BUDDHIST PROCESS ETHICS : DISSOLVING
THE DILEMMAS OF SUBSTANTIALIST METAPHYSICS

In sharp juxtaposition to the multifarious doctrinal disputes over the teachings of the Buddha is the consensual portrayal of the Enlightened One as an ethical teacher of the first order; one who, having realized the Dharma, is "not interested in meta-physical truths *per se* but in the ethical transformation of man."[1] For the Western philosopher, confronted as he is by the remarkable degree of disagreement and disarray within his own ethical tradition, the fertile grounds of Buddhist philosophy would seem to be a land of opportunity and promise.[2] Yet in turning to Buddhism, one must avoid the imposition of one's own philosophical categories and assumption on the other tradition. One must first establish conceptual correlates. In other words, are we concerned with the same issues ?

I will argue that, while the Buddha is confronted by many of the same dilemmas which confound Western ethicists, his response arises from a radically different philosophical perspective than that of most of his Western counterparts. The doctrines of non-egoity (*anattā*), momentariness (*kṣaṇa-bhaṅga-vāda*) and conditioned origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*) challenge fundamental assumptions undergirding Western ethics.

Thus, the main task will be to articulate Buddhist ethics in terms of an immanent philosophy of process rather than a transcendental philosophy of substance or essence. To set the stage, however, I will in the first section provide a thumbnail sketch

of the substantialism and essentialism which underlies much of Western philosophy—as well as, I shall argue, the *Upaniṣad* tradition—and, in so doing, draw out some of its more important ethical implications. Next, I will demonstrate how the doctrines of non–egoity, momentariness and conditioned origination appear at first glance, at least when read through the tinted lenses of substantialist metaphysics, to undermine many central ethical notions. I will then in the main section show how process philosophy renders the objections raised by opponents of Buddhism—that it denies moral agency, effaces ethical autonomy and repudiates the dentity of the moral agent necessary for ethical responsibility—null and void. It is not that Buddism resolves such metaphysical conundrums as free will *versus* determinism, the identity or lack of identity of the ethical agent and so forth, but that they are non–starters within the Buddhist framework. They are not concerns for the Buddha—not because he is uniterested in these metaphysical issues *qua* metaphysics—but because for him stating the issues in such terms is simply wrong–headed; only faulty assumptions lurking behind a philosophy of static substances and permanent essences could give rise to these specious difficulties. Once one understands how the doctrines of non–egoity, momentariness and conditioned origination counter such a philosophy, these problems no longer arise; they are not solved, they dissolve.

A. The Bias of Transcendental Substantialism : its Ethical Implication

With some notable exceptions, Western philosophy has been founded on a metaphysics of substance rather than of process; it has emphasized being rather than becoming, things rather than events, permanent essences rather than transitory attributes.[3] Epistemologically, philosophy of this kind seeks the Truth—*episteme* rather than *pistis* or *doxa*; metaphysically, it is con-

cerned with Reality and correspondence to Reality whether understood rationally *a la* Plato, Kant and Russell or empirically as with Hobbes, Locke and Hume; ethically, it seeks Absolute Good rather than conditional good. The attempt has been to ground philosophy in some transcendental source of permanent being or absolute principle. [4] The individual is separated from the Forms, from God, from the Noumenal which represent ultimate value—be it Truth, the Good or the Real. Correlate to this bifurcation is the generation of dualisms : theory, whether the contemplative life of the elite Greeks or the disinterested rational reflection of Descartes, takes precedence over practice; the body is subordinated to the mind; the subject is juxtaposed to the object; science reigns over and against aesthetics; fact is cut off from value; " is " wants connection to " ought ".

With this cleaving of the subject from the object, of the person from the source of value, ethics in the West, since the Enlightenment, has come to be construed in terms of universal moral responsibility—the obligations and duties—and moral freedom—the universalizable rights—of moral agents. The attempt to ground one's ethical order in the secure and permanent founda- tions of absolute value has led many to the notion of an ahistori- cal, universal moral law. The quest has been, *a la* Kant, for overarching moral principles binding for every discrete moral agent. Moreover, it is generally argued that for ethics to get off the ground, these moral agents must be autonomous individuals. That is, moral responsibility (indeed any kind of responsibility) is contingent upon freedom; one is held morally culpable only for those actions for which he is able to exercise choice. To the extent that one's ability to choose is negated by coercion, by external factors beyond one's control, one is absolved from blame. [5] Even such an atrocious act as killing a baby is exempt from moral censure if it is the result of a defect in the steering

wheel such that the driver lost control over the vehicle and inadvertently crashed.

The Ethical Challenge : Do the Doctrines of Non-egoity, Conditioned Origination and Momentariness Undermine Ethics ?

The doctrine of *anattā*—nonself, soullessness, non–egoity— would seem to call into question one of the primary concerns of Western ethics—the moral agent. The question arises, 'Who is morally responsible ? Who is it that acts ?' As Sharma notes, it appears that Buddhism "admits action without agent, trans- migration without a transmigrating soul."[6] Similarly, the doctrine of conditioned origination, at first glance, appears to undercut the ethical requirement of autonomy. In that one's actions are all conditioned, one is not free to act as he chooses. One's actions are determined by, are dependent upon. arise from, the condi- tions. Given conditioned origination, it is not a matter of acting but reacting. Acting presupposes choice; reacting does not. If one is confronted by a stimulus and involuntarily moves, it is reac- tion. Reactions differ from actions in that one cannot be held responsible for one's reaction. Thus, the ethical question becomes not only 'who acts ?' but 'can one act ?'—at least can one act in a way that allows for moral responsibility ? Finally, the doctrine of, momentariness not only appears to frustrate the Western ethical project but would seem to subvert any ethical system. As Sharma alarmingly proclaim, "Momentariness is inconsistent with the ethical life and with spiritual experience ... The momentary idea which performs an action vanishes without reaping its fruit, and another momentary idea reaps the fruit of an action it never performed. The ethical theory of *Karma* is thrown overboard."[7] Ethical responsibility assumes the conti- nuity of the ethical agent.

It is important to note that the ethical concerns generated by these three doctrines are not entirely peculiar to Western ethics.

The same charges are levelled against the Buddhist sage Nāgasena by King Milinda who represents the orthodox Hindu system of the *Upaniṣads* :

" How is your reverence called ? What is your name ? "
" Your Majesty, I am called Nāgasena...it is nevertheless, your majesty, but a way of counting, a term, an appellation, a convenient designation, a mere name, this Nāgasena; for there is no ego here to be found "

"Bhante, Nāgasena, if there is no ego to be found, who is it then...keeps the precepts ? Who is it applies himself to meditation ? Who is it realizes the Paths, the Fruits, and *nirvāṇa* ? Wno is it destroys life ? Who is it that takes what is not given to him ? Who is it commits immorality ? ...In that case, there is no merit; there is demerit; there is no one who does or causes to be done meritorious or demeritorious deeds; neither good nor evil deeds can have any fruit or result. Bhante, Nāgasena, neither is he a murderer who kills a priest, nor can you priests...have any teacher, preceptor, or ordination." [8]

Several points are notable here. First, Milinda observes that the doctrine of momentariness taken literally would make it impossible to blame a murderer for his heinous crime. The person who committed the murder would not be the same person standing before the judge. The murderer exists, as it were, only in the moment of murdering. The problem is exacerbated by the notion of *anattā*. Not only is the murderer not the same agent who can be held resposible for the deed, there is no agent. If there no agent, who commits the murder ? It would seem that there is a murder without a murderer, but how could this be ? Thirdly, and significantly, the possibility of there being permanent moral laws or principles is questioned. If everything is momentary, in

flux, changing, then how can moral precepts be considered as permanent ? [9]

In light of these objections, one must wonder about the characterization of the Buddha as a distinguished ethical teacher. It would appear that he has undermined the foundations upon which any ethical edifice could conceivably be constructed. *Anattā* seems to deny selves; but if there are no selves, how can there be moral agents ? Momentariness seems to disallow identity; but without identity, how can there be any ethical responsibility ? Conditioned origination seem to render freedom illusory; but without freedom, how can ethics get off the ground ?

B. *The Buddhist Response : Anattā, Conditioned Origination and Momentariness as a Philosophy of Process Rather than Substance*

Before condemning Buddhism to the ethical dungheap, one must reconsider the Buddha's position from a perspective which does not impose the substantialist and essentialist presppositions which prevail in Western philosophy, and, as attested to by Milinda, in some Indian systems as well. To understand the doctrines of *anattā*, conditioned origination and momentariness, Buddhism must be viewed as a reaction to the tradition of the *Upaniṣads* which identified the Self with the Ultimate Reality, *Ātman* with *Brahman : tat tvam asi*—thou art that. Kenneth Inada depicts the *Upaniṣad* tradition as "aim[ing] at an ontological absolute of being." [10] *Brahman* is the ultimate, the absolute, the locus of all value and the ground of Truth. While the self is illusory, contingent, transient and ephemeral, *Brahman* is permanent, unchanging, eternal. Only when the self realizes that it is *Brahman* does it attain salvation. But if all is eternal *Brahman*, then how does one account for the changing empirical world ? For the empirical self ? When the self realizes it is *Brahman*, does it cease to be or does the Self become eternal ? It is against this identity of the Self with *Brahman* and the con-

sequent metaphysical dilemma of eternalism/substantialism
(*śāśvatavāda*) or annihilation/nonsubstantionalism (*ucchedavāda*)
that the thrust of the Buddha's insights are directed.

Anattā

The Buddha specifically denies both eternalism and the
annihilation of the self :

> If I, Ānanda, when the wandering monk Vachchhagotta
> asked me, "Is there the ego ?" had answered : " The ego
> is", then that Ānanda, would have confirmed the doctrine
> of the Śamaṇas and the Brāhmaṇas who believe in per-
> manence. If I, Ānanda, when the wandering monk asked
> me : " Is there the ego ? " had answered : "The ego is
> not," then that would have confirmed the doctrine of the
> Śamaṇas and the Brāhmanas who believe in annihilation...
> He who holds that there is no ego is a man with false
> notions... He who holds that there is an eternal ego is
> [likewise] a man with false notions. [11]

Hence the ethical concerns which followed from the literal inter-
pretation of *anattā* as a denial of the self are unfounded. It is
not a denial of the phenomological self— the self as becoming—
but of a substantial, essentialistic self—the self as static being :

> There is no corporeality whatever, O monks, no feeling, no
> perception, no disposition, no consciousness, that is perma-
> nent, everlasting, eternal, changeless and identically abiding
> forever. [12]

Buddha, to be sure, is not denying the phenomenal reality of the
empirical world. Corporeality, feelings, perceptions, dispositions,
consciousness exist. It is just that they exist as part of a ongo-
ing process of conditioned becoming rather than as static, in-
dependent elements of permanent being. As pointed out by
K. N. Upadhyaya, the Buddha disparages the conceit of the

self which construes itself as the ultimate reality, as something permanent, unchanging, immutable :

> I (self) and mine not being truly and really discovered, is it not, monks, a perfectly foolish doctrine to hold the point of view, 'this is the world, this is self; permanent, abiding eternal, immutable shall I be after death, in eternal identity shall I persist ?' [13]

Hence the doctrine of *anattā*, in its repudiation of the self-as-static-being, entails the rejection of the metaphysics of the *Upaniṣads:* " it was not a simple overturn of the *ātman* concept into nullity but a unique overhaul of the understanding of human experience." [14] Though Buddha rejected the metaphysics of the *Upaniṣads* along with the substantial, essential, permanent self that this metaphysics generated, he was careful not to do away with the self. He was aware that the nihilistic interpretation of *anattā* would repudiate ethics, that it is, as Upadhyaya summarily observes not only "philosophically absurd" but "ethically reprehensible." [15] He is reported to have said :

> " Never brahmin, have I seen or heard of such an avowal, such a view. Pray, how can one step onwards, how can one step back, yet say : 'There is no self-agency; there is no other agency ?' What think you Brahmin. is there such a thing as initiation. "
>
> " Yes, sir "
>
> " ...Well, brahmin, since there is initiative, and men are known to initiate, this is among men the self-agency, this the other agency ". [16]

Thus, Buddha rebuffs the notion of a permanent, independent ontological self without relinquishing moral agency. [17] Conditioned as we are by the biases of philosophies of static substances, it is hard to imagine what this self could be like. We are at a loss

much as was Hume when, in searching for the self, he failed
to locate it :

> For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call
> myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or
> other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain
> or pleasure. I never catch *myself* at any time without a
> perception, and never can observe anything but the percep-
> tion. [18]

We have the idea of the self, and so we think there must be
some ontological referent, some discrete sense particular in the
world, which corresponds to and gives rise to this idea. But
what causes this impression ?

> For from what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd ? ... It
> must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real
> idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but
> that to which our impression and ideas are suppos'd to
> have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea
> of self, that impression must continue invariably the same,
> thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is *suppos'd*
> to exist after that manner. But there is no impression
> constant and invariable. [19]

The key to curing the dis-ease occasioned by our inability to
discover the substance, the essence, of the self underlying our
perception is found in the Buddha's reply to Vaccha. He has
become confused by Buddha's "four–cornered" negation. The
Buddha denies that any of the metaphysical theories—that the
priest is reborn; that he is not reborn; that he is both
reborn and not reborn; that he is neither reborn nor not
reborn—fit the case. It is not that he denies that they are true,
but that they are inappropriately conceived; they entail unac-
ceptable metaphysical assumptions. To illustrate his point, the

Buddha uses the example of the extinction of a fire. He asks Vaccha :

> "On what does this fire that is burning in front of you depend ? "
>
> "It is on fuel of the grass and wood that this fire... depends. '
>
> "[If the fire goes extinct and then] someone were to ask you, 'In which direction has the fire gone—east or west or north or south ?' what would you say, O Vaccha ? "
>
> "The question would not fit the case, Gotama ". [20]

To apply the category of direction in this case is inappropriate. Similarly, imposing the metaphysical biases of substantialism on the question of the self leads to confusion. The Buddha could no more provide an answer to the annihilation *versus* eternalism quandary than he could tell us in which direction the fire went. The questions are framed in terms which are inappropriate, not true or false. One must give up the assumptions of the meta- physics, including the notion of a static self—as-being and look at experience in terms of a process ontology.

Momentariness and Process Ontology : The Self as Becoming

Though Hume was led to the same kinds of reflections and doubts about the existence of a substantial self as the Buddha, the consequences were quite different. Hume adopted the Lockean theory of experience in which the subject was separated from the object. The subject was a passive observer, a disinterested recep- tacle, a blank slate upon which the external objects made their impressions. Each impression arose from discrete bits of sense datum which comprised the external world. The mind, having copied the sense datum, supplied the connections and relations between them. But as D. C. Mathur notes, " reflective introspec-

tion revealed to Hume that the mind was nothing but a series
of disjointed impressions and ideas with no 'real' relations
between them. Such an experience revealed, according to Hume,
no permanently subsisting self".[21] Thus Hume, like Gotama,
came to see reality as a flux :

> I may venture to affirm of the rest of minkind, that they
> are nothing but a bundle or collection of different percep-
> tions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable
> rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement... There
> is no *simplicity* in it at any time, nor *identity* in different.[22]

Everything is impermanent, changing, momentary. However,
it is interesting to remark, as Mathur does, that " having disco-
vered no permanent self and having explained away the notion
of personal identity, Hume .. gives expression to feelings of
melancholy, despair and doubt... These feelings are in sharp
contrast to the feelings of release, liberation, and *nirvāṇic* peace
experienced by the historical Buddha at his discovery of and
insight into the nature of things in general and the self in parti-
cular".[23] Hume falls prey to this melancholy, whereas the
Buddha does not, because he feels, firstly, that the self has been
cut off from the world, from the Real, from Truth, from the
ground of value. The self is merely a passive copier of sense
particulars. There is no causal connection between the relations
the mind supplies and the real world of sense data. This obviates
initiative and moral effort. But more importantly, when the self
as well as reality is looked upon as momentary, as a flux of
discrete particulars lacking a causal connection—that is, when
the self is understood to be impermanent and lacking in identity—
then moral responsibility itself seems impossible. Who is it that
can be held responsible ? Thus he resorts to the construction
of a " feigned " or "fictitious" self on the basis of associations,

contiguities and similarities in order to allow for moral responsi-
bility, for " human commerce ". [24]

But this despair arises only if one begins with the presupposi-
tions of an eternal, substantial self. It is not the momentary,
self–in–the–process–of–becoming that is fictitious, it is the myth
propagated by the *Upaniṣads* and empiricist philosophers of an
essentialistic, permanent self which is the imaginary projection.
But giving up this fanciful creation need not occasion ethical
angst. Indeed, quite the contrary. It is precisely the myth of the
permanent self which gives rise to the conceit of 'I-ness' that,
according to the Buddha, is the cause of suffering in this world.
"I do not see, O monks, that form of clinging to 'I–ness' which
having clung to, there would not arise sorrow, lamentation, suf-
fering, agony and despair ". [25] Clinging leads to suffering because
it is the attachment to self–interest, to desires, which stops the
flow of life. As Inada discerningly remarks, "passions and
desires (*tṛṣṇā*) are vital parts of our experiences but they need
not be restrained by the clinging phenomenon (*upādāna*), i.e.
they can go on in a purely detached manner without the clinging
elements of being ". [26] It is not that desires are bad in themsel-
ves but that we become attached to them and thus interrupt the
ongoing process of becoming. Inada elaborates on the incon-
gruence of (*tṛṣṇā*) as becoming and *upādana* as being :

> On the one hand, *tṛṣṇā* is a force, an activity that lunges
> forward in the experiential process and on the other
> *upādāna* (attachment) is a holding, steadying pattern that
> keeps the process from lunging forward in the sense of
> incorporating new elements...The latter is always ancillary
> to the former and in its expended nature counters the flow
> of the basic flow. While the former thrives on process, the
> latter thrives on static objectification...While the former is
> a moving ontology, the latter is a static type of ontology...

One of the most basic origins of the suffering state is the inability of man to cope with the flow of existence or the plain fact that life and its elements are momentary or transitory.[21]

Thus it is clinging, not the desires themselves, that, as cause and consequence of the static self, of the conceit of 'I–ness', leads to suffering. Life is a process, a flux, momentary. But it is not a series of discrete ontological or mental particulars as with Locke. Rather it is a continuum or stream of reality/becoming (*bhava*) and a continuum or stream of consciousness (*bhavāṅga*). As a process, experience is without any static substratum, either ontologically or consciously. The attempt to read this process ontology in terms of substantial–as–static–being is to err as egregiously as if one were to insist on imposing direction on the extinguished fire. Indeed, to view life from the perspective of static 'I-ness' entails clinging and hence suffering.

Nevertheless, while momentariness would seen to militate against a static conception of the self, it does not reduce to a denial of the self. The momentary self is ontologically and phenomenologically real. It is not, however, a simple sense particular. Hume's problem of identity is the outgrowth of his metaphysics; it is part of the myth propagated by substantialism. To be sure, identity in the strict Humean sense is fictitious : "Time ... implies succession, and when we apply its idea to any unchangeable object, 'tis only by a fiction of the imagination, by which the unchangeable object is suppos'd to participate of the changes of co-existent objects".[23] But the problem of identity only arises if one presupposes a metaphysics of permanence, a static ontology of being; the fiction, in other words, is the "unchangeable object", the eternal self. But to give up the identity of static, permanent selves does not entail that the self if feigned "Unchanging", "identical", "permanent" equate with real for the

substantialists and essentialists, not the advocates of a process philosophy. The self is phenomenologically real; it is just not permanent. The theory of momentariness and process philosophy does not preclude continuity, merely identity. In that sense it does not vitiate moral responsibility; the murderer is still tried. After all, the Buddha does maintain the theory of *karma* in which one 'sows that which he reaps', be it for better or worse. But to fully appreciate the continuity of the self and the Buddhist conception of ethical responsibility as entailed by *karma*, one must understand the doctrine of conditioned origination.

Conditioned Origination : *The Self as Person-in-Context*

As noted above, Hume, in contrast to the Buddha, was troubled by his insights into the phenomenal nature of the self. He felt that if there were no permanent identity to the self, then moral responsibility would be effaced. Having adopted the atomistic view of experience as consisting in discrete, static elements, when his analysis of identity revealed to him that the relations holding the pieces together were the fictitious attributions of the mind, the world, for Hume, simply fell apart. It disintegrated into a flux of discrete particulars which disallowed the continuity necessary for an ethically responsible self.

The Buddha, on the other hand, did not share Hume's atomistic metaphysics. He did not reduce the flux of experience to independent, discrete ontological elements (*dharmas*). He saw experience, not in terms of static being, but as a process of becoming in which one moment is conditioned by the preceding one and in turn conditions the next. Experience is a flow. Continuity is implicit. It is not something "added" by the mind; experience is relational.[19] Again, discontinuity is one of the peculiar idiosyncracies of misguided metaphysicians who, wanting to hold on to a permanent self, separate the subject from the object, who break up the flow into discrete elements, and there-

by give the lie to continuity. They, because of their metaphysical assumptions of fixed substances, discrete ontological units and so on, impose discontinuity onto experience. It is a reflection of the degree to which this type of metaphysics has conditioned thinking that, in spite of one's own everyday experience which is surely felt to be—and lived as if it were—continuous, one must still argue for continuity in experience rather than discontinuity. The kind of ethical difficulties over moral responsibility which the theory of momentariness has been accused of generating can only exist in the minds of errant metaphysicians. Only they could be worried about stringent identity requirements of Hume because they alone, by construing the flow of experience in terms of discontinuous, discrete, ontological particulars, sabotage continuity and thereby undermine ethical responsibility. The Buddha's theory of *karma*, predicated on the doctrine of conditioned origination which entails continuity between events in the process of becoming, ensures that not only will one be held responsible for his deeds but that he will receive his just deserts—nothing more, nothing less.

However, as noted above, *pratītⁱa-samutpāda* would seem to pose its own challenge to ethical responsibility. If one's actions are conditioned, then his freedom is impinged upon. He is deprived of autonomy; he is, in short, coerced. His actions are determined by external conditions and hence he is absolved from ethical responsibility. One must be an autonomous agent to be ethically culpable.

Again, this kind of problem could only arise for metaphysicians who deny the process nature of the flux of experience and cling to the wayward notion of essentialistic, discrete selves. The culprit is the myth of an autonomous ethical agent. By imposing their assumptions of static reality on the flux, they create a dichotomy between the subject and the object, the individual and

the environment, and thereby give rise to the dualism of autonomy and determinism. If the self is not an indivisible individual radically estranged from the rest of the atomistic beings which constitute the world but rather a relational person-in-context, then the issue becomes one of degrees of freedom and conditionality (and hence of responsibility), not a case of either-or. That is the dualism of autonomy and determinism collapses, becoming a continuum instead.

Indeed, as we have seen, the self, for the Buddha, cannot be taken as an independent, fixed, ontological element. Experience is a continuous process of interdependent *events* in which one event gives rise to another. Unlike the sharp definition of discrete, atomistic ontological element, the boundaries of the phenomenological events are indeterminate. The shape of an event is carved out of the flux from a given perspective; its parameters are defined according to a particular locus of interest. In that sense, an event protracts or contracts as the field of experience, the flux, is brought into focus. Similarly the self, then, is not a discrete entity but an event in process. Its boundaries cannot be defined in a once and for all way, but will depend on the particular perspective, the specific focus. The self is a person-in-context; it is conditioned by, and conditions, the context.

At first glance, then, the problem would seem to be just the opposite of that generated by the theory of momentariness. Instead of there not being enough continuity to provide a self which can be held morally responsible for its acts, there is too much. That is, the self is so interdependent with its context that it cannot be isolated, thereby rendering it impossible to attribute to it autonomy and hence the kind of unilateral responsibility required to assign unmitigated blame or praise. But

this is not as problematic as it appears. One can, if he so chooses, isolate the self in the same way that one can bring the field into sharper focus to highlight a particular aspect. The judge is able to try the murderer as a moral agent by focusing on him within the flux of the total environment—by bringing his actions out in relief against the surrounding background—just as the listener can focus, for example, on a certain musical phrase within a song or even a note within the phrase. [30]

The real difficulty, however, arises in determining the extent of responsibility of the person vis a vis the other environmental conditioning factors which gave rise to the event for which the person is being held responsible In that an event originates from a nexus of interdependent conditions, ethical resposibility would seem to be diffused over the continuum. No single person could be held totally responsible for an event; the murder would be a communal act. Indeed, this has been the line of reasoning taken by the American pragmatists Dewey and James as well as by the Chinese philosopher Confucius, all of whom share with the Buddha the view of experience as a process, a flux, in with the person is both conditioned by, and a conditioner of, his environment. That the community shares the responsibility for Confucius is attested to by his concern with shame rather than guilt. As Roger Ames observes, " guilt tends to be individual as a condition of one's relationship to law; shame tends to be communal as a condition of one's relationship to others." [31] The most incontrovertible verification that responsibility was indeed taken to be shared by the Chinese lies in the historical fact that, in murder cases, not only would the murderer be executed but so would his family and relatives. While James and Dewey would surely not have taken the implications of the diffusion of responsibility to such draconian extremes, they do

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eloquently articulate the social dimensions of the self in their writings. They see the individual not as a disinterested observer but the product of social forces which condition the way one responds to his environment. Dewey, in particular, is acutely aware of the power which the social, political and economic institutions bring to bear on the individual. His call for the application of "Intelligence" to the social problems created by these institutions is an attempt to force society to face up to its collective responsibilities.

Curiously, the Buddha does not seem to be as engrossed with the social dimensions of the self as are the others. His eight—fold path concentrates on ethical concerns within the grasp of the individual—right speech, thought, resolve, concentration and so forth. One can only speculate as to his reasons for this. Perhaps he felt that ultimately the decision and hence the responsibility lies with oneself regardless of the other conditions. One can, as he himself did, resist the pressures and lead an ethical life. Perhaps he felt that if one could just carry out the eight-fold path which was within each person's reach, this would be enough. After all, the person is a constituent of society. So when the person changes, so does society. Perhaps he felt that we do not need social changes which come from the top down or that they simply cannot work. That is, the ethical life cannot be imposed from outside but must begin from within. Ultimately, a person must realize the way for himself; the ethical life arises from personal experience, not social legislation Interestingly, this difference between Buddha and James, Dewey and Confucius, parallels to some measure the distinction between the Hinayāna and the Mahāyāna schools. While the former is more interested in individual slavation, the latter is primarily concerned with universal salvation.

The result of Buddha's meditations was a Copernican turn from the *Upaniṣad* philosophy of substances to a process philosophy of events, from experience as static being to experience as a flux of becoming. This upending of the traditional perspective brought with it a radical change in the conception of ethics. Unfortuately, the stubborn persistance of a metaphysics of substance and essences threatens to undermine the ethical insights of the Buddha by imposing the wrong categories on the central doctrines of *anattā*, momentariness and conditioned origination. Viewed from the perspective of a metaphysical tradition which presupposes an ontology of static being a d discrete sense datum, the teachings of the Buddha would seem to sound the death knell of ethics. *Anattā*, taken literally rather than as an injunction against the fictitious attribution of permanency to the self, would ensure the demise of ethics by denying the existence of the ethical agent. But when the theory of *anattā* is read in light of the doctrines of momentariness and conditioned origination, it becomes clear that the self that is being repudiated is the illusory permanent self of *Upaniṣad* metaphysics, not the phenomenological self–as–becoming. Similarly, momentariness would appear to spell the end for ethical responsibility by denying that the self which murders is the identical self which is being tried for murder. But again, when understood in conjunction with *pratītya–samutpāda,* it becomes clear that it is not that the continuity of the self is being denied; it is just that the self is not identical in the sense presupposed by a philosophy of static being. Finally, the doctrine of conditioned origination is taken to task for being deterministic As such it deprives the individual of the autonomy required for voluntary acts and hence vitiates ethical responsibility. But again, this dualism of autonomy and determinism is operable only from the standpoint of a philosophy which bifurcates the subject and the object, the individual and the world. Such sharply drawn distinctions, however, have

ontological validity only in a system which assumes discrete. static particulars. For the Buddha, the world is a flux and the self a person–in–context. One not only is conditioned by, but conditions, one's environment. Thus, though the Buddha himself did not elaborate at length on this aspect, there is a social dimension to the self. Ethical responsibility becomes not only an individual concern but one for the whole society.

Department of Philosophy   **R. P. PEERENBOOM**
University of Hawaii at Manoa
2530 Dole Street
HONOLULU, HAWAII–96822–2383

NOTES

1. B. C. Mathur, "The Historical Buddha (Gotama), Hume and James on the Self : Comparisons and Evaluations, " *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 3, (1978) : 254. See also *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (ed) Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 272; Chandraadhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1976) p. 71.

2. Bernard Williams explores the disarray within the field of ethics in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1985). In the process of considering and rejecting moral theory since Socrates, he questions the role of philosophy for ethics, arguing that philosophical reflection " might destroy knowledge ", p. 167.

3. The most notable exception is of course the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. However, I will also have occasion to refer to the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey both of whom rejected the substantialist and essentialist biases in favour of an analysis of experience in terms of a flux.

4. Confer David Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius,* (Albany : State University of New York Press), pp. 12–17. They define transcendence as follows : "A principle, *A*, is transcendent with respect to that, *B*, which is served as principle if the meaning or import of B

cannot be fully analyzed and explained without recourse to *A*, but the reverse is not true. "

5· See for example, Alan Gewirth, "Categorial Consistency in Ethics," *The Philosophical Querterly*, vol. 17, no. 69, (1967): Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere.* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 110–126.

6. Sharma, p 80.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

8. Henry Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, (New York : Atheneum 1982), pp. 129–130.

9. While the scope of this paper prevents me from treating this point at length, I would like to briefly suggest that one would expect, given the nature of the Buddha's process philosophy, that there would indeed not be any universal, eternal moral laws or principles. While Dharma may refer to the way of the world in the most fundamental sense, it should not be rendered as Moral Law. Rather, the doctrine of conditioned origination would seem to imply a pluralistic ethics in which what is appropriate is so for a given time and place and is conditioned by the particulars which define the environment. I will touch tangentially on this issue below.

10. Kenneth Inada, "Problematics of the Buddhist nature of self," *Philosophy East and West* 29, no. 2 (1979), p. 146; see also Inada, "Munitz' Concept of the World...A Buddhist Response" and "Rejeinder to Munitz," *Philosophy East and West* 25, no. 3 (1975), pp. 309, 351–352.

11. S. IV, 400. Tr. Sharma, p. 78.

12. S. III, 144. Tr. by K. N, Upadhyaya, "The Buddhist Doctrine of *Anattā*," *Philosophical Quarterly*, p. 123.

13. M. 1. 138. Upadhyaya, p. 121.

14. Inada, p. 144.

15. Upadhyaya, p. 119.

16. E. M. Hare, tr. *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, vol. 3 (London : Luzac and Co., 1937, 1952), pp. 237–238.

17. It is important to note that there is both "self–agency" and "other agency." This will be taken up below when we discuss the notion of the conditioned origination and the manner in which the self is both conditioned by, and conditions, the environment.

18. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1888, 1964), 1, iv, 6, p. 251.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 252, emphasis mine,

20. Warren, p. 127.

21. Mathur, p. 259.

22. Hume, pp. 252-253.

23. Mathur. p. 261. He cites Hume, p. 264 : " I am at first affrighted and confounded with that forlorn solitude, in which I am plac'd in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell'd all human commerce, and left utterly abandon'd and disconsolate...When I look abroad, I foresee on every side, dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny, and detraction. When I turn inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. "

24. Confer Mathur, pp. 262-262; Hume, pp. 253-254, 259, 262.

25. M. I, p. 137, Upadhyaya p. 123.

26. Inada, p 153.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

28. Hume. I, iv, 6, p. 200,

29. In this sense the philosophy of the Buddha is much more akin to that of the American pragmatists. William James, for instance, states : "The generalized conclusion is that..the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience. The directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure...The statement of fact is that the relations between things...are just as much matters of direct particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves ' (*Meaning of Truth*, Cambridge : Harvard University Presr, 1975, xii-xiii).

30. The note is the smallest unit available in our language for breaking down the flow of music but it need not be. Just as physicists continually create new jargon to describe the increasingly smaller distinctions which they need to carry out their work, so could musicians further subdivide the flow of music if there were the need to do so.

31. Hall and Ames, p. 174. I would also like to acknowledge Hall and Ames for having developed the field-focus model as applied to the process philosophy of Confucius as well as K. N. Upadhyaya and Peter Hershock for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.