgh. The true authority for this chapter though falls under that of D’harawal Traditional Descendants and Knowledge Holders Circle, including (but not limited to) Aunty Frances Bodkin, Uncle John Foster, Uncle Gavin Andrews, Aunty Karen Adams, Uncle Ros Evans, and Jade Foster-Guadalupe.

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Every year, on the weekend closest to April 17, and barring the increasing prevalence of floods, bushfires, and disease (such as Covid-19), a memorial service is held to commemorate what is now widely known in the local communities as the Appin Massacre of the D'harawal and Gundungurra peoples. Officially, the memorial services began under the kindness, hard work and leadership of Sister Kerry McDermott and the *Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group* that formed in 1993. Unofficially, in 1977, after multiple miscarriages, Frances (with her husband Gavin), returned to the Children's Rock, a sacred place of protection, to ask their D'harawal Ancestors and Country to protect their new-born (and two-month premature) son, Gawaiian. Through the oral histories passed onto them, the Children's Rock was not only a place of ceremonial protection and healing, but it was also a campsite linked to the Appin Massacre. A massacre that included the brutal killing of *at least* fourteen Aboriginal warriors, mothers, fathers and children. Within the contemporary memorial service, respected Aboriginal Aunties and Uncles give Welcomes and speak of their Knowledges and connections to The Massacre, talented Aboriginal dancers perform both traditional and contemporary stories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders speak of the diverse strengths within the surrounding communities, and even varying politicians occasionally lament on this tragedy of the past.

Some would suggest that this memorial service is a strong example of an act of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples. Some would dig a little deeper and suggest that the memorial service is an act of truth-telling, a long overdue acknowledgement of at least one of the many atrocities (e.g. around 400 'recorded' massacres of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – Ryan et al. 2022) that have been systemically committed against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout the colonial history of what is now labelled as Australia. Others paint The Massacre as an example of one of the last periods of Aboriginal resistance during what has only been recently recognized as the Frontier Wars (Gapps, 2018). However, it is the purpose of

this chapter not to critique or reject these perspectives, but to offer a different lens on both the Appin Massacre and the events that led up to The Massacre itself. A lens that is directly linked to D'harawal Storytelling and the voices of D'harawal Elders and Knowledge Holders.

Through a methodology closely aligned with D'harawal Storytelling (Bodkin 2013; Bodkin-Andrews et al. 2022), and a synergetic weaving of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald 2008) and Indigenous yarning (Bessarab and Ng'Dandu 2010), this chapter will privilege the voices of the D'harawal Traditional Descendants and Knowledge Holders Circle, who in sharing the sacred D'harawal Garuwanga (Ancestral Dreaming) Story of *Meyrani Wiritjiribin*, The First Lyrebird, will reveal a hidden pathway of knowledges to the Appin Massacre. It will provide a lens that will highlight the true depths of the tragedy surrounding The Massacre, yet also hopefully offer valuable lessons for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples. Lessons of diversity, respect and compassion. A lesson of Indigenous Relatedness.

Relatedness through storywork and storytelling

The theoretical foundation of this chapter is centred on the notion of Indigenous Relatedness or Relationality (Kwaymullina 2017; Martin 2008; Tynan 2021; Wilson 2008). Indigenous Relatedness is central to how Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and First Nations peoples and their ancestors have come to understand the world. It does not emphasize the individual, their achievements, wealth, and what they may or may not own, nor the individual's family, that is who they may or may not be related to. Rather Indigenous Relatedness' central element, or 'heart', is Country (Tynan 2021).

Country, from an Indigenous standpoint, is not some lower-case notion of Western governments and their political and economic management systems, nor is it a vague location sitting some distance away from cities or largely populated areas. Rather, Country, as summarized by

Aboriginal scholar Nerida Blair (2019), is the lands, the waters, the skies and ecosystems that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations peoples are deeply connected to. Country is the sacred place where one comes to not only know the world, but to also know their responsibilities to the world. Country is the very foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing (epistemology, axiology, ontology) – their very identity (Tynan 2021). Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson captures this sense of deep connection between Country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations peoples:

Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationships with the land, with their Ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being on the land. Rather than viewing ourselves as being in relationship ... we are the relationships that we hold and are part of. (Wilson 2008: 80)

Noonuccal and Bidjara scholar Karen Martin (2008) highlighted that Indigenous Relatedness is both micro and macro stories, yet is also the understanding of how they are all connected within and across stories. According to Martin (2008), Indigenous peoples and their identities are just one element of the micro story of *Entities*, where *Entities* are *all* the elements of Country (people, land, animals, plants, skies, waterways and climate). Martin (2008) lists three other key micro stories, including the *Ancestral Core* which includes the Creators and Ancestral Spirits, the original sources of our lives and laws today. Connecting the *Ancestral Core* to our very existence (ways of knowing, being and doing) is the *Spirits*, the messengers who have taken the form of *Entities* to ensure the stories of the Ancestral Core are passed on, and the relatedness is maintained. The maintenance of this relatedness though is not simply the passing on of the Stories or messages of the *Ancestral Core*, but is the protection, the sustaining *and the expansion* or evolution of relatedness, so that it does not become forgotten or replaced. It is the *Filter*, the process through which Elders, Law Peoples and storytellers ensure that our sense of Indigenous Relatedness survives.

From this foundational understanding, it is hoped that the reader can grasp some preliminary sense of the critical importance of Indigenous

Relatedness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations peoples. Whilst Trawlwulwuy woman Lauren Tynan (2021) rightly suggests that relatedness cannot be truly understood by reading a piece of paper, at the very least, once acknowledged, one may see that:

Relatedness reveals itself in its most simple and natural, but most powerful form. When simply and naturally maintained, Relatedness is sustaining for the Entities ... Relatedness was sustained through Story lines, ceremony lines, trade and marriage amongst Aboriginal groups and across great distances. (Martin 2008: 75)

A sense of Indigenous Relatedness is not only the key to a greater understanding of the purpose of this chapter, but it is the core of the research project that this chapter emanates from. Relatedness guided the project's engagement with members of the D'harawal Traditional Descendants and Knowledge Holders Circle, that was then further achieved through the methodological foundations of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald 2008). Within Western academic contexts, Indigenous Storywork was introduced by respected Stó:lō Plains Cree scholar, Jo-ann Q'um Q'um Xiiem Archibald (1997; 2008), and involves the care, time and effort needed to make meaning of the stories (traditional or contemporary) of Indigenous and First Nations peoples.

One of the keys to understanding Storywork is that Indigenous and First Nations storytelling, and oral traditions, when translated onto the printed page, can threaten the very foundational understandings of the story itself. Indigenous storytelling and oral traditions are about relationships between not only the storyteller and storylistener, but also the very fabric of Indigenous and First Nations peoples' belief systems, their codes of conduct, their cultural practices (Archibald 2008), and their sense of relatedness. Essential then to understanding Indigenous Storywork is that there can be great complexities and many layers of meaning imbedded within any one story, many of which may be inaccessible through the written word (especially when using the colonizers' language that has too often reduced such stories to near meaningless myths and legends – Bodkin-Andrews et al. 2022). To highlight the depths of Indigenous and First Nations stories, Archibald (2008) identified seven key principles of Storywork (see Figure 11.1).

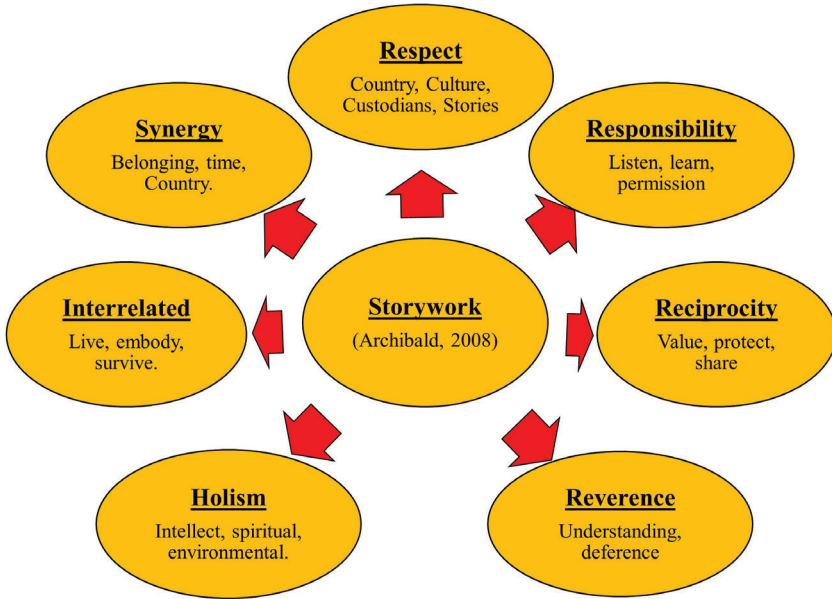


Figure 11.1. The seven principles of indigenous storywork (adapted from Archibald 2008).

The first four principles (Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity and Reverence) reveal the nature of the values that need to be embraced when engaging with not only the Story itself, but also the storyteller and storylisteners. The remaining principles of Holism, Interrelatedness and Synergy centre on the learning imbedded within the story itself (Archibald 2008).

Similar to Martin's (2008) writing on Indigenous Relatedness, the work of Archibald (2008) has arguably inspired many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars to meaningfully imbed Indigenous storytelling into their academic writings (De Santolo 2019; Kwaymullina 2017; Neale and Kelly 2020; Phillips and Bunda 2018), and this is certainly the case of the lead author of this paper. In 2019, D'harawal man Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews (with Aboriginal scholar Professor Bronwyn Carlson) was able to win an Indigenous Discovery Australian Research Council

Grant titled 'Shielding our Futures: Storytelling with Ancestral and Living Knowledges' (IN190100014). This grant was in close partnership with the D'harawal Traditional Descendants and Knowledge Holders Circle, with whom Bodkin-Andrews has a long cultural learning, academic and working relationship. In short, The Circle is a close-knit group of D'harawal Storytellers – whose connections extend from Saltwater Country, along the Georges River into the marshlands of Bitter-water Country extending to Menangle, into the Sweet-water Country of the Nattai Valley – all of whom are seeking to teach of the important lessons imbedded within D'harawal Stories.

In part inspired by the work of Martin (2008) and Archibald (2008), The Circle's first priority was to honour their D'harawal Ancestors and the Garuwanga (Dreaming) stories, and to highlight the inherent values and protocols that must be considered when both sharing and learning from D'harawal stories. As a result, through a series of in-depth Circle yarns, a set of twenty-five interrelated protocols were established.

In a recent paper by Bodkin-Andrews and The Circle (Bodkin-Andrews et al. 2022), these protocols and values were placed into three overarching themes that centred on the unchanging Laws of the Stories, and the more mutable roles of the storyteller and storylistener.

- *Midan Yewing: the Law – what is:* this overarching theme is made of a collection of protocols that are deeply embedded within the stories themselves, and must never change, regardless of who may be telling or listening to the story itself. Themes include *Interrelatedness, Country, Ancestors, Foundation, Time, Consensus, Cultural Rights* and *Governance*.
- *Barkolo Yewing: the Storyteller – what I see:* this overarching theme encompasses the protocols and values that focus on the responsibilities of the individual storytellers, and what they may see and do for any story being told. At times these protocols and values may vary between storytellers, sometimes they may be shared. Themes here include *Custodians, Resistance, Centring, Responsibility, Strength, Flexibility, Language, Confidentiality* and *Gifting*.

- *Duragai Yewing: The Storylistener – What you see*: Within this overarching theme, the emphasis was on the protocols and values required of the person hearing, listening, and learning from the story (and that we, as storytellers, must recognize that storylisteners come with their own unique histories and lenses). Themes here focused on considerations around *Outsiders, Connections, Diversity, Mentoring, Conflict, Trust, Focus* and *Transparency*.

In writing this chapter, we realize that in sharing the Story of *Wiritjiribin*, we are reducing it to the written word of the colonizers themselves. But we also hope that in providing a brief glimpse of the values and protocols emerging from The Circle meetings, the reader will come to understand that there is much more to learn from this story than what has been presented in this chapter. With this in mind, The Circle has agreed to not only share the *Wiritjiribin* Story, but to also share key themes from their Circle Yarns that centred on the *Wiritjiribin* Story and the Appin Massacre (see boxed text with the use of cultural pseudonyms for anonymity purposes). It is through the voices of the D’harawal Elders and Knowledge Holders, the readers may discover the links between the lessons of the *Wiritjiribin* Story, and the Appin Massacre itself, and also further understand that our stories connect us to each other, our Country, and our Ancestors.

I know it’s a theme within our Stories, which is tying us back to that land, that Mother Earth, that Country, you know, all those words and tying that bond of connection to Country or connection to Mother Earth as if we’re one and the same, that’s what that symbolizes. Sort of like a lot of those stories have the same connection, connectivity, but with different circumstances.

- Wiritjiribin

A long, long time ago, there was a severe drought, the first the D’harawal Peoples had ever experienced. As the heat of Wuri – the sun – beat down upon them, they began to see the creeks dry, the flowers wilt, the forests die, and its many foods became scarcer and scarcer. That the Peoples had never before suffered such scarcity, they did not know what

to do. They only knew that now they had to travel long distances to obtain enough food and water to sustain themselves, to survive. As a result, The Peoples became thinner, and the oldest and the youngest increasingly became sickly. The young children were lacking in their usual energy and spirit, and the old ones were becoming weak and unable to travel far without help. It was at this point that the oldest of the Peoples, old Wiritjiribin, with her silvery white hair and her ever ready chuckle, persuaded the Peoples to take the long journey back to the Place of Sanctuary, the first Wirrimbirra. The place where the sacred Miwa Gawaian – the white waratah – acted as the message stick to the Creator Spirit. It was Wiritjiribin's hope that they would be able to conduct a sacred ceremony and call to the Creator Spirit to ask her for help. The journey to the Wirrimbirra – the sacred place – was long and arduous, but Wiritjiribin knew that if the Peoples worked together, if they cared for each other, they would all make it back to the sacred place of protection – the Place of the Beginning. All the Peoples followed Wiritjiribin closely, for not only had the younger one's never seen this Wirrimbirra, but many of the adults, the initiated, had forgotten the way. Regardless they were looking forward to reaching this sacred place that Wiritjiribin spoke of so often in the Garuwanga – the Ancestral Dreaming – Stories.

There have been many attempts to recount, or piece together, the events of the Appin Massacre. These include the many historical summaries of the event, largely drawn from the colonial archives (Daley 2018; Liston 1988; Organ 2016; Pickering 2010; Sutton 2021; Turbet 2011), varying artistic representations (Allas and Muller 2021), and more recent health-based approaches linking the Massacre to historical and intergenerational trauma and healing (Raeburn et al. 2020; Raeburn et al. 2022).

A key focus of this chapter, though, is the need to understand the antecedents of the Appin Massacre itself. As already noted, some, like non-Indigenous historian Stephen Gapps (2018), have directly linked the Appin Massacre to the Sydney Frontier Wars which included well over *100 armed conflicts and skirmishes* between non-Indigenous colonizers and Aboriginal peoples between 1788 and 1817 (including at least three massacres of Aboriginal peoples). It is critical to note that Gapps' work has been essential in breaking down the whitewashing of historical representations of early non-Indigenous/Aboriginal relations in the Sydney region and overturning the illusions of peaceful 'settlement' as opposed to a violent, and genocidal invasion (Behrendt 2019).

What it makes me think of is that the whites are trying to glorify colonization, you know, and this sort of information prevents them from doing that to a degree. They're trying to snow white colonization, you know?

– Garawai

Context, though, is also important. In what is now understood to be the South-western Sydney region (areas such as Airds, Campbelltown and Appin), numerous historians have noted that after early hostilities, relations between the Aboriginal peoples and colonizers had become quite peaceful by around 1810, at least for some (Irish 2017; Karskens 2009; Liston 1988). This was particularly noted by Goodall and Cadzow (2009: 51) who found that the 'Dharawal peoples around those areas already settled [sic], were trying to negotiate new ways to work with the settlers.' This possibly included working relationships where the D'harawal and other Aboriginal peoples provided labour and essential services (like shepherds or guides) of value to the colonizers themselves, in exchange for goods, shelter and even money (Irish 2017; Karskens 2009).

... because there had been peaceful coexistence in the area ... in the Appin area ... there were good strong friendly relationships between the locals [D'harawal] ... and the farmers...

– Wiritjiribin

Apart from increasing numbers of (stolen) land-grants gifted to the colonizers by their governor of the time (Gapps 2018), another very powerful force began to threaten the peaceful relations between non-Indigenous peoples and Aboriginal peoples of the Sydney Region. That was the oncoming of a very severe, and long-running drought:

The severe Distress suffered by the Settlers in general, and most particularly by those in the middle and lower Classes, from the late long continued Drought, which has alike injured the Live Stock, and rendered the present Harvest much less productive than was hoped for and expected ... (Allan 1814)

It was during their arduous journey back to the place of the Beginning, when The Peoples still had some distance to go, they suddenly found a reason to pause their travels. For as they were walking, they noticed dark clouds that began to creep over the horizons and slowly sneak across the sky towards them. Soon, they pointed joyfully as these clouds approached them even faster, and when a few drops of rain spattered down onto their faces, they began to laugh and dance. But the rain was quickly over, and it was not even enough to dampen the dry soils. So, when the Peoples resumed their journey, little dust clouds still rose from the ground as they walked.

Yet worse was to come, for the clouds remained, and the Sky Spirits soon became crowded and began to growl at each other. Then they lost their tempers and began to fight, throwing their spears of fire at each other. Whilst the old ones (including Wiritjiribin) looked up in fear, the young ones eagerly watched in awe at the Sky Spirits' battle. But all too soon the Sky Spirits began to tire, and their spears began to miss and crashed into the dry earth below. And as a result, the dry litter on the forest floor quickly caught alight, and a fire began to rage across the land, greedily devouring all the bushes in its path, and climbing up even the tallest of trees.

Now all the Peoples watched in horror as the fire danced over the mountains, across the flatlands, and raced beside the creeks and rivers towards them.

It is the position of The Circle that this severe drought (that was obviously already having a great impact on the colonizers by the end of 1813) was also having a significant impact on the Aboriginal peoples of the broader Sydney Region (especially the D'harawal, Gundungurra and Dharug peoples). This impact, whilst certainly not the sole antecedent to the Appin Massacre, would have potentially increased the likelihood of tensions arising between the colonizers and the Aboriginal peoples of the Sydney region. However, non-Indigenous historian Peter Turbet (2011) contests this possibility by noting that previous droughts suffered by the colonizers had not resulted in conflict. One may argue that Turbet's (2011) assertion could be misguided, for as powerfully noted by Gapps (2018), early invader relations with Aboriginal peoples was certainly not uniformly peaceful (and prior droughts may have contributed to this). Yet from a

D'harawal perspective, Turbet's (2011) assertion does hint at more complex possibilities that have largely escaped non-Indigenous historians' attention.

To explain this complexity, we must first draw on the general consensus that the 'Mountain Tribes' (the Gundungurra peoples) also faced the full force of the drought, arguably with less resources to survive it (Liston 1988; Turbet 2011). This was particularly noted by Goodall and Cadzow (2009: 52) who explained that:

When the drought struck in the winter of 1814 [as noted previously, it began well before then in 1813], many Gandangarra people apparently moved eastwards towards the rivers, as they would always have done.

Goodall and Cadzow's (2009) quote above should be considered very carefully. Firstly, the 'always' statement may contradict earlier allusions in their book to the allegedly tense relations between the D'harawal and Gundungurra peoples (see also Liston 1988; Turbett 2011). Secondly, it has been well established by numerous historians that the 'Mountain Tribes' were not known (or seen before) by the colonizers around the Appin/Campbeltown area (Gapps 2018; Liston 1988) – although D'harawal born chief, Cannabayagal, is often confused as being Gundungurra, despite being well known around the Picton, Razorback and Appin areas in the early 1800s (Calay 1966). Finally, as noted by Turbet (2011), there had been previous droughts, so why had not the Gundungurra been seen before, as they 'always have done'? Later in this chapter, we would argue that this 'movement' is indicative of a much more careful and meaningful relationship between the Gundugurra and D'harawal peoples, one that was not based on hostility or mistrust.

When the high Country dried out – remember this Country was getting dry too – but there was still bounty to be had down here in the natural systems ... not just the crops the farmers were producing ...

– Wiritjiribin

Regardless of the complications in non-Indigenous historians' assertions, the 'Mountain Tribes' did descend from the Blue Mountains and

Southern Highlands, and it was here that arguably the first hostilities, and death, directly linked to the Appin Massacre emerged. The death of a non-Indigenous overseer:

The mountain natives have lately become troublesome to the occupiers of remote grounds. Mr Cox's people at Mulgoa have been several times attacked within the last month, and compelled to defend themselves with their muskets... On Sunday last Mr Campbell's servants ... were attacked by nearly 400, the overseer was speared through the shoulder, several pigs were killed ... Similar outrages have been committed in other places; which it is to be hoped will cease without a necessity of our resorting to measures equally violent to suppress the outrages. (Lord 1814)

These hostilities, seemingly instigated by the 'Mountain Natives', are viewed differently by The Circle, whose insider knowledges offer another interpretation of these and subsequent hostilities. An interpretation where the colonizers' land-grants and farms (and exclusive ownership) violate ancient practices, duties and agreements that promoted care and peace between the Peoples of varying Countries.

Wiritjiribin: *So Gundungurra were out of the mountains, and that disrupted the ten or twelve years of peaceful coexistence between black and white, because the Gundungurra hadn't – because they were Mountain People, they hadn't come across the white fellas before. And the white fellas' ways and habits, hadn't had any adjustment to ...*

Kannabi: *The individual ownership ...*

To better understand The Circle's positioning, one should look to the first Aboriginal death in May of 1814. The death of a young boy:

... three privates of the Veteran Company, in the district of Appin, fired on a large body of the natives who were plundering the corn fields of a settler ... A native boy was unfortunately killed, and the small party ... were compelled to fly; and two escaped; but the third, whose name was Isaac Eustace, was killed on the spot. (Broughton 1814)

Whilst the newspapers framed these attacks and hostilities as being instigated by the Aboriginal peoples, one other reoccurring theme was

given only scant attention, and that was the 'killing of pigs' and the 'plundering of corn-fields' that preceded the hostilities. From The Circle's perspective, the Gundungurra were claiming the right to survive, to share D'harawal lands. Unfortunately, the duty of care that the D'harawal and Gundungurra peoples were bound to was instead met with musket fire.

As the raging fire drew closer-and-closer, one of the warriors spotted a cave high on the side of a valley they were just about to travel to, so he screamed for all to follow. The children and the oldest ones though felt fear, for whilst they followed the adults as best they could, they found it increasingly difficult to climb to where the cave offered its shelter.

The winds though pushed the fire towards them, and its blinding smoke began to wrap its suffocating tendrils around The Peoples. The adults, the warriors, the mothers and fathers ... they panicked. The cave was closer and easier to get to for them, and as the warmth of the flames steadily grew, their fear became too difficult to control. For remember, they had never seen such a fire before, so they fled towards the cave, choking on the thick black smoke as their hands slipped apart from the weakened children and old ones, who were left behind. Calmly, but firmly though, Wiritjiribin's unique sing-song voice caught their attention above the roar and loud crackling of the fast-approaching flames. Shaking her head, she pointed towards the cool, green gully far below the cave, and screamed that the children and the old ones had to link hands. When no hands were left alone, she led them into the gully where she directed them all into potholes that were scattered throughout the slowly flowing creek. But when she sought the pothole for herself and her grandson, there was only a small hollow beneath the bank of the creek left. She placed her beloved grandson in this hollow, then disappeared into the smoke to find another place to hide.

Within only a few breaths though, drowning out the screams of the children, the fire raged overhead, and the trees hissed with agony as the fire not only tried to burn the life out of everything, but the smoke tried to suffocate those hiding in the waters. The children and the old ones though trusted Wiritjiribin, and they obeyed her orders to stay despite their fears.

From the killing of the non-Indigenous overseer and the young Aboriginal child, the conflicts, and the atrocities, intensified over the following two years. For example, in the first conflicts leading to the massacre,

the newspapers of the time reported that the natives had allegedly chopped off the hand of the colonizer killed on the same day as the Aboriginal boy, and that they had paraded the hand to the non-Indigenous peoples, jokingly 'begging for bread'. Sadly, the veracity of this account will forever be 'justified' by the one-sided non-Indigenous writings of time. It should be noted, though, that in 1903, an old non-Indigenous man by the name of William Byrne was interviewed (who may have been around six to eight years at the time of the massacre), suggesting that the blame should not be solely levelled at the 'blacks':

After we arrived, there was considerable trouble with the blacks. This was largely due to the fault of the settlers themselves, who often treated the blacks with a great deal of cruelty. Outrages by both blacks and whites extended over the years 1813, 1814, and 1815, up till 1816, when the settlers were granted military protection. (Byrne 1903)

There are other records of similar concerns about the treatment of Aboriginal peoples around the area of Appin/Campbelltown. For example, Raeburn et al. (2020) powerfully noted the efforts of a colonial farmer of the time, Dr Charles Throsby, who wrote to the Governor Lachlan Macquarie suggesting that many of the Aboriginal raids were in retaliation to the brutality of the colonizers themselves. Indeed, in a letter penned to a respected Irish surgeon D'Arcy Wentworth on April 5, 1816, Throsby explained some of the extreme violence that had been directed towards the Gundungurra and D'harawal peoples:

Not content at shooting at them in the most treacherous manner in the dark, they actually cut the woman's arm off and stripped the scalp of her head over her eyes. On going up to them and finding one of the children only wounded, one of the fellows deliberately beat the infants' brains out with the butt of his musket, the whole of the bodies then left in that state by the party unburied. (Throsby (1816) as cited in Raeburn et al. 2020: 614)

It is important to note, this was an unprovoked surprise attack by the colonizers.

Whilst the retaliatory narratives hold considerable sway with non-Indigenous historians (e.g. Irish suggesting acts of reciprocal exchange), the position of The Circle needs more careful consideration.

As was our ancient Law, if your neighbours lands were sick, your neighbours can move down and co-habit. That happened at around early 1814 ... in our ways, you just take what you need and that was it ...

– Wiritjiribin

This taking and sharing only what is needed (to survive) was ingrained within many Aboriginal Nation-groups' ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2008). To have this very way of life, this responsibility to Relatedness, passed down through uncountable generations suddenly be denied, may be argued to be a serious violation of the laws of Country. To suggest simple indiscriminate tit-for-tat retaliation by Aboriginal peoples around the Appin/Campbelltown area may be misguided (although there were some limited examples of 'payback'). Between late 1814 and 1816, it has been noted that the *colonially recorded* deaths due to conflict were largely limited to colonizers themselves (Gapps 2018; Turbet 2011). But on the clear majority of occasions, Aboriginal peoples were either shot at or threatened first. For example:

- The killing of two of Maria Bently's children occurred after she *shot* at them (July 1814);
- Five convict workers killed after *pursuing* natives who plundered George Palmer's farm (March 1815);
- Spearing of James Watsford and wife occurred after being '*berated*' for theft (July 1815).

There were also many other instances where colonizers were left unharmed.

Regardless of where the blame(s) may lie, the conflicts, when combined with increasing fear of the colonizers (Turbet 2011), ultimately resulted in the following military orders by colonial Governor Lachlan Macquarie:

On any occasion of seeing or falling in with the Natives, either in bodies or singly, they are to be called on, by your friendly Native Guides, to surrender themselves to you as Prisoners of War. If they refuse to do so, make the least show of resistance, or attempt to run away from you, you will fire upon and compel them to surrender, breaking and destroying the spears, clubs, and waddies of all those you take Prisoners.

Such Natives as happen to be killed on such occasions, if grown up men, are to be hanged up on trees in conspicuous situations, to strike the Survivors with the greater terror. On all occasions of your being obliged to have recourse to offensive and coercive measures, you will use every possible precaution to save the lives of the Native Women and Children, but taking as many of them as you can Prisoners. (Macquarie 1816)

Beela: ... you know, the fact that we don't have treaty, but war has definitely been declared and all of those, like it just opens up this huge sort of Pandora's box of just, can I say, total fuckery?

Kannabi: *Genocide.*

Beela: *Genocide. Yeab. And just erasure ...*

When the fire had swept through the valley, the warriors, the mothers and fathers, came out of the dark cave they had hidden in. They were distraught, for as the fire raged beyond the mouth of the cave, they had realized that the children, and old ones, were no longer with them. So, despite the scalding hot ground, and the smoke that still seeped from the smouldering trees, they ran down to the gully they had fled from, and they saw that the undergrowth around the creek had barely been touched by the fire. To their joy and amazement, they found their beloved children and the old ones all alive and safe.

Except for Wiritjiribin.

Soon, everybody ran up and down the gully, screaming her name, but they were only answered with hissing, crackling and silence. Suddenly, Wiritjiribin's grandson yelled with excitement, for across the creek, a rock ledge protected an untouched cluster of large, green ferns, and the child thought they heard not only Wiritjiribin's chuckle, but also caught a glimpse of her silvery locks of hair.

Joyfully, the mothers and the fathers ran towards the tall ferns, calling her name, only to be answered by a whisper that seemed to echo their calls: 'Wiritjiribin ... Wiritjiribin ...' But when they climbed the ledge and reached the clump of ferns, she was nowhere to be seen.

It was then that Wiritjiribin's beloved grandson pointed past the ferns, to another rock, this time sitting on the scorched earth. There, staring at them intently was a bird whose feathers seemingly hid it within the charcoal colours of the burnt-out bushlands. With a quizzical look, the strange bird

ruffled its brown and black feathers, and raised its long tail, causing the sunlight to flash silver streaks over the feathers. The bird's eyes twinkled, just like Wiritjiribin's eyes.

And then it chuckled, just like Wiritjiribin. And so, the first Lyrebird came to be.

Three separate colonial military regiments (each with Native guides) were sent out by Governor Lachlan Macquarie to quell the uprising of 'hostile Natives' throughout the Sydney basin (Gapps 2018; Organ 2016; Sutton 2021). Of these three regiments, the 46th regiment of the Appin Massacre was led by a Captain James Wallis, and most historians note that this regiment was guided by two D'harawal men, Budbury and Bundle (some of The Circle members are descendants of Bundle). The label of 'Native guides' needs to be considered with considerable caution, at least for these two D'harawal men. The letter Throsby wrote on 5 April (1816) clearly suggested that both were conscripted, or enslaved, with 'considerable impressions of fear'. Additionally, a number of recounts of the Appin Massacre fail to address the fact that on the night of 11 April, both Budbury and Bundle escaped despite being guarded (Wallis of the 46th regiment later suggested Budbury was waiting at a pass, possibly unknowingly waiting for those who were slaughtered in the massacre or stolen/kidnapped).

After days of searching (and being thwarted by sympathetic landholders like Throsby and Kennedy who harboured and protected Aboriginal peoples on their farms), on the night of 16 April, the 46th regiment was approached by Thomas Nobel, a servant of colonial land-owner William Sykes, who claimed that he knew where the 'Native war-party' was camped in Appin. In the early hours of 17 April, the Appin Massacre began. The report of Captain James Wallis details what took place:

A little after one o'clock AM we marched, Noble joined us, and led us where he had seen the natives encamped, the fires were burning but deserted ...

... we feared they had heard us and were fled, a few of my men who wandered now heard a child cry ...

... I formed line ranks, enter(ed) and pushed on through a thick brush towards the precipitous banks of a deep rocky creek, the dogs gave the alarm and the natives fled over the cliffs, a smart firing now ensued ...

... it was moonlight the grey dawn of morn appearing, so dark as to be able only to discover their figures bounding from rock, to rock ...

... I had ordered my men to make as many prisoners as possible, and to be careful in sparing, and saving the women and children ...

... I regret to say some had been shot, and others met their fate by rushing in despair over the precipice ...

I was however partly successful, I led up two women and three children they were all that remained to whom death would not be a blessing, t'was a melancholy but necessary duty I was employed upon, fourteen dead bodies were counted in different directions ... (Wallis 2016)

In poor light, Wallis counted fourteen dead bodies (although Mr William Byrne recalled sixteen). However, the Circle, in considering both the very orders of Macquarie and their knowledges of the local community (as opposed to colonial records), suggests many more.

Wiritjiribin: *The thing that shocked me about those orders, resistance would ... in Macquarie's orders ... I'd sort of heard or read into it maybe that resistance meant failing to surrender. Like running away meant that that was resistance and bang. And so the notion of resistance wasn't necessarily fighting back.*
Kannabi: *Yeah, but the question was there were fourteen bodies or more?*

One of the saddest tragedies of the massacre though, was that despite Macquarie's allusions to war (e.g. prisoners of war), and non-Indigenous historians' portrayal of the Massacre as part of the Frontier Wars (see Gapps (2018) who suggested that the deserted campsite was somehow strategic), the writing of Captain James Wallis suggests that this was not a Native war-party:

I regretted the death of an old native Balyin and the unfortunate women and children from the rocky place they fell in, I found it would be almost impossible to bury them, I detached Lieut Parker with the bodies of Durell and Kinnahygal, to be hanged on a conspicuous part of a range. (Wallis 2016)

Of the supposedly fourteen counted bodies, and based on Macquarie's orders, only 'two' were deemed as warriors by Captain James Wallis and

hung. Even then, there is reason not to trust the colonizer reports of Wallis and some of the subsequent written histories of the Massacre itself. Non-Indigenous historian Michal Pickering (2010) reported on an investigation into the interview reported with Mr William Byrne in 1903. This investigation in part centred on the skulls of Durell and Cannabayagal, that after the hanging had been removed to international museums for the amusement of the colonizers themselves. More specifically, there was a focus on Byrne's (1903) claim that there were three bodies that were hung, not two. Indeed, Pickering reported that a third unnamed skull was found stored with that of Durell and Cannabayagal. And this was the skull of a woman (who had been erased from history).

Connecting the Massacre to storytelling and Relatedness.

In the final stages of this chapter, you, the reader, maybe sitting in some confusion wondering what the Appin Massacre itself has to do with Indigenous Relatedness and the Story of *Meyrani Wiritjiribin*. The answer is complicated, and it may be difficult to see.

The Circle chose to honour the voices and wisdom of our Ancestors (our *Core*) through the sharing of the *Wiritjiribin* story. Indeed, this story – a story of survival, of respecting our Elders, of learning of our Country and its climate, of our messenger spirit of the Lyrebird (the clan totem of the inland D'harawal), of our place of Creation – has often been shared through song and dance (Doyle 1996) and Storytelling as part of the Appin Massacre memorial services.

... when you're in a, like, whether they say sink or swim situation or fight or flight situation like that traumatized ... like the massacre even ... It might seem obvious, you know ... wouldn't you think people would just hold hands and run together, but they don't ... So she's, she's guiding them to do that together, form like a human chain, sort of thing.

– Boo'Kerrikin

The story teaches us of the importance of survival, but at the same time, suggests that there is not just one pathway to survival: whether it be the young and old ones who followed Wiritjiribin, or the adults who fled to the cave (remembering that there was no more room in the potholes); whether it be the 'mountain Natives' who did 'resist', or the Aboriginal peoples who worked and lived with the colonizer landholders or the survivors of the Massacre who ran from the muskets or were captured. We must respect that these divergent pathways will always exist, but we must also remember and allow for a returning to story, a returning to Indigenous Relatedness.

The *Wiritjiribin* story teaches of this need for respecting different pathways to survival, but it is also connected, related, to the massacre itself. The story is not only directly connected to the sacred place of Creation where the D'harawal Peoples were returning/fleeing to preceding the massacre, but also to one of the 'campsites', near the Children's Rock, that preceded the massacre itself (see Figure 11.2). A massacre which took place in a gully by the 'precipitous banks of a deep rocky creek ...'

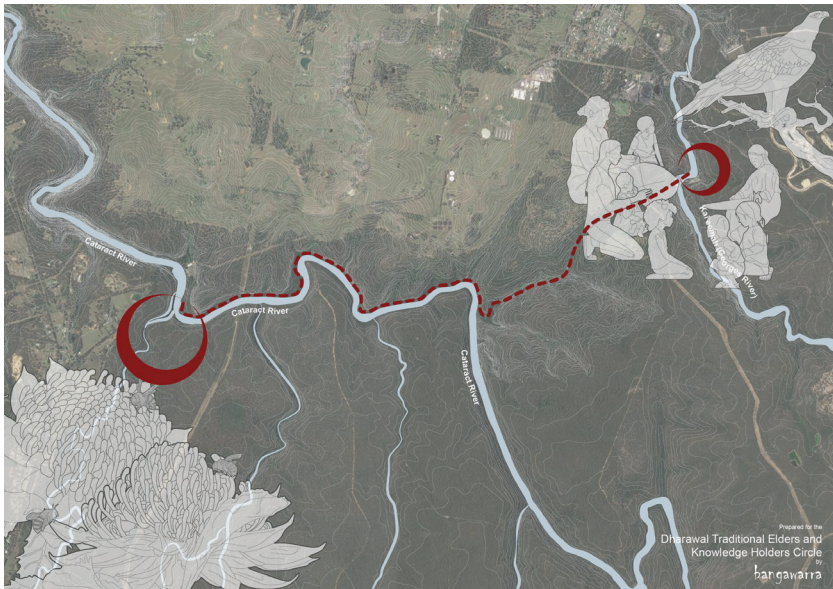


Figure 11.2. A sacred pathway of the D'harawal (kindly compiled by Bangawarra (2022) for the Circle).

It is all connected.

Kannabi: ... *Wiritjiribin not only looked after those who struggled to look after themselves, but the safe place was the Place of Beginning by the waters. Those who fled higher, had to go into the darkness.*

Boo'Kerrikin: Yes.

Kannabi: *And they no longer saw the light and stuff like that. Is there a symbolism there of the different pathways we could take as Aboriginal people?*

Conclusion

In conclusion, rather than offering a summary of this paper, or outlining some generic limitations or recommendations favoured by Western academics, this paper will instead offer one more revelation that emerged from The Circle and its yarnning sessions. It is recognized by some that by the time The Massacre had taken place, the drought was coming to an end (Irish 2017; Liston 1988). As a result, the duties, the 'Ancient Law' that was governing the relationship between the Gundugurra and D'harawal peoples, was changing due to their Relatedness with the changing climate at that time. As a result, The Circle argues that the Native camp of The Massacre was not some war party (made of old ones and children), it was a meeting of peacemaking, of recognizing connectedness, it was a farewell to the last of the Gundugurra who were returning to their Country.

The purpose of the camp or the gathering ... there were too many people having been killed in the open range warfare which had been going on for about two years and it was time to bring an end to it ... The Ancient Law was she could move onto your neighbour's land if their land was able to sustain you until such time that your land started to heal.

– Wiritjiribin

If only the colonizers, with their picket fences, land allotments, and 'national borders' would have both understood and appreciated this. Maybe then, this massacre, and the hostilities preceding it, would have never eventuated.

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PART III

Paths of Compassion

12 Teaching with Heart: Reflections on Compassionate Pedagogy in Higher Education

The higher education landscape

What does it mean to teach with heart? This chapter considers the ways in which a pedagogy of compassion can be developed and applied as a response to the suffering experienced by academics and students within higher education. It defines compassion, discusses its pedagogical applications, and offers a case study that illustrates compassionate pedagogy in action. Ultimately, it proposes that this pedagogical approach can be used as a tool to effectively respond to, and inquire into, suffering within university settings.

The context for this exploration is the rise of neoliberalism within higher education in Australia and internationally. This trend, or ideology, has been associated with a range of concerning developments, most notably a marked decrease in public funding as well as the deregulation of student fees (Rea 2016). At the same time, the increased marketization and competition of universities have been associated with a philosophy of commodification that has characterized students as consumers or customers rather than life-long learners or social citizens.

Neoliberal ideologies have also had serious implications for the academic workforce, including increased precarity and insecurity. Employment within Australian universities, for example, has undergone extreme

1 My deep thanks go to Dr Susan Murphy Roshi who assisted with the research for this chapter and engaged in many interesting and creative conversations with me on the topic.

casualization, with 43 per cent of the total workforce engaged casually as of 2018 (Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission 2018) and approximately 70 per cent of academic positions being filled by casual employees at certain universities as of 2020 (Harris et al. 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has further compounded workforce precarity with an unprecedented number of redundancies occurring due to a sudden drop in international students and rising global financial pressures (see Hurria 2021). Such trends have been associated with poor mental health outcomes amongst university staff, as well as a lack of access to entitlements including sick leave, holiday pay, long service leave and parental leave, contributing to significant social strain and suffering, particularly amongst the underemployed and precariat workers (Harris et al. 2020).

Underpinned by the ideological notion that students' value is linked more to the payment of their fees than their ongoing educational development, aspects of the university environment have gradually become more impersonal and corporatized. As a result, many students have come to feel more like a number or a commodity than a human being with inherent dignity and worth. This environment is particularly troubling for undergraduate students who may be facing a sharp transition from a student-focused high school environment to a university, in addition to navigating the challenges associated with the shift from adolescence to adulthood. Students today are also contending with the ongoing burden of debt associated with increasing student loans, which many may struggle to pay within their lifetime (Desierto and De Maio 2020: 152).

Neoliberal policies, such as the abolition of compulsory student unionism, have resulted in fewer resources and student services, which has arguably eroded the community ethos and institutional support offered by universities. Other social stressors like natural disasters associated with climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic have further heightened the experience of social disconnection and continue to contribute to the growing concerns regarding the mental health of students. Thus, it is no surprise that university students have begun to develop a range of coping strategies in response to the emotional and social toll of such ongoing stressors (see Hernandez-Hernandez and Sancho-Gil 2021).

Buddhist compassion

Compassion can be seen as an active and skilful response to both social and individual suffering within higher education. A compassionate pedagogy has the potential to address the unique suffering that both academics and students currently face. Compassion can be broadly defined as the sensitivity to the suffering (of another or the self), coupled with a commitment to attempt to alleviate or prevent it (Gilbert 2017). The *desire and commitment* to help are what differentiates compassion from similar emotions like empathy and sympathy. However, compassion does rest on a certain amount of empathic resonance – enough to spark concern and a sense of common humanity. According to Paul Gilbert (2017), there are two components of compassion: courage and dedication. That is, the courage to turn toward suffering and the dedication to alleviate it.

Another aspect of compassion, at least from a Buddhist perspective, is that of clear seeing and skilful means. Compassion and wisdom are seen as inseparable, and they are often described as two wings of the same bird. Thus, a compassionate response does not simply arise from a place of sentimentality, but rather from a place of clear discernment, equanimity and wisdom. Compassion, then, is seen as a highly logical response involving an assessment as to what is needed and would be helpful and useful in the circumstances. This process involves foregrounding the needs of the individual/s suffering and responding to them meaningfully. At times, the response might be that of silence or simple observation, while at other times, what is needed might be more active and dynamic. This continual agility and flexibility in relation to the needs of someone suffering is crucial in this context.

The clarity needed to guide the wisdom of compassion is very much linked to *attention*, or *mindfulness* in Buddhist terms. Compassion, therefore, involves the *capacity to attend* to the experiences of both self and others. So, in this sense, the quality of mind of the individual offering compassion is critical. Buddhist compassion invites the individual to focus, gather their attention and drop into the body in order to respond to suffering. In this sense, compassion is not only mindful but is also embodied. Buddhism

describes two main approaches to attention that are relevant here: one is broad-based, taking in the environment in an expansive way, and the other is focused on a particular phenomenon. Compassion invites us to move between these based on the circumstances and what is needed.

Another important point to highlight is that compassion rests on the Buddhist theological view of non-self (*anatta*). Thus, unlike other traditions, there is no giver or receiver, or saviour and saved. Rather, there is simply energy, altruism and goodwill moving between sentient beings. According to Buddhist thought, glimpses into non-self will cause individuals naturally to become more compassionate and receptive to the cries of the world as they learn that the world's pain is not separate from their own.

Compassionate pedagogy

How can Buddhist-inspired compassion be applied within the context of teaching and learning in higher education? This is a highly pertinent question given Western education has largely been shaped by the Cartesian split of body/mind, and emotion/reason. Educating students in emotional literacy and attunement is a very recent phenomenon and still only happens in certain disciplines, like psychotherapy, or as a minor addendum to disciplines like education and medicine (see Gilar-Corbi et al. 2018).

Compassionate pedagogy invites educators to trouble the dichotomy of emotion/reason and to bring emotion, as well as courageous approaches to suffering, explicitly into the classroom. It also represents an invitation to educators in this field to refine and reflect upon their own pedagogical practices in relation to their position, history and emotional responses. Hao describes critical compassionate pedagogy as:

... a pedagogical commitment that allows educators to criticize institutional and classroom practices that ideologically underserve students at disadvantaged positions, while at the same time be self-reflexive of their actions through compassion as a daily commitment. (2011: 92)

Hao's above definition is interesting as it invites a certain compassionate fierceness, coupled with a day-to-day kindness that is responsive, self-aware and clear seeing.

Compassionate pedagogy rests on the teacher's belief that pro-social emotions, like care and compassion, are available to most human beings. In fact, there is a wide body of persuasive work in the evolutionary sciences that demonstrates that for the most part humans are caring, feeling animals who possess empathic resonance and a desire to help in the face of others' suffering (Goetz et al. 2010). It also rests on the teacher's capacity to see a student as a fellow human being with a name and a unique history, who is at once vulnerable and agentic, complex and budding with potential.

How might this appear in a classroom setting? Pedagogically, a teacher might invite students to reflect on how they habitually respond to suffering and consider the ways certain social and psychological forces shape their response. Do students react in a stronger way to the suffering of certain groups? Do they believe that certain classes or types of individuals and beings deserve to suffer? What gets in the way of a skilful response to suffering? Is their compassion universal or selective? To what extent do they relate compassionately to their own suffering? A teacher might reflect in the same fashion, additionally considering whose voice and experience is privileged in a classroom, and how small acts of practical kindness can be introduced within the parameters of a higher education setting. In this way, a compassionate pedagogy is practical, socially engaged and reflexive – it invites teachers and students alike to consider not just obvious suffering but also invisible or unnoticed suffering that might be out of clear view.

It is no surprise that compassionate pedagogy arises out of the field of critical studies and is linked to Paulo Freire's work (1978) on the 'pedagogy of the oppressed', where value is placed predominantly on the transformation of the learner. The invitation, according to Freire, is to place trust in the students' own life experiences and capacity for critical reflection to advance the values of equity, justice, and social transformation. Freire proposes that all learners possess the capacity to become aware of the social, political, ideological, linguistic, and psychological forces that make up their present experience. This process of uncovering such forces in a classroom setting, as well as analysing the ways they perpetuate and reproduce our collective

social reality, is central to Freire's promise for freedom through education. It is within this context that compassionate pedagogy is practised.

In the book *The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education*, Gibbs (2017) explains that compassionate pedagogy can be seen as a counter-cultural response to the current neoliberal trends in higher education which value choice, independence and personal achievement, often at the expense of more human values like kindness, care and connectedness. Compassionate pedagogy offers a way of creatively and skilfully engaging with students within this neoliberal environment. Further, compassionate pedagogy invites students and educators to consider the ethical dimensions of suffering and their own responses to social injustice and harm.

Compassion here is not viewed as separate from justice, rather it is fuelled by it. Some theorists in this space refer to this as 'compassionate justice', arguing that both compassion and justice are seen as essential responses to human suffering (Reilly 2006). Compassionate justice, as a cluster, challenges the commonly held assumptions within higher education that a 'fair' approach is a universal one involving top-down protocol, standardized metrics of assessment and generic student policies. There is undoubtedly a place for such approaches, however within this paradigm they must be balanced by the commitment to alleviate the specific suffering of students, ensuring appropriate discretion and flexibility within the policy and practice for this movement of the heart, as well as compassionate practices within the classroom setting.

Compassion in the classroom is multidirectional: it flows from teacher to student and vice versa, as well as between students. In this sense, the classroom can be seen as a field of compassion, one that is actively maintained and nurtured through the presence of the teacher. Teachers in this space are also invited to recognize and impart to students a sense of common vulnerability and humanity. This emphasis recognizes that we will all, at some point, be subject to forces and harm beyond our control that will lead to pain and suffering. Such forces, whether social or existential, require both awareness and appropriate responses, which at times may be collective in nature.

Compassionate pedagogy, however, must also be coupled with a certain criticality that invites both students and teachers to analyse their own positionality in the classroom as well as deep reflection upon the way we

experience, relate to and act upon what we might call ‘self’ and ‘other’. This critical dimension moves compassion beyond the realm of simple emotional intelligence and into something more daring and revelatory.

Compassionate pedagogy in action

To illustrate the ways compassionate pedagogy can be practically applied in the classroom an example will be discussed arising from the post-graduate subject *Compassion at Work*, which forms part of the Health and Social Wellbeing Program at the Nan Tien Institute (NTI). NTI is a private, not-for-profit, higher education provider offering courses in the areas of Applied Buddhist Studies, Health and Social Wellbeing, Humanistic Buddhism and Mental Health, as well as special interest subjects across the areas of meditation, mindfulness and health. The frame of ‘compassionate pedagogy’ is particularly fitting because compassion is a core value of Buddhist education that shapes both NTI’s institutional and pedagogical approaches.

At NTI, compassionate pedagogy involves a range of small steps, as well as certain starting assumptions that are supported institutionally through our institute’s values and orientation. Compassionate pedagogy is seen as a praxis that requires the careful reflection, refinement and responsiveness of the teacher in the moment. In this sense, compassionate pedagogy here is highly practical, as opposed to predominantly aspirational and theoretical. It follows that the most educative moments happen spontaneously within the context of a relational interaction either between students or between teacher and student. While this cannot be planned, certain practical steps can be taken to make these moments more possible.

At the centre of NTI’s *Compassion at Work* subject is an invitation to challenge and interrogate the dichotomy of self and other. The troubling of self/other challenges students’ assumptions about whose suffering they are responsible for. The invitation here, however, is not to subscribe to a certain doctrine or philosophy, but rather to critically reflect on the teachers’ and students’ own formations pertaining to notions of autonomy,

free will and self-determination, as an ontological starting point. How do the teacher and student construct themselves in relation to others, and is there any resistance toward moving toward the 'other' with greater intimacy and receptivity? What gets in the way?

This inquiry takes many forms in the classroom. One form involves compassion meditation and contemplations, such as a secularized version of the Tibetan practice *Tonglen*, where the practitioner imagines exchanging themselves for others, through a guided meditation (Brach 2022). In addition to such imaginal practices, mindfulness is utilized by both the teacher and the students to sharpen their capacity to notice suffering and to respond to it with receptivity and gentle curiosity. The active cultivation of embodied receptive awareness encourages greater engagement with one's own emotions which translates into increased resonance with the experiences and emotions of those in the room. Thus, incorporating sacred silence and mindfulness meditation into the teaching day is an essential component of compassionate pedagogy within our institute.

Another important practical component in the subject, Compassion at Work, is the practice of heartfelt listening. Students and teachers practice noticing and witnessing another's suffering with their attention, suspending judgement, and observing their own reactions. One such tool used in the classroom is the 'talking circle', which offers a way to listen to others that elicits the wisdom of the individual who is speaking. Students and teacher bear witness to the speaker's story and experience, with kindness and attention, allowing them the space they need to speak freely and spontaneously (Halifax 2009). A talking circle typically begins with ten minutes of mindfulness meditation, allowing participants to connect with what is alive for them in the moment. The pause at the start also creates an atmosphere of sacredness and contemplation. The teacher then offers a question into the space (such as 'how do I relate to my own suffering?' or 'what gets in the way of compassion for others?') and each member (including the teacher) is invited to speak to the question in turn. There are four guidelines for the circle: first, participants are invited to listen from the heart and offer the speaker unconditional positive regard; second, the speaker is asked to speak from the heart, staying close to their felt experience, rather than offering an intellectual analysis; third, the speaker is asked to be succinct

and efficient in their expression; fourth, the speaker is encouraged to speak spontaneously and from their own embodied presence, considering what might serve themselves and others in the community (Halifax 2009). What flows from these talking circles can be deeply transformative for all involved.

Compassionate pedagogy, here, is not moralistic. It does not prescribe a certain course of action or a certain reaction. Rather, it arises out of investigation and intimacy with the difficult parts of life, with a view of opening to unexpected and creative possibilities. It follows that this is not about teaching students normatively what is right and wrong but rather allowing space for creative and critical responses to come to the fore. However, this approach does rely heavily on the teachers' experience and knowledge. It is crucial that the teacher intuitively and sensitively identifies and names moments where compassion may be morphing into pity, victimhood or sentimentality. The teacher may be able to meet such moments with sensitive inquiry, attempting to broaden the field of awareness and ground students in present moment awareness. That being said, every teacher is idiosyncratic and individual, and their expression of compassion in the classroom will reflect their own style and proclivities.

The interruption of self/other in a teaching space allows a teacher to be more able to see past themselves as an authority figure or expert, and to put effort into sensing the needs and feelings of the less powerful other (in this case, the student). This is not to imply teachers should let go of boundaries, but rather that they consciously choose those that best serve the setting. From a Buddhist perspective, the spiritual generosity of compassion, which involves offering time, help, and kindness to the other represents an act of self-overcoming which enhances one's own life, thus compassionate pedagogy represents a rich and deep opportunity for teacher and student alike.

Compassionate possibilities

The pedagogy of compassion explored here has two main dimensions: first, it is critical in that it aims to transform students, educators,

and institutions through the power of reflexivity and critical inquiry. Second, it is pragmatic in that it looks to create immediate and practical openings that encourage the nonprescriptive and spontaneous experiences of giving and receiving compassion in the classroom.

Many teachers are wary of bringing 'emotions' into higher education classrooms, however where the teacher has experience in contemplative approaches to learning, as well as the capacity to make sense of emotions academically, a compassionate pedagogy represents a significant opportunity. Compassionate pedagogy can transform the ways students understand and relate to suffering and can empower students to engage with suffering collectively. It also offers the teacher a precious opportunity to connect with students in a deeply human way, moving beyond the notion of students as consumers, toward students as both vulnerable and empowered social citizens.

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13 The Role of Humanistic Buddhism in Improving the Response of Modern Medicine to Contemporary Challenges

A Person centred approach to contemporary challenges

The contemporary crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic across the world has thrown a spotlight on the approaches and practices of modern medicine. It has also caused a crisis in the field as health workers grapple with the huge demands placed on them. And yet, the humanistic principle of health care continues to be advocated strongly. A humanistic physician is one who views the patient uniquely and holistically, and considers the influence of the patient's social, cultural and spiritual wellbeing on their care (Miller and Schmidt 1999). Modern medicine boasts a multitude of scientific advancements and an integration of complex technology that has progressed the treatment of disease in ways that were once unimaginable. This continued increase in the complexity of medicine will require the skills to navigate a rapidly expanding knowledge base, and also brings greater expectations relating to workload, productivity and competing agendas. It is hardly surprising that at times, the patient as a person is lost, despite the goal of humanistic practice. Consider the patient 'Lucy'.

Lucy has Type 2 diabetes. She comes to see a new doctor with a health record bursting with tales of her many prior visits, including the common theme of 'non-compliance' in taking her medication. She is aware she has recently been labelled 'a difficult patient'.

Our patient Lucy may expect to be berated for her lapses in taking her medication as the consultation begins, as she *knows* that she should take it. What a difference it would make if the conversation began with her

doctor simply asking, ‘Tell me how you are, and what is going on for you?’ And then taking the time to actively listen. Lucy might reveal her struggle to pay for her medication since her rent payment has progressively skyrocketed. Likewise, she may tell of challenges in getting to the pharmacy in town, as her days are filled looking after her three young grandchildren for her daughter, who is recently divorced. Mutual respect built through humanistic actions builds therapeutic patient-doctor relationships that improves patient care and sustains a doctor’s work as meaningful.

The patient-centred approach described above, as pointed out by the Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Quality of Health Care in America (2001), means ‘providing care that is respectful of and responsive to individual patient preferences, needs, and values and ensuring that patient values guide all clinical decisions’. The notion of placing the patient at the centre of care echoes the core value of Humanistic Buddhism, first advanced by Venerable Tai Xu in 1916 (Long 2000), which claimed that the learning of Buddhism should start from one being a true person. Inspired by Tai Xu, the concept and implementation of Humanistic Buddhism was later advocated by other monastics. One prominent modern-day advocator is the founder of the Fo Guang Shan (FGS) Order, Venerable Master Hsing Yun. Hsing Yun simplified Humanistic Buddhism into ‘what is taught by the Buddha, what is needed by humanity, what is pure, and what is virtuous and beautiful’ (Hsing Yun 2018). It is then clear from the manner in which the FGS Order engages with the community that humanity is at its core.

The Humanistic Buddhism movement lead by Hsing Yun differs from the traditional religious approach; Hsing Yun advocates strongly for equality between monastic and lay practitioners (2001). It places what people need at the centre so that their challenges and difficulties are listened to and solutions are tailored to their needs. The core values of Humanistic Buddhism resonate strongly with the discovery Buddha made after his enlightenment over 2,500 years ago. Buddha pointed out that all beings have Buddha Nature and all beings are equal. Looking at the ideologies of patient-centred care and Humanistic Buddhism, we can draw the conclusion that both are well equipped to provide solutions and guidance to facing human suffering.

A humanistic health worker and a humanistic Buddhist

Patient-centred care is the cornerstone of humanistic health practice. In the unprecedented times of the global pandemic, health care workers have been exposed to elevated stress and exhaustion as well as a myriad of ethical dilemmas such as caring for patients without family members and the risk of transmitting the virus to loved ones at home. Such impactful challenges make it even more pertinent for us to turn to interdisciplinary dialogue for practical solutions. There are many similarities between the role and expectations of a humanistic Buddhist and a humanistic health care worker, and the two can learn and benefit from each other. For example, the courageous action and compassion of health workers resembles the act of a Human Bodhisattva in Humanistic Buddhism. In Buddhism, the Buddha is often referred to as the doctor who tends to human beings in their very fundamental need: fulfilment in attaining freedom from suffering (Shi 2021). Buddhism offers moral guidelines and ethics such as loving kindness, compassion, empathy and equanimity, which can be key attributes of an ideal physician (Kalra et al. 2018). The notion of ‘being in this together’ bolstered the general community through social isolation and lockdowns during the pandemic, and the same can be said of health care professionals. Humanistic practices of respect and listening, authentic dialogue and discussion with peers, has cultivated connections and contributed to building the capacity of moral resilience, integral to practitioner wellbeing (Spilg et al. 2022).

The basic qualities of the Hippocratic Oath are not scientific qualities, they are the human qualities of relationship and connectedness. These human qualities should remain at the forefront of the mind of the learner while learning the scientific knowledge, examination and procedural aspects of medicine, to support students to recognize that ‘who they are’ is as important as ‘what’ they know in their journey of becoming humanistic doctors.

Addressing the challenges in health care via contemplative learning and teaching

Through training medical students in clinical communication skills for over a decade, we developed an educational model based on the theory of contemplative pedagogy, to build both personal resilience and human capabilities in health professional learners. Our approach, known as MaRIS, utilizes controlled graded exposure to deliberately stressful learning experiences and combines *Mindfulness*, *affective Reflection*, emotionally *Impactive* learning experiences and a *Supportive* learning environment to attend to the value-laden nature of doctoring. Our research has shown the MaRIS model to facilitate the foundations for building the human capabilities and personal resilience required for effective humanistic professional practice (Chan et al. 2020).

The MaRIS model is guided by Contemplative Pedagogy (CP). CP is an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students to move beyond factual content to examine feelings and thoughts related to their learning experiences (Barbezat and Bush 2014). Previously, higher education has been heavily biased towards ‘third person’ learning, where the teacher is considered the expert who imparts knowledge to the student. In this model, students learn how to analyse and memorize facts, and the subjectivity of the knower is largely ignored. Conversely, in CP based curricular, learners are supported to take a ‘first-person’ stance, engaging directly with the content being studied, observing and exploring their internal world and making connections with their own values and sense of meaning. CP in medical education allows doctors-in-training to consider their values and incorporate who they are into their world, as well as how they might be changed by their learning and ‘becoming’ a doctor (Wald et al. 2015). Positive outcomes reported from CP practice include enhanced focus and attention (Jha et al. 2007), improved cognition (Zeidan et al. 2010), increased cognitive flexibility (Moore and Malinowski 2009), enriched creativity and curiosity (Dyche and Epstein 2011) and a deepened sense of morality (Zajonc 2013).

CP comprises elements that, in concert, encourage complete attentiveness, aimed at supporting learners to comprehend their experience with deeper insight (Zajonc 2013). These include mindfulness (deliberately and nonjudgmentally paying attention in the present moment, both a process and an outcome); active listening (hearing without judgement or attempts to control the conversation, finding a personal voice and hearing alternative voices); contemplation (the connection, compassion, thoughts and feelings that are internal to each individual, but also shared during interactions, equally exposing the vulnerability of each person and imparting authenticity to how each communicates with the other); beholding (intimately exploring and internalizing images and objects (and stories) through sustained attention, noticing detail, moving beyond the automatic response); and sustaining contradictions (the act of holding and honouring conflicting and contradictory world views and being comfortable with not knowing whether there is a correct answer).

In our teaching of clinical communication skills to medical students, MaRIS is woven throughout our curriculum design. Students participate in small workshop groups with a trained clinical facilitator, where each student has a chance to simulate a medical consultation with an actor as a patient. Each simulated patient portrays a real-life clinical scenario, and after the consultation, students begin self-reflection in a process that involves feedback from the actor, peers and, finally, the facilitator. Sharing of personal experience and feelings requires a protected space, and consistent with trauma-informed pedagogy (Tsantefski et al. 2020), we prioritize a psychologically safe learning environment through building a collegial, supportive culture. Our workshops are not discomfort-free, as impactful experiences underpin the MaRIS model. Instead, our workshops are spaces where discomfort and vulnerability is contained through a spirit of respect of difference and generosity of listening.

Students continue to make sense of their affective learning through writing a reflective journal after the class session using a tailored version of the simple 'What?-So What?-Now what?' framework originally used in the field of nursing (Rolfe et al. 2001). We specifically direct students' focus toward affective reflection Notice-Make Sense-Action' model (Humphreys

2023), where the ‘Notice’ of the cycle begins with identification of how they felt during the class activity rather than a more cognitive exploration of what they might have done (as indicated in Figure 13.1). They are then encouraged to explore the beliefs, values and attitudes behind it to support their development as a health professional.

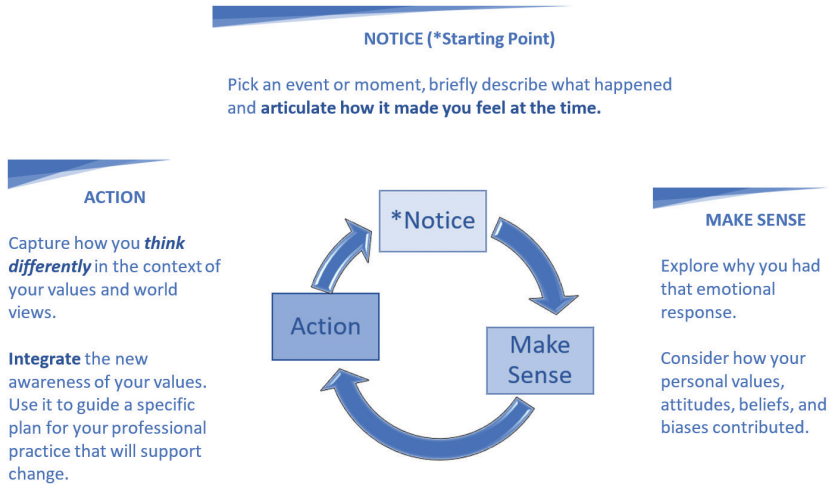


Figure 13.1. The notice-make sense-action (NMA) model of structured reflection (Humphreys 2023), adapted from Driscoll’s ‘What Model’ (Driscoll 2007).

We commence each workshop with a short mindfulness practice to assist learners to be present and grounded. It prepares the students to face the challenges ahead and encourage a mindful approach to the entirety of the workshop, and then to all aspects of students’ learning and future practice. In addition, we scaffold the emotional intensity of the scenarios and content topics with time. As students gain mastery with both their application of communication skills and their affective reflection skills, more complex situations such as anger, death, grief and loss are introduced.

In 2017 we conducted research on the impact of MaRIS in the training of clinical communication. The outcome showed that, statistically, the model has a positive impact on the development of human capabilities of

self-assessed communication competence, empathic capacity and the emotional resilience of medical students. The student feedback suggested that the learning in the later part of the programme occurs particularly in the affective domain, and thus may be less apparent to early learners. Second, as learners enhance their capability, they also become more attuned to the complexities of doctor-patient interaction, and thus more critical of their own development (Chan et al. 2020).

From the classroom to the real world

From our analysis and observation, MaRIS provided a structure for medical students to unpack their clinical simulated challenges (impactive experience) and to learn and grow through affective awareness leading to the reflection of personal values and beliefs. Through interdisciplinary dialogue, there are possibilities where the MaRIS teaching model can be applied to the practice of Humanistic Buddhism. Conversely, the non-secular core values of humanistic Buddhism can enrich the focus and practice of a humanistic physician.

Reverend Man Yi wrote in her book *Be a Buddha: Humanistic Buddhism's Hsing Yun Theory and Practice* (Shi 2021) that according to Hsing Yun, the application of Humanistic Buddhism is through the practice of the four boundless vows (kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity) and the six perfections (Giving, *dana-paramita*; Morality, *sila-paramita*; Patience, *ksanti-paramita*; Diligence, *virya-paramita*; Meditative Concentration, *dhyana-paramita*; and Prajna, *prajna-paramita*). To create a platform of equality between the monastics and the lay people, Hsing Yun founded the Buddha Light International Association (BLIA) in 1991, and the application of humanistic Buddhism for BLIA members was guided by the Four Verses of BLIA. The four verses of the BLIA are: may kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity pervade all Dharma realms; may all beings benefit from our blessings and friendship; may our ethical practice of Chan, Pure land and precepts help us realize equality and patience, and may we undertake the Great vows with humility and gratitude.

To demonstrate the application of Humanistic Buddhism in clinical practice we return to the story of Lucy that we mentioned at the beginning. We can see the six perfections practised in the interaction with Lucy and her doctor (although please note that the authors are using a simplified interpretation of the perfections in this example). As the consultation started, Lucy was concerned that she might be berated for her lapses in taking her medication because of her past experiences of being told what she 'should' do. The doctor will benefit from applying the relevant perfections. Firstly, the practice of giving can provide a rich foundation for the therapeutic relationship. One needs to know that giving is not always about material things, for example, attentive listening by the physician can lead to confidence, the removal of fear, and bring hope to the patient, the greatest of all gifts. Lucy's fear of the doctor's reaction toward her not taking her medication may cause her to feel judged and on guard to defend her behaviours, and there is much to be gained if the doctor exercises meditative concentration and patience. Meditative concentration in this context is the ability to be mindful and aware of how external factors are triggering our internal reactions. The doctor will need to exercise mindfulness to avoid being reactive. The application of patience is crucial, for if the doctor shows impatience it is likely that Lucy will feel she is being judged and will shut down, particularly given her previous experience. One key element is to remain patient towards patients who are not following medical advice, to have compassion toward their human suffering. Health practitioners need to remain open-minded and curious about why things happen and why patients make certain medical decisions. Being compassionate will free the health care worker from the emotional burden and at the same time allow them to see the situation without making assumptions. By applying these perfections, the doctor will be able to approach Lucy with openness, asking, 'tell me how you are, and what is going on for you?' Followed by taking the time to really listen.

With this invitation, perhaps Lucy would reveal the external factors that make it hard for her, such as the cost of rent or responsibilities watching her grandchildren. For a physician to fulfil their role they need to uphold the morality that underpins the ethical behaviour and diligence which supports a deep-seated conviction to fulfil professional obligations and a

predisposition to respond sympathetically to the needs of those in their care. Through application of the perfections, the individual will accumulate experience and insight which will contribute to the continued cultivation of the six perfections Prajna. In this context, we refer Prajna to the wisdom of the art of medicine rather than the truly enlightened view in the Buddhist context. Having said that, when one contemplates the unfolding phenomenon at hand deeply, it can eventually lead to the profound understanding of the inherent emptiness of dependent origin. The application of the six perfections will result in mutual respect built through humanistic actions, building therapeutic patient-doctor relationships that improve patient care and sustain a doctor's work as meaningful.

One of the ways Humanistic Buddhism differs from traditional religion is how it embraces all aspects of human life with respect and equality. As mentioned by Rev Man Yi (Shi 2015), Venerable Master Hsin Yun advocates for the application of Buddhism in everyday life; in his opinion Buddhism should not be away from people, does not give up on family, does not deny emotions, wealth and family connections. From this approach it will be beneficial to apply MaRIS in the learning, teaching and application of Humanistic Buddhism.

The MaRIS model can easily be applied in Humanistic Buddhist practice because the comprising elements are familiar to Buddhist teachings. Mindfulness is a core of Buddhist practice, impactive experience resembles the impermanence and uncertainty central to the Buddhist world view towards reality, and safety and support is the manifestation of compassion and care. The most influential contribution MaRIS can add to Buddhist practice is through the affective reflective component. In the field of education, Benjamin Bloom (1956) identified three learning domains namely Cognitive (knowledge), Affective (feelings) and Psychomotor (hands-on application). Affective learning includes the way in which we deal with things emotionally, and underpins our motivations and attitudes. It is closely linked to mindfulness, as it describes first noticing and then exploring emotional responses to experience through the lens of personally held values, beliefs and assumptions. Affective reflection is a core element of critical reflection in medicine, defined as:

... connecting with feelings that occur before, during and after situations with the purpose of developing greater awareness and understanding of both the self, other and the situation, so that future encounters with the situation, including ways of being, relating and doing are informed from previous encounters.' (Wald 2015)

Examining feelings and values is integral to professional identity development, which leads to acquisition of the set of professional values that the community demands of our health professionals.

The model can be used as a way to unpack emotional impact in times of challenges through self-reflective questionings. Using a model of questioning (see Figure 13.1) ensures that reflection is structured, has some sort of logical order and supports new understandings. As mentioned earlier, the simple 'Notice, Make Sense, Action?' cycle allows a deeper look at feelings, the values and beliefs that might have underpinned the response, encourages taking a step back to consider how things might be viewed differently, or to crystallize what one may have learned about themselves. In this way practitioners can contemplate what are otherwise automatic and often reactive behaviours. In essence, MaRIS facilitates the practice of thoughts awareness, an essential practice in Buddhism.

Conclusion

Humanistic Buddhism was founded from Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism in response to the contemporary challenges at the beginning of the last century, and is even more beneficial today. Similarly, contemplative educators in medical education have responded to the needs of humanity. Through supporting students to directly engage with their lived experience, future doctors will have an increased capacity to offer compassionate and empathic care, as well as build resilience to withstand the complex challenges of their profession.

Contemplative practices applied more widely can provide an anchor for navigating disruptions and social upheaval caused by the global pandemic, such as isolation and the decline of quality human contact and

interaction. Through engaging the whole person, contemplative pedagogy brings strong emotions into the spotlight and builds a community of trust to collectively navigate uncertain terrain whilst developing personal agency. Acting cooperatively during confronting times such as these reinforces ethical choices and helps maintain authentic hope despite the inherent uncertainty.

It is our hope to build a future health workforce of people who are patient centred through contemplative pedagogy. It will also be beneficial if the non-secular core values and practices of humanistic Buddhism can serve as a reminder of where to look when we are in search of what it means to be human, particularly in times of crisis.

We hope that this article is the beginning of an interdisciplinary conversation that will bring the understanding and practice of wisdom and compassion into health care and also our everyday life.

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JONATHAN MAIR

14 Transcending Cultures East and West: Ethnographic Research Methodology as a Path of Compassion

Introduction

One of the proponents of Humanistic Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, clarifies the concept of the bodhisattva, a being defined by the vow to rescue all beings from suffering. As he explains, if we commit ourselves to fulfilling this vow, we appear to face a choice. Should we concentrate first on liberating the self in order to become wise and powerful enough to help other beings most effectively, or should we respond to the urgent needs of others by prioritizing compassionate activity over self-cultivation? The dilemma dissolves if we realize that there is no contradiction between self-cultivation and compassionate action (Hsing Yun 2012: 122). We do not find Chan (an influential Chinese Buddhist meditative school, also known as Zen in Japan) in isolation but in the world, among other beings. We realize, first of all, that in helping others we benefit ourselves. With greater wisdom, we learn to value the wellbeing of others for its own sake, even above our own. Finally, an accomplished bodhisattva ceases to distinguish between self and other, understanding that this distinction is only conventional, that ultimately all beings are Buddha.

The idea that we should transcend the distinction between self and other to be truly compassionate is challenging under any circumstances. Perhaps it is more challenging in a context in which the differences seem to be particularly pronounced. In this chapter I want to speak about one such context: international or intercultural context attempts at compassionate

action. This is something that Fo Guang Shan monastics and devotees face all the time. What does it mean to transcend the difference between the self and other in order to practise the compassion of a bodhisattva in such situations?

There will be many ways to answer this question, but I will resort to my training as a social anthropologist and to my practice as an ethnographic researcher in order to suggest one way in which the problem could be approached to forge new paths of compassion. I have been researching Buddhism as an anthropologist since the early 2000s, and Humanistic Buddhism in particular from 2009. Starting with a project on self-cultivation at the London temple in 2009, my research has given me the privilege of meeting and befriending many Fo Guang Shan monastics and lay devotees and of taking part in many practices, including the Short-Term Monastic Retreat in Fo Guang Shan headquarters in Taiwan and the European headquarters in Paris. One of the things I learned through this research, initially to my surprise, was that the methods of social anthropology have a great deal in common with the practices of Humanistic Buddhism.

Perhaps I should not have been surprised, since both anthropology and Humanistic Buddhism aim to understand the human being in all its aspects: mental, corporeal, social and so on. Early on, I realized that this meant that social anthropologists could learn from the wisdom of Humanistic Buddhism, not only about Buddhism in the specific sense, but also about all the things we anthropologists are supposed to be the experts in. I will say a little more about that presently, but my main purpose in this chapter is to humbly suggest that there are areas in which the affinities between social anthropology and Humanistic Buddhism mean that the learning can also take place in the opposite direction. I mean to say that, in line with Hsing Yun's teaching, Buddhism should learn from the best elements of all traditions and practices. Fo Guang Shan could learn from social anthropology, and its ethnographic research methodology, that would assist lay devotees and monastics in their attempts to understand diverse communities and use skilful means to adapt Humanistic Buddhism for the benefit of all beings.

Social anthropology, ethnographic research methodology and Humanistic Buddhism: Affinities

Social anthropologists study human beings, and in particular the variety of human cultures and societies. There are many other kinds of scholars in the humanities and social sciences who do the same – sociologists, historians or economists, for instance. But anthropologists have developed a distinctive methodology for understanding humanity. Rather than relying primarily on written evidence or questionnaires, their main method is to build long-term relationships with members of the communities they study, and try to learn to live as they live, taking part in their routines and practices in order to experience them first hand. We usually send our students out on their own to live in a place that is unfamiliar to them for around a year in order to understand it.

This emphasis on personal experience and first-person experience has led anthropologists to emphasize a number of principles that are distinctive within the social sciences, but which I think are similar in some respects to the approach of Humanistic Buddhism:

1. The importance of relationships. Anthropologists study people's activities not only by reading about them or asking about them, but by getting involved in person. When you experience activities first-hand you suddenly find yourself linked to other people by a network of relationships, and those relationships are often the most important thing about the activities. When religious scholars or economists ask people to describe their activities the answers often focus on goals: we perform this ritual to ensure a good harvest, we go to the annual market to trade livestock. But when anthropologists take part in these activities, they often learn that the relationships come first: religious rituals provide a shared emotional experience that reinforces friendships and solidarity, and annual markets are an important opportunity to renew relations with far off relatives and to meet potential marriage partners.

2. The importance of the body. The body must be cared for. As Buddhists know, the body is born, it suffers, ages, sickens and dies. Its needs must be attended to every day. In many societies these aspects of human experience are seen as something shameful, or they are taken for granted. When we interview people about their lives, they often concentrate on intellectual aspects. When we are involved in activities practically, our attention is drawn to the way in which embodiment fundamentally conditions every human practice and relationship.
3. Third is what academics call the social construction of knowledge. The categories we use to think are what Buddhists would call conventional truth, not ultimate truth. Different cultures divide the world in different ways and our categories can change dramatically between historical periods. Not every anthropologist studies in an environment that is initially unfamiliar to him or her, but most do. When we experience culture shock, we are often forced to question our categories and reflect on those of the people around us. Ethnographic research also often reveals that the shape of categories such as kinship and ethnicity change dramatically even for the same person, depending on practice and context. Nonetheless, although many important categories are socially and historically constructed, categories have real effects, just as the concept of the self in Buddhism is both empty and has important effects.

In a number of my publications aimed at my social anthropology colleagues, I have built on these affinities to argue that the discipline should learn from the insights of Humanistic Buddhism. This is not the main theme of this chapter, but to give one brief example, together with my collaborator James Laidlaw I published an article on the relationship of religion to everyday life in the American journal *Cultural Anthropology* in 2019 (later republished in *Humanistic Buddhism*). We addressed a basic model widely shared by anthropologists and other social scientists who are interested in religion. According to this model, largely based on the work of classic French sociologist Emile Durkheim, human experience can be divided into two distinct spheres. On the one hand, there is

a profane sphere of 'everyday' life. This aspect of life is supposedly governed by self-interest and economic calculation. On the other hand, there is a sacred sphere. This is supposed to come into play whenever humans participate in religious ritual. According to the theory, the sacred is governed by morality and selflessness, and it is in some sense timeless. The two spheres are supposed to be opposed and a great deal of academic effort has been spent trying to understand how everyday life is related to the world of religion and ritual. For example, if the two spheres are so separate, we need an explanation of how religion aims to inject morality into the profane sphere.

We rejected this established model, basing our argument on the teachings of Hsing Yun, interpreted through our first-hand experience of Fo Guang Shan's short-term monastic retreat, which we took part in, first at Fo Guang Shan global headquarters in Kaohsiung, then at the European headquarters in Paris. In the retreat, participants are sealed away from their everyday lives and perform frequent rituals while being instructed in morality. On the surface, this looks like a typical case of Durkheim's sacred sphere. But to understand it in those terms would be misleading.

Hsing Yun teaches that 'Chan never leaves the human world,' and this principle is easy to see in practice in the retreat. The temple is considered a kind of Pure Land, but that is because of the intentions of the monastics and the practitioners, not because selfishness and anger are completely absent. On the contrary, the retreat is extremely effective because it is a kind of crucible in which participants are forced to confront and reflect on their flaws. Living cheek by jowl with hundreds of other participants is difficult, and as the guiding venerable monastics often reminded us, it was bound to stimulate our tendency to anger, to fruitless comparison, jealousy and selfishness. This is what makes it such an effective context for self-cultivation. We reached the conclusion that Hsing Yun's argument was not only good for Buddhism, but for ritual and religious life in general, and argued that our anthropological colleagues should abandon Durkheim's idea of the sacred altogether and instead adopt the Humanistic Buddhist understanding of religion as never leaving in the human world.

Humanistic Buddhism holds many such lessons for the social sciences. However, I want to suggest that there may be some areas in which

the opposite is also the case, that is, that there are things that Humanistic Buddhism could learn from the practice and theory developed by social anthropologists.

Fo Guang Shan aims to promote Humanistic Buddhism to every society, to make the Buddha's light shine over the five continents (Fu 2004: 282).¹ As Hsing Yun has explained, this requires sensitivity to cultural difference, in order to provide forms of Buddhism that help people to be good in their particular social and cultural context. Buddhism has always celebrated local adaptations of its teachings, encouraging the search for specific teachings that will appeal to different people according to their different needs and tastes. The history of Buddhism is full of examples of adaptation, including the adaptation of Indian Buddhism for a Chinese context over many generations. Humanistic Buddhism faces the same challenge, but in a much more intense form than ever seen before, as modern travel and communication allow it to engage, in principle, with all human societies simultaneously.

There are some excellent and well-known examples of cultural localization in Fo Guang Shan, of which the organization is rightly proud. For example, the use of football in Brazil to help children of the favelas, or of music and dance in South Africa and the Philippines, societies that prize skill and expression in the arts. However, it is clear that Hsing Yun's early goal of having many forms of localized Buddhism, led by local people, is progressing quite slowly in most countries in which Fo Guang Shan is active. While Fo Guang Shan has spread around the world and grown in popularity with astonishing speed, most devotees continue to be drawn from Chinese communities. Serving worldwide Chinese communities is a very important function, but perhaps more could be done to serve other communities more effectively.

1 Hsing Yun commemorated the first Buddha's Light International Association general conference attended by members from Africa, America, Asia, Australia and Europe with the following verse: 'Embrace the vow of compassion to deliver all beings, Float like an untethered boat in the Dharma sea. Ask me what merits have I over a lifetime, They are the Buddha's Light across five continents.'

The question of translating between cultures is also the area on which social anthropology concentrates, and unsurprisingly it has many things to say that could be of potential value in Fo Guang Shan's international project. In this short chapter there will only be room to make a few suggestions, but I hope that something of what I have to offer here might inspire some of the readers of this volume to investigate the topic further. I will briefly comment on three possible lessons. The first is about how to engage with members of communities to which we are newcomers. The second is about how we think about the variety of cultures on the planet and the way in which diversity is distributed in space. The third is about the importance of practical engagement with people's everyday lives as a way to get to know them.

The problem of the first family in the village

One lesson from social anthropology that could prove useful is what we might call the problem of 'the first family in the village'. Social anthropologists used to specialize in the study of what they considered to be 'traditional societies', by which they mostly meant societies without much industrial activity. To do this they would almost always carry out their research by living for long periods of time in small villages, which were considered the most traditional. As this research method became established, a common problem emerged. Often when the anthropologist arrived, one kinship group – a family or a clan – would greet the anthropologist very warmly and take him or her in as one of their own. That sounds ideal, but it often turned out that these families were eager to ally themselves with an outsider because they were not like their neighbours, or were even in conflict with them. Where that was the case, the relationship with the first family could be misleading, and it could be an obstacle for getting to know other people.

Anthropologists came to understand that they had to take great care when making early alliances. These days, anthropologists are as likely to do their research in large cities as in small villages, but the same problem often

arises, and anthropology PhD students are warned about it when they are preparing to embark on their first long-term project.

I think this lesson could also be useful for Humanistic Buddhism. When Fo Guang Shan monastics are working in societies in which Buddhism is not widely practised, who do they mainly deal with? First, they naturally have great affinity with many members of the Chinese communities present in those societies. There are people who have perhaps experienced Chinese Buddhism in their own families and are keen to find an environment in which they can practice and learn more about Chinese culture. Second, there are non-Chinese participants who are attracted to Chinese Buddhism. During the dozen or so years that I have been conducting research on Fo Guang Shan, I have met many of these people.

Of course, it is impossible to generalize in a way that applies to all of them, but there are some common characteristics. For example, most non-Chinese participants are highly educated, they tend to be university students or work in professional jobs. They tend to emphasize the importance of critical thinking and see Buddhism as above all a rational system of philosophy and meditative practice. Many of these people have been brought up in religious households, especially in Christian ones. They often appreciate the moral values they were brought up with, but reject what they see as the authoritarianism and superstition of organized religions. They do not want to be dependent on a religion's god, but are looking for a way to take control of their lives that builds on their own experiences and reason. For them, Buddhist philosophy and meditation provides a way to do that. This affinity between Buddhism and people who have rejected other religions in the name of reason has a history dating back long before the European Enlightenment, and it continues to exercise a strong influence on some people.

This understanding of Buddhism is not exactly the same as taught in Humanistic Buddhism. For example, ritual and the authority of venerable monastics both hold important places in Humanistic Buddhism. However, that need not be an obstacle in terms of these people's relationship with Fo Guang Shan. After all, Hsing Yun's teachings emphasize giving others convenience. In that light, emphasizing the aspects of Buddhism that appeal to these people and perhaps downplaying others is in an appropriate skilful

means of achieving that objective. Humanistic Buddhism can and does successfully appeal to such people by providing them with meditation classes and cultural activities that emphasize mindfulness and self-cultivation. This works well, but it's not surprising that participants in Europe are sometimes confused by the difference in emphasis between Chinese and local-language activities. The attitude of one young man I remember well is typical. Leaving a meditation class at London Fo Guang Temple, he said to me: 'These Fo Guang Shan venerables are amazing meditation teachers, they're the best, but when you see their other activities you realize – they have taken Buddhism and turned it into a religion!'

These scientifically minded people are good allies for Humanistic Buddhists because they are enthusiastic about studying Buddhism and learning about Buddhist practices. They are also often well positioned in society, or will be in the future, and will be able to support Fo Guang Shan. But some reflection is also warranted. Could this be a case of the 'first family in the village'? Could it be that the more Fo Guang Shan adapts its activities to serve this kind of participant the less it may be able to appeal to other people?

The non-duality of cultures East and West

An important element of Fo Guang Shan's relationship with its 'first family in the village' in European countries (I mention European countries specifically because it is in European countries that I have had the opportunity to observe this relationship) is the idea of the distinction between the East and the West. Many times I have been told by monastics that their services have to be adapted to the tastes of 'Westerners'. For example, monastics in Paris told me that Westerners are unable to tolerate the same degree of hardship (e.g. in short-term monastic retreats) as Asians. The non-Chinese participants in Fo Guang Shan events often speak of their enthusiasm for Eastern philosophy and culture.

All over the world, people are used to speaking in this way of 'Western thought', the 'Eastern mindset', and so on. At a very general level, these

categories might be helpful, but they are often very misleading when applied to specific cases. The East/West distinction, like all distinctions, is empty of intrinsic existence. Every East is only East relative to certain locations; relative to others, the location would be more accurately described as West. This distinction is something anthropologists have to come to terms with quickly in their research. The distribution of influences and ways of thinking is much more complex on the ground than the East/West opposition would lead us to expect and this is quickly apparent when we carry out ethnographic research in any location that is thought to be characteristically Western or Eastern.

For these reasons, anthropologists usually avoid using the East/West distinction as a term of description or analysis. However, that doesn't mean that we can ignore the idea altogether. People's ideas about East and West are an important part of the way they interact with others, even if those ideas are simplistic and sometimes harmful. For this reason, the history of the distinction has been thoroughly studied, not only by anthropologists, but also in other disciplines that concern themselves with the interaction of cultures, including literature and history. Studies show us that our idea of contrasting Eastern and Western civilizations is a relatively modern one (Said 1995).

The distinction emerged as people in mediaeval Europe began to think of themselves as a unified Christian civilization in dialogue and conflict with Muslims and others in the lands directly to the East and South. Early in the Renaissance, a great deal of scientific exchange took place between Christian scholars and Jews and Muslims from the 'East'. Later, however, European thinkers developed a sharp contrast between pragmatic, scientific reason on the one hand, and emotion, imagination and intuitive inspiration on the other. Beginning in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, European rationalists and romanticists argued, sometimes bitterly, about which of these aspects of human experience was the most valuable. At this time the industrial revolution was transforming many European cities. Technological change and rational reform of government administration meant that many ancient traditions were being lost. At this time, some people began to map the distinction between reason and emotion onto the distinction between Europe and the 'Orient', with Europeans

representing the rational side of human nature and 'Easterners' representing the emotional, traditional and artistically inspired side. The idea of the Orient first applied to the 'Near-' and 'Middle-' East, but it was progressively extended to incorporate the 'Far-East', including India, China and Japan. In the end the whole world in its complexity was encompassed in the binary distinction between West and East.

There is no question that this way of dividing up the world was grossly racist. The 'Orient' was often depicted as being intrinsically weaker than the West, incapable of logical thought, hopelessly bound by its traditions and in some sense outside of history. However, for romantics who rejected the dominance of reason, there was room in the distinction to see positives in the 'Orient': a greater connection to tradition and therefore authenticity, to emotion and honour, a noble resignation to the tragedies of life in contrast to the restless but ultimately futile efforts of Western technology to overcome them. For this reason, many intellectuals in the 'East' embraced the idea of the Orient, but turned its values on their head. They argued that although the 'West' had provided some useful technological innovations in all the most important ways the 'Eastern' way of being was superior to the 'Western'. A well-known example of this approach in China was the work of Liang Shu-Ming, who made it the basis of his influential *Eastern and Western Cultures and their Philosophies* (1922). Through the work of these intellectuals, many people in Asia came to accept the image of themselves as different in a categorical way from people in Europe and North America: more emotional and intuitive, less scientific and rational, less individualistic, more communal and more bound to tradition.

A modern form of this value-laden distinction is often found in the relationship between Asian Buddhist institutions and European and North American audiences. As I mentioned above, I have certainly heard it referred to by Fo Guang Shan monastics in the context of the adaptations that are required in order for Humanistic Buddhism to be accepted in the West. I have been told that Humanistic Buddhism needs to be made more scientific in order for 'Westerners' to accept it, that they will not be able to accept talk of fate, deities, ghosts and miracles, and that even talk of life after death might be challenging for them. But is the idea that people

in the 'West' are strongly attached to a scientific and rational approach to the world accurate?

There are surely a great many people who are like that, especially in major cities where highly educated people tend to congregate (just as there are many people like that in Singapore, Beijing, Taipei and elsewhere in the so-called 'East'). However, there are very many ethnographic studies of ordinary people in countries that we usually consider to be 'Western' that show that strict rationalism is not universal or even typical. Ethnographic studies of British people have shown that many of them, like people everywhere, believe that they can communicate with the spirits of the dead, that they will be reborn in some other form, and that their lives will unfold according to a destiny or fate over which they have only limited control (Day 2011; Luhrmann 1991). Abby Day (2011), an ethnographer who carried out research in the north of England, details the interesting relationship she found between religion, morality and belief in ghosts and angels. It turns out that people who told her they were religious or not religious were often expressing a moral position, but that independently of their religious affiliation, a high proportion believed in ghosts, rebirth and fate.

I think of the people I know in northern China, or in Taiwan, who think of the UK as being a modern and scientific place, and would be surprised by the small English seaside town I lived in between 2016 and 2020. Located in Kent, it has a population of about 35,000 people, and no fewer than eleven professional mediums. In the next town along the coast, there are regular theatre evenings hosted by a medium, in which audience members hope to be able to speak to their deceased family members. The residents of that town are, in general, very unlike the non-Chinese participants who turn up at meditation classes in London. They are different socially, economically, and in terms of their education and beliefs. Importantly, they have some distinctive challenges and problems for which the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism might be able to provide help. But in order to help, Humanistic Buddhists would need to be able to understand these people and their lives in a way that is more nuanced than a simple distinction between 'West' and 'East'.

The potential of 'humanistic ethnography'

That brings us to my final suggestion, that Fo Guang Shan should consider the potential of venerable monastics or lay devotees conducting ethnographic research among unfamiliar populations with the aim of better understanding them and ultimately designing new adaptations of Humanistic Buddhism that will appeal to them and alleviate their suffering.

I am already aware of a number of social anthropologists who are working, as I have done, to understand the lives of Humanistic Buddhists better by applying ethnographic research. To the extent that these efforts are supported by Fo Guang Shan, this is part of an impressive range of activity that aims at analysing and documenting Humanistic Buddhism, a range that includes multiple museums and galleries, university departments, journals and so on. What I am suggesting is something that would be additional to and quite different from that work: an attempt to understand the lives of other people motivated by the compassionate desire to help them in their suffering enabling them to thrive.

The task will be most urgent and most useful among people who are less educated and less capable of taking part in international conversations where the basics of Buddhism are well understood. The research might take place as part of an established programme of study, such as a masters or doctoral degree in social anthropology, or it might be undertaken, after some appropriate training and with proper supervision, in a novel form suited to the needs of Humanistic Buddhism.

Conclusion: Ethnographic paths to compassion

During the time that I have been closely involved with Fo Guang Shan, I have been impressed with the power of Humanistic Buddhist teachings and practices, and with the very effective way in which Fo Guang Shan and Buddha's Light International Association manage their affairs. I am

convinced that the movement's energetic pursuit of its four founding principles – propagating Buddhist teachings through cultural activities, nurturing talents through education, benefiting societies through charitable programmes, and purifying hearts through Buddhist practices – can improve the lives of people everywhere, whether or not they are Buddhists.

Inspired by the *Lotus Sutra* and other classic teachings, Humanistic Buddhism places great importance on the adaptation of Buddhist teachings. Using skilful means, Humanistic Buddhists aim to cater to an endless variety of cultures, societies, historical situations and individual characters. And yet, despite its phenomenal and rapid growth around the world, I think it is fair to say that the reach of Fo Guang Shan's Humanistic Buddhism has been limited in important ways, at least I can say this with confidence of the temples in Europe I have observed. It has mainly reached Chinese communities and non-Chinese people like me – educated, with access to international discourses and interested in the intellectual aspects of Buddhist teachings and practice.

What I have suggested is that it may be possible for Humanistic Buddhists to learn lessons from the attempts of social anthropology to cross cultural and social boundaries. I have suggested three such potential lessons. The first was the problem of the first family in the village: when establishing ourselves in an unfamiliar setting we may find that building relationships with the people with whom we find it easiest to get on is not the same as building a wide range of relationships across the community. The second was that when we are crossing between cultural settings considered 'Western' and those considered 'Eastern', we shouldn't place too much value on that distinction. The diversity within the so-called East and within the so-called West is much greater than the general differences between the two. Finally, I suggested that just as social anthropologists have found that long-term ethnographic fieldwork is the key to really understanding the lives and concerns of the communities they study, so a similar approach could be helpful for Humanistic Buddhists who aim to develop skilful means. I hope these thoughts have been stimulating and that they will help you as you seek to build paths to compassion around the world.

Reading list

The following suggestions are related to some of the issues I have raised:

- Day, A. (2011). *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This is an intriguing account of religion and belief in the north of England based on ethnographic research and interviews in the first decade of this century. It emphasizes the widespread beliefs in the supernatural and in the importance of life after death and the complex relationship of those beliefs to organized religious institutions.
- Luhrmann, T. M. (1991). *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. This is a wonderful ethnographic study of witchcraft beliefs in England based on fieldwork carried out by an American anthropologist in the 1980s.
- Said, E. W. (1995). *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. 1978. Harmondsworth: Penguin. The classic book on the historical development of the academic discipline of 'Orientalism', which built on and gave substance to the East/West opposition. This work has been developed by postcolonial scholars in the decades since it was published.
- Gellner, E. (1993). 'The Mightier Pen', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 February, 3–4. Ernest Gellner's interesting and critical review of Said's work on Orientalism. Gellner was an anthropologist and calls for a more nuanced view than presented by Said.
- Lempert, M. (2012). *Discipline and Debate*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Specifically the chapter 'Discipline and Debate', an ethnography of Buddhism and monastic training based on research in Tibetan temples in India. Lempert shows how the *idea* of a 'Western' audience, supposedly with a scientific and rational sensibility, has become an important influence for some aspects of contemporary Tibetan practice.

- Moran, P. (2003). *Buddhism Observed: Travellers, Exiles and Tibetan Dharma in Kathmandu*. London: Routledge. A study of Buddhism in Kathmandu that pays close attention to the interaction of Tibetans, Nepalis and foreign religious seekers, mainly from Europe and North America. The idea of the East/West distinction is ever present and causes many misunderstandings.
- Laidlaw, J., and Mair, J. (2019). 'Imperfect Accomplishment: The Fo Guang Shan Short-Term Monastic Retreat and Ethical Pedagogy in Humanistic Buddhism', *Cultural Anthropology*, 34 (3), <<https://doi.org/10.14506/ca34.3.02>>.

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15 Hopeful Monsters: Can Art Build Empathy? A Sculptural Exploration of Social-Emotional Macroevolution



Figure 15.1. A Hopeful Monster. Photo credit: Linus Lancaster and Asherah Weiss.

Hopeful Monsters is an ongoing series of art projects with youth in Northern California, which began in 2019. As educators, it is motivated by our awareness of increasing levels of trauma, depression and anxiety among our students, and the question of whether we can teach or facilitate greater levels of empathy and compassion in a school setting as a way to help address them. The global context of the project is the combined

crises of our time, existential in their reality, and seemingly overwhelming in their magnitude. The climate crisis can, in some ways, highlight the deepest issues we have that stem from colonial conquest and its consequences. Western industrialism and consumer capitalism leave us feeling separate from the Earth that sustains us. The physical abuse of our host-body, and its entities, is directly related to the inner turmoil we feel, and leaves humans grappling with overwhelming grief, righteous rage, crippling anxiety, feelings of hopelessness and depression on a monumental scale. Consumerism and social-emotional isolation create the illusion that we are all having an individual experience rather than being part of societal systems designed to create and maintain conditions of crisis and alienation.

On a regional level, we witness our communities experiencing crises in more specific ways. In Northern California where the project began, we see our students grappling with climate anxiety, cultural conflicts, incessant gun violence, the effects of systemic racism and poverty driven by extreme income inequality. Several years ago, we as educators began talking about the elevated levels of trauma that we know our students are carrying, turning our focus on 'trauma-informed teaching.' However, potential causes were seldom in our district-level conversations. Additionally, Northern California began experiencing a devastating series of wildfires that have caused evacuations and permanent displacement. This was all before Covid-19. Students of the last two graduating classes from Healdsburg High School experienced disruption for four consecutive years by evacuations from fires and/or lockdown. In the wake of all this turmoil we know that we are carrying multiple layers of very tangible trauma on top of exacerbated pre-existing anxieties. Thus, the global, regional and local state of affairs are all acting as multipliers for each other.

We believe the crises of our times can, and need to, be addressed at many levels, but as art educators, the role we choose is to support young people in developing their creativity, empowerment and social-emotional intelligence. We work with students during very formative periods of their growth and development as people. Children are not the future, they are the present, experiencing the same crises that we adults are. We began the Hopeful Monsters project as a way for students to explore their inner

landscapes, and address some of the more personal experiences of trauma that can act as impediments to treating others with compassion and dignity. Through self-reflection and creative processes, students design and build soft sculptures, similar to stuffed animals, that anthropomorphize character traits, personal issues or external stressors that they see as being challenging in their lives. In other words, participants take an aspect of themselves that they struggle with and create a creature out of it. By personifying our 'monsters' (dragging our personal demons into the light of day) we have the opportunity to see them in a new light, gain a better understanding of them and perhaps make peace with them in some way.

A critical lack of empathy, compassion and imagination are part of every systemic problem within the human experience. Empathy and compassion are essential parts of environmental justice that allow us to view more-than-human entities, and the earth as a whole, as worthy of relationships based in reciprocity. They are what would enable us to consider income inequality and poverty as being based on policy decisions which are forms of violence, rather than Darwinian inevitabilities. It is through the lens of empathy and compassion that we can understand that every systemic crisis in the world is a crisis of the imagination. It is through them that a better world is possible. This is one of the areas where our work intersects with Humanistic Buddhism, as it is our mission to help raise the level of empathy and compassion that is practised in our communities, especially through education. More specifically, we are addressing the nurturing of imagination and self-knowing among participants through arts education in productive ways.

As an art project, imagination plays a central and direct role in *Hopeful Monsters*, whereas the role of imagination in Humanistic Buddhism is a much larger consideration whose breadth and scope would exceed this particular discussion. However, it is worth mentioning that Buddhist practices have used art in many forms as helpful objects of contemplation, aids to understanding, and, perhaps most importantly, inspiration to pursue spiritual paths. Imagination also plays a role in compassionate practices given that placing oneself in another's shoes is sometimes an imaginative act, and also calls for a degree of abstract thinking, where it may not be automatic or seemingly instinctual.

Here it is important to clarify how we define these keywords. *Empathy* is putting oneself in another's experience, and allowing oneself to feel what they feel. *Compassion* is the combination of kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. *Self-compassion* is treating oneself how you would treat a loved one, turning kindness, common humanity and mindfulness toward oneself.

Buddhist practice strives to raise the level of compassion with which people treat each other. Everyone has a different starting point in the degree to which they experience empathy and compassion, based on their background and own development of them. This project gives an opportunity to build that muscle. Sometimes a person can easily relate and put themselves into the shoes of another, perhaps empathically experiencing feelings the other may feel. Other times, we need to exert a bit more imagination to decide to get inside that person's world, or to feel kindness toward another person. When it is not as easy, a choice needs to be made to actively develop this skill intentionally.

Self-compassion can occur when we self-reflect in order to see ourselves more clearly. This project begins with an important written component, 'The Uncensored Free-Write', which asks participants to imagine themselves as a monster. 'If you were a monster, what would make you so? How would your anger, sadness or other struggles be translated into your physical form?' These questions guide the creative writing process that is then translated into the designs of their monsters. The writing itself is kept secret if students wish. While it can often be painful or feel vulnerable to see ourselves so clearly, this is a crucial developmental step toward accepting our shortcomings or transforming our lives. This is how self-compassion can be seeded, especially through the way this project begins to normalize the fact that all of us have parts of ourselves or lives that we struggle with.

We are looking at ways in which our relationship to pain and hardship can be transformed through art practice, allowing for self-compassion and extending that out to build empathy with other people and their struggles. The art practice itself may offer non-verbal and subconscious means for self-reflection and meaning-making with our personal pain. By engaging in a process of art-making based on something that feels challenging, natural self-reflection deepens, side-by-side with others who are in a parallel

process. Hopeful Monsters allows participants to grapple with deep, personal issues while being embedded in a group. We have seen students share openly without prompting, inviting others into their world while creating their monsters. Other times, students keep to themselves. This is based on many factors including personality, level of comfort in the group, whether they have peer-allies nearby and how vulnerable they feel in sharing whatever they are making their monster about. Creating safety in the room is helpful, but it's never advisable to push people when they are not comfortable, and it is important to respect young people in their boundaries. Simply allowing the artwork to speak for itself without the need to talk about it can be enough. Much gets communicated without words.

This project is not an attempt to change behaviours or solve problems on its own, but gaining some knowledge about the dynamics of one's challenges can support self-growth and resilience. We have students consider root causes of their own issues, again bringing it back to systems rather than individual problems we are alone in. For example, if a student struggles with being hungry at school, thinking on a bigger scale about income inequality and food scarcity can help an older student recognize the complexity of the issue. We also invite students to take the largest problem they face, for example, anxiety, and look at what adds to it. Upon reflection, being up late on social media, looking at beauty magazines, or sticking with toxic friends might be added to their list of multipliers of their anxiety.

Sometimes, this project can reveal situations that require further communication with counsellors and others who can help support a child in need. One finding was that during the first year of doing the project there were some revelations of raw and difficult issues, but nothing requiring intervention by counsellors. During lockdown, however, there were several instances of suicidal ideation that had to be reported. As another example, one seventh grade girl revealed her eating disorder in her first writing. Upon sharing this with the support staff at the school, Asherah found out that this student was already being monitored and going to therapy. As an art teacher only getting to see this student once a week, she didn't know this history but was then able to support her in expressing her deepest personal challenge in her monster. The monster was a depiction of the pressures for female perfection and unfair beauty standards (See

Figure 15.2). Interestingly enough, another student in the same class chose the same theme of feminine beauty standards and pressure to conform, without knowing her peer's struggle. This points to this project creating space for young people to process systemic oppressions, in this case patriarchal sexism, in the form of deeply personal artwork.



Figure 15.2. Seventh-grade monster based on the creator's eating disorder. Photo credit: Linus Lancaster and Asherah Weiss.

Pedagogically, this project brings up some important concerns around safety. The context of *Hopeful Monsters* is set inside a classroom, within a school. Because we are asking students to manifest their challenges in a visible, physical way, we have to think about group dynamics in the classroom, and ways to let students explore their inner landscapes without revealing more than they are comfortable doing. In full recognition that students

should not be pushed beyond their comfort level, they are allowed a high level of freedom to choose their own topic for their monster, which enables them to skip traumatic histories or triggers that would not be supportive in this setting. From the outset, we allow students to veil their writing if they prefer not to reveal their monster directly.

Potential limitations to this project are the extent to which the teacher and students have had the chance to develop rapport. In the first year we ran this project, we waited until the spring, which gave ample time for trust to develop in the classroom. In contrast to this, Asherah has had the experience of teaching this project as a visiting artist at an elementary school where she had previously worked with the students for only a few sessions. While having the main teacher in the room certainly helped, there were limitations based on the lack of relationship between this new adult and the young people in the room. Asherah was unable, without prior knowledge, to prompt students based on background or identity, and relied heavily on the individual's willingness to interact. Another curious finding was that two sixth graders were having a hard time starting their free-write and getting invested in the project. The teacher commented privately that she found it interesting because these students were the ones who were going through the hardest challenges outside of school. Upon reflecting on this, it would seem that there are times when a person is going through something quite difficult and is not yet able to process the hardship. It is helpful to keep this in mind when met with resistance, and to perhaps encourage students to explore something more resilience-building in their lives and discover a personal superpower rather than dwell on challenges.

Project process

We first learned about this project from Sasha Lyth, another teacher who had done it with a class of middle school students under a different title, which we expanded and modified considerably. It was facilitated by Linus teaching to 14–18 year olds, and Asherah teaching to 11–14 year olds. Each modified the process to be successful and appropriate with their

students. At the high school, the project started with discussions defining empathy and compassion, and what their absence means in our lives. What are some ways in which our societies and communities may lack sufficient empathy and compassion, and what would they begin to look like if people began practising them to a greater extent? We talked about the important differences between them, as well as the ways in which they are related. We compared human sociopathology and psychopathology with Hollywood monsters and various mythical creatures, including superheroes and villains. We also talked about how monsters can be sympathetic characters. Students were asked to think about anti-heroes like Godzilla. We talked about why we tend to like them, especially in the context of redemption stories, etc.

For grades six through eight, we kept it simpler, defining these terms and exploring villain characters from popular culture (examples include Gollum, Voldemort, Ursula the Sea Witch, and so on). Students looked at a series of known monsters and wrote about their characteristics. Then they chose one they were most familiar with and wrote from their perspective, in order to build the empathic lens. Students then redrew the character after thinking about why they act the way they do. For example, one could consider a werewolf, and the experience of being out of control of their own body. Then a drawing of that creature could look much more relatable once having been seen through their eyes.

Next, we shifted to asking: 'If you were a monster, what would make you so? What are the *behaviours* and *characteristics* that would make you a monster? How would your angry, sad, sneaky, obsessive, etc., parts of yourself get translated into a physical being?' From there, we move to asking: *what* is your monster? What causes you suffering, blockage, or annoyance?

We asked students to be as vulnerable as possible. In some cases, a worksheet was used to support their thinking, especially for younger grades and students with certain learning disabilities. Students were asked to contemplate some of their 'inner demons', things that limit and block them. What causes you pain or hindrance? They were asked to list six (e.g. anxiety, anger, procrastination). These could also include external stressors and difficulties (e.g. stressful home life).

If something has the power to cause you ongoing suffering, it is probably not acting alone. What adds to personal challenges or exacerbates the conditions or state of mind that you are identifying as a monster? We call these *assistants* (multipliers) and use the examples of gaming addiction and depression as things that could assist procrastination for instance. At the high school, this was an opportunity to introduce students to systemic thinking about the ways that multipliers can exacerbate problems without necessarily being their cause. Students were then asked to think about what they do to cope with their monsters. We talked about coping mechanisms and ‘Band-Aids’ such as *friends*, *ice cream* and *You Tube videos*, etc. We also discussed ways in which coping mechanisms can be monsters in their own right if they become bad habits or are pursued obsessively, such as excessive online gaming.

We also talked about whether or not personal monsters could be superpowers in disguise. Not all monsters are superpowers of course, but sometimes they can be turned into advantages. Additionally, the processes that one goes through to bring them into the light, overcome them, or make peace with them, can take extraordinary effort that is worth acknowledging.

At the high school, students were asked to look up the etymologies (histories) of some of the words they used to name their monsters and assistants. These could also be used to veil the monsters if students didn’t want what they were working on to be visually obvious. For instance, if a student didn’t want to make a depressed rain cloud in front of their peers they could use the Old English *clod* (rock, or hill) and design a mountain with the same emotional representation.

Students start the project writing in a raw, uncensored way, like a journal entry, and complete the project with a more edited artist statement. These two writing processes bookend the act of art-making. What we discovered was how brutally honest many were in sharing their process. The artist statement was an assignment that was not anonymous to the teacher, but remained so if shared publicly. For instance, we hung excerpts of some of these statements in the exhibition without names associated with them. Viewers then got another level of insight into the depth of this project, an important avenue for compassion-development for the viewer.

Exhibiting the Hopeful Monsters gives the audience a chance to put themselves in the experiences of the artists. It gives them a chance to reflect and perhaps re-evaluate their level of compassion toward the experiences of others. We found that many audience members were extremely moved by the experience of viewing the exhibit, a felt sense rather than a mental process. More than a few people left in tears, often those who were also mental health professionals.



Figure 15.3. Entrance to the Hopeful Monsters exhibition. Photo credit: Linus Lancaster and Asherah Weiss.



Figure 15.4. Abandoned warehouse used as an exhibition space for 150 Hopeful Monsters. Photo credit: Linus Lancaster and Asherah Weiss.

Artists' statements

Healdsburg High School artist statements

My hopeful monster is Failure. I have a grave fear of failing at anything, even though I am up to try many things. My monster's assistants are insecurities, weakness, and being unprepared for life. Sometimes I get so afraid of failing at something, I won't try at all or I won't leave something until it is perfected. My monster is a humanoid who is struggling to lift a weight. While it is trying, there are faces laughing around it. The faces are the accessories. They represent the assistants to failure: Weakness, Insecurity, and Unpreparedness. I used grey felt for the doll, with brown

arms because that was the last bit of felt we had. I also used burlap for the heads, to show that failure can have many circumstances that cause it, and some aren't controllable. The cap on the humanoid's head is to show that no matter how you dress failure, it is still failure. Often people will say 'I failed, but ...'. However the only part I can hear when people try to reassure me is the first part. Failure can lead to other monsters such as depression. It can also lead to success, but only if failure is worked out of the equation. As long as failure is an option, I am afraid of the situation. In extreme times of struggle I think it is important to know there are other people in the same or worse situation than you. And when you're surrounded by those who are also struggling, it makes people want to band together. Failure is easier to overcome when you surround yourself with people who are trying to overcome it with you.

- 17-year-old twelfth grader

What does the Hopeful Monsters Project mean to you?

What the Hopeful Monsters Project means to me personally is that it helps to get my feelings out in a special way. Creating this project in class with my peers was fun, emotional, but mostly very moody since everybody was in their little bubble doing their monsters with feelings. I enjoyed doing these creative monsters.

- Eighth grader

Hopeful Monsters to me are monsters who have feelings and struggles too.

- Seventh grader

The Hopeful Monster Project ... [is] a sentimental meaning of how not all monsters are bad and how there is more to the story than what it looks like.

- Seventh grader

The Hopeful Monsters Project, to me personally, means you can show your biggest insecurities but still hide them.

- Sixth grader

To me, the Hopeful Monster Project was a way to express more about myself through art.

- Seventh grader

For the Hopeful Monsters Project I had a really fun time piecing together my creation. The project was new from anything we've done in the class before and new from anything I've done in general. I've never made my own stuff. It was interesting to sit and really think about what monsters you have in your life and to think about how to turn that 'bad' thing into something a little less scary.

- Eighth grader



Figure 15.5. Hopeful Monsters on student-made armatures at the exhibit. Photo credit: Linus Lancaster and Asherah Weiss.

Young people are collectively holding in a tremendous amount, perhaps more now than many generations before. While some note that we have overcome atrocities like slavery, the generational trauma and the systemic oppression of that era in the United States still manifests for people of African heritage and other People of Colour in daily life. Social media and the Twenty-four-hour news cycle, combined with the climate crisis and ongoing injustice in the world, is pushing younger people into a situation that feels all-encompassing. To somehow respond to this crisis, The Hopeful Monsters Project establishes a space of reflection and integration within the school system where there aren't many places to do so. The project gives people a chance to slow down when everything else says to speed up, to accept and love oneself as a contradiction to so much that is blaring noisily at our children.

Depending on cultural and familial norms, there isn't often much space to investigate the vast world within. Though some schools develop social-emotional competencies with children in elementary school, basic tools such as self-reflection, self-regulation and communicating one's feelings are not practised as schoolchildren move into the middle grades, unless a blaring conflict arises. The United States has a tendency toward reacting to a problem, rather than looking systemically at what needs to change. This is no difference in the educational approach. Unless you have a very clear issue manifesting, many people's everyday struggles go unseen. It is imperative that schooling makes a sharp turn toward supporting every young person's abilities to cope and build resiliency, to address the mental health crisis of our time. This pedagogy is one aspect of teaching social-emotional intelligence through art-making practice that can be brought into the mainstream classroom and reach many. Our hope is that this project can be a growing part of this necessary work.

From the time we were inspired to do this project, we knew it was right to put our energy into it and bring it to our students. Art education in particular is a special context that allows for development of the self that otherwise may be lost in academic classes, and we see that with *Hopeful Monsters*. We now have the curriculum for third grade through twelfth grade that anyone may implement in their classroom, and we invite others to contact us to connect. We believe that engaging in the arts to help build the muscles of empathy and compassion are of absolute need right now. As with Humanistic Buddhism's emphasis on working for positive change in the world, particularly through education, we feel compelled to address the emotional needs of our students through creative engagement. There is no end to the monster mutations this project could produce to that end, and we welcome you to adopt it in whatever form or educational context fits your circumstances.

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Figure 15.6. Another Hopeful Monster with the words 'I'M FINE' stitched across a black mask covering its mouth. Photo credit: Linus Lancaster and Asherah Weiss.

16 Walking the Paths of Compassion Amidst Conflict

Humanistic Buddhism at work

There's a beautiful artwork of Guan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion, in the meeting room in my law firm. Her face is serene, softly gazing at her lightly closed palms that hold the world's suffering, exuding a sense of deep compassion and equanimity. The multiple ears adorning Guan Yin are artistically painted to depict her hearing the cries of the world. She sits on a lotus that rises from the muddy waters, symbolizing the purity that can come from a chaotic and imperfect world.

Guan Yin has an important place in this meeting room because this room is where I meet with clients and conduct mediations. As a lawyer and mediator, I deal with conflict every day across a range of areas in law: family law, child protection, guardianship, mental health, and property and estate law. I see fractures in relationships between people, and in their relationship with themselves.

In my meetings with my clients, I hear about their relationship issues, marriage breakdowns, past traumas, parenting problems, their fears, their stress and their suffering. I bear witness to the raw emotions from their recounting: their anger, hate, resentment, sadness, pain, anxieties, worries and grief. The court documents depict the story of their lives. They may have been exposed to – or themselves have issues with – drug or alcohol addictions, mental health, domestic violence, lack of parenting skills, intergenerational trauma or criminal activities.

So having Guan Yin in this meeting room allows me to draw on her qualities when I am meeting with clients. Sometimes when my clients feel

disheartened about their situation, I may remind them that this could be a turning point for them. I may encourage them to grow from what they are going through, just as a lotus grows from mud. Sometimes my clients are stressed and anxious, trying to just hold it all together, and I offer them my loving kindness to accompany my legal advice. Sometimes when I am listening to some harrowing tales of what my clients have been through, I can personally draw on the compassion and equanimity of Guan Yin so I can deal with what I am hearing.

For some people, it may seem strange having Guan Yin feature so prominently in a law firm. For some people, the idea of a Buddhist lawyer may be an oxymoron. For me, not only is this my lived experience, but this is also what Humanistic Buddhism means to me. The practice of Buddhism should not be simply confined to times on meditation cushions and on extended retreats. The Buddhist practice is that, and so much more. The Buddha's teachings are so practical and valuable that it can be applied in all contexts. Where there is suffering, there is the need for Humanistic Buddhism. Buddhism allows us to not only cope with suffering and conflict but also understand and transform it. Not only does Buddhism help us through our conflict, but we use the conflict that has arisen as our training ground for our own spiritual development.

I have found this in my journey as a Buddhist lawyer. Not only has Buddhism allowed me to be a better lawyer to assist my clients, but by consciously bringing Buddhism into my work, my work becomes the whetstone for my own Buddhist practice, while my law firm becomes my temple for training. Having worked as a Buddhist lawyer and mediator for many years, I believe that it is possible to bring your Buddhist practice into your work, and this will change your work into a deeply spiritual endeavour.

Having worked amidst conflict for so many years, I realize that conflict is undoubtedly a source of suffering for many people, but conflict can also teach us so much about the Buddha's teachings and practice, teach us about others, and importantly, teach us about ourselves.

Below I share with you some practices that I have found useful in my work understanding and responding to conflict. I have by no means mastered them, but offer them here with the hope that it may be useful to you.

Transforming conflict

I deal with a lot of angry people in my line of work. People are angry at their situation, angry at the other party, at 'the system', and sometimes at themselves. Their anger often clouds their judgement, hindering their ability to make rational decisions. Their anger harms them and the other party, and sometimes also their children. Sometimes clients may project their anger at me, and they spit out their words like they are shooting arrows. People in caring professions and those in customer service roles may relate to this.

One time I represented a man at court who had a long history of criminal offences and domestic violence convictions against his former female partners. His usual lawyer wasn't available to attend the hearing and had asked me to represent his client that day instead. After I accepted the case, I read the file and read information about his lack of respect for women. Unbeknownst to me, his lawyer neglected to tell his client that he wasn't coming to court for this final hearing and was sending me instead. So, imagine me turning up to court on the most important day of this person's case, and telling him that his lawyer has sent me. Yes, a woman was going to represent him. The client was so angry. He started yelling and swearing, pacing around the meeting room. He couldn't believe that his lawyer would not turn up to court and would send me instead without consulting with him. He didn't know me and didn't have faith that I could help him with his case. When I tried to explain the situation to him, he talked over me.

He was yelling so loudly that the court security guard knocked on our door. I opened the door and the security guard said, 'Is everything okay?'

I replied, 'Yes, it's under control.'

'Are you sure?' He looked concerned. 'The magistrate asked me to come in here to check on things because she could hear your client in the courtroom. Are you okay?'

'I'm fine,' I reassured him, 'Thank you.'

The security guard wasn't convinced. 'Okay, well I'll just be right outside in case you need anything, okay?'

'Thank you. I appreciate that,' I said.

The security guard gave the client a 'look' and then left the room.

Now that I had a moment of silence from the client, I spoke to him in a calm and steady voice. 'The magistrate who will be deciding your case can hear you yelling from this room. You can keep yelling; I can leave, and you can represent yourself. Or I am here now, and you can work with me. I know you're upset that your lawyer isn't here, and he should have told you. But I'm here and I've prepared for today. I've read your whole file. I've read about your history, the domestic violence and the drugs, but you know what else I read?' I paused and softened my tone. 'I read about your kids. And how much they miss you and how much they want to see you. They want their dad, and they don't know why they can't see more of you.'

What happened next, I wasn't expecting and would never forget.

The client started crying. He had missed his kids too.

From there, we had a really good conversation. I asked him what kind of father he wants his kids to remember him as. Does he want his kids to know how he treated their mother, and does he want his kids to model themselves off him? He said 'No, I don't want them to be like me.'

So I suggested to him to make a change in his life. Get off the drugs, complete a Men's Behaviour Program, parenting courses, and anger management counselling, and no more criminal activities. Make a real change and prove he can be a good dad to his kids.

The client told me that during this whole case he felt everyone had treated him like he is a criminal and he felt he was fighting a battle he couldn't win. He said I was the only one who made him feel he had something to work towards.

The rest of the court hearing went well. He even stood up and apologized to the magistrate – a female magistrate – for his yelling earlier in the day. The magistrate accepted his apology and encouraged him to make changes for the better for his kids.

As we were leaving the courtroom, Security asked if he needed to escort the client out of the courthouse. I said there's no need and I would walk him out. I didn't want the last memory for this client on this day to be of Security walking him out of the courthouse as though he were a criminal. So I walked through the glass doors with him, while Security and the other lawyers watched us from inside.

The client then turned to me and put his hand out. I thought he wanted to shake my hand, but he gave me a hug instead. He said, ‘thank you for everything today. I will remember what you said, and I will do it for my kids.’

I wished him all the best and returned into the courthouse to see a shocked group of Security and lawyers who couldn’t believe what they just witnessed.

The conflict that arose between this client and I could have turned out very differently. The conflict could have escalated, or if I thought it was unsafe then I would have withdrawn from representing him.

This was one of the many times when my Buddhist practice has come to my aid and helped the client to soften and let go of his anger, even if just for a moment to allow for an honest self-reflection, and hopefully the beginning of his journey for real change in his life.

In the work that I do as a family lawyer, I represent the victims of violence in some cases, and the alleged perpetrators in others. It’s easy to bring up compassion for victims, but what of the perpetrators? Some may wonder, how can a Buddhist lawyer represent someone who has done harm to others? When I represent a perpetrator in parenting disputes, I advise my client about how the court might decide the case based on the children’s best interests. This allows me to discuss with the perpetrator about their actions and its effect on the children, encourage them to make changes to their lives and refer them to services to assist them on that journey. This allows me to represent these perpetrators in an authentic way that does not compromise my own values, and does not condone or excuse their harmful actions.

Turning arrows into flowers

In the following sections, I discuss how our Buddhist practice can assist in times of conflict. These relate to situations where personal safety is not an issue. If safety is an issue, then the wise thing to do is to act protectively, including removing ourselves from the situation and seeking immediate assistance.

Conflict often arises when angry words are exchanged. When someone projects their anger at us, that is the moment when we have an opportunity to practice what the Buddha taught. That is the moment when we are tested on how well we have been practising leading up to that moment. That is the moment when we know whether all the meditation we've done, the Dharma books that we've read and the Dharma talks we've listened to, are being put to good use to deal with our defilements of greed, hatred and delusion. Alternatively, that moment may be a humbling reminder that we have more to go with our practice.

I draw a lot of inspiration from the Buddha's life and how he handled conflict. I am reminded of the story of the angry Brahmin, Akkosaka Bharadvaja, who insulted and cursed the Buddha. The Buddha calmly asked him, when serving his guests food, 'if they don't accept them, to whom do those foods belong?' The Brahmin replied, 'if they don't accept them, Master Gautama, those foods are all mine.' The Buddha said, 'in the same way, Brahmin, that with which you have insulted me ... I don't accept from you. It's all yours, Brahman. It's all yours. Whoever returns insult to one who is insulting... is said to be eating together, sharing company, with that person. But I am neither eating together nor sharing your company, Brahmin. It's all yours. It's all yours' (trans. Thanissaro 1999).

Another inspiration that I draw on is recalling the Buddha on the eve of his Enlightenment when Mara and his armies attacked the Buddha with thousands of arrows. The Buddha remains seated peacefully, without retreating in fear or reacting in anger. The arrows do not touch the Buddha, but rain upon him as soft flowers.

So, when someone thrusts upon us their 'gifts' of anger and negativity, we can choose to decline them and the gifts rest with them. Similarly, when someone shoots their arrows of hurtful words at us, our practice is to not let these arrows touch us, but allow them to simply drop to our feet like flowers. We need to bring forth our Dharma practice to deal with our own reactions to the situation, to ensure that we do not contribute further to the conflict, and to minimize the harm that the conflict may have on us.

Meet their pain with compassion

Another practice that I find useful in the face of angry arrows is to see deeply into the other person's suffering. A happy person does not intentionally hurt others. Only a person who is suffering will say and do hurtful things, and it springs from their pain. When I see this, compassion wells up in me. I'm no longer reacting to their hurtful and unskilful conduct, but I'm meeting them where they are: at their pain. I can turn the focus away from me, so I can be there for them. I find this way helps me to not take things personally, which in turn deescalates conflict. This is by no means to condone or sweep under the carpet someone's poor behaviour, but the other person becomes more open to reflecting on their unskilful behaviour when they are not so heightened.

Recently, I had a case referred to me. I called the client to introduce myself and within minutes of the conversation she launched into a barrage of criticisms of me. At this point, I could have become defensive or angry. Instead, I reminded her who I was, that this was the first time we had spoken, and that I had no knowledge of the matters she was talking about. She continued her complaints until I stopped her and said firmly, 'it sounds like you've had a really difficult time with other lawyers and social workers, and you're now projecting that all on me. I'm not them. I just came into your case. I can't help you if you continue to project all that anger on me.' The client apologized for projecting. She said she had been waiting so long to talk to someone about her problems, so when she heard I was the lawyer, all her frustrations came out. We managed to have a better conversation after that, which would not have been possible if I had retaliated angrily or terminated the conversation.

There's a Buddhist story of a husband who was sent to the market to do some shopping for his wife. At the market, a stranger came up to him and started shouting profanities at him. The man was shocked as he had never met this stranger before, and he was embarrassed to be called such names in public at the marketplace. The man was so angry and upset that he hurried home, forgetting to buy what his wife had asked for.

When he returned home, he carried his anger the whole way. When his wife saw him, she asked him why he returned empty-handed without the items she asked him to buy. He angrily relayed to her about what happened at the market. She chuckled and said, 'oh I know him. He's mad and doesn't know what he's talking about. Everyone in town knows that! You just don't know as you don't go to the market much.'

After hearing this, her husband's anger immediately disappeared. Then his wife said, 'you went all the way to the market and because of the madman you forgot what I asked you to buy?' Her husband apologized and set off again to the market.

When he arrived at the market, again the stranger approached him and started yelling profanities at him. This time, however, as the husband knew about the man, he didn't take what was said personally and he had no anger. In fact, now that the husband understood the stranger's suffering and that he was mentally unwell, the husband felt compassion and equanimity for the stranger.

In the two trips by the man, many things were the same: same stranger, same profanities and same location. Yet the outcome of both for the man was different. Why? The reason is because in the first trip the man did not know the truth of the matter and was offended. In the second trip, the man understood about the stranger, and he did not take what was said personally. So, when we take time to understand the other person's situation, and particularly when we can touch their suffering, we can turn our negativity to compassion and understanding instead. The conflict that has arisen, or may arise, can then be healed, and resolved.

See the whole elephant

A lot of conflict arises from differences in views and opinions, and importantly our attachments to those views and opinions. When we become too close to the dispute, we can develop tunnel vision and not realize that we may be missing some crucial information about the dispute. When I come into a long-standing case as a lawyer or mediator, I can apply fresh eyes to

the dispute, bring a fresh perspective or point out things that people have missed because they've become too caught up in the case.

During the Buddha's time, there were many ascetics and wanderers professing different views and doctrines on various subjects. One time, the Buddha's disciples asked the Buddha about these ascetics and wanderers who argue and attack each other with sharp tongues on what is and isn't the Dharma. The Buddha responded by telling a story of a time when there was a King who ordered all the congenitally blind people in his kingdom to assemble in one place. Once the blind people were assembled, the King ordered them to be shown an elephant and asked each of them to describe the elephant to him.

The one who touched the elephant's head said an elephant is like a pot. The one who touched his ear said an elephant is like a winnowing fan. The one who touched his tusk said an elephant is like a ploughshare. The one who touched his trunk said an elephant is like a plough-pole. The one who touched his tail said an elephant is like a broom.

The blind then started arguing amongst themselves as to what they say an elephant is and what is not an elephant. The Buddha compared this to the ascetics and wanderers who argue about what is and isn't the Dharma, and being so attached to these views, they dispute like people who see only one side.

When we're in conflict, we should take a step back and see the whole elephant. We need to see all sides of the dispute, not only the side that we are on. We need to keep an open mind to the possibility that we may not know all the answers. We need to actively look for any other relevant information that we may be missing, to fill in all the gaps, otherwise we are like the blind arguing over what an elephant is and is not. We should also give the other disputing party the benefit of the doubt that they may also not have all the information, and perhaps do not know that they do not have the information, so we can understand why they may take the stance that they are taking.

I have resolved many cases by identifying and making available the missing information to the parties to consider. Many conflicts arise due to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Clarifying these misunderstandings with relevant information can help the parties make informed decisions about the conflict and options for their resolution.

Beyond perspectives

Related to seeing the whole picture is understanding that we are also seeing the picture from one perspective. In my work with separating couples, I often hear them complain about the other person (about who did what or who didn't do what), about what they deserve and what the other doesn't deserve. They may retell stories of the past about the same incident, but their retellings are so different, it's as if they are talking about totally different people and events. Then they may start accusing the other person of lying, saying why they are right and the other person is wrong.

There are a few exercises that I do to help disputing parties through this. One is to put the conflict in perspective for them. What may seem so important to 'win' now, may not be when considered in another context. For example, I ask parents to reflect on their children's wedding day. That day may seem like a long time away for parents with young children, but I ask them to imagine their children having to choose which parent they invite to their wedding day because they know their parents dislike each other so much that they can't invite both. This exercise helps parents put their conflict in perspective: what is more important – to win over the other parent now, or to work together so their children can grow up with both parents in their life?

Another exercise that I use when parties become stuck or start arguing in mediation, is to draw this symbol 6 and place this in between them. I then ask them what they see. One would say nine and one would say six. I then ask them, 'so who is right?' They often reply with, 'depends on where you're sitting', or 'depends on your perspective'.

I would reply, 'exactly. We have all experienced what we have experienced from our perspective. All of us have experienced this session together today, and yet all of us will experience it differently. We will also remember today differently. There will be some parts that you will remember and some parts you will forget. Just because you experience or remember events differently to me, it doesn't make your experience any less real than what I experience. The reverse is also true. So if we keep talking about the past,

about who is right or wrong, we are unlikely to reach a resolution today. What we can talk about is how to move on from here and look to the future. So can we agree to let go of the past and put a plan in place for the future?’

This exercise puts a pause on the parties’ arguments and redirects them into the future. It also allows them to just loosen – and even let go of – their attachment to their views and resentments, even if just for a moment, so they can be open to another perspective that is different from their own.

When someone says six or nine, they are not lying, they are just relaying their perspective. In both this and the earlier example of the blind men describing an elephant, neither party is not being untruthful. Each of us has our own inclinations and conditioning, our likes and dislikes that arise from our six senses and five aggregates. By understanding this, we can then distinguish between the matters that require resolution, and the matters that aren’t important and can be released. If we practice in this way, we can loosen our attachments to our views and our need to be ‘right’. We become less judgemental of others. We break down the barriers of ‘me’ versus ‘them’. Importantly, we develop a deeper understanding of the Buddha’s teachings on non-self and emptiness.

Words that heal

Sometimes people ask me, ‘as a divorce lawyer, what are the common reasons for marital breakdown?’ One reason that comes up repeatedly in my clients’ divorces is a breakdown in communication. That may involve abrasive or untruthful communication, miscommunication, lack of communication, or a combination of these.

The practices of right speech and deep listening are essential to resolving conflicts and improving relationships. Too often we are not mindful with our speech and once the words are spoken, we can’t retrieve them again. Trust and loving relationships may be worn down due to untruthful and harsh speech. We may be stingy with our kind words and words of appreciation. We may forget to deeply listen to another. We may be physically

present with our loved ones, but we are not truly present, with our attention distracted and scattered.

To ensure that my legal advice is tailored for a client's specific situation, and not just a stock standard response from a lawyer, I need to understand them. I do this by practising deep listening. I offer my presence and undivided attention, not to respond, but to understand. I listen to them as a person with their own views and history, without being too quick to judge them on what they say. Having worked with clients from different backgrounds and cultures, it's important to be aware of how my own conditioning, background and culture may be framing my understanding of what they are telling me. I ask questions to better understand their situation or context, or to help them reflect on things they had not considered.

Sometimes just having someone listen to them in this way is in itself healing, as they may feel no one truly understands them or they feel they don't have a voice. Sometimes through our discussions, my clients may feel they have misunderstood the situation and their partner. Sometimes I even have clients who realize they don't need a divorce anymore. My clients may ask me about ways to improve communication with their partner or their children. I then encourage them to practice what they experienced with me in our session in their relationships with their partner or children.

In some of my mediations, I help parties to really hear what the other person has to say. Each party is given a chance to speak while the other listens without interruption. I invite the parties to listen, not so they can respond, but to truly hear what the other person says, without judgement or interference. I ask them to practice speaking respectfully to, and about, the other person. These sessions can be very healing, and often resolve the conflict between the parties. It also becomes an example on which the parties can model their future communications, to know that it is possible to speak words that heal, and listening to understand.

So if conflict arises in your life, consider how deep listening and right speech can help your situation. Even if you feel that only you are doing this, and the other party is not, rest assured that at least you are not contributing to the escalation of the conflict. Moreover, the qualities that you are practising in doing so – such as mindfulness, patience and kindness – are likely to be worth more than any fight that you can win.

Make more pie

Some conflicts concern how much one should get, or how much one needs to give. These conflicts arise when people think there is only one pie, and everyone is trying to get the biggest piece from that pie. When we define our conflicts in this way, resolution may be reduced to just negotiating with numbers and unless there is compromise by the parties, it can be hard to reach an agreement.

When this happens, consider making more pie. Widen the scope of what is important by understanding what each party truly needs. Sometimes what they need is not actually what they are arguing about; what they need is something even more valuable to them than the immediate dispute. The parents in my earlier example may be willing to put aside their conflict now for the sake of their children growing up with both parents in their life, and on their wedding day.

During the Buddha's time there was a dispute that broke out between the Sakyans of Kapilavatthu and of Koliya, over the water that flowed in the Rohini River between the two kingdoms. They were preparing for war until the Buddha intervened and told each of the Kings, 'for the sake of some water, which is of little value, you should not destroy your lives which are of so much value and priceless' (trans. Tin 1986). What is more valuable: the water that they are about to fight over, or the blood that would be shed from this conflict?' Reflecting on this, the warring kingdoms desisted in pursuing their war that day.

So, when faced with conflict, we should look beyond what we assume the conflict is about and look to what is truly valuable and fulfilling of everyone's needs.

Look to what is common

When people are in conflict, they see the other as their opponent. To help parties change their perspective on their conflict, I look for what is

common between them and use this to change their view of each other so that they are no longer fighting each other, but rather are on the same team working together to solve their common problem for a common purpose. In parenting disputes, I ask the parents to tell me what their children have been going through and ways to help the children navigate through their problems. This helps reframe the conflict to one of problem-solving, and it places both parents into the same boat to help their children together.

In Buddhism, we recognize the Buddha Nature of all beings, and the common humanity in all of us. When conflict arises, we can use this opportunity to break down our tendency to label the other party as the 'opponent' and remind ourselves that there are more commonalities between us than there are differences.

Paths of compassion

There are many ways to resolve conflict and many opportunities for us to learn the Dharma. Lessons may come from a respectful teacher or a spiritual friend. Lessons may also come in the form of conflict, and the other persons involved in that conflict may be the teacher, with us the unwilling student. If we take conflict, when it visits, as our training, we can use this to sharpen our wisdom, develop our compassion and deepen our understanding of the Buddha's teachings. If conflict isn't present, then we should deeply value the peace that is already here, the cause of that peace, and maintain those causes.

Then perhaps you too can have Guan Yin and her qualities featured at your work, your home, or wherever she can inspire you to walk your paths of compassion. In doing so, Guan Yin will no longer be just a picture on the wall, but alive in our hearts, inspiring us to be the peacemakers and peacekeepers in our communities.

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17 Abundance from *Dukkha*: The Pandemic from a Third-World Perspective

Introduction

In the Philippines, the local term for town or country is *bayan*. Historically, one who sacrifices self in defence of one's native land is called a *bayani* – a national hero. From this root word, the term *bayanihan* is derived to signify a collective and voluntary action of serving fellowmen. *Bayanihan*, evoking a deep sense of community and mutual help, is a cultural trait Filipinos are known for wherever and in whatever circumstances they find themselves in. It originated in the early times when Filipino houses, built of light materials like bamboo and nipa leaves, needed to be re-located for various reasons, be it geographical, social or occupational. Able-bodied men in the neighbourhood would gather and, with wooden stilts on their shoulders, lift the house from the ground and carry it to its next destination. Movements are delicately synchronized and calibrated in order to gain momentum to cover desired distances or for gradually slowing down to rest and regain strength. Thus, the act required a collective harmonious rhythm of might and brawn. Once completed, the community celebrates with merriment over drinks, local delicacies and endless stories. Such tradition forged a quality of selflessness and a strong spirit of community among Filipinos and is readily invoked when circumstances call for it. Such was the case during the pandemic when the unabated rise in hunger, unemployment and natural calamities wrought by climate change tested the Filipinos' mettle in overcoming what appeared dire and insurmountable.

From the lens of a neophyte Buddhist scholar taking up courses in Humanistic Buddhism and Applied Buddhist Studies at the Nan Tien Institute, this chapter explores how deep Filipino communal values resonate with humanistic responses to societal ills and challenges that are at once local yet decidedly universal in its human theme, context and inspiration.

Arranged chronologically, this piece is a retelling of events and how this same spirit of cooperation and solidarity inspired Filipinos to stand strong when their needs were great and their pain deep. It is the Filipino collective experience of *dukkha* (suffering) and how individual out-of-the-box initiatives sparked and inspired local communities to take matters into their own hands when traditional state resources proved much too limited and inadequate. More so, it is about harvesting the richness and abundance of the human spirit borne of adversity and common struggle. *Bayanihan*. The best of Filipino culture has proven the strongest assurance against the worst challenges in life, before and now.

This paper similarly takes into account the author's individual response to the crises and concludes with an analysis of how shared suffering carries with it the seeds of *Bodhicitta* – the awakening of kindness, generosity and compassion – which are the hallmarks of what it means to be human and humane in today's world.

Lockdown, 2020: The Philippine scenario

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global condition that knows no bounds in wreaking havoc and suffering to human lives. The virus appears random and indiscriminate, not recognizing borders and all other labels man has invented to differentiate one or one's own from others – country, nationality, creed, colour, culture or religion. It is a great leveller that brings humanity and the whole world at the mercy of its deadly scourge. Urgent social and economic problems arise due to lockdown restrictions resulting in business reversals and job displacements. When government efforts are no longer sufficient to address the situation, civic duty and responsibility demand action and response from its citizenry. I am responding to this

call from the moral perspective of being a Filipino communitarian and a socially engaged student of Humanistic Buddhism.

The hunger problem

Six months into the lockdown, many third-world countries continued to struggle against the virus with no end in sight. The Philippines, while still unable to contain the virus, had yet to grapple with another, more urgent socio-economic calamity – hunger, and its tightening grip on adults and children. The national mobile phone survey by the Social Weather Station (2020) as of September 2020 reported that the hunger rate stood at 30.7 per cent, up from 10 per cent in the first quarter and 20 per cent in the second quarter. In a population of 106 million, the figure translates to around 7.6 million households or 32 million Filipinos suffering from hunger.

Filipinos could endure poverty for a lifetime, but hunger could only be endured for days. When children begin to cry out of hunger, desperation sets in. More alarming is that best efforts from traditional support groups (government together with religious, business and civic organizations) could no longer suffice to stem the tide of rising hunger, and further reduction from this level of support would simply mean increasing the population of the hungry. Keenly aware of this delicately dangerous human condition, I joined an alliance of private citizens from the academe, the arts and social enterprises to mobilize action for the immediate relief of hunger. In Metro Manila, the capital of the Philippines with 15 million people, 30 per cent (4.5 million) of whom are hungry could be found in hard hit Covid-19 areas.

But there remained people whose help could be tapped. Statistics indicated that in Metro Manila, there remained around 6 million people who were not hungry nor threatened by hunger. Matching this with the 4 million who were already hungry, the act of mitigating hunger could be achieved if creative approaches could be harnessed to approximate a 1:1 ratio of those in grave need and those able to help. The 6 million people

that comprised 40 per cent of Metro Manila residents could be broken down into 20 per cent who are not hungry and have something to give, and another 20 per cent who are not afraid to be hungry and have more to give (We Are Social and Hootsuite 2020).

The alliance of hunger warriors, of which the writer was a part, utilized massive digital campaigns on all platforms. The creative part in this call for generosity was its affordability without undue economic strain in the time of difficulty. The hunger drive targeted the 6 million residents of Metro Manila to donate P100-P500 (US\$2–US\$10) per month from September to December 2020 for the initial stage of the campaign. At PHP25 per meal per day (US\$.50 per day), millions of Filipinos could afford to share this amount, every day, every single day. The alliance sought to match the millions of the hungry with millions of the not-hungry by looking at new sources of donation, specifically from the bracket of ages 18–44 that represent 75 per cent of social media users, and assumed to have been the least involved, if ever, in donating to feed the hungry. Their massive entry into the effort with small and affordable donations (US\$2 a month) opened a new venue for hunger mitigation.

My own contribution tapped into the Reward System of banks, retail establishments and credit card companies to set up a system for consumers to convert reward points (from purchases and transactions) to cash that would then go into a hunger fund. The taipans (Filipino moguls of Chinese descent) of big Philippine businesses listened and were equally intent on doing their share in the project. They initiated the identification of priority areas for immediate food distribution through local grassroots leaders.

The joint efforts of volunteers in this alliance did not seek to compete with the efforts of traditional players from the private sector. Rather, its aim was to enhance the capability of the traditional players by contributing innovative approaches to harness funds from non-traditional sources. The role of the Alliance was to harness collective action and encourage citizenship values grounded on the principle that all Filipinos are responsible for and accountable to one another, a move to build the culture of caring and sharing in the spirit of equality and for the survival of the whole.

But, despite all efforts to boost the hunger drive campaign, the hunger rate continued to rise, together with the growing number of the

unemployed, as the domino effect of business closures relentlessly paralysed many industries and livelihoods. The most vulnerable were the small, start-up enterprises with limited financial capital and the hired daily wage earners across the country whose next meal comes from the day's earnings, if at all. Then, one day, along with the helplessness and growing despair from this displaced sector, came a miracle.

The Community pantry: 'Give what you can, get what you need'

In an effort to help daily wage earners who were made idle by industry lockdowns and business closures, a young university graduate, Ana Patricia Non, decided to open a small furniture refurbishing business which hired displaced construction workers and *jeepney* drivers as woodworkers and delivery men. However, after some time of poor business turnout amidst higher and stricter levels of COVID alerts, the young social entrepreneur found herself in a tight squeeze unable to sustain both her business and workers after months of no income. Facing utter helplessness over a situation which she had no control over, she had no choice but to close shop, but the continuing hunger problem haunted her and lingered over her head. She preoccupied herself with ways by which she could help people tide over from one meal to the next; not from any noble intention on her part as she later claimed but solely from the sheer need and urgency of having food in order to survive. Just to continue living, learning and striving in the hope of better times to come.

Non looked inside her pantry for what could be shared with people for the next meal. After surveying the neighbourhood for an area that could be accessed by sizeable foot traffic, she secured permission to use a small space under a tree in front of a restaurant and convenience store on Maginahawa Street in Quezon City, the northern part of Metro Manila. She then rushed home to collect her already-packed goods, called for a tri-cycle, and quickly made her way back. Non set up a bamboo cart stocked

with rice, vegetables, milk, vitamins, face masks, canned goods, soap and other essentials that are needful in times of such crisis. Thus, began the first Community Pantry that snowballed into a phenomenon that was replicated in all parts of the country with its compelling plea to ‘Give what you can, get what you need’.

Social media platforms captured Non’s model and soon community pantries mushroomed in numerous areas across the country. About a week after, *CNN Philippines* reporter Juli Suazo (2021) featured what the community pantry movement meant for Filipinos. Suazo’s interviews with different community groups are recounted below (italicized) with notable innovations and variations on the idea and model that Non introduced.

Within 24 hours, Non’s post had gone viral across all social media platforms and hundreds of Filipinos were requesting for more information on how they could help further this initiative. She marked the first day of the Maginhawa Community Pantry through a public Facebook post. From six in the morning to six in the evening, this community pantry was stationed in front of a convenience store accessible to residents located in Krus na Ligas, UP Village, San Vicente, Teacher’s Village, Sikatuna and Bliss, who came to take freely much-needed supplies while bringing and sharing with others whatever they could. A few hours later, she received cash donations from her friends and family which she used to purchase bundles of vegetables that replenished her cart.

To those outside the boundaries of Maginhawa Street, where the movement started, Non encouraged like-minded volunteers to start their own community pantries. Local newspapers were quick to pick up the story and, not long after, Non’s model was replicated with as many versions and modifications as there were communities and civic affiliations. In less than a week, community pantries were formed each day, nationwide. Non’s model had its quantum leap of support when through social media online instructions and step-by-step processes were disseminated on how individuals could locally organize in their own areas and partake in this movement. It likewise attracted monetary, moral and information support from those who could not directly participate from both local and international audiences. Thus, what Non believed was a necessary humanly act

of help just to tide over one meal at a time cascaded into a social action that spanned and solidified a nation in deep need to survive.

In Sampaloc, Manila, Toots Vergara and his wife Ana adopted Non's pantry model. Riddled with doubt in the early stages of planning, they were worried about not having enough resources to sustain the community pantry. Merely a few hours after they were approached by a cohort of community members in P. Noval wanting to support what they had started. 'We realized people were just waiting for a venue where they can help, however much they can,' he said.

Situated in front of Casa Labada, the Marikina Community Pantry set up by Mara de Guzman, an executive director at an NGO, hoped that street sweepers and tricycle and jeepney drivers receive as much support as they can. 'We wanted to empower struggling Filipinos because they are a huge help to make this community a better place.' She likened this movement to a big step towards a stronger Philippines where we demonstrate humanity, hospitality and Buddhist charity works.

Social entrepreneurs augmented this initiative and brought it to a new level by working with farmer organizations to buy the farmers' surplus vegetables and redistribute them directly to consumers through what they called the Farmers Outlet through the Community Pantry. The Farmer's Outlet gave out free sweet potatoes and other vegetables that they purchased directly from the farmers strained by the pandemic.

In the district of Merville, Paranaque, my own community of 10,000 residents picked up the initiative by similarly buying supplies for donation to the Community Pantry from within our village sellers who saw livelihood opportunities in supplying food and basic supplies door-to-door due to lockdown restrictions. We were hitting two birds with one stone by helping our micro-entrepreneurs with their home-grown livelihood initiatives while feeding our own poor in the surrounding areas. The Merville Community Pantry received donations weekly while rotating food distribution to different areas of the community every Tuesday and Saturday. In time, the volume of supplies became greater as contributions from virtual friends here and abroad poured in. Likewise, funds for birthday celebrations and other life's milestones were also redirected to this food distribution project.

Suazo's *CNN Philippines* article (2021) elucidated Non's idea behind the community pantry where people could take freely what is needed while sharing or donating whatever they can: rice, canned goods, fresh vegetables, eggs, masks, alcohol, sometimes fresh meat and fish. The young Filipina who started the movement strongly argued against the glamourized narrative that the community pantry movement represents Filipino resiliency, but rather as evidence of response and unity born out of necessity.

The same article, however, added that the concept behind community pantries is not new. It cited how US universities developed food pantries to provide assistance to students in crippling debt back in 2013 while Thailand's Too Pan Sook (Pantries of Sharing) also emerged late in 2020. However, Filipinos have unequivocally instituted a movement that's entirely their own. From affected restaurant owners in *Maginhawa* to farmers in the province of Tarlac, Non continued to be surprised by the ones who were taking action and participating in the initiative that she started. 'For as long as there are Filipinos willing to share the resources to sustain it, the community pantry is here to help those in need', she quipped.

Super typhoon 'Odette' (known as Super Typhoon Rai outside the Philippines), December 2021

Amidst the twin problem of hunger and unemployment, towards the end of 2021 the Philippines found itself grappling again with the mercilessness and devastation of climate change disasters and calamities. Typhoon Odette was the black swan that punctuated the Philippine pandemic. It was measured as the second-worst natural disaster for 2021. Happening just before Christmas made it even more painful for Filipinos. More than 400 died, and more than 500,000 homes were damaged with one third completely destroyed. Infrastructure and crops were badly affected as well, both estimated at PHP30 billion.

National and local governments were caught unprepared, and as the typhoon was not anticipated early enough, it was particularly destructive. Again, as in practically all massive disasters, the response of civilians,

or the private sector, became a crucial factor in saving lives and helping victims. Among the many local and foreign organizations that rushed to bring relief to victims in disaster areas was Fo Guang Shan, the local order of Humanistic Buddhism in the Philippines.

Buddhist charity works: Fo Guang Shan (FGS) in the Philippines

In the minds of the Filipinos, the Buddhist presence in the Philippines is synonymous to charity works, especially during times of great calamities and disasters. FGS, together with another Buddhist institution, the Tzu Chi Foundation, have been known for their relief and rehabilitation efforts, particularly in the disaster-prone provinces of the Southern Philippines.



Figure 17.1. Local FGS nuns traversing rivers and mountains to reach out to typhoon victims. Reproduced with permission from Fo Guang Shan.



Figure 17.2. Local FGS Abbess Venerable Miao Jing heading relief operations in the Visayas. Reproduced with permission from Fo Guang Shan.

Adaptability to local culture and its strong orientation towards community building and social action has allowed the almost seamless assimilation of Buddhist culture among the locals. The majority of Christians whose Catholic value upholds preferential option for the poor (the least, the last and the lost) finds resonance in the cultivation of the highest possibility of being in Buddhist practice and philosophy – the Bodhisattva ideal of relinquishing self in order to serve and liberate the collective. To the level of everyday community life, this is akin to the Filipino’s *bayanihan* spirit of serving and promoting the common good.

Convergences in the Buddhist cultivation of compassion and the Christian love of neighbour have historically been recorded to have influenced each other in earlier times. The reformation of traditional Chinese Buddhism by Master Taixu into what is now known worldwide as Humanistic Buddhism, reportedly took inspiration from the strong social orientation of early Christian missionaries (Jesuits and Protestants) in China whose adaptation to local culture enabled the spread of Christianity in the mainland. In the Philippines, a related practice has probably occurred. The Jesuits, among the various religious orders in the Philippines, appear to

the present day to have the closest affinity to Buddhist practice and philosophy as evidenced in its own practice and body of religious literature.

Master Taixu's initial efforts and projects to reform Buddhism as a religion 'for the living', rather than a 'religion for the dead', was brought to a new level of dynamism when the baton was passed on to Venerable Master Hsing Yun, who left China for Taiwan where he founded the Fo Guang Shan – the biggest order of Humanistic Buddhism today that comprises more than 200 temples and several thousands of devotees across countries in five continents of the world and beyond.

This is not to say, however, that ancient Buddhism is bereft of its own social action and charity works. In his book, *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Intents of the Buddha*, Hsing Yun states that 'Buddhist charity works began from as early as Buddha's time ... disciples built public bathrooms, called on the sick, and provided free medicine' (2016: 294). Sudatta the Elder, King Bimbisara, and Visakha were considered forerunners of Buddhist charity as they 'donated housing and viharas', while King Asoka held open banquets to feed the famished, built pharmacies, and welfare houses to provide supplies such as medicine and food to travellers and the sick and the destitute' (Hsing Yun 2016: 294). Their compassion and spirit of service exemplify the path for those who lead.

Back in ancient India, Buddhist teachings encouraged followers to dig wells and plant trees along the roadside in order to provide drinking water and rest areas under the trees for wandering monks and pilgrims (Dhammika 2020). All combined, Buddhist training lends itself to taking care of others to benefit the whole as part of the journey towards individual and collective liberation.

The role and goal of the Bodhisattva

In the Mahāyāna tradition, compassion as a way of being and dealing with the world arises from the belief that each one possesses the Buddha-Nature and, hence, everyone can equally become a Buddha. Serving the whole as the primary aim of the bodhisattva presupposes the inextricably

linked relationships and interdependence of causes and conditions that affect one much as it does the collective. Mahayanist teachings suggest that ‘dharma can only be found in the world’ (Master Huening, as cited in Hsing Yun 2016: 252), and enlightenment cannot be attained away from it. The role of the bodhisattva is to defer his own nirvana in order to serve the cause of collective advancement towards liberation and enlightenment (Shi 2020). In the same spirit, the project taps individual participation to powerfully drive a collective action towards the alleviation of human suffering in trying times.

Fo Guang Shan’s ‘Three acts of goodness and four givings’

The role and presence of Fo Guang Shan in the Philippines, however, is not limited to relief operations but also in its continuous efforts to spread and cultivate goodness among various communities of learners and their families countrywide, through its growing advocacy of the ‘Three Acts of Goodness’ (TAG) in the Philippine educational system. The project is recognized and endorsed by the Department of Education as a way of enhancing values education among the youth. TAG chapters in various schools all over the country would initiate projects related to urgent community concerns, such as mask-making, information campaigns, and food distribution at the height of Covid-19. Other projects provided facilities to promote cleanliness and hygiene among learners, like installing faucets with running water in strategic areas so children develop the habit of washing hands regularly. On the side of character formation, nationwide seminar workshops on Mindfulness Practice were conducted by the FGS Mabuhay Temple for all TAG coordinators and teachers, as well as education leaders (principals and superintendents) of various school divisions. I was given the opportunity to serve this project by way of designing and facilitating such workshops using the materials and knowledge I learned from my courses at Nan Tien Institute.

On the institutional level, FGS similarly operates Guang Ming College in Manila and Guang Ming Institute in Cebu, south of the Philippines.

Both tertiary institutions offer college degrees in the Performing Arts, Film and Theatre Production, as well as a bachelor's degree in Buddhist Studies. These institutions offer full scholarships for poor but deserving Filipino students.

Though there are many faces of Buddhism, the core doctrines of mind purification and character development are common to all. These values are translated by Hsing Yun to what modern Humanistic Buddhism is known for in various parts of the world, 'the Three acts of Goodness' – do good deeds, speak good words, think good thoughts, and the 'four Givings' – give joy, give hope, give confidence, and give convenience' (2016: 310–13). Humanistic Buddhism, thus, becomes truly alive, relevant and applicable in its various humanitarian projects where, through formal education or civic engagement, ethical and productive living fuelled by compassion and altruistic intentions become the norm for both individual and the collective.

Conclusion

The Philippine experience of the pandemic and its dire effects on the economy and people's lives highlights the abundance of spirit in the midst of *dukkha* (suffering). Given the scale and enormity of this third-world human problem, what comes to mind is the ancient, oft-told story in the Jataka Tales of one of the Buddha's past lives as a parrot that tried to put out a fire by filling its beak with water, one douse, one beak at a time. The action, while it appears insufficient and even futile, calls attention to the quality of mind that drives such action: compassion. The cultivation of compassion underscores all Buddhist thought and practice; however, it is equally a universal value embraced by all cultures. In the Philippines, it finds resonance in the *bayanihan* spirit that makes Filipinos stand tall in the face of adversity. Where those who have the ability to give and help are brought by the same fear and adversity to embrace the weak, the helpless and the broken-hearted that all may heal and become whole. It is a virtue borne out of man's interconnectedness and interdependence

with all forms of life. It renders its fullest service and purpose without counting the cost, no matter the outcome.

As in the case of the Jataka Tale's 'parrot' that gave its all in dousing a big fire with its small beak, intention is key to any meaningful action, no matter how big or small. In the context of massive economic, ecological and societal problems in the Philippines, individual efforts could similarly appear small and insignificant, but joined together they become a unifying spirit that can save a nation and its people. With technology, the collective force of a community becomes the embodied global bodhisattva with a thousand arms that listen and reach out to provide a safe refuge for its people where trust, loving kindness and compassion dwell. But the thousand arms are now multi-coloured as global mankind awakens to its intrinsic nature that the whole can survive only if it heals and breathes as one.

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Notes on Contributors

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UNCLE GAVIN ANDREWS is a D'harawal Elder directly connected to Nattaimattagal Country and is a direct descendant of Bundle (c. 1770s–1845). Born and raised in the Hunter Region, New South Wales, he returned to his home Country in his late teenage years and has since developed extensive experience within Aboriginal Affairs (e.g., senior leadership positions in the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council, NSW State Aboriginal Land Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service).

AUNTY FRANCES BODKIN is a D'harawal Elder directly connected to Bidigal Country through her mother Elvie Peery and grandfather Albert Perry and is a direct descendant from Cannabayagal's birthing family. She has extensive lived experiences of learning from, and teaching of, Country, and has deep Ancestral D'harawal Knowledges that have been passed onto her since she was a child (particularly along the Georges River). She has extensive D'harawal Knowledges focussing on native plant medicines, climate cycles, and sustainable land management practices.

GAWAIAN BODKIN-ANDREWS is a proud D'harawal man born in Sydney and is directly connected to Bidigal (Bitter-Water) and Nattaimattagal (Fresh-Water) Country. He is also the Director of Indigenous Research at Western Sydney University, where his work focuses on Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Research Methodologies, Indigenous Storywork,

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BRONWYN CARLSON is an Aboriginal woman who was born and lives on Dharawal Country in NSW Australia. She is the Head of the Department of Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University and the Director of the Centre for Global Indigenous Futures. She is the founding and managing editor of the *Journal of Global Indigeneity* and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Bronwyn is co-author of *Monumental Disruptions: Colonial Commemorations and Aboriginal Australians* and co-editor of *The Palgrave Handbook on Rethinking Colonial Commemorations*, both to be published in 2022.

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UNCLE ROSS EVANS is a D'harawal Elder born in Paddington, Sydney. His grandmother was separated from her family as a young child, being forced to become one of the Stolen Generations. He has worked within many Aboriginal positions involving significant community liaison responsibilities, including for the Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council and the NSW Police.

GRACE EWART (she/her) is a community organizer and climate justice advocate. Since engaging in youth climate activism during her bachelor's degree, Grace has dedicated her time to train, coach, and mentor people of all demographics to collectively organize and empower themselves to take

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LEN FISHER is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the School of Physics at the University of Bristol and holds an MA with distinction in philosophy from that institution. A prize-winning author and broadcaster, he now works with institutions that include Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute, the Swiss-based International Risk Governance Council, the Helmholtz Institute for Functional Marine Biodiversity in Germany, the Complexity Centre at Binghamton University, New York, the Nan Tien Institute, and the University of Wollongong to bring science and philosophy together as tools to understand and find more effective ways to cope with global catastrophic risks.

UNCLE JOHN FOSTER is a recognized and respected D'harawal Elder, artist and storyteller. Throughout his career as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, John made significant impacts in the areas of Aboriginal employment, disabilities and health policy earning him the nomination of NAIDOC Elder of the Year in 2010. Before retiring, John's work culminated in his address to the United Nations on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia with disabilities.

SHANNON FOSTER is a D'harawal Saltwater Knowledge Keeper and an ORALRA recognized Traditional Owner in the Sydney Basin. Shannon is currently completing her doctoral thesis at the Centre for the Advancement of Indigenous Knowledges at University of Technology Sydney (UTS) where she is also lecturing in a Masters of Design Studio for the School of Architecture. Shannon's doctoral research investigates the Narinya, or Living Dreaming of the D'harawal peoples of the

Sydney region with an emphasis on Indigenous Research Methodologies including Yarning and Storywork.

JADE FOSTER-GUADALUPE is a D'harawal Saltwater woman, artist and an emerging Knowledge Keeper for her family. Jade was the proud recipient of the 2020 Eliza Clarke Award for her outstanding work with D'harawal Knowledges and Storywork. Currently, Jade is a Research Assistant and artist working in the Connecting with Country co-design space across multiple industries.

SUZANNE FRANZWAY is Emeritus Professor at the UniSA and Adjunct Professor at the Nan Tien Institute NSW. Her research expertise in Sociology and Gender Studies includes feminist theory, social activism, labour movements, workplace cultures, the state and domestic violence. She has served on boards and women's community organizations; she was president of Sakyadhita, Australia (Daughters of the Buddha) (2016–19), and a founding member of the UNESCO Women's Studies and Gender Studies Research Network, and serves on the boards of the NGOs, the Working Women's Centre, SA, and the Tuwhiri Project. Suzanne has published widely: her books include *Sexual Politics of Gendered Violence and Women's Citizenship* (2018), *Challenging Knowledge, Sex and Power: Gender, Work and Engineering* (2013), *Sexual Politics and Greedy Institutions* (Pluto Press, 2001) and *Staking a Claim: Feminism, Bureaucracy and the State* (Allen & Unwin, 1989).

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STEPHEN HILL is Emeritus Professor at the University of Wollongong. He has had a career that covers multiple disciplines supporting an overall

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LINDA HUMPHREYS is a Lecturer in Medical Education at Griffith University School of Medicine and Dentistry. Her key role is in supporting student clinical communication skills development in the Doctor of Medicine Degree. She is also the Reflective Practice and Portfolio Lead for the school and supports the integration of contemplative activities in the curriculum as generative learning opportunities to establish habits of life-long learning. She shines a specific focus on affective reflection to help students make sense of their values and beliefs during their learning and develop the human capabilities required to navigate the complex human interactions in health care.

JADE HUTCHINSON is a Cotutelle PhD Candidate in the Department of Security Studies and Criminology at Macquarie University in Australia and the Research Centre for Media and Journalism Studies at Groningen University in The Netherlands. Jade's research is focused on understanding far-right violent extremism in the context of an 'online ecosystem' and in what ways social media platforms and websites shape far-right extremist disposition and engagement in terrorism. He currently holds a position as a Visiting Fellow and Guest Lecturer at The Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University in The Netherlands.

JO KINNIBURGH is a Wugulora/non-D'harawal participant in the D'harawal Traditional Descendants and Knowledge Holders Circle, and a descendant of Karyouakou enslaved peoples. She has worked in

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LINUS LANCASTER is a conceptual artist, and arts educator in Northern California. He has an MA in philosophy and art practice from Sonoma State University, and a PhD in art practice and soil ecology from Plymouth University (UK). He has taught visual arts in the Healdsburg School District since 2002 and has also taught for the Prison University Project at San Quentin. His current projects are focused on ecological and cultural issues on the US/Mexico Border, working in collaboration with students at Healdsburg High School. He is also on the Healdsburg Center for the Arts board of directors.

NADINE LEVY holds a PhD in sociology and Honours degrees in both law and gender studies. Her research investigates women's lived experience across a range of social sites, including health, therapeutic landscapes and spiritual movements. Her PhD examined the themes of belonging, emotions and social connection in the context of Intentional Communities in late modern society. Nadine is a committed Buddhist practitioner and is currently completing teacher training in the Insight meditation tradition. As such, she has a particular interest in Buddhist sociology / a sociology of Buddhism and the ways these two paradigms can enliven each another.

JONATHAN MAIR is a Social Anthropologist, currently visiting researcher at Complutense University, Madrid, and he has taught at the universities of Cambridge, Manchester and Kent. His interests lie in intercultural ethics and he has been doing research on Fo Guang Shan since 2010.

CECILIA B. MANIKAN specializes in Transformational Leadership and is known for her signature course in Whole-Brain Self-Mastery at the Asian

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TINA NG is the Founder and President of the Metta Centre (Australia) and also the Principal Solicitor of Metta Legal, a law firm that deals with cases relating to family law, child protection, property, civil litigation and guardianship matters. She is an accredited mediator at Metta Resolution, which provides mediation, training and coaching to resolve conflict in the community and within families. Tina has a keen interest in supporting the youth and has run various mentoring programmes through her business and social projects. She has shared the Buddha's teachings in conferences, talks, workshops, and in her writings.

JONATHAN PAGE graduated in Medicine (Hons) in 1976, from the University of Sydney, followed by training in Medical Oncology. In the 1980s, he began a long-term interest in the nascent field of Palliative Care where suffering could be ameliorated to a considerable extent by Buddhist practices. He has been able to visit Buddhist sites in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, encountering recent or active warfare not infrequently. Finally, he has enjoyed an educational role in the broader Buddhist community for 20 years, more recently with the Nan Tien Institute, Australia.

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BEE SCHERER is chair of Buddhist Studies at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam (Netherlands) and the rector of the Dutch Buddhist Seminary that oversees the national Buddhist chaplaincy training programme. Before that Bee was Chair of Religious Studies and Gender Studies at Canterbury CCU, in the U.K. Having practised Tibetan Buddhism for decades, Bee has been leading retreats and teachings around the world for more than fifteen years as a recognized dharma teacher. Trained in the classical Buddhist languages and thought systems, they have published on a wide range of topics in Buddhist Studies including Early Buddhist literature, Mahāyāna Philosophy, Contemporary Thai Buddhism, Global Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism and Engaged Buddhist Thought.

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JANE WANG is a PhD candidate in religious studies at McMaster University where she is currently researching gender-based violence and Buddhism. Before embarking on her current path, Jane worked as a policy analyst in both Canadian and Australian governments. Her research interests build upon her professional experience in family violence policy and Indigenous issues, and her academic interests in social work and Buddhist studies. Jane also holds a Master of Arts in Applied Buddhist Studies from Nan Tien Institute, a Master of Social Work from the University of Toronto, and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from Queen's University at Kingston.

ASHERAH WEISS is an artist-educator, believing that creativity is a birth right. She works with all ages, especially 'non-artists', using traditional and non-traditional art, movement, and theatre. She co-founded many places that sought to foster meaningful culture, including the PLACE

for Sustainable Living in Oakland and womb space collaborative arts in Santa Rosa, CA. The arts, she believes, can make things more collaborative, just, beautiful and meaningful. Her latest collaboration is the Peptoc Project, a hotline and series of posters created by young people which went viral around the world.

Glossary

A *bbikṣu* (S) / *bbikkhu* (P) is a religious mendicant who is dependent on alms for a living; he has left home and has been fully ordained. While a *bbikkhu* or *bbikṣu* is a monk, a *bbikṣuṇī* (S) / *bbikkhunī* (P) is a nun. They are often referred to as monastics. For monastics, material belongings should be few, while the possession of Dharma should be abundant.

Bodhicitta (S) is the enlightened mind or one that seeks enlightenment. The bodhicitta is awakened to the true nature of things, including the self. A person who possesses the bodhicitta pursues Buddhahood in order to benefit others. This is because bodhicitta springs from deep compassion for the suffering of others.

A *bodhisattva* (S) / *bodhisatta* (P) is generally a being (*sattva* or *satta*) pursuing enlightenment (*bodhi*) to become a Buddha. In non-Mahāyāna traditions, bodhisatta refers to the previous lives of Siddhartha Gautama. In Mahāyāna traditions, a bodhisattva is the ideal practitioner who strives for enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Bodhisattvas delay entering Buddhahood and prefer to alleviate the suffering of other living beings. Bodhisattvas seek complete and perfect awakening through wisdom and compassion. Today, the term ‘bodhisattva’ denotes one with the vow and intent to benefit others.

Chan in Chinese is derived from *dhyāna* (meditation) in Sanskrit. This school of Buddhism stresses the cultivation of intuitive wisdom that relies on meditative concentration for the path to liberation. It is an extremely influential Buddhist school in East Asia, having been known as *Thiền* in Vietnam, *Seon* in Korea and *Zen* in Japan.

Fo Guang Shan is an international Buddhist monastic order founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. It was established in 1967 in Kaohsiung, Taiwan and has since grown to include over 200 temples in five continents, with over 1,000 ordained disciples. Associated with Fo Guang Shan is the Buddha’s Light International Association, founded in 1992 in

California, USA. Both Fo Guang Shan and Buddha's Light International Association promote the principles of Humanistic Buddhism.

Guanyin / Guan Yin / Kuanyin / Kuan Yin is the Chinese translation of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva who embodies compassion. The name literally means 'Perceiver of the Sounds (of the World)'. Guanyin is variously known as Kannon or Kanzeon in Japanese, Kwans'eum in Korean, and Quanam in Vietnamese. In Tibet he is known as (sphyan-ras-gzigs, 'One Who Sees with Eyes'). This bodhisattva is known as Chenresi ('one who sees the eyes') in Tibet, Lokeśvara (lord of the world) in Cambodia and Java, and; Lokanātha (protector of the world) in Burma, and Nātha Dēviyō in Sri Lanka.

Karuṇā is a Sanskrit term that is commonly translated to mean compassion. It is defined as a wish for others to be free of suffering. It is distinguished from *maitrī* (S) / *mettā* (P) which is the wish that others be happy. Mahāyāna Buddhist leaders, past and present, have asserted that compassion is integral to the practice of Buddhism. The bodhisattva seeks to develop *bodhicitta* and *upāya* (skill-in-means) that enables one to act for the benefit of others. Together with *prajña* (wisdom), compassion is one of the two indispensable qualities to be cultivated on the path to Buddhahood.

Lojong (T) literally means 'mind training', associated with the Kadampa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, based on the teachings of Atisha (an Indian monk who went to Tibet in the eleventh century). *Lojong* is a practice based on the technique of exchanging self and other, as set forth in the eighth chapter (on meditative concentration) of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*. The practice transforms a self-cherishing attitude into concern for others by contemplating the illusory nature of the self and the benefits that flow from cherishing others. The practice also transforms adverse situations into reasons for strengthening resolve to benefit others. The purpose of this practice is to cultivate compassion and the bodhicitta.

Mahāyāna, which literally means the 'Great Vehicle' to enlightenment, is a Buddhist tradition that is characterized by a commitment to the bodhisattva path. The Mahāyāna movement arose within Indian Buddhism

around the beginning of the Common Era and became dominant in Central and East Asia after the ninth century. One of the biggest contributions of Mahāyāna Buddhism is making the concept of compassion central to its teachings.

Māra, literally meaning ‘death’, embodies the ‘death’ of the skilful spiritual life. He is the personification of greed, hatred, delusion, evil, and temptation. Māra is an active adversary of the Buddha and attempts to stop the Buddha and his followers from attaining enlightenment. He does so by promoting grasping (*trṣṇā*) that leads to further rebirth and suffering. Buddhists are reminded that such demonic forces can be tamed by controlling one’s mind against cravings and attachments.

Maitrī (S) / **mettā** (P) is often translated as ‘loving kindness’ or ‘kindness’. It is the gentle and friendly wish that others be well and do what needs to be done to find such wellbeing. In the *Mettā Sutta*, the Buddha instructs his monks to meditate on loving kindness for all living beings to be safe and happy. In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa recommends a practice of *mettā* that begins with wishing for happiness for oneself, and then extends that wish to others. In other contexts, *maitrī* is one of the factors that motivates the bodhisattva to save all beings from suffering.

Nirvāṇa (S) / **nibbāna** (P) refers to freedom from suffering and rebirth. The Sanskrit term signifies ‘blowing (at something) to put it out’. ‘Blowing out’ means relieving and calming, not annihilation of being. For the most part, *nirvāṇa* emphasizes the cooling down of craving, aversion, and unawareness. It represents freedom from the turmoil and raging fires of human existence and experience. It also represents liberation of the mind, from the fire generated by ideas of self and possession. *Nirvāṇa* is the ineffable state of the liberated Buddha.

Pure Land is an English term with no direct equivalent in Sanskrit. It is used to translate the Chinese *jingtu*. The term is used to represent a Buddha-field purified of transgressions and suffering and hence, considered an ideal place in which to be reborn. The Mahāyāna cosmology consists of numerous Pure Lands, each presided over by a Buddha and is an alternative to the impure Sahā world in which we live. Pure Land

Buddhists who believe in the power of the Amitabha Buddha recite the name of the Buddha faithfully to get rebirth with the aid of the Buddha's compassion.

Saṃsāra, literally meaning 'wandering', refers to the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It is a process that arises from ignorance and is characterized by physical and mental *duḥkha* (suffering). This ongoing series of lives is determined by the moral quality of an individual's karma. It is generally postulated that the effects of wholesome moral actions will lead to good rebirths, while unwholesome moral actions will lead to undesirable rebirth destinations. Liberation from this cycle altogether is known as *nirvāṇa* (S) / *nibbāna* (P) and is achieved only by those who gain the right insight and realization of the truth of the Buddha's teachings.

Tonglen / gtong len (T) is a well-known mind training practice of 'giving and taking'. It is often used to develop the Bodhicitta. In this meditative practice, the practitioner inhales and imagines taking others' suffering and their causes into themselves. As they exhale, the meditator imagines all their happiness and merit going out to other sentient beings. This practice is set forth in the eighth chapter (on meditative concentration) of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*.

Abbreviations

P – Pāli

S – Sanskrit

T – Tibetan

Index

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 182, 301
- addiction 15, 111, 259, 267
- affective reflection 8, 224–226, 229, 303
- Ahina Sutta* 60
- altruism 129, 131, 132, 137, 141, 177, 212
- Anthropology 8, 236–238, 241, 242, 247, 248, 250
- anthropomorphize 253
- anxiety 59, 155, 251, 252, 255, 258
- Appin Massacre 7, 181–183, 188, 189, 191, 193, 198, 200
- Art 8, 40, 131, 173, 229, 251–255, 259, 263, 265, 304, 307
- Attention economy 101, 116
- Avalokiteśvara (觀世音Guanshiyin) 153
- awakening 5, 60, 62, 128, 130–134, 137, 176, 178, 284, 309
- bayan, bayani, bayanihan 283, 284, 292, 295
- Bhikṣu / Bhikkhu 309
- Bodhisattva 3, 6, 7, 60, 62, 69, 130–132, 135, 136, 144, 145, 153, 164, 167, 171, 172, 176–179, 223, 235, 236, 292–294, 296, 309–311
- Bodhicharyavatara 176
- Bodhicitta 59, 68, 88, 144, 175–179, 284, 309, 310, 312
- Bodhicaryāvātāra 145, 310, 312
- bodhisattva 3, 6, 7, 60, 62, 69, 130–132, 135, 136, 144, 145, 153, 164, 167, 171, 176–179, 223, 235, 236, 292–294, 296, 309–311
- Buddha-nature 173, 176, 178, 222, 280, 293
- Buddhism 1–4, 6, 8, 13, 15, 16, 23, 29, 32, 37, 41, 54, 59, 61–63, 70, 75, 82, 84–86, 88, 91, 102, 112, 113, 115, 117, 128, 131–136, 141, 144–148, 151, 152, 154, 157, 158, 164, 165, 169, 172, 176, 211, 215, 221–223, 227–231, 235–240, 242, 243, 245–250, 253, 265, 267, 268, 280, 284, 285, 291–293, 295, 304, 306, 307, 309–311
- Cakkavattasihanada Sutta 62
- capitalism 31, 90, 102, 107, 108, 111, 252
- Chan 8, 132, 133, 145, 146, 224, 227, 235, 239, 300, 309
- Chao-Hwei 152
- Cheng Yen 2, 146
- Circle of Wholeness 41
- Circular economy 32, 168
- Climate change 2, 5, 7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 30, 51, 59, 62–64, 66, 68, 70, 71, 81, 86, 135, 157, 161, 162, 168, 172, 210, 283, 290, 301
- CNN Philippines Reporter 288
- cognition 16, 23, 38, 48, 68, 158, 224, 256
- commodification 101, 148, 209
- communication 8, 33, 109, 110, 115, 224–227, 240, 255, 277, 278, 300, 303
- Communities of Practice 23, 24
- community healing 92, 95
- Community 1, 4–6, 8, 17, 23, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37–41, 63, 82–84, 87, 90–95,

- 110, 142, 154, 157, 160, 162, 163,
167, 169, 182, 199, 210, 217, 222,
223, 230, 231, 248, 283, 287–290,
292, 294, 296, 300, 302, 305–307
- Compassion 1–9, 23, 30, 34, 40–42, 47–
49, 53, 59–61, 63, 69, 71, 74, 75,
82, 85–96, 101, 102, 113, 115, 123,
125–137, 141–143, 149, 150, 152,
157–160, 162–164, 166–169, 171,
173, 176–178, 183, 209, 211–218,
223, 225, 227–231, 235, 236, 240,
247, 248, 251, 253, 254, 258–260,
265, 267, 268, 271, 273, 274, 280,
284, 292, 293, 295, 296, 301,
309–311
- Compassionate pedagogy 209, 211–218
- Consciousness 7, 16, 17, 19, 21, 101, 125,
128–130, 158, 171–174, 176,
177, 179
- Contemplative pedagogy 224, 231, 300
- Covid-19 1, 2, 5, 9, 14, 29, 32, 34–36, 39,
81, 110, 157, 160, 162, 166, 182, 210,
221, 252, 284, 285, 294, 301
- Creativity 9, 38–40, 74, 224, 252, 307
- Critical mass 54, 55
- culture 3, 4, 37, 38, 59, 75, 83, 104, 173–
175, 179, 225, 238, 242, 243, 258,
278, 284, 286, 292, 307
- D'harawal Traditional Descendants and
Knowledge Holders Circle 181,
183, 185, 187, 303
- Dadirri 174
- Dasābhūmika* 145
- deep adaptation 74
- Deep listening 152, 174, 277, 278
- degrowth 69, 70
- Delusion 14, 16, 18, 21, 166, 177, 272, 311
- Dependent co-origination / Dependent
Co-arising 15–17, 19, 20, 22, 24
- Depression 31, 74, 111, 251, 252, 259, 262
- Dharawal peoples 190
- Dharma 3, 61–63, 82, 85, 91, 92, 95, 128,
130, 131, 141, 143, 146–148, 150,
151, 153–155, 169, 227, 240, 250,
272, 275, 280, 294, 300, 306, 309
- Dharma Drum (Fagu Shan) 146
- Dharmology 152, 155
- Disability 6, 149, 150, 152, 153
- Diversity 4, 141, 147, 149, 150, 153, 155,
183, 188, 241, 248
- dukkha (suffering) 148, 150, 283, 284, 295
- Durkheim, Émile 238
- Ecodharma 61, 63, 169
- Ecology 60–62, 103, 168, 304
- Emotional intelligence 215, 252
- Empathy 1, 9, 31, 71, 115, 125, 126, 136, 211,
223, 251, 253, 254, 258, 265
- Engaged Buddhism [include Socially
Engaged Buddhism] 85, 86,
146, 169
- Enlightenment (bodhi) [include:
awakening] – Enlightenment,
mind i. focused on;
2cultivated towards (bodhicitta) 85,
132, 144, 175, 178, 222, 242, 244,
272, 294, 309–311
- Equity 59, 74, 160, 161, 172, 213
- Ethics 68, 85, 87, 88, 91, 95, 152, 157, 164,
166, 167, 223, 304, 307
- Ethnography 141, 247, 249
- Evolution 55, 102–104, 184
- First Nations 7, 161, 171–173, 183–185
- Fo Guang Shan 1, 41, 146, 222, 236, 239,
240, 242, 243, 245, 247, 250,
291–294, 304, 309, 310
- gender 6, 18, 81, 82, 84, 94, 147–149, 153,
154, 302, 304, 306, 307
- Genocide 181, 197

- Global 3–6, 24, 29–31, 34, 35, 37, 41, 49, 51, 55, 59, 60, 62, 64, 65, 67, 69, 71, 74, 81, 86, 110, 117, 125, 127–129, 135, 141, 146, 147, 161, 210, 223, 230, 239, 251, 252, 284, 296, 300, 301, 303, 306
- Globalization 61, 70, 85
- Goreng Goreng, Tjanara 173–175
- Greed 14, 18, 21, 23, 39, 47, 62, 165–167, 188, 191, 272, 302, 311
- Guanyin / Guan Yin / Kuanyin / Kuan Yin 310
- Harmony 7, 39, 41, 59, 61, 154, 171, 174, 178
- Hatred 14, 18, 21, 23, 165, 166, 272, 311
- Hermeneutics 6, 84, 85, 147, 150–152
- Higher education 209, 211–215, 218, 224
- Hsing Yun (Venerable Master) 2, 15, 20–22, 41, 48, 85, 117, 146, 154, 222, 227, 235, 236, 239, 240, 242, 293–295, 309
- Huayan 154
- Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教 renjianfojiao 人生佛教 renshengfojiao) [include: Human World Buddhism; Human Life Buddhism] 1–4, 6, 8, 13, 15, 23, 29, 37, 41, 59, 84–86, 102, 112, 113, 115, 117, 141, 145, 146, 158, 169, 215, 221–223, 227–231, 235–240, 242, 243, 245–248, 250, 253, 265, 267, 268, 284, 285, 291–293, 295, 306, 310
- Humanity Revolution 39
- hunger problem 285, 287
- hunger rate 285, 286
- Impermanence 68, 70, 71, 89, 141, 229
- Indigenous Relatedness 183–186, 200, 201
- Indigenous Storytelling 185, 186
- Influencers 50, 52
- interbeing 19, 60, 154
- Interconnectedness 5, 18, 19, 21–23, 39, 49, 50, 73, 93, 149, 295
- Interdependence 4, 7, 61, 62, 85, 87, 165, 294, 295
- Interfusion 154
- Invisible Hand 31
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 13, 64
- Kanyini 174
- Karma 19, 82, 87, 148, 150, 152, 312
- Karuṇā 4, 5, 47, 49, 50, 52–55, 128, 130, 159, 310
- Kindness 2, 4, 5, 8, 13, 21–25, 40, 41, 47–49, 53, 74, 89, 141, 158, 177–179, 182, 213, 214, 216, 217, 223, 227, 254, 268, 278, 284, 296, 301, 311
- Kinship systems 174
- Lalitavistara 144
- Law 4, 8, 15, 16, 19, 24, 61, 65, 67, 102, 126, 160, 168, 173, 174, 179, 184, 187, 196, 202, 267, 268, 304, 305
- LGBTIQ+ [include queer] 147
- Liang Shu-Ming 245
- Liberation Theology 6, 150
- Local(isation) 4, 5, 9, 30, 32, 39–41, 127, 147, 151, 161, 162, 165, 182, 190, 199, 240, 243, 252, 283, 284, 286, 288, 290–292, 299, 300
- Lojong 68, 310
- Lovingkindness / kindness 2, 4, 5, 13, 21, 23–25, 41, 47–49, 74, 89, 141, 158, 223, 268, 296, 311
- Macquarie, Lachlan 195–199, 300, 303
- Macy, Joanna 60–62, 108, 114, 216, 217, 222
- Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra 143

- Mahāvastu 130, 131, 143
 Mahāyāna 3, 83, 86, 143, 144, 230, 293,
 300, 306, 309–311
 Maitrī / mettā 141, 310, 311
 Makarrata 173
 Māra 145, 153, 272, 289, 311
 Mātṛceṭa, Śatapañcāsatka 144
 Meditation 20, 69, 71, 73, 132–137, 154,
 168, 178, 215, 216, 242, 243, 246,
 268, 272, 304, 309
 Mental health 111–114, 159, 210, 215, 260,
 265, 267, 307
 Metta Sutta 60, 311
 MettāVerses 5, 13, 21, 23–25
 Mindfulness 8, 23, 73, 135, 136, 211, 215,
 216, 224–226, 228, 229, 243, 254,
 278, 294, 300
 Moral values 5, 49, 55, 242
 Mūlasarvāstivāda 142, 143
 Multipliers 252, 255, 259

 Nagarjuna (Nāgārjuna) 60, 179
 Neoliberalism 29, 31, 162, 167, 209
 Network 15, 18, 24, 47, 50–55, 103,
 106, 107, 109, 114, 115, 165, 168,
 237, 302
 Nirvāṇa / nibbāna 90, 128, 130, 294,
 311, 312
 No-Self 148, 149, 152, 153

 Orientalism 249
 Othering 143, 149, 150, 153, 154
 Over-consumption 30, 64

 paṇḍaka (gender-deficient) 149, 153
 Pedagogy 7, 209, 211–218, 224, 225, 231,
 250, 265, 300
 Poelina, Anna 172
 Pure Land 85, 86, 146, 227, 239, 311
 Pure Land in the Human World (人間淨
 土renjianjingtū) 146
 Psychology 83, 89, 106, 300, 302

 Queer Theory 6, 150, 153

 Race 37, 147, 152, 153
 Rebirth 131, 133, 137, 246, 311, 312
 restorative justice 93, 95
 Right speech 83, 87, 277, 278

 Sacred leadership 171, 174, 176
 Saṃsāra 16, 17, 19, 20, 141, 312
 Saṃyutta Nikāya (SN) and Saṃyukta
 Āgama (SĀ) 145
 Saṅghabhedavastu 143
 Sanpo-Yoshi or Triple Win
 Concept 38
 Śāntideva 145, 310, 312
 Secular 4, 49, 88, 92, 96, 125, 127, 133–135,
 137, 216, 227, 231
 Self-interest Economics 29
 Self-reflection 115, 151, 225, 253, 254,
 265, 271
 Sentient 16, 85–87, 126, 127, 129, 130, 135,
 144, 167, 212, 312
 sexual abuse 81, 83, 88
 Shengyan 146
 Silk Road 144
 Six perfections 227–229
 social ethics 88, 95
 social justice 6, 87, 88, 91, 147, 148
 Social Media 5, 33, 101, 102, 104–107,
 109–117, 166, 255, 264, 286, 288,
 303, 307
 Smith, Adam 30, 31, 37, 47, 48
 spiritual bypassing 148
 Spirituality 38, 41
 Storehouse consciousness 16, 21
 Structural issues 157
 Suffering 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 14, 16, 18, 19, 21,
 23, 48, 62, 63, 69, 71, 85–88, 90,
 91, 93, 95, 115, 125–129, 133–136,
 146–148, 153, 158, 159, 163, 164,
 166, 169, 177, 209–216, 218, 222,
 223, 228, 235, 247, 258, 259, 267,

- 268, 273, 274, 284, 285, 294, 295,
305, 309–312
- Superpowers 259
- Surveillance capitalism 102, 107, 108, 111
- Suttanipāta 144
- Taixu 2, 3, 85, 146, 292, 293
- The Book of Zambasta 142
- The Community Pantry movement 288,
290
- Theravāda 62, 142
- Thich Nhat Hahn 19, 60, 62, 85, 136,
146, 159
- Tjungunghu 174
- Tocharian 144
- Tonglen 69, 216, 312
- Transformation 5, 39–41, 47, 48, 54, 55,
68, 71, 74, 95, 147, 176, 213, 304
- Trauma 63, 73, 82, 88, 89, 92, 93, 148,
173, 189, 200, 225, 251–253, 257,
264, 267
- Tzu Chi (Ciji) 146, 291
- ubhatobhyañjanaka (both-sexed) 149
- Udana 143
- Uluru Statement from the Heart 172,
179
- Vinaya 142, 143, 151
- Weiji (Crisis) 5, 29, 39, 171
- Western Buddhism 84, 86
- Wholeness 13, 20, 21, 24, 41
- Wisdom 1, 7, 14, 21, 22, 33, 68, 69, 83, 88–
91, 93, 95, 133, 135, 149, 150, 157,
164–167, 171, 172, 174, 175, 178,
200, 211, 216, 229, 231, 235, 236,
280, 309, 310
- World Happiness Report 38
- Yin Shun 145
- Zhao Puchu 146, 154

