
**Benefit of Self and Other:
The Importance of Persons and their Self-Interest in Buddhist Ethics**

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Abstract

“Self and other” themes, [including benefit, interest, protection, goal, exchange, sameness,] demonstrate the centrality of distinct beings and their self-interest and undermine the idea that selflessness or emptiness are keys to understanding Buddhist ethics. Self and other benefit are interrelated in a productive paradox, in which compassion benefits the compassionate.

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Keywords

svaparārtha; compassion; selflessness; Buddhist ethics

1. Introduction

The pervasive and enduring themes in Buddhist thought centered on the distinction between self and other, *svapara* or *ātmapara*, particularly the benefit and protection of self and other, challenge some general assumptions about Buddhist ethics. Buddhist thinkers recognized that the vast majority of Buddhists understood neither selflessness nor emptiness and accounted for this in their systematic thought. So rather than basing moral selflessness on ontological selflessness, they supported ethics on the basis of the ordinary perception of sentient beings and the distinction between self and others.¹ Rather than an ethic of self-abnegating altruism rooted in ontological deconstruction of the self, they advocated the inseparability and mutuality of self and other benefit. The distinction between self and other is prominent, pervasive, and thematic. Concern for others leads to maximum self-benefit, even in worldly terms of health, safety, wealth and prestige, while self-interested disregard for the benefit of others may lead to poverty, harm, humiliation and misery. On the personal, social, and political levels, compassion blesses the compassionate. Conversely, the benefit of others is impossible without self-empowerment. The benefit of self and other are interrelated in a productive paradox. Interest in others is the most self-interested perspective possible and, in both Mahāyāna and Mainstream sources, exclusive interest in the benefit of others was even considered inferior to exclusive interest in oneself.

2. Methodology

This paper highlights the intertextual matrix of some of the common

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¹ Indeed all Buddhist ethics is based on the perception of conventional beings, but as discussed below, I refer here to *sattva-ālambana-karuṇā*, the perception of beings without *abhidharma* or emptiness analysis.

stock of threads out of which the tapestry of Buddhist scriptures is woven, all related to the thematic trope of “self and other.” These include the benefit, goal, protection, sameness, and exchange of self and other. Many among the common stock of motifs, tropes, etc. that make up Buddhist texts remain unexplored, and so we often have only a vague impression of the deeper patterns formed by their interrelationships. None of these threads can be understood except in relation to the others, with which they often have productive contrasts, tensions, paradoxes, and even contradictions. Since the importance of any given thread is likely to be expressed with hyperbolic exaggeration, as best, highest, exclusive etc., we can easily be fooled into thinking we have a found expressions that stand alone as definitive, when Buddhist texts just do not work this way. This is not primarily a matter of internal inconsistency or multi-vocality, which sometimes occur, it is also a matter of literary style. The *Śikṣāsamuccaya*’s meditations on the vileness of the body, for instance, have to be taken together with those on protecting the precious human body. Candrakīrti’s jeremiad against rationalized violence in his *Bodhisattvayogācāracatuḥśatakaṭīkā* has to be taken together with his explication of compassionate killing in the same text. Such contrasts can make you wonder if the same person could have written both passages.

In addition to remaining alert to the general tendency to exaggerate any concept in its moment of emphasis, we also have to be prepared for the possibility that, when understood in their interrelation to others, any given trope may mean something entirely different than when it is taken in isolation. This is the case here. Compassionate interest in benefiting others, which may seem self-abnegating, always benefits the agent. Even the most strident emphasis on sacrificing one’s own interest is very likely being expressed with the understanding that nothing could be more beneficial to those who take such an attitude. But as shown below, this is true not only for the long-term multiple-life perspective required to appreciate offering one’s head, but also for immediate concerns of health, safety, prosperity, and even a good night’s sleep.

Generally speaking it is a mistaken approach to seek out key passages, take them as stand alone definitive statements and subject them to a philosophical workout meant to get at the essence of Buddhist ethics. It is quite possible to cherry pick passages that support an interpretation of Buddhist ethics as self-abnegating; and, perhaps because of the great self-abnegation at the heart of Christian tradition, this perspective has been over privileged. I will assume that the reader is well aware of abundant passages that speak of a *bodhisattva*'s intention having the single taste of benefiting others, but how then do we explain passages, often in same text and in close proximity, that emphasize pursuing the interest of both self and other, even denigrating interest only in others as inferior?

3. Ontology

Based on the distinctive Buddhist teaching of selflessness, it is natural to conflate moral and ontological selflessness in reading Buddhist ethics. These two uses of selflessness mean completely different things and have no necessary relationship. The Western moral convention "selfless" is connected to a very strong ontological conception of the self, but Buddhists, for whom selflessness is an ontological term, never use "selfless" as a moral descriptor. It is not possible to become selfless in Buddhist thought, because we are selfless to begin with.

The emphasis on self and other, *sva* and *para*, in all these motifs reminds us that Buddhist ethics is about distinct persons or beings. Judging by the proportion of nuns and monks that meditated or studied philosophy, only a small percentage of monastics historically understood no-self to the degree that it would inform their ethics. Monasteries teemed with children, adolescents, and persons at every level. The laity, who generally focus on merit making, blessings, healing and auspiciousness, would be even less likely to think in these

terms.² It is perhaps a philosopher's conceit to think that some abstract philosophical construct lies at the root of ethical choices. If we want to understand Buddhist worlds, it seems commonsensical to look elsewhere than elite philosophical constructions.

Buddhist systematic thought explicitly recognized this. Although in rare instances one finds arguments that relate ontological selflessness and compassion,³ the mainstream tradition consistently insists that compassion is a conventional perspective with the sentient beings of the desire realm for its object, (with the exception of the supererogatory *great* compassion of a Buddha, which extends to all realms). According to the *Abhidharmakośa*:

The Immeasurables have living beings for their object. More precisely, "They have the living beings of the Kāmadhātu for their sphere." ... However according to the *sūtra* [Dīgha, i.250, iii.223 etc.] the ascetic produces the mind of goodwill with regard to one cardinal direction, with regard to two cardinal directions, ... The *sūtra* speaks of the physical world, but it has in view the beings that are to be found in the

² This includes the modern rereading of dependent origination as "interconnection" which should not be projected on traditional texts and never served as the basis of arguments for compassion.

³ With the consistent exception of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, such passages are rarely cited by those who base compassion on selflessness or emptiness. Lambert Schmithausen correctly observes that selflessness and compassion are actually found more often in tension with one another and questions the idea that there should be any automatic relationship between them. "Logically, too, the mere 'implosion' of self-centeredness by means of the contemplation of 'not-Self' does, to be sure, eradicate selfish activity, but does not seem to entail, of necessity, active concern for others unless an *additional* 'explosive' momentum emerges, probably due to previous cultivation of empathy or compassion. When the spirituality of 'not-Self' became dogmatized into a *doctrine* of 'no-Self' in which holistic persons and living beings were dissolved into mere bundles of factors, this resulted in a certain tension or even incompatibility between this level of ultimate denial of selves or holistic living beings on the one hand and compassion as essentially referring to just living beings³⁸ on the other, with the tendency to relegate compassion to the conventional level. ... This tension between 'no-Self' (or Emptiness, for that matter) and compassion is occasionally palpable even in Mahāyāna sources." Schmithausen 2000, 33-34. For additional arguments that this "tension" is not only palpable, but thematic in both Mahāyāna and Mainstream sources see Jenkins 2015.

physical world.⁴

In Mahāyāna Buddhist theory, compassion for beings seen as selfless and composed of elemental *dharmas*, *dharmā-ālambana karuṇā*, is only possible for *arhats* and advanced *bodhisattvas*; and compassion based on emptiness is only possible for *bodhisattvas* on or above the eighth *bhūmi*. In both Mahāyāna and Mainstream realms of thought, compassion with sentient beings for its basis, *sattvālambana karuṇā*, is operative for most or all people.⁵ The tendency in the study of Buddhist ethics to associate compassion with special ontological or meditative perspectives is dubious and misleading. Most Buddhist ethical thought is not based on emptiness or selflessness, but on the simple perception of beings.⁶ But if compassion is not generally rationalized based on subtle philosophical or meditative perspectives, then what supported this value as it broadly influenced public and polity? One important factor is the belief that compassion benefits the compassionate, which supports the productive and typically Buddhistic paradox that both persons and societies flourish most when they are characterized by compassionate interest in the benefit of others.

4. The Personal Benefits of Compassion

The standard litanies of compassion's more general benefits for the compassionate include good sleep, happiness, the affection of humans and nonhumans, protection from fire, poison and weapons, health,

⁴ Poussin, 1266. The following discourse describes the practice of expanding the immeasurables through larger and larger areas until all beings are embraced.

⁵ For an extended exposition of the *ālambana* of *karuṇā* as a thematic motif in a broad range of Mainstream and Mahāyāna sources see Jenkins, 2015.

⁶ Even where selflessness or emptiness perspectives are engaged, the objects of compassion are still conventional sentient beings seen as selfless or empty of inherent existence, not *dharmas* or the void *per se*. See Jenkins, 2015.

long life, serenity, ease of meditation, merit, high rebirth and so on.⁷ Buddha tells Anāthapiṇḍada, the paradigm of the benevolent lay donor, that one who produces a mere squirt of *mettacitta* accumulates more merit than one who donates whole monasteries, or feeds one hundred *arahants*, or one hundred *paccekabuddhas*.⁸ But if we include generosity as compassionate activity, it should also be remembered that the gifts of donors like Anāthapiṇḍada also guaranteed their continued wealth.

These benefits come to the compassionate whether they help anyone else or not. According to the *Abhidharmakośa*, the meditation on compassion gains merit from the compassion itself even though there is no other beneficiary of the compassion, in the same way that a gift to *caitya* gains merit for the giver even though the Buddha is gone.⁹

If indeed there is only merit from benefiting others, [then] there is no [merit] in mentally cultivating *maitrī* and the other immeasurables and in cultivating the right viewpoint... As in regard to *maitrī* etc., even without a recipient or benefit to another, merit is produced, arising from one's own thoughts.¹⁰

Śāntideva, responding to the question of why, if there have been countless *bodhisattvas* who have vowed to save the endless numbers of sentient beings, does the world continue to be filled with suffering, answers that it is in fact not possible to change the world and that

⁷ On standard benefits of *mettā* see: *A.i.129; Aṅguttara*, Woodward, vol. 2, 133; Aronson, 58; A.iv.50-1; Lamotte, *Le Traite de la Grande Vertue de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, Bibliotheque du Museon, vol. XVIII, 1944-76, Chapter XXXIII, p. 1264; *Questions of King Milinda*, Rhys-Davids, 1963, v.1, 279; *The Bodhisattvapīṭaka*, Pagel, 140, note 79.

⁸ A.iv.395.

⁹ *Abhidharmakośa*, 4:121 b, Poussin, 702.

¹⁰ *Abhidharmakośa*, Shastri, vol. 2, p. 548: *yadi hi puṇyam parānugrahāt eva syāt, maitryādyapramāṇa-samyagdṛṣṭibhāvanāyām na syāt...yathā maitryādiṣv-antareṇa api pratigrāhakaṃ parānugrahaṃ vā puṇyaṃ bhavati svacittaprabhavam, tathā hi atīte 'pi' guṇavati tadbhaktikṛtaṃ svacittāt puṇyaṃ bhavati; Sphutārthā: Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā*, Wogihara, vol. 2, p. 436; cf. *Abhidharmakośa*, Poussin, iv.121b, p. 702.

generosity is merely a state of mind.

V.9: If the perfection of generosity were the alleviation of the world's poverty, then since beings are still starving now, in what manner did the previous Buddhas perfect it?

V.10: [Response] The perfection of generosity is said to be the thought to give all beings everything, together with the fruit of such a thought, hence it is simply a state of mind...

V.12: Unruly beings are as (unlimited) as space: they cannot possibly all be overcome, but if I overcome thoughts of anger alone, this will be the equivalent of vanquishing all foes.

V.13: Where would I possibly find enough leather with which to cover the surface of the Earth? But (wearing) leather just on the soles of my shoes is equivalent to covering the earth with it.

V.14: Likewise for me it is not possible to restrain the external course of things; but should I restrain this mind of mine, what would be the need to restrain all else.¹¹

It would be wrong to conclude that concrete action for the sake of others is being dismissed here, but it is clear that developing a generous mind is in one's interest, regardless of whether it benefits anyone else.

I have argued elsewhere that, at least from the perspective of the important *Āryabodhisattvagocaropāyaviṣayavikurvaṇanirdeśa Sūtra*, the idea that compassion protects and blesses the compassionate was also naturally extended to social and political perspectives. A compassionate nation tends to have many allies and no enemies. So

¹¹ Batchelor 1987, 45-6; *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Tripathi, 54-5: *adaridraṃ jagatkrtvā dānapāramitā yadi, jagaddaridramadyāpi sā kathaṃ pūrvatāyinām. phalena sahasarvasvatyāgacittāḥ jane'khile, dānapāramitā proktā tasmāt sā cittam eva tu. matsyādayaḥ kva nīyantāṃ mārayeyaṃ yato na tān, labdhe viraticitte tu śīlapāramitā matā. kiyato mārayiṣyāmi durjanān gagana-upamān, mārite krodhacitte tu māritāḥ sarvasatravaḥ. bhūmiṃ chādayituṃ sarvāṃ kutaścarma bhaviṣyati, upānaccarmātrena channā bhavati medinī. bāhyā bhāvā mayā tadvacchakyā vārayituṃ na hi, svacittam vārayiṣyāmi kiṃ mama anyair nirvāritaiḥ.*

the arising of enemies should prompt analysis of one's own culpability. Benevolent external relations lead to greater security. Benevolent internal governance creates a culture of generosity, rather than tax evasion. So the royal coffers of a compassionate king are full, while those of the exploitive are empty. In contrast to the idea of enlightened self-interest, according to which the maximum pursuit of self-interest results in the good of all, this might well be described as "enlightened other-interest," according to which the most extreme altruism results in the supreme fruition of the ultimate self-interest.¹² This is a sensibility whose significance extends beyond extraordinary acts of supererogatory self-sacrifice or even the requirement of a multiple-life perspective. Compassion leads to the good life, prosperity and both personal and national security.

5. Protection of Self and Other

The idea that protecting others protects oneself is related to the fact that *karuṇā* and *maitrī* were understood to literally protect those who felt them. Compassion's protection and the peril of living without it are illustrated in many wonderful stories of murderous elephants being pacified by the compassion of the Buddha, or of kings hit by arrows just when their compassion lapsed. The progenitor of the Sinhala race is remembered as the patricidal son of a lion and a woman. When he attempts to kill his father, the lion, the arrows simply bounce off him, because the lion is filled with love on seeing his son. But when the lion realizes his son is trying to kill him, he becomes enraged. As soon as this rage replaces the armor of affection, the arrows slam home.¹³ Lack of compassion makes us vulnerable and its presence protects us. Today Theravāda Buddhists still recite the *Metta Sutta* to gain

¹² See Jenkins, 2010.

¹³ For a variety of illustrative examples from Pāli sources of the power of love to protect see Jenkins, 2011, 51; *Dīgha*, trans. Walshe, 613, note 986; *Milindapañha*, Rhys-Davids, vol. 1, 282, note 1.

protection from snakebite and other dangers. According to Buddhaghosa's commentary on the *Metta Sutta*, it was first taught to provide protection when terrifying deities were harassing monks. This classic expression of "loving kindness" was conceived as originally taught for the sake of self-protection.¹⁴ *Maitrī* is inseparable from the notion that it protects its agent, that it serves *svārtha*. This helps us see why, in the *Prajñāpāramitā*, generating *bodhicitta* is called "putting on the armor;" and why the main symbol for the power of compassion is a *vajra*, which from the early tradition on is Vajrapāṇi's weapon for protecting the Buddha.

In the *nikāyas* it is said that one who protects herself protects others and one who protects others protects herself. This is taught in one example through the allegory of a pair of acrobats, one standing on the other's shoulders, who depend on each other for mutual support. They each must mind themselves or their partner will fall, but they must also mind their partner in order to keep their own balance.¹⁵ The *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa* and *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtras*, explain loving kindness, *maitrī*, as protection for oneself and delight in benefiting others, and acceptance, *kṣānti*, as protecting self and other.¹⁶ The *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa* also makes this a polemical issue; *bodhisattvas* protect everyone, while *śrāvakas* only protect themselves.¹⁷

6. Benefit of Self and Other

The theme of *svaparārtha* runs throughout the historical and cultural range of Buddhist thought from the *nikāyas* to Mādhyamika and Yogācāra path literature, to the early Chinese Pure Land thought of T'an-luan and the Sōtō Zen essays of Dōgen. Its textual elaborations

¹⁴ *Minor Readings*, Ñāṇamoli, 266-270.

¹⁵ S.v.169; Bodhi, 1648.

¹⁶ *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*, Braarvig, 345, 146, 373; *Vimalakīrti*, Lamotte, 157; Cf. *Vimalakīrti*, Thurman, 56.

¹⁷ *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*, Braarvig, 351.

concretely address the relationship between benefiting oneself and benefiting others. One of the challenges of translating *svārtha* or *ātmahita* is that terms like self-interest, self-serving and so on, including almost any term with the prefix “self,” have such negative moral associations. Long ago, Bendall and De La Vallée Poussin used “egoism” for *svārtha*, but I suspect this would be even less well received.¹⁸ But, as we will see below, self-interest and self-benefit have very positive meanings in their function as Buddhist moral categories.

The commentaries on this enduring theme in Indian Buddhist thought tell us that exclusively pursuing the benefit of others is mistaken. Benefit of self and other must be wedded together. This cuts against two stereotypes. One is that Mainstream Buddhism, especially when naively identified with the Mahāyāna’s straw man, emphasizes self-interested pursuit of individual liberation. The other is that the *Mahāyāna* emphasizes benefiting others at the expense of self-interest, sometimes, it is thought, even to the degree of undermining their own spiritual progress.

We should note in the beginning that interest in others’ benefit is more strongly emphasized throughout Buddhist texts for two reasons. The more obvious reason is that self-interest is considered natural, even animalistic, and needs no encouragement. For practical purposes it is more urgent to pull people away from their natural self-interest. The other more tricky reason, explained below, is that interest in others ultimately benefits both self and other. The focus on developing interest in others as a motivational quality is informed and explicitly encouraged by the understanding that this is paradoxically most beneficial to oneself. Nothing could be more self-beneficial in Buddhism than altruistic motivations.

The scheme of self and other benefit is often portrayed in simple statements about benefiting both self and other, which are present

¹⁸ See Bendall and De La Vallée Poussin, 1902.

throughout the literature.¹⁹ It is implicit in the *bodhisattva* vow to attain the ultimate self-development, Buddhahood, for the sake of benefiting others, and, as will be shown below, authoritative path literature explicitly used *svaparārtha* in this way to frame the attainment of Buddhahood. But, in its most basic expression, *svaparārtha* is elaborated by comparing four types of persons in the following hierarchical order: those concerned for nobody's benefit, those concerned only for others, those concerned only for themselves, and those concerned for both themselves and others. As would be expected, those concerned with the good of nobody are censured. The *Āṅguttara Nikāya* colorfully compares such a person to a torch from a funeral pyre smeared with dung in the middle and lit at both ends; no fire will be kindled from it.²⁰

Third best of these four is the person concerned only for others. This tells us there is something different than straightforward altruism going on here. One problem with being solely interested in the benefit of others is that it presents a bias. The meditation techniques for expanding compassion do not negate self-cherishing for the sake of others, but expand self-cherishing until it includes others without bias. The effect of “breaking down the barriers” between self and other is to generate an impartial love that does not discriminate. One's own self is included in the class of all sentient beings toward which compassion is generated. Buddhaghosa, in discussing the practice of breaking down the barriers between oneself, a neutral person, an enemy, and a friend, describes something resembling a modern hostage situation. He creates the hypothetical situation of four such people being captured by bandits. The bandits demand that one of the captives be given up to them so that their throat can be cut for a blood offering. One might expect the ideal Buddhist to jump and down, shouting

¹⁹ Powers, *Samdhinirmocana*, 261; Cleary, *Daśabhūmika*, 708; Thurman, *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, 57; Braarvig, *Akṣayamatīrdeśa*, 410 and 412; See Braarvig, *Akṣayamatīrdeśaṭīkā*, 354, in regard to the definition of compassion; Naughton, *Sphutārthā*, 93.

²⁰ A.ii.95; Woodward 1933, 104.

“pick me,” but this is not the case. Those who would prefer to sacrifice any one of the three over the others, or even to offer themselves, have failed to break down the barriers between these categories. The ideal attitude is to impartially prefer neither the sacrifice of self or other.²¹

The other problem with those only interested in others, identified concretely in the *suttas*, is that such a person attempts to guide or aid others without working on their own development. The ultimate self-interest here is construed as progress toward *nirvāṇa*, and one must pursue this self-interest before being of capable of supporting others on the path.

Returning to the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, those concerned only for themselves are considered better than those interested in only others, but they too are found lacking.

Monks, possessed of five things a monk is set on his own good, but not the good of another. Of what five? Herein Monks, a monk is perfect in virtue himself, but does not strive to perfect virtue in another; he is perfect in concentration himself, but does not strive to perfect concentration in another; his own release is perfected, but he does not strive that another’s should be; his own vision and knowledge of release is perfected, but he does not strive that another’s should be. Monks, possessed of these five things a monk is set on his own good, but not the good of another.²²

²¹ *Visuddhimagga*, IX:41, Warren 254; Ñāṇamoli 1976, 332-3; CF *Vimalakīrti*, Thurman, 57: “What is the *upekṣā* of a *bodhisattva*? It is what benefits both self and others.”

²² Hare 1934, 9-10; A.iii.12: *Pañcahi bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu attahitāya paṭipanno hoti no parahitāya. Katamehi pañcahi? Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu attanā sīlasampanno hoti, no paraṃ sīlasampadāya samādapeti, attanā samādhisampanno hoti no paraṃ samādhisampadāya samādapeti, attanā paññāsampanno hoti no paraṃ paññāsampadāya samādapeti, attanā vimuttisampanno hoti no paraṃ vimuttisampadāya samādapeti, attanā vimuttiñānadassanasampanno hoti no paraṃ vimuttiñānadassana sampadāya samādapeti, Imehi kho bhikkhave pañcahi dhammehi samannāgato bhikkhu attahitāya paṭipanno hoti no parahitāya ti.*

Monks “set on their own good” are at least accomplishing their own progress and so are better than those who pursue the benefit of others without that qualification. We should also remember that merely by purifying themselves as merit fields, monks benefited all those who offered to them.

Another *Aṅguttara* passage shows awareness of the apparent selfishness of the monastic life. Here, a Brāhmaṇa raises a doubt, which could have been phrased by a Mahāyānist, that Buddhist monks seem interested only in individual self-cultivation.

Brahmins offer sacrifice and get others to do so. All these are following a course of merit, due to sacrifice, that benefits many people. But whoever...has gone forth from home into homelessness, he tames but one self, calms but one self, makes but one self attain final Nirvana.²³

The response is simply that Buddhist renunciants are not merely self-interested, because they call others to follow them, and so they also benefit many.

The *Aṅguttara* concludes by describing those interested in both self and other in the highest superlatives as the best among them all. They are like the finest *ghee* clarified from milk.²⁴ In the light of the negative comparison to those interested in both self and other, the *crème de la crème*, and the broad prevalence of exhortations to practice for the sake of the world in phrasing identical to Mahāyāna texts, the pursuit of only one’s own spiritual benefit is clearly inferior and out of keeping with a constant refrain of the Buddha. On a scale from a gory funerary stick to clarified ghee, one would certainly want to be as high up as possible and from passages like the one above we

²³ A.i.168-9, Conze, 37-8.

²⁴ A.ii.95-7; Woodward, 104-7; see also A.iii.12; for the laity see A.iv.218-21, Hare, 149-50; See also D.iii.233, Walshe, 494: “Monks if you see your own benefit, you should strive with effort. If you see another’s benefit, you should strive with effort. If you see benefit for both, you should strive with effort.” The commentary to our main text says that those interested only in themselves are virtuous. Those interested only in others are learned, but wicked. Those set on neither are wicked and unlearned. The arhat interested in both is virtuous and learned. See A.iii.12, Hare, p. 10, fn. 1.

can see that self-interested asceticism is generally denigrated. The *Āṅguttara*'s account of the selfish monk would make a valid description of the Mahāyāna's straw man, and shows that, even in the *nikāyas*, interest only in one's own enlightenment was considered inferior. This is one more confirmation that the derogative term "hīnayāna," which merely provides negative space for the Mahāyānist self-image, should stop being used in reference to Mainstream abhidharmic traditions.

In an excellent article that came some years after the dissertation from which I drew much of this research, Lambert Schmithausen discussed this same passage and its parallels. To address the question of how close this early devaluation of self-interested practice was to the Mahāyānist critique of the *arhat*, he gave a nuanced account of the variations in the textual parallels regarding those who strive only for self-benefit, which range from outright censure to being inferior on a scale of desirability.²⁵

However, it is easy to show, through prominent and pervasive themes like *lokānukampā*, *mettacitta* and so on, that even in early texts those only interested in their own benefit would be disregarding some of the Buddha's most salient and persistent exhortations. In the *Nikāyas*, virtually every activity of a monk, from begging to meditation, was supposed to be motivated for the benefit and happiness of the multitude, out of *anukampā* for the world, for the benefit and happiness of divinities and humans.²⁶ In many cases, the seemingly distinctive language of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* regarding universal compassion is merely adapted in identical form from the *Nikāyas*.

²⁵ Schmithausen 2004, 152-158; Jenkins, 1998/2003, 49-67.

²⁶ D.ii.119: *Tasmāt iha bhikkhave ye vo mayā dhammā abhiññāya desitā, te vo sādhuṅgaṃ uggahetvā āsevitabbā bhāvetabbā bahulī-kātabbā yathayidaṃ brahmacariyaṃ addhaniyaṃ assa ciraṭṭhitikaṃ, tad assa bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya athāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ*; cv. Walshe, 1987, 253; See also Horner 1982, 28: "Monks you should carefully assume those practices which I have taught for the sake of direct knowledge... This is for the welfare of the multitudes, the benefit, welfare..." For extensive examples see Jenkins 1998/2003, 67-87.

Anukampā for the whole world, for all humans and *devas*, or for all sentient beings is presented as the motivation for practice, study, enlightenment, and teaching. *Mettacitta*, with its highly suggestive similarity to *bodhicitta*, is defined as the pervading thought to benefit all sentient beings. It is presented as an essential quality of a true monk and renunciant and a prerequisite for the proper mode of exchange between monks and laity.²⁷ We should also note that early or Mainstream accounts of selfish asceticism are less likely to be as extreme as in Mahāyāna *sūtras*, whose condemnations of the selfish, cowardly, and uncompassionate *śrāvaka* served the purposes of vitriolic self-validation through a hermeneutic of superiority.

Asaṅga devotes an entire chapter of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* to the theme of *svaparārtha*. He treats three of the four types of persons found in the *Nikāyas*, leaving out those who are interested in neither themselves nor others. As in the *Ānguttara*, benefiting self and other are correlated with advancing oneself and others on the path. He defines effort for one's own sake as effort for the attainment of unsurpassed enlightenment, i.e. buddhahood, and effort for others' sake as effort for the liberation of sentient beings from all suffering. We can find this same thinking in the *sūtras*. For instance, according to the *Dharmasamgīti Sūtra*:

Equipping oneself with bodhi is *mahāmaitrī*. Causing other beings to desire that equipment is *mahākaruṇā*. ... *Mahāmaitrī* is not damaging conduct, training, and restraints, while *mahākaruṇā* is protecting the moral discipline of others through your own moral discipline. *Mahāmaitrī* is having excellent tolerance and chastity. *Mahākaruṇā* is taming sentient beings with that chastity and tolerance. *Mahāmaitrī* is strenuously setting out for the sake of your own attainment of Buddhahood. By that strenuous effort to make other sentient beings consider strenuous effort is *mahākaruṇā*.²⁸

²⁷ Jenkins, IBID.

²⁸ *Dharmasamgīti Sūtra*, Peking bKa' 'gyur, vol. 36, no. 904, p. 37:2:5.

In the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, Asaṅga divides the perfections of the *bodhisattva* path according to whether they are for the benefit of oneself or others. *Dāna*, *śīla* and *kṣānti* are *parārtha*, and *dhyāna*, *prajñā* and *vīrya* are *svārtha*.²⁹ According to the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśatikā*, which more often agrees with Asaṅga, the first 3 perfections, *dāna*, *śīla*, *kṣānti* are for the sake of others; *dhyāna* and *prajñā* are for oneself; and *vīrya* is for both.³⁰ The *Ratnagoṭravibhāga* divides the buddha-bodies according to their relation to self and other interest. The attainment of the *dharmakāya* is *svārtha*, and the attainment of the *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya* are for the sake of others.³¹ Just as the *svaparārtha* scheme illustrates the importance of interest in others in mainstream traditions, it conversely illustrates the importance of self-interest in the Mahāyāna.

Returning to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, Asaṅga sees those interested only in themselves as inferior simply because they fail to cultivate others. But surprisingly, just as in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, those interested only in others are actually worse than those only interested in themselves. Such people actually succeed in benefiting neither themselves nor others, because they fail to develop in themselves the necessary powers and capabilities to help others.

If a *bodhisattva* himself [sic] were capable, but his followers did not become trained, then, because his actions for the sake of others are neither abundant nor fitting, he would be incapable of accomplishing the benefit of others. If a *bodhisattva* were himself powerless and incompetent, and [yet] his followers were trained, that *bodhisattva*'s actions for the sake of others would not be abundant and fitting, even including action for his own sake, because he is incapable of accomplishing the good of others. Therefore, when both [self-empowerment and training of followers] are present and both are accomplished, the *bodhisattva*'s actions for others become abundant and

²⁹ *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* XVI. 3. Jamspal, 191-192.

³⁰ *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*, Braarvig, 114. He suggests the commentator is Sthiramati.

³¹ Takasaki, 318-9.

fitting, since he is able to help others. And the *bodhisattva* who has become like this quickly matures [both] his own buddha-qualities and sentient beings in the three vehicles; and he [both] realizes unsurpassed true awakening and liberates matured sentient beings.³²

By developing in herself the power to help others, the ideal practitioner benefits both self and other.³³ This is the elegant interrelation of benefiting self and other in both the *arhat* and *bodhisattva* ideal, which is to empower oneself for the sake of others. Benefit of self and other are linked, since the best way to benefit others is by pursuing the ultimate benefit to oneself.

Even apparent acts of radical self-abnegation are considered empowering and self-rewarding. In the Hungry Tigress *Jātaka*, the Buddha's companions are all filled with fear as they enter the jungle, but in anticipation of offering his body, the Buddha declares that this is a day of great opportunity.³⁴ In the Hare *Jātaka*, the Buddha describes the act of hurling himself into the flames as doing himself a favor.³⁵ When *bodhisattvas* are obstructed from giving their heads, or someone protests that this is harmful to them, they may be rebuked for hindering their progress toward enlightenment.³⁶ Another illustration

³² *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, ed. Dutt, 21-2: *svayaṅ ced ayaṃ bodhisattvaḥ pratibalaḥ syād vineyās ca asya na niyojyā bhavyeḥ | evaṃ asya na pracurā syān na pradakṣiṇā parārthakriyā yena ayaṃ na śaknyāt parārtham kartum | svayaṅ ced ayaṃ bodhisattvaḥ śaktaḥ syād apratibalo vineyās ca asya niyojyāḥ syuḥ svārthakriyām ārabhyaivam api bodhisattvasya parārthakriyā na pracurā na pradakṣiṇā syād yena ayaṃ na śaknyāt parārtham kartum | tasmād ubhayasānnidhye ubhayasampadi satyām bodhisattvasya sattvārthakriyā pracurā bhavati pradakṣiṇā yena śaknoti parārtham kartum | tathābhūtaḥ ca asau bodhisattvaḥ ātmanāś ca buddhadharmān sattvāṃś ca triṣu yāneṣu kṣipraṃ eva paripācayati | ātmanā ca anuttarām samyaksambodhim adhisambudhyate | paripakvāṃś ca sattvān vimocayati |* For many additional Mahāyāna sources on the *svaparārtha* theme and a brief discussion of this theme, see Dayal, 1978, 359, note 107, and 180-1.

³³ Schmithausen also states that Mahāyāna sources agree in ranking the person interested in both self and other highest, but does not cite or discuss them. Schmithausen 2004, 152.

³⁴ *Sūtra of Golden Light*, Emmerick, 88-100.

³⁵ *Jātakamālā*, Khoroché, 32-38; *Jātaka #316*, Rhys-Davids, C., 131-135.

³⁶ For multiple examples see Ohnuma, 118-119.

is the ethics of compassionate killing, where the *bodhisattva* appears to be poised for a mighty plunge into the hell realms. Nothing better assures that a *bodhisattva* will not go to hell for her actions than the willingness to do so. Because of their willingness to take on negative karmic results, killer *bodhisattvas* instead make great merit.³⁷

The logic here is natural to India, where power, even of the diabolically self-serving kind, is often attained through the apparent self-negation of asceticism and self-mortification. One can see how this double-edged quality can easily lead to misunderstanding. Statements that speak of being motivated purely for the benefit of others do not, as they appear, necessarily intend the sacrifice of self-interest. In fact it is precisely the least self-interested motivation that is most self-beneficial. This is not to argue that extreme acts of generosity and suffering for the sake of others are not actually being advocated, but only that they are in fact the basis of extreme self-benefit including heavenly rebirths and massive acceleration of spiritual progress. More importantly for most of us, being kind results in happiness and sweet dreams. What can appear to be a subtle selfishness behind these practices is only the other side of the naturally double-edged relationship between developing oneself and benefiting others.

This double-edged quality leads to many paradoxical constructions. Nothing assures future wealth better than generosity and so receiving can be the greatest kindness. Subhūti, well-known interlocutor of the *Vajracchedikā* which is set in the Jeta Grove donated by his older brother Anāthapiṇḍada, was idealized as the monk most worthy of offerings. This was because as he went on begging rounds he meditated on *maitrī*, thus boosting the merit received by those who gave to him. Receiving alms becomes a form of compassion for a monk, since by receiving he allows others to accrue merit. Susanne

³⁷ Both the *Upāyakaśālyā Sūtra*, the key source, and commentators like Asaṅga emphatically state that the compassionate killer incurs no karmic harm and instead makes abundant merit. See Jenkins, 2011.

Mrozick notes this kind of paradox in her study of the body in Buddhist thought. Those who sacrifice their bodies for the sake of others are the very ones who attain the exquisite body of a Buddha.³⁸ Self-sacrifice is so self-beneficial that giving becomes a form of receiving. Being eaten by a tiger or self-immolation are opportunities. Protecting others is the best way to protect oneself.

Bodhisattvas are even encouraged to see their enlightenment as being dependent on sentient beings, since without them they can never accumulate the merit necessary for full enlightenment.

When the *bodhisattva* thus gives to those sentient beings, he truly regards those he helps as being more helpful to him than he himself (is to them). Because (he thinks) they serve as the very foundation (for my attainment) of unexcelled perfect enlightenment.³⁹

Conversely, the pursuit of self-interest is said to lead to bad rebirth, low status and misery. The inferior attainment of *śrāvakas* is a result of only pursuing their own interest, instead of pursuing the interests of others. While altruism ultimately blesses the altruistic, selfishness ultimately harms the selfish.

There is a circular relationship here between self and other benefit that can be confusing. The following famous passage from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is usually taken to express the essence of a *bodhisattva*'s altruistic interest in others.

From the desire to elevate only oneself [come] bad birth, lowliness, and stupidity. From that very desire directed elsewhere, [come] good birth, respect, and intelligence ... Whoever is pained in the world, they all are so do to desire for their own happiness. Whoever is pleased in the world,

³⁸ Mrozick, 78-79.

³⁹ *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, Jamspal, 197: See also *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, v.77-78, "If Buddhas attain the unsurpassed stage by [giving] living beings support, what is so strange if [those] not guided by the slightest concern for others receive none of the pleasures of gods and men..." Lindtner, 59.

they all are so do to desire for others' happiness.⁴⁰

In light of the standard teaching of benefiting self and other, it is actually a stock expression of the fact that, not only is the self-interested person actually harming their own selfish interest, but that those interested in others receive abundant worldly blessings such as auspicious rebirths, high social status, intelligence and happiness, that is, they benefit themselves. It is only natural that appeals to self-interest are part of the rhetoric of compassion as its purpose is to draw people from their normal self-interest into appreciation of this paradox. Aśaṅga expressed this circularity centuries earlier in a verse that could have been a template for the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*'s.

Foolish people striving for their own benefit,
fail to attain it and always head toward suffering.

The wise, however, always strive for the benefit of others,
and delivering both [*sva* and *parārtha*] head toward cessation.⁴¹

7. Brief comments on the exchange and sameness of self and other

Two prominent constructions related to meditation techniques for generating compassion, the exchange and sameness of self and other, have not been discussed here. Because they have received so much attention, and the sameness of self and other in particular is so rich and deeply interrelated with more general meanings of *samatā* and *upekṣā*, they will require a separate treatment. The understanding of

⁴⁰ *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, VIII. 127-129, Tripathi, 169: *durgatir nīcatā maurkhyam yayaivātimonnatīchayā, tām eva anyatra saṅkrāmya sugatīḥ satkṛti matīḥ*. [127]. . . *ye ke cid duḥkhitā loke sarve te svasukhecchayā, ye ke cid sukhītā loke sarve te 'nyasukhecchayā* [129]. Compare *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*, verses 77-78.

⁴¹ *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, Lévi. Tome 1, Chapter V, verse 8, 21: *jano vimūḍaḥ svasukhārthamudyataḥ sadā tadaprāpya pareti duḥkhatām | sadā tu dhīro hi parārthamudyato dvayārthamādhāya pareti nirvṛtiḥ* || cf. Jamspal 44 and 64. In two cases here I differ from Jamspal *et al*, based on the context, in taking *dhīra* as “wise,” rather than courageous.

“sameness” is also quite different in various schools of thought. However, since both of these motifs have suggested a collapse of self and other based on selflessness, it seems appropriate to make some brief comments. The manner and degree to which these meditations are based on selflessness has been the subject of rich debate, but it is plain in regard to both that much of their traditional treatment is actually based on the ontological distinction between persons. The most common appeal to sameness is not ontological, but psychological, to the fact that all beings fear suffering just as we do.⁴²

The main purpose of these meditations is to produce a kind of psychological sameness, i.e. of loving kindness or compassion to all the varieties of beings and in all their relations. One of the few safe generalizations about Buddhism is that it gives distinctive attention to the infinite diversity of sentient beings and the need to understand and attend to their particular character. In Mahāyāna Buddhism this may even include teaching beings that communicate with smells. The inability to make meaningful distinctions about what kind of being is in need would render a *bodhisattva* helpless. Karma is also based on personal distinctions, for instance it is an “immediate,” a sin that leads directly to hell, to kill one’s own mother, but not to kill the mother of another.⁴³

The goal of exchanging self and other is not to assume a distinctionless perspective, but to assume an alternate identity and even to see oneself through another’s eyes. However selflessness may be used to rationalize this practice, the distinction between self and other remains its frame. Even when sources integrate consideration of selflessness, we must always ask whether there is the intention to suggest an ethics based on an ultimate personless perspective, or if instead the point is to inform the conventional appearance of persons with wisdom.⁴⁴

⁴² See Jenkins, 1998/2003, 46, 63.

⁴³ See Jenkins 2011.

⁴⁴ See Jenkins 2015.

8. Conclusions

These motifs based on self and other illustrate that, rather than impersonal perspectives that collapse meaningful distinctions between beings, the distinctions between oneself and others are basic to Buddhist ethics. This distinction may be collapsed at times through sophisticated ontological analysis, but Buddhist texts show a clear awareness that for most people ethics was based on the perception of beings. Buddhism does not rely on the unrealistic expectation that its adherents be advanced in philosophy or meditation in order to engage the values of compassion. The common tendency to see no-self and emptiness as keys to Buddhist ethics is mistaken, as is the related tendency to conflate ontological selflessness and moral selflessness. Buddhist ethics is better characterized as skillfully and self-consciously adapting, with great hermeneutical flexibility and particularism, to the distinct needs of myriad types of sentient beings, diverse human persons, and their unique and complex situations.

Both the Mainstream and Mahāyāna treatments of *svaparārtha* explicitly portray exclusive interest in the benefit of others as inferior. Those interested only in developing others would be unable to do so, since they would fail to develop themselves. Both agree that exclusive self-interest is still better than such naïve altruism, as at least oneself is developed. Several stereotypes are challenged here. Mahāyāna sources saw Buddhahood as the ultimate attainment of self-interest; the ideal is not simple altruism, but the interrelationship between benefiting self and other. Early and Mainstream sources reject the ideal of the selfish monk pursuing only their own liberation; these texts clearly embrace the ideal of seeking enlightenment for the sake of benefiting others. The circular interrelation of self and other benefit, implicit for instance in the *bodhisattva*'s vow to attain Buddhahood for the sake of others, can appear paradoxical and ironic. Self-immolation may be a nice thing to do for yourself. Assuming vast power is the kindest thing we can do for others. Mere interest in helping others benefits oneself, and, as even Mainstream sources emphasize, only through benefiting oneself can we gain the ability to

help others. Rather than an ethical ideal based on profound ideas of selflessness or emptiness, perhaps the central idea is that compassion blesses and protects the compassionate and the lack of it ultimately leads to individual, social and political misery.

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自他的利益：佛教倫理學中個人與自利的重要性

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摘要：

「自他」的主題（包括利益、利害、保護、目標、交換、同一）顯示眾生個體和他們個己利益的重要性，動搖認為無私和空性對理解佛教倫理而言很重要的觀點。自己和他人的利益相互關聯，處於一種生產矛盾。在此矛盾中，悲憫能夠利益悲憫者。

關鍵詞：

自他義、悲憫、無私、佛教倫理