

## POLITICAL THEORY IN CANONICAL BUDDHISM



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### *Introduction*

Over roughly the past fifteen years there has been an explosion of scholarship in comparative political thought. There have been numerous articles and monographs published on the political thought of Islam, Confucianism, Africa, and other traditions.<sup>1</sup> Curiously, virtually none of this work has focused on Buddhism and political theory, despite the facts that Buddhism is the fourth or fifth largest religion in the world, that its teachings guide hundreds of millions of people, and that several Asian nations identify their governments as being guided by Buddhist principles. Indeed, over the past thirty to forty years, there has been only a trickle of political theory scholarship published in English that seriously discusses Buddhism.<sup>2</sup>

This oversight is unfortunate because Buddhism proposes a theory of politics that both is distinct from Western theories and poses a plausible and attractive alternative to them. In particular, Buddhism proposes a theory of politics that is deflationary about the importance of politics in human lives, that rests on an immanent theory of morality, and that articulates a compelling and helpful argument that our sense of personal identity is a harmful illusion.

However, asking what “Buddhism” says about politics is roughly like asking what “Christianity” says about politics—it’s an impossibly large and vague task. The existing literature on “Buddhism and politics” breaks down into a number of main types: descriptive literature about how Buddhists have actually engaged in politics and/or are doing so today;<sup>3,4</sup> normative literature about what Buddhism (or Buddhists) say about whether (and how) Buddhists *should* engage in politics;<sup>5</sup> historical/sociological literature on the social and political context within which Buddhism first arose;<sup>6</sup> literature on Buddhist ethics, some of which touches on politics;<sup>7</sup> and political advocacy from a Buddhist standpoint.<sup>8</sup>

To make the present task manageable, I have narrowed the topic in two ways. First, this essay only examines what Canonical Buddhism says about politics. “Canonical Buddhism”<sup>9</sup> refers to the contents of the Pāli Canon, which is the scripture of one tradition of Buddhism (Theravada) and is recognized by the other traditions (Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna) as being authentically the teachings of the Buddha. Thus, whatever conclusions we can draw about political theory from the Pāli Canon are relevant to all Buddhists, though some Buddhists may believe that there are other valid teachings on these topics as well. Second, this essay only considers those passages in the Pāli Canon that appear to contain what I will call “normative political theorizing.” Given the plurality of interests and approaches among political theo-

rists,<sup>10</sup> any description of political theory will be controversial. In this case, what I mean by “normative political theorizing” is texts that appear to offer either advice or judgments about how politics ought to be conducted. Thus, for example, there are many, many passages in the Pāli Canon that mention kings,<sup>11</sup> but only a handful that appear to give advice about how kings should behave.

Although political theorists have largely ignored Buddhism, there is an existing literature from other disciplines on the Pāli Canon and normative political theory. Within that literature there are three debates that bear on the current essay. The first debate is over whether Canonical Buddhism contains a theory of politics at all, or whether the various comments about politics in the Pāli Canon are better understood as parables, illustrations, and comments on important contemporary events. Max Weber influentially argued that Buddhism is entirely unconcerned with politics,<sup>12</sup> while contemporary scholars like Stanley Tambiah, Steven Collins, Richard Gard, and Balkrishna Gokhale have argued that politics plays at least some role in the Canonical teachings. As I argue below, the evidence of the primary texts makes clear that there is indeed a normative political theory in the Pāli Canon, one that has been underappreciated.

The second debate is over whether any theory of politics ostensibly put forward in the Canonical texts supports monarchy or some form of republicanism, which in this context means broader popular participation in decision making (though typically nothing approaching even the level of semidemocratic participation of contemporary Athens). Here, the clearly dominant view is that the Canonical political theory of Buddhism supports monarchy,<sup>13</sup> though a handful of scholars argue that that reading is mistaken, and that there is a subtle but detectable preference for republicanism.<sup>14</sup> This issue will also be addressed below, though I will argue that the issue of the particular political system embraced by the Pāli Canon is less important than the question of the underlying theory of politics.

The third and final debate is over the role or significance of politics within Buddhism overall. On the one hand, some scholars argue that any politics in the Pāli Canon is relatively peripheral to the main concerns of Buddhism, which are primarily about individual salvation,<sup>15</sup> while other scholars argue that politics and salvation cannot be separated in the Buddhist theory, and thus that politics should be understood as central to Buddhism.<sup>16</sup> This question is central to my discussion below, where I argue that politics is distinctly secondary to individual salvation, and to some degree actually irrelevant.

### *The Relevant Canonical Texts*

There is a scholarly consensus on which passages of the Pāli Canon offer normative commentary about politics (and related issues like the distribution of resources or social class). The passages that are widely seen as relevant to normative political theory are the *Aggañña Sutta*, the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*, the *Mahāsudassana Sutta*, the beginning of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, and various discussions in the *Jātaka Tales* about the ten duties of the righteous king (the *Rajāḍhamma*), such as in

*Jātaka* 385.<sup>17</sup> (A few other tangentially relevant texts will be mentioned below.) I will briefly summarize these key texts.

### *Aggañña Sutta*

The *Aggañña Sutta*<sup>18</sup> purports to be an explanation of the origin of the four main castes: *Brāhmaṇa* (clergy and teachers), *Khattiya* (warriors), *Vessa* (farmers and merchants), and *Sudda* (servants and peasants). It is widely accepted among scholars that it is intended to be a satire of Vedic origin myths, in that it undermines Vedic claims for the intrinsic superiority of the Brahmins.<sup>19</sup> The story begins as a creation myth about the origin of the cosmos (though apparently the cosmos has no true beginning, only periods of expansion and contraction):

There comes a time, Vāseṭṭha [the name of the Buddha's Brahmin interlocutor], when, sooner or later after a long period, this world contracts. . . . But sooner or later, after a very long period, this world begins to expand again. At a time of expansion . . . beings . . . are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious—and they stay like that for a very long time.<sup>20</sup>

As the world continues to become more material and less ethereal, “savory earth” spreads itself out on the surface of the ocean. One of the beings tastes it, and craving arises in that being. Seeing the first being enjoying the savory earth, other beings taste it, and craving arises in them. As these beings continue to eat, they lose their luminosity, and slowly transform from being mind-made to being matter-made. This same process occurs several times, with several different kinds of foods, and each time the beings become more bodily and also more disposed to misconduct of various kinds, such as arrogance, spite, lust, and so on.

With each successive coarsening of the bodies and characters of the beings, the foods available to them become less tasty and harder to obtain. Eventually we reach a stage where the main food is rice, which needs to be cultivated with the familiar degree of steady effort. This leads the beings to divide the fields into individual plots, so that each person could be assured of reaping the benefits of his or her own labor. But ownership inevitably leads to theft.<sup>21</sup>

To solve the ongoing problem of theft, the beings decide to appoint one among them to serve as enforcer of the rules. This appears to be a simple social contract (though see below):

Then those beings came together and lamented the arising of these evil things among them: taking what was not given, censuring, lying and punishment. And they thought: “Suppose we were to appoint a certain being who would show anger where anger was due, censure those who deserved it, and banish those who deserved banishment! And in return, we would grant him a share of the rice.” So they went to the one among them who was the handsomest, the best-looking, the most pleasant and capable, and asked him to do this for them in return for a share of the rice, and he agreed.<sup>22</sup>

This king, whose title was Mahā-Sammata, which the text argues means “People’s Choice,” was the first *khattiya*, which the text argues means “Lord of the Fields.”<sup>23</sup> Some of the people in this society began to reflect on the evils that had arisen, and committed themselves to refraining from evil: “‘They Put Aside Evil and Unwholesome Things’ is the meaning of Brahmin, which is the first regular title to be introduced for such people.”<sup>24</sup> Finally, the names for the *vessa* and *sudda* castes are simply occupational titles—merchants and hunters.<sup>25</sup> Hence, the Vedic division of castes is purely historical and occupational, and the castes reflect nothing about the origins or natural qualities of their members. Further, the Buddha’s own *khattiya* caste were originally the political and social leaders, as opposed to the *brahmins* valorized by the Vedic literature.

### *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*

Right next to the *Aggañña Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* comes the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*. This *sutta* (Skt: *sūtra*) concerns a *cakkavatti* or “wheel-turning monarch.” The Buddha’s first sermon after achieving enlightenment was called the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*, or the *Sutta* on the Turning of the Wheel of *Dhamma*.<sup>26</sup> *Dhamma* (Skt: *dharma*) in this context means truth or teaching, and in that first sermon the Buddha’s teaching set the truth rolling through the world. Coomaraswamy argues that the wheel, the *dhamma cakka*, is related to pre-Buddhist images that represent the revolution of the year, especially the movement of the sun, and that it is intended to represent the totality of existence. In Buddhist iconography, the wheel more narrowly symbolizes the *dhamma*—the truth of the world, and/or the truth of the Buddha’s teaching.<sup>27</sup>

The *cakkavatti* or wheel-turning monarch is a king who advances the *dhamma* through his governance. A basic description of how a king becomes a wheel-turner, and of the seven treasures that he obtains by doing so, is given in the *Mahāsudassana Sutta*.<sup>28</sup> Very briefly, a king can only become a *cakkavatti* through achieving personal moral purity, and then can only maintain that status through ruling in a way that encourages the people to also achieve moral purity. The symbol of a king’s status as a *cakkavatti* is the Wheel Treasure, which is apparently a visible but magical wheel that allows the king to peacefully conquer and rule neighboring states. The *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* recounts what happens when a *cakkavatti* rules in the wrong way.

The story begins with Daḷhanemi, a wheel-turning monarch who realizes that he is reaching the end of his life and decides to spend his last days seeking spiritual wisdom as a wandering ascetic. After the king leaves the kingdom, the Wheel Treasure disappears. The newly crowned king consults the royal sage, who explains that the Wheel Treasure cannot be passed from one king to another but must be earned by each king individually fulfilling the duties of a wheel-turning monarch, which are as follows: “you should establish guard, ward, and protection according to *Dhamma* for your own household, your troops, your nobles and vassals, for Brahmins and householders, town and country folk, ascetics and Brahmins, for beasts and birds. Let no crime prevail in your kingdom, and to those who are in need, give property.”<sup>29</sup>

That king and the next seven of his successors follow this advice and become wheel-turners. But the eighth makes the fatal mistake: “[H]e ruled the people according to his own ideas, and, being so ruled, the people did not prosper as they had done under the previous kings who had performed the duties of a wheel-turning monarch.”<sup>30</sup> He tries to mend his ways, but doesn’t follow the sages’ advice carefully; in particular, he does not give property to the needy. This leads the poor to steal; interestingly, the king’s initial response is to give the thieves enough property that they don’t need to steal anymore, but eventually the king realizes that this will have the perverse effect of encouraging theft. The king decides to execute the next thief, which has the unintended consequence of legitimating the use of force, thus making theft both more common and more dangerous.

This starts a cycle of moral degradation, parallel to the one in the *Aggañña Sutta* in which physical craving for food leads to moral degradation:

Thus, from the not giving of property to the needy, poverty became rife, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased—and from the increase in the taking of life, people’s life-span decreased, their beauty decreased, and [as] a result of this decrease of life-span and beauty, the children of those whose life-span had been eighty-thousand years lived for only forty thousand.<sup>31</sup>

This same cycle continues, with novel crimes being committed (always caused by the previous crime), until the life span is only one hundred years—that is, until today. The Buddha predicts that in the future there will be further degradation, until the life span is only ten years. Then the cycle reverses:

And for those of a ten-year life-span, there will come to be a “sword interval” of seven days, during which they will mistake one another for wild beasts. Sharp swords will appear in their hands and, thinking: “There is a wild beast!” they will take each other’s lives with those swords. But there will be some beings who will think: “Let us not kill or be killed by anyone! Let us make for some grassy thickets or jungle-recesses or clumps of trees, for rivers hard to ford or inaccessible mountains, and live on roots and fruits of the forest.” And this they will do for seven days. Then, at the end of the seven days, they will emerge from their hiding-places and rejoice together of one accord, saying: “Good beings, I see that you are alive!” And then the thought will occur to those beings: “It is only because we became addicted to evil ways that we suffered this loss of our kindred, so let us now do good! What good things can we do? Let us abstain from the taking of life—that will be a good practice.” And so they will abstain from the taking of life, and, having undertaken this good thing, will practise it. And through having undertaken such wholesome things, they will increase in life-span and beauty. And the children of those whose life-span was ten years will live for twenty years.<sup>32</sup>

In the future, when the life span has again reached eighty thousand years, a new Buddha will appear, named Metteya. At the same time, a new *cakkavatti* will arise, named Sankha. The two will rule the two spheres—spiritual and temporal—side by side, by implication creating the best possible human society. Ultimately, Sankha will

become a disciple of Metteya and achieve enlightenment, thus demonstrating the superiority of the spiritual to the temporal.

There appears to be widespread agreement among scholars that this story represents a novel theory in the history of Indian political thought, often referred to as the Two Wheels of *Dhamma*<sup>33</sup>—the identification of both religious life and political/social life as being governed by the same underlying moral laws, and the assertion that ultimately the temporal powers were subordinate to the spiritual powers.<sup>34</sup> This theory is frequently contrasted with the realist theory of politics put forward by Kautilya in the later *Arthashastra*. Later Buddhist thinkers identified King Aśoka (died ca. 238 B.C.E.) as having been a wheel-turning monarch.<sup>35</sup>

### *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*

The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* is the last of the major Canonical passages that appears to offer normative political guidance (more on the *Jātaka* tales below). In this passage, the Buddha learns that King Ajātasattu intends to attack the Vajjians. The king sends a minister to the Buddha to inform him of this plan, and to report back to the king whatever the Buddha says in response. The Buddha tells the minister that he had previously advised the Vajjians to follow seven principles, and that as long as they followed these principles they would prosper and not decline. The seven principles were: (1) “hold regular and frequent assemblies”; (2) “meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony”; (3) “do not authorise what has not been authorised already, and do not abolish what has been authorised, but proceed according to what has been authorised by their ancient tradition”; (4) “honour, respect, revere and salute the elders among them, and consider them worth listening to”; (5) “do not forcibly abduct others’ wives and daughters and compel them to live with them”; (6) “honour, respect, revere and salute the Vajjian shrines at home and abroad, not withdrawing the proper support made and given before”; and (7) ensure “that proper provision is made for the safety of Arahants [enlightened beings], so that such Arahants may come in future to live there, and those already there may dwell in comfort.”<sup>36</sup>

The subtext of all of this is that the Vajjians had a quasi-republican form of government. Some scholars have read this passage to say that the Buddha had told the Vajjians to uphold their republican traditions, and thus implicitly was criticizing monarchy. On this reading, it is significant that the aggressive king is Ajātasattu, who had murdered his spiritually advanced father, Bimbisāra, to obtain the throne. (Elsewhere in the Pāli Canon the Buddha reveals that, after his death and due to his spiritual virtue, Bimbisāra was reborn in one of the heavenly realms, and that he would achieve enlightenment after only one more human birth, thus demonstrating that political leaders can make spiritual progress.<sup>37</sup>) Bolstering this reading, the Buddha then gives parallel advice to his monks about how they should govern the *sangha* (the community of monks) after his death. The structure of the *sangha*, which the Buddha himself had set up, was republican. For example, there was no leader of the *sangha*, and all decisions were made in open meetings, where all monks had equal rights to

make proposals and vote. Indeed, given that the *sangha* was the only community that the Buddha ever created, some have argued that we should see it as representing his preferred model of social organization.<sup>38</sup> Further, the Buddha had grown up in a society governed by semi-republican principles, though during his lifetime that form of government was rapidly disappearing.<sup>39</sup>

### *Jātaka Texts*

Finally, there are passing comments about normative political theory in the *Jātaka* texts, parables about the previous incarnations of the Buddha. In a number of places, they list a series of duties to be observed by kings who would be righteous. These *Rajādhamma* duties are as follows: “Alms, morals, charity, justice and penitence, Peace, mildness, mercy, meekness, patience.”<sup>40</sup>

### *The Political System of Canonical Buddhism*

It will be helpful for us to distinguish between the *political system* that the Pāli Canon texts endorse and the *theory of politics* that underlies that endorsement. Although this reading will require some elaboration, in brief the political system that the Pāli Canon texts endorse is enlightened monarchy based on a primal social contract. The king’s authority originally arose from the consent of the governed, but is maintained by the spiritual righteousness of the king himself. The king’s legitimate power extends to preserving order and preventing extreme poverty, though the people apparently have no right to resist even an incompetent or evil king, and there appears to be no possibility of reopening the terms of the social contract. Social and political inequality are an inescapable fact of life, though they are based on human conventions rather than on any natural or spiritual differences among the people. *Cakkavattis* will not need to use violence, but inferior kings will inevitably rely on it, though even such semi-legitimate violence is ultimately socially destructive.

This brief summary of the political system that is laid out by the Pāli Canon touches on three controversies in the existing literature that need to be addressed before we move on. First, legal scholar Andrew Huxley has objected to reading the *Aggañña Sutta* as depicting a social contract, on the grounds that the Buddha’s society had no tradition of legal contracts to draw upon—the ideas of mutually independent parties voluntarily accepting certain duties and obligations, and of a breach either dissolving the relationship or justifying coercion, simply were not available. Huxley suggests that instead we should read the *Aggañña Sutta* as depicting merely the necessity that those governed accept or acquiesce in being ruled.<sup>41</sup> However, as Steven Collins argues in response to Huxley, we can read a bit more into the *Aggañña Sutta*, even if we accept the point that we cannot treat it as simply another instance of social-contract theory.<sup>42</sup> First, as I noted above, we can read the *Aggañña Sutta* as a statement of the moral equality of persons, and also of their original social equality. Second, we can read the *Aggañña Sutta* as a claim that the only way that original social equality could justifiably have been broken was through the choice of the society itself. Third, we can find in the *Aggañña Sutta* some rudimentary criteria

for judging the performance of kings, though not the later idea found in the social-contract tradition that failure on their part could give rise to justifiable rebellion. For these reasons, it is reasonable to discuss the *Aggañña Sutta* as depicting something closely analogous to a social contract, even if that exact model was not available at the time of its composition.

Second, in my summary above I suggest a reading that synthesizes what are ostensibly different and possibly conflicting theories of the origin of legitimate authority. Both the *Aggañña Sutta* and the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* offer theories about the nature of political legitimacy. The *Aggañña Sutta* suggests that a king's authority rests on the initial consent of the people, and implies that subsequent kings inherit authority as a birthright. The *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* appears to offer a very different theory of legitimacy, based on the king's personal spiritual purity (though rule still appears to be passed to a male heir). An explanation of the relationship between the two texts that is widely cited by other scholars<sup>43</sup> is the one given by Balkrishna Gokhale: "In the second phase of theorizing [the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*] the early Buddhists endeavored to use the state to further the ends of *dhamma* by asserting the supremacy of the *dhamma* over *āṇā* [the power of the state]."<sup>44</sup> On that reading, the change from *Aggañña Sutta* to *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* represents a strategic attempt on the part of the Buddha or *sangha* to benefit from state patronage or protection, by depicting kings in a flattering light as possessing unusual spiritual grace. In that way, Gokhale suggests, the *sangha* hoped to become the arbiter of political legitimacy by evaluating the spiritual fitness of kings.

In other places, however, Gokhale suggests that the change was due to the rapidly increasing power of monarchical states during the Buddha's lifetime and a desire on the Buddha's part to try to restrain state power.<sup>45</sup> The *Rajādhamma* texts seem to support this latter reading, indicating an effort on the part of the Buddha to restrain kings. I am not convinced that there is really a problem here. The *Aggañña Sutta* and *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* depict very different stages of government—the *Aggañña Sutta* its origins, and the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* its perfection (and inevitable cyclical decline). In the era depicted in the *Aggañña Sutta*, there had never been kings. In the era depicted in the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*, kingship was an accepted background fact about society, and the interesting question was how kings could be better or worse. There does not seem to be any insuperable problem to reading them synthetically, as I have proposed above.

Before we move on to the third and final controversy in the literature, we should address one additional issue about the nature of legitimate authority in the Canonical texts. One of the main purposes of the social-contract tradition in Western thought is to tell a story of the origins of coercive authority that appropriately respects the moral autonomy and agency of the citizens. That is, one of the background assumptions of Western thought (especially since the seventeenth century) is that society is composed of more-or-less independent, rational individuals whose autonomy and subjectivity must be respected by the political system for that system to be legitimate. We see this illustrated very clearly, for example, in Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, where he argues that since human beings have all been created by God,



and since we can therefore infer that God must want us to exist, it is a violation of God's will to harm any human being (including oneself) or hinder anyone from peacefully pursuing their goals.<sup>46</sup> This raises an additional problem for reading the *Aggañña Sutta* as (resembling) a social-contract argument, because Buddhism rejects the idea that human beings are at base atomistic, rational beings endowed with natural rights. As will become clear below, this traditional Western conception of human subjectivity conflicts directly with the *anattā* or no-self doctrine that the Buddha taught. If human beings are not rational essences endowed with natural rights, the idea that legitimacy arises from consent seems arbitrary rather than logically necessary. In other words, if human beings are ultimately just more-or-less contingent phenomena, what does it matter whether they are ruled by someone they choose or by someone who seizes power against their will? What exactly would be the normative problem with that?

It might be tempting here to say that the concept of legitimacy doesn't have a place in Buddhist political theory, because it assumes that citizens have some kind of natural essence (expressed as natural rights) that could either be respected or violated. But draining the bathwater of legitimacy would also entail tossing out the baby of normative political theory. At the end of the day, political theory just *is* the idea that some forms of government are normatively good and others normatively bad, in other words that some forms are legitimate and others are not. Thus, if Buddhism is to have a normative political theory, there must be some criterion of legitimacy other than one based on the natural rights of rational individuals. I believe we get the clue to that alternative criterion in the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta's* implicit lesson that some forms of government elicit lower levels of social conflict and individual spiritual regress than others, in particular that rule by a spiritually advanced king minimizes social conflict while maximally encouraging individual spiritual progress. By implication, any other type of rule would be less beneficial to the ultimate goal of achieving enlightenment. Thus legitimacy is not about adequately respecting the autonomy of rational selves, but rather about creating conditions to allow human beings to make spiritual progress (though, as I argue below, the political system can do no more than create a conducive atmosphere—the individual must make the choice to pursue enlightenment).

Returning to the third and final controversy in the existing literature, there is the question (mentioned above) about whether the Pāli Canon texts really endorse monarchy, or whether there is a subtle but detectable preference for republicanism present in them, as briefly sketched in the summary of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* above. I believe that the evidence is overwhelming that the Pāli Canon endorses monarchy rather than republicanism, for several reasons. First, the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* is the only place in the Pāli Canon where the Buddha even appears to recommend republican government for lay society (as opposed to the community of monks or *sangha*). In every other place where the Buddha discusses lay government, either descriptively or prescriptively, he is talking about monarchy. Second, when the Buddha offers a utopian vision of a much better political future, at the stage of the

*Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* when humanity once again lives for eighty thousand years, the form of lay government is still monarchy. Indeed, the implication of the sine-wave view of time that underlies the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* is that this would be the best possible form of lay society: monarchy led by a spiritually advanced king, in an era during which a fully enlightened Buddha is also teaching. Especially given the semi-fantastic nature of the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta's* predictions of the future, this would be precisely where we would expect the Buddha to endorse republicanism as a distant-but-obtainable ideal; the fact that he did not do so suggests that the Buddha did not see republicanism as the ideal for lay society.

Finally, it is worth taking seriously the differences between the *sangha* and lay society. While it is true that the only society the Buddha ever set up, the *sangha*, was republican, there are good reasons to think that the *sangha* may not have been intended as a model for the larger society. First, the *sangha* was an intentional community, with a long list of rules and precepts whose violation could mean expulsion. Many of the typical social problems of the larger society could be eliminated without the use of force in the more restrictive setting of the *sangha*. For example, the *sangha* required celibacy, a practice that the Buddha never proposed for society at large. Second, the *sangha* could count on the guidance of (relatively) enlightened members to help resolve disputes through peaceful discussion, again avoiding the use of force or coercion that typifies government. Thus, the *sangha* could employ republican methods in part because it didn't face the same problems as a lay political society. For all of these reasons, I believe that we should treat the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* as primarily emphasizing the value of tradition and continuity, rather than seeing it as a subtle endorsement of republicanism. This suggests that when it comes to the form of government, the Buddha either supported or acquiesced to monarchy as the only practical form.

### *The Theory of Politics of Canonical Buddhism*

Seen solely as an endorsement of a political system, the political theory of the Pāli Canon is not of much interest—it's just another iteration of the very familiar defense of enlightened monarchy based on a primeval and unrecoverable social contract. We find much the same theory in the *Republic*, the *Leviathan*, and *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, among many other texts. If this were all Buddhism had to offer us, it wouldn't be worth the trouble. Happily, Buddhism has a great deal more to offer, because the theory of politics that underlies the political system is radically different from comparable theories in the Western tradition. In particular, the theory of politics of the Pāli Canon texts rests on three ideas: a deflationary account of the role of politics in human life; an immanent theory of morality; and the claim that individual identity is both illusory and harmful. It is these three underlying arguments that are really of value—indeed, the vast majority of Buddhists living today have abandoned monarchy in favor of some form of republican government, though they have preserved these underlying rationales of the Buddhist theory of politics.

### *The Role of Politics in Human Life*

It is overwhelmingly clear from the Pāli Canon texts that the goal of Buddhism is individual salvation (though there is considerable debate about whether one ought to save oneself as soon as possible, or intentionally submit to continued rebirths to help save others first). The content of the Buddha's first sermon after achieving enlightenment was the Four Noble Truths, the core of the religion, which explain (1) that life is suffering, (2) that suffering is caused by clinging, (3) that one could stop suffering if one stopped clinging, and (4) that one could stop clinging by living according to eight guidelines called the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>47</sup> The entire focus is on how individuals can make spiritual progress in escaping the cycle of reincarnation and suffering.

That raises the question of the relative importance of politics to soteriology. Is politics integral to Canonical Buddhism, such that individual salvation is significantly affected by the political system under which one lives? Or is politics of secondary importance, such that it has a relatively small or even negligible effect on individual spiritual progress? As Joanna Macy correctly argues,<sup>48</sup> politics must have some effect on salvation, because the theory of causality put forward in the Pāli Canon (called *paticcasamuppāda*, or dependent co-arising<sup>49</sup>) argues that every condition is the result of all previous causes in the universe. If politics exists, it has some effect on individuals and their struggle for enlightenment.

But the Pāli Canon texts themselves make clear that politics has a relatively small effect on salvation, and that politics is relatively unimportant in human life. First, there are a few places in the Pāli Canon where the Buddha explicitly downplays the importance of politics. As Andrew Huxley points out, in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, Māra (a demon who is the personification of temptation and ill will) tempts the Buddha by encouraging him to become a *cakkavatti*.<sup>50</sup> The Buddha rejects the invitation.<sup>51</sup> The spiritually advanced lay disciple Citta rejects a similar invitation, from various well-intentioned gods and spirits, that he strive to become a wheel-turning monarch in his next life.<sup>52</sup> In both cases, it is clear that the grounds of refusal are that even being a righteous ruler would be a distraction from the more important goal of spiritual progress.

Second, a closer reading of the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* offers substantial evidence against the idea that political factors are essential to achieving enlightenment. The *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* clearly places the historical Buddha's own era, when people lived to be one hundred (that is the typical human life span mentioned in the Pāli Canon), as being far inferior to the era in which a *cakkavatti* rules, and also as being on the downward slope toward things getting worse.<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is apparently possible to achieve enlightenment (as the Buddha and many members of the early *sangha* did) without living under the rule of a *cakkavatti*, who, the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* implies, appears only in the eras when people live to be eighty thousand years old. Conversely, the text makes clear that the vast majority of people alive during the reigns of the nine successive *cakkavattis* did not achieve enlightenment. This indicates that while living under an enlightened ruler is helpful, that alone is not enough to lead one to enlightenment.

At the nadir of human existence, when people live for only ten years, it is some of the people themselves who decide that they must improve their behavior, not a *cakkavatti* or even an inferior king. Thus, it appears that the people are capable of moral self-reform, and do not require the help of a king, either good or bad. Indeed, the next *cakkavatti* will not appear until the people become so good that they once again live for eighty thousand years, which won't be for tens of thousands of years. During that entire period, the people will continue to improve without the guidance of a *cakkavatti*, though admittedly they will presumably have inferior kings to help them (though, interestingly, the inevitable errors of those less-than-righteous kings appear to be unable to derail the overall society's moral progress). Thus, while the text overtly appears to say that the actions of the *cakkavatti* (i.e., the political environment) determine whether the society is morally good or not, the structure of the story suggests that in fact it is the moral goodness of the people/society that makes the emergence of a *cakkavatti* possible in the first place. The *cakkavatti* then clearly does have some influence on whether that moral goodness will be maintained, but it also appears that political leaders are powerless to improve a society that is already deteriorating, and that truly excellent political leaders don't emerge in morally bad times.

Therefore, even the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* appears to say that while social and political factors are relevant to the spiritual progress of individuals, they are not determinative. A bad social environment cannot stop people who are determined from making moral progress (witness the survivors of the generation that lives to ten), and a generally good social environment cannot stop people from deteriorating morally (witness the generation that lives to eighty thousand due to their general moral goodness, but begins to behave immorally after the failed *cakkavatti*'s errors). Further, the quality of government and social policies appears largely to *follow* from the goodness of the people, rather than to *lead* it.

Thus, while politics obviously plays some role in human life and has some effect on how easy or difficult the individual finds it to achieve enlightenment, politics is neither a central help nor a central hindrance to salvation. Politics simply isn't that relevant to the truly important things in life; at most it plays a supporting role.

### *Immanent Moral Theory*

The Pāli Canon texts depict an unusual moral universe, one that requires some interpretation and unpacking. First, as mentioned in the summary of the *Aggañña Sutta* above, the universe has neither beginning nor end, only endless cycles of expansion and contraction. Buddhism offers no theory about where the universe came from or what its ultimate fate might be—in that way, it focuses on soteriology and avoids eschatology.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the universe is apparently spontaneously repopulated with sentient beings during each expansion. Buddhism does not posit a creator god or power, and actively works to depict the chief Vedic god, Brahma, as just one more sentient being—an unusually powerful one, but not the creator of any aspect of the universe.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the Buddha teaches that the gods who think themselves to be creators have merely forgotten their own origins, limitations, and mortality.<sup>56</sup>

As in the Vedic religion from which it emerged, the fundamental force in the Buddhist universe is *kamma* (Skt: *karma*). In the Buddhist texts *kamma* is widely explained as merely being cause and effect—every action leads to some reaction.<sup>57</sup> There is no cosmic judge or accountant who tallies up one's *kamma* and sends one to one's next incarnation; rather, one's *kamma* creates a disposition or quality of character that leads one naturally and inevitably to a uniquely suitable next life. While the Pāli Canon texts do sometimes talk of future incarnations as being rewards or punishments,<sup>58</sup> we should understand this language metaphorically—people in essence choose their own next incarnations through their actions, and the justice is poetic rather than juridical.

Sentient beings are caught in a cycle of continuous rebirth called *saṃsāra*. Achieving enlightenment allows one to escape from *saṃsāra*, and after the death of one's body an enlightened person enters *nibbāna* (Skt: *nirvāṇa*), about which the Buddha was exceedingly vague. Various people tried to get the Buddha to clarify whether *nibbāna* was a state of existence or nonexistence, and so on, but he refused all such requests. All he said explicitly was that *nibbāna* was beyond suffering and beyond birth and death.<sup>59</sup> Human beings are uniquely well positioned to achieve enlightenment. The implication seems to be that subhuman incarnations are so filled with either misery or the struggle for survival that it is exceedingly difficult to behave in a way that will lead either to a better incarnation or directly to enlightenment, and that conversely the superhuman incarnations (as gods, demi-gods, and so on) often lead beings to be both complacent and arrogant, such that spiritual progress stalls or relapses.<sup>60</sup> Someone on the path toward enlightenment does not acquire more and more "good" *kamma*, but in fact ceases to generate *kamma*.<sup>61</sup> When one enters *nibbāna*, one has no *kamma* at all.

As I suggested above, this is an immanent moral theory. There is no transcendent source of rules or laws, no judge, no reward or punishment, no telos. Everything that happens in this universe follows knowable laws. Thus, for example, one's next birth is the natural consequence of one's current, freely chosen actions (though these actions are themselves influenced by one's actions in previous lives). While each sentient being must inevitably make moral choices about his or her own behavior, there is no outside authority that judges one. In a sense, the natural and the normative are coextensive, in that the effects of good or bad *kamma* are both natural facts about the universe and the basis of moral evaluation. For this reason, the Buddhist moral theory is very similar to the later theories developed by Hobbes<sup>62</sup> and Spinoza.<sup>63</sup> Finally, it is worth noticing that the Buddhist moral universe is made up only of conditional imperatives: if you wish to escape *saṃsāra* and the suffering it entails, act in this particular way. Otherwise you are free to continue being reincarnated forever, though of course the Buddha thinks that that is such an unappealing option that no rational person would choose it. But, importantly, that would be a weak or foolish choice, not an evil one.

### *Theory of the Self*

In his second sermon after achieving enlightenment, the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*,<sup>64</sup> the Buddha taught that there is no self.<sup>65</sup> Before we look at his arguments, it will be help-

ful to take a step back and ask what we mean by a self. Thinking abstractly, whatever a self might consist in, it would have to have three basic qualities: identity, continuity, and causality. First, the self would have to be that thing that makes you who you are, that distinguishes you uniquely from all other human beings. Second, the self would have to exhibit relevant continuity over time, so that it would be true to say that you are the same person today that you were twenty years ago and will be twenty years from now.<sup>66</sup> Finally, to preserve the first two qualities, the self would have to have an unusual relationship to causality. It would have to be the primary cause of your experiences and actions, or else it would not fulfill the identity condition. Of course other factors would also be causally relevant, but without the self they would not lead to *your* experiences. At the same time, the self would have to be largely immune to being affected by other causes, or else it would not fulfill the continuity condition. If the self could be changed by outside causes, it would not remain the same over time, and you would not be the same person that you were twenty years ago.

In essence, the Buddha's argument was that nothing in our experience has these two causal qualities, and that therefore there is nothing that could be a self. On the one hand, he argues that if any object of our experience (either internal or external) were our self, then it should be able to exert some degree of volitional control over other objects of our experience. For example, if the self were the same as our emotions, and if by hypothesis the self is the primary cause of our experiences, then it seems that we ought to be able to exert volitional control over our emotions—that we could choose to experience or not experience certain emotions at will. But, the Buddha points out, we do not have that ability. The vast majority of the time, our emotions rise and fall as if they were entirely independent of our will. The same is true of all other objects of our experience. On the other hand, he argues, if the self were identical with one or more of the objects of our experience, then we should notice that some of the objects of our experience appear to be immune to causal influences. Yet our experience is precisely the opposite—both the internal and external worlds are entirely subject to causal influences, and the more carefully we look the more fluid all aspects of our experience become. Since no object of our experience has the right causal properties of being causally efficacious over our experience at will, while at the same time itself being immune to causal influences, there is no object of our experience that we are justified in identifying as our self. Since the only other option for asserting the existence of a self would be to assume that there is a self without any evidence, the Buddha concludes that there is no self.

Adopting the no-self view isn't merely an intellectual matter of adopting the right position, no matter how counterintuitive it may be. Rather, according to the Buddha, accepting that there is no self is central to liberation and enlightenment. There are a number of passages in the Pāli Canon where the Buddha makes this point. Given the limitations of space, I will quote only two. First, the Buddha argues that every possible self-view will lead to suffering—that is, to the failure to overcome suffering through achieving enlightenment. For example, in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, the Buddha teaches that there are four kinds of clinging (recall that clinging is the root cause of suffering): “clinging to sensual pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to rules and observances, and clinging to a doctrine of self.”<sup>67</sup> Elsewhere the Buddha says:

“Bhikkhus [monks], you may well cling to that doctrine of self that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who clings to it. But do you see any such doctrine of self, bhikkhus?”—“No, venerable sir.”—“Good, bhikkhus. I too do not see any doctrine of self that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who clings to it.”<sup>68</sup>

These passages suggest that achieving the right insights and knowledge about the self is central to liberation.

### *Theory of Politics*

These three elements add up to a distinctive theory of politics. The most basic human desire is happiness. Unfortunately, life is characterized not by happiness but by suffering. Even our happiest moments are marred by the knowledge that they must end, that everyone involved must eventually sicken and die, and that even as we are enjoying them we are wasting precious time worrying about the future and fretting about the past. Every human being has a natural and powerful incentive to try to escape from the suffering of life. That escape is possible, but only through individual effort. The incentive to seek enlightenment is entirely pragmatic. There is no moral duty to seek enlightenment, and one is perfectly free to continue in the cycle of *saṃsāra* forever. Since the universe is without beginning or end, there isn't even a threat of running out of time before making spiritual progress—when the universe collapses and re-expands, one will simply be reborn and start right back into the cycle of birth and rebirth.

It is helpful on the path to enlightenment to have support from like-minded friends, and to live in a relatively peaceful and stable society, but neither of these conditions is necessary—it is possible to achieve enlightenment without them. The primary goal of politics is to ensure social stability and peace by promulgating laws and rules, punishing violations, and preventing extreme poverty (which typically leads to crime). Politics is a useful and inescapable human activity, since some human beings will inevitably seek to benefit themselves at other people's expense through theft, violence, and fraud, and the victims of these actions will seek to create laws and institutions to protect themselves. However, individuals have no moral duty to participate in politics, and one should participate only to the extent that doing so helps one make spiritual progress. Typically, active participation beyond merely obeying the laws and paying taxes will be a distraction from the more important goal of individual salvation. Government actions and policies will inevitably have an effect on the spiritual progress of the citizens, but that effect is not dispositive—good policies will not ensure that individuals make progress, and bad policies cannot prevent them from making progress. Obviously, helpful policies are to be preferred to obstructive policies, but generally one should not take an active role in politics for the purpose of making better policies, and should instead focus on one's spiritual life—indeed, the Buddha himself gave up his claim to the rule of a kingdom precisely so that he could seek enlightenment, despite a prophecy that he would have become a *cakkavatti* if he had become a political ruler.

Finally, one of the key steps toward enlightenment is realizing the illusory nature of the self. Overcoming the illusion of the self has both soteriological and political consequences. On the one hand, as discussed above, it is a necessary step in letting go of clinging, and thus learning to suffer less from life. On the other hand, since the basic problem of believing that one is or has a self is that it leads one to act egocentrically, always seeking to fulfill one's needs before or at the expense of the needs and desires of others; letting go of the idea of the self should make one extremely unlikely to commit any crimes. Although the Buddha never discusses this possibility, it seems that a society made up entirely of enlightened individuals would operate according to some form of pacifist anarchism. Further, as the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* clearly implies, a society of people who have each weakened, though not yet totally eradicated, their sense of self would apparently be more harmonious and less conflictual than the societies with which we are familiar (and the citizens would all live to be eighty thousand years old!).

Thus, government is both necessary and inevitable, but it doesn't matter very much what form it takes. In any event, one should not play an active role in government if one can avoid it. Real social and political change and improvement will come from the transformation of individuals; this is only modestly affected by politics and is largely the responsibility of each person.

### *Conclusion: Why the Buddhist Theory is a Serious Alternative to Western Theories*

It is important to appreciate just how different the Buddhist theory of politics is from more familiar Western theories. While it is certainly true that we see bits and pieces of this theory in the Western tradition, no one Western theory includes all of them, or puts them together in this way. Thus, for example, we certainly see a deflationary attitude toward politics in some Western thinkers, such as with Thoreau's point that he came to the world to live in it rather than to improve it,<sup>69</sup> and in Augustine's pessimism about the possibility of avoiding evil when involved in politics.<sup>70</sup> Yet both Thoreau and Augustine argue that there are some circumstances—rare for Thoreau, common for Augustine—under which one must nonetheless take an active role in the political life of the community. We see nothing like this in the Pāli Canon texts. *Someone* has to run the society, but it needn't be *you*, and in fact there will always be someone else eager to do it, usually for all the wrong reasons.

More common in the Western tradition is the idea that participation in government is pragmatically necessary, morally obligatory, and/or the only path to full development of one's capacities. We see this theme in the earliest works, such as in Plato's implicit argument in the *Republic* that no class of citizens can fully develop its nature without the cooperation of the other classes through politics, and in Aristotle's overt argument in the *Politics* that individual perfection and the good life can be achieved only in the polis.<sup>71</sup> That same theme recurs throughout the Western tradition, in Augustine's argument that Christians have a moral duty to participate in politics despite the likelihood that they will sin in the process,<sup>72</sup> in Locke's assumption that political participation is the only rational course of action,<sup>73</sup> in Marx's



assertion that human beings can only achieve their full potential through active participation in a democratic and egalitarian society,<sup>74</sup> in Arendt's valorization of the life of action in the public sphere,<sup>75</sup> in the value pluralists'<sup>76</sup> argument that plurality requires a kind of constant political engagement, and in the civic republican emphasis on self-cultivation through political participation. It is virtually always true that the cure proposed for anomie, alienation, sectarian conflict, disempowerment, and other political ills is . . . more politics!

Given the Western tradition's emphasis on more and more politics, it is tempting to treat the Buddhist argument that politics isn't so very important as being an irresponsible quietism or the response of an elite that can shelter itself from the consequences of bad policies. Indeed, Slavoj Žižek argues just that.<sup>77</sup> Yet this response misses the fact that the Buddha's depreciation of politics successfully captures the experience of many modern-day citizens. The Buddha's advice is to participate in the political system in whatever ways are required and/or typical—obey the laws, pay your taxes, and vote for the candidates you think will enact the best policies. But don't expect politics to dramatically improve the society. Change ultimately comes additively, from the many personal transformations of individual citizens. Yes, it matters what happens in the world of politics, but what happens in the mind of each individual matters more, not just for each individual personally (contra Žižek), but for the society as a whole. To paraphrase Rousseau, good laws cannot make good citizens, and bad citizens cannot make good laws. Only improving citizens can create improving laws. Although patterns of political participation and engagement vary widely among societies, this idea—that one should not expect fundamental social change to be led by the political system—is a familiar feature of the politics of many contemporary democracies. To the extent that this deflationary view reflects the views of (some) modern citizens, the Buddhist theory of politics seems to be a better fit for them than much of the Western theory tradition, whose optimism about politics strikes many modern citizens as quaint.

The question of the relative value of the Buddha's immanent system of morality is more complex. There are a number of Western thinkers who have developed roughly similar immanent systems, such as Epicurus and Lucretius, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, William Connolly, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and a number of other thinkers. However, these theories have typically run into problems that the Buddhist theory might be able to avoid or at least minimize. For the sake of analysis, it is helpful to think of immanent moral theories as tending in three directions.<sup>78</sup> Some such theories are *declarations*—they make strong metaphysical and ontological claims, upon which they base their immanent moral systems. In this category we find thinkers like Epicurus and Lucretius, with their emphasis on the fateful clinamen or swerve that makes both change and free will possible, as well as Spinoza, whose system rests on a complex ontological argument about the nature of the universe. The typical danger of such declarative theories is that their ontological and metaphysical premises are inevitably both contestable and contested, so that the theories end up being unable to demonstrate their preferability to competing transcendental theories. Readers are left to choose between

competing unsupported assumptions, with no principled reason to choose one rather than the others.

The second tendency among immanent theories is toward being merely *descriptions*—such theories articulate an immanent worldview but avoid basing that worldview on contestable premises, precisely to avoid the problems that declarative theories encounter. An example of a descriptive theory is Pyrrhonism, with its emphasis on suspending belief about any claims not immediately obvious to the senses.<sup>79</sup> The typical problem of such theories is that by claiming so little they become in effect aesthetic preferences rather than theories of how the world works. There is no strong reason to adopt such a theory, other than that it appeals to one.

Buddhism is an example of the third tendency among immanence theories, an *invitation*. In essence, invitation theories try to split the difference between declarations and descriptions, by making some ontological and metaphysical assumptions, but at the same time acknowledging that these assumptions are contestable, while also seeking to maximize common ground. For example, William Connolly, resting his moral and political theories on various assumptions, explicitly points out that these assumptions are contestable, and then invites his opponents to join him in experiencing how painful it is to have one's most basic beliefs challenged. His bet is that the recognition of the shared experience of the instability of one's foundations may itself become a novel basis for mutual respect and cooperation, at least on some issues.<sup>80</sup> Buddhism pursues a slightly different invitation strategy, by putting forward some ontological and metaphysical claims and then arguing that all human beings either already believe these claims or would come to do so if they were to reflect on their experience. Buddhism adds two important qualifications to this approach. First, it is not necessary to believe all of Buddhism's claims to get the benefits of Buddhist practice. For example, one can treat the theory of reincarnation as a metaphor rather than a metaphysical fact, and yet still get many and possibly all of the benefits to be had from meditation and following the Noble Eightfold Path. This is related to the second qualification, which is the Buddha's insistence that each individual must test for him- or herself whether the Buddha's teachings are true and helpful. The Buddha articulated this point in response to a question from the Kalamas about how they could know which of the various religious wanderers who visited them (including the Buddha) were right. The Buddha's answer was:

Now, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, "This contemplative is our teacher." When you know for yourselves that, "These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to welfare & to happiness"—then you should enter & remain in them.<sup>81</sup>

Invitation theories are more likely than declaration or description theories to be successful in attracting the skeptical, largely because they try to maximize areas of partial agreement while acknowledging the contestability of their inevitable assumptions. In that way, they attract as many people as possible while driving away as few

as possible. If that is correct, then Buddhism, as an invitation theory, is likely to be one of the strongest immanence theories. To the extent that we are dissatisfied with transcendent theories that rest on premises that the theories themselves refuse to see as contestable, and to the extent that we are dissatisfied with immanence theories that claim either too much or too little to be successful, we may find that invitation theories, like the Buddhist theory, are the best ones available.

Finally, we come to the Buddha's theory of the self. As I suggested above, this theory is unique when compared with Western theories. A number of thinkers have suggested that the self may be an illusion, from Kant<sup>82</sup> and Hume<sup>83</sup> to Nietzsche,<sup>84</sup> Derek Parfit,<sup>85</sup> Antonio Damasio,<sup>86</sup> and others.<sup>87</sup> But no one in the Western tradition has argued that the self is an illusion *that we could get rid of*, or the further claim that we would all be better off if we did get rid of it.

Yet, not surprisingly, the Western philosophical tradition contains several different strands of thought about the self, which are more or less close to the Buddhist position. The view that is the furthest from the Buddhist no-self theory is the Greek and Christian idea that human beings are or possess selves, and that these selves are indestructible, immortal natural essences (i.e., souls). A view that takes one step toward the Buddhist position is the idea that human beings are or possess selves, but that these selves arise more-or-less contingently from the functioning of the body and/or mind. In this group we get thinkers like William James, who argues that the self is ultimately merely a way of talking about some aspects of the body;<sup>88</sup> like Kant, who argues that the mind's perception of a single, unified self is merely the logically necessary but empirically unverifiable corollary of the mind's perception of external objects extended in space and time;<sup>89</sup> and finally like the contemporary "embodied mind" school of thought, which builds off of phenomenology to suggest that our experience of being selves may be rooted in both bodily and cognitive processes.<sup>90</sup> The closest that Western thinking about the self gets to the Buddhist perspective comes in the work of Hume,<sup>91</sup> who suggests that the self is an illusion but one that we cannot get rid of, and Nietzsche,<sup>92</sup> who suggests that the self is an illusion that we might turn to our own purposes. One influential line of contemporary Western thought (which roughly corresponds to "postmodernism") has built on the insights of Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche to argue that identity is either largely or wholly contingent or constructed.<sup>93</sup>

Given this range of ideas, we can see, first, that while the Buddhist no-self position goes further in one direction than any influential Western theory,<sup>94</sup> there are similarities between the two traditions, and, second, that the Buddhist position extends one of the Western approaches to its logical conclusion. The *anattā* doctrine would not be shocking to Hume, Kant, or Nietzsche, though none of them would be prepared to embrace it, and it, at the same time, represents the logical next step for contemporary theories of the constructed and contingent nature of identity. Thus, the Buddhist theory is not so foreign that it could not enter into conversation with Western theories, and it presents the opportunity to extend more familiar theories in their natural direction of development. For both reasons, it is simultaneously distinct from Western theories and an appealing alternative (or supplement) to them.

Further, the Buddhist theory adds a welcome alternative to Western theories of the self by explaining how autonomy is possible without either assuming an essential self or denying the causal influences of super-personal social forces. When we assume that there is an essential self, the question of autonomy gets posed as a metaphor based on physics—we assume that the self is capable of arriving at a final determination about how to act, and then worry that various intervening forces, both psychological and social, may prevent the self from acting in that way. We see the self as having a certain momentum, and then wonder whether the opposing forces will stop it in its tracks. Although it is not obvious on its face, we use the same semi-conscious metaphor when we assume that the self is more or less the product of external social forces. Because the particular self is the result of the effects of many different forces, it is not identical with any one of them, and thus may have interests or needs that are in opposition to some or all of them. In that way, it has unique interests that it might be able to assert interstitially, provided that it is not entirely blocked by those various forces, either as they have been internalized as part of the self (i.e., guilt) or as they continue to exist outside the self (i.e., as the police, public opinion, and so on). In this view, autonomy consists in the self being able to assert and pursue its idiosyncrasy despite being hemmed in by normalizing and homogenizing forces. Once again, we have a semi-conscious metaphor of opposing forces—the self-determination of the individual versus the obstructions of various aspects of power. And once again the problem of autonomy is cast as a problem of the relative strength of the contending forces.

The Buddhist no-self position dissolves this problem by denying that there is a self that has a single, determinate interest or agenda that it is pursuing. Even the theory that sees the self as socially constructed nonetheless argues that the self is a *something*, even if it is a constructed something. The Buddhist position flatly denies this. There is no something that comes to a final and potentially effective decision about how to act and that thus stands as a moving object opposed to other moving objects and forces. Rather than being an object, what we think of as the self is a space, a forum, in which competing forces, both external and internal, interact. The space or forum itself has no interests or goals. The actions of the human being are ultimately determined by reconciliation of the various forces—the adding together of forces pushing in the same direction, the canceling out of opposing forces, the veering off course of one force influenced by another, and so on. In essence, this is the same theory of decision making as that embraced by those who see the self as socially constructed, but without the anxiety. In this view, a human being can act against social forces when the reconciliation of the various forces inclines one in that way. Among the active forces are all of the familiar internal ones like memory, consciousness, emotion, intention, knowledge, and so on. The Buddhist point is simply that nothing helpful is added by saying that sometimes the reconciliation of forces is good (autonomous) and sometimes it is bad (heteronomous)—it merely is what it is. If particular outcomes cause either that human being or others to suffer, there will be feedback that will itself become a force in future reconciliations, and perhaps the future behavior of that person will be different. There isn't anything else useful to be said.

Thus, if what we mean by autonomy is that the individual human being can sometimes act against some of the external forces that influence it, then human beings do have autonomy. If what we mean is that the human being's actions consistently reflect that person's self, either being an intrinsic essence or a constructed essence, then we do not have autonomy because we do not have such selves. In this way, the Buddhist theory of the self manages to defang what is otherwise an insoluble problem by undermining one of its shaky premises.

Thus, overall, the Buddhist theory of politics is appealing because it envisions a role for politics whose modesty is in keeping with the experience of many modern citizens, rests on a moral theory that seeks to make positive claims while making as few contestable assumptions as possible, and posits a theory of the self that clarifies and simplifies the theories that many thinkers in the West had already arrived at. As I have suggested, this theory deserves to be seen as a serious competitor with more familiar Western theories. Hopefully recognition of this will lead Western theorists to a more serious and sustained engagement with this rich, challenging, and in many ways compelling tradition.

## Notes

- 1 – For an excellent bibliography of major recent work, see Andrew F. March, "What Is Comparative Political Theory?" *Review of Politics* 71, no. 4 (2009): 532.
- 2 – I have been able to identify only a handful of works in political science since 1970 that offer a substantive discussion of Buddhist ideas: Michael G. Barnhart, "An Overlapping Consensus: A Critique of Two Approaches," *Review of Politics* 66, no. 2 (2004); Joseph Beatty, "Radical Change and Rational Argument," *Ethics* 87, no. 1 (1976); Daniel A. Bell, review, "The Limits of Liberal Justice," *Political Theory* 26, no. 4 (1998); Antony Black, "The 'Axial Period': What Was It and What Does It Signify?" *Review of Politics* 70, no. 1 (2008); Patrick Fitzgerald, "Gratitude and Justice," *Ethics* 109, no. 1 (1998); James M. Glass, "The Yogin & the Utopian: Nirvana & the Discovery of Being," *Polity* 5, no. 4 (1973); Charles Hartshorne, "Beyond Enlightened Self-Interest: A Metaphysics of Ethics," *Ethics* 84, no. 3 (1974); David Kelly and Anthony Reid, *Asian Freedoms: The Idea of Freedom in East and Southeast Asia* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Philosophy: Theories, Thinkers, Concepts* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001); Martin E. Marty and F. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Stephen McCarthy, *The Political Theory of Tyranny in Singapore and Burma: Aristotle and the Rhetoric of Benevolent Despotism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); John M. Peek, "Buddhism, Human Rights, and the Japanese State," *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (1995); Adamantia Pollis, "Cul-

tural Relativism Revisited: Through a State Prism," *Human Rights Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1996); Benoy Kumar Sarkar, "Democratic Ideals and Republican Institutions in India," *American Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (1918); John Seery, "Moral Perfectionism and Abortion Politics," *Polity* 33, no. 3 (2001); Fred Dallmayr, ed., *Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction* (Houndmills, England: Palgrave, 2010); Slavoj Žižek, "From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism," <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/western.php>.

- 3 – See Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. De Silva, eds., *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Ian Harris, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-century Asia* (New York and London: Continuum, 2001); Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics, and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1982); Ian Harris, ed., *Buddhism, Power and Political Order* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Suksamran Somboon and Trevor Oswald Ling, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia: The Role of the Sangha in the Modernization of Thailand* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976); Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, *In Defense of Dharma: Just-war Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Emanuel Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965); Rebecca Redwood French, *The Golden Yoke: The Legal Cosmology of Buddhist Tibet* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995).
- 4 – A good, recent overview of the current role of Buddhism and Buddhists in the national politics of various countries can be found in Peter Friedlander, "Buddhism and Politics," in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). Similarly, a good overview of the role of Buddhism/Buddhists in the post-classical period can be found in Ian Harris, "Buddhism and Politics in Asia: The Textual and Historical Roots," in Harris, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-century Asia*. See also: Francois Houtart, "Buddhism and Politics in South-East Asia: Part One," *Social Scientist* 5, no. 3 (1976), and "Buddhism and Politics in South-East Asia: Part Two," *Social Scientist* 5, no. 4 (1976); Somboon and Ling, *Political Buddhism in Southeast Asia*.
- 5 – Uma Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Lambert L. Schmithausen, "Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude Towards War," in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben and Karel R. Van Kooij (Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 1999).
- 6 – Chakravarti, *The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*; Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), and *Nirvana and other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias*

of the Pali Imaginaire, Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

- 7 – S. Tachibana, *The Ethics of Buddhism* (London: Curzon Press; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1975); Damien Keown, ed. *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), and *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2001); Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, rev. ed. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997); Russell F. Sizemore and Donald K. Swearer, eds., *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990).
- 8 – Peter D. Hershock, *Buddhism in the Public Sphere: Reorienting Global Interdependence*, Routledge critical studies in Buddhism (London: Routledge, 2006); David Edwards, *The Compassionate Revolution: Radical Politics and Buddhism* (New Delhi: Viveka Foundation, 2001); Ken Jones, *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003); Melvin McLeod, *Mindful Politics: A Buddhist Guide to Making the World a Better Place* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006).
- 9 – Scholars use several different terms to identify the same aspect of Buddhism: what is written in the Pāli Canon (PC), and in some cases in the major commentaries on the PC. Thus, Damien Keown calls this “classical Buddhism” (Damien V. Keown, Charles S. Prebish, and Wayne R. Husted, “Buddhism and Human Rights,” in *Curzon Critical Studies in Buddhism* [Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998], p. 17). Heinz Bechert calls this literature “canonical,” (Heinz Bechert, “Sangha, State, Society, ‘Nation’: Persistence of Traditions in ‘Post-Traditional’ Buddhist Societies,” *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 [1973]), as does Ilana Silber (Ilana Friedrich Silber, “Dissent Through Holiness: The Case of the Radical Renouncer in Theravada Buddhist Countries,” *Numen* 28, no. 2 [1981]). Balkrishna Gokhale calls it “early” Buddhism (Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, “Dhamma as a Political Concept in Early Buddhism,” *Journal of Indian History* 46, no. 2 [1968]).
- 10 – For a helpful discussion of the different activities called political theory, see March, “What Is Comparative Political Theory?” pp. 533–534.
- 11 – See André Baret, “Le Bouddha et les rois,” *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient* 80, no. 1 (1993).
- 12 – “Ancient Buddhism represents in almost all practically decisive points the characteristic polar opposite of Confucianism as well as of Islam. It is a specifically unpolitical and anti-political status religion, more precisely, a religious ‘technology’ of wandering and of intellectually-schooled mendicant monks” (Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale [New York: Free Press, 1958], p. 206).
- 13 – Hence: “Certain it was that there was no real *salvation* to be found in the socio-historical context or in the improvement of its forms. This means that Buddhism

on the whole has surveyed political forms with supreme indifference. Or perhaps it might be stated better thus: Buddhism took the monarchical form of secular society that it found in India for granted and was not concerned enough to worry about changing it" (Winston L. King, *In the Hope of Nibbana: An Essay on Theravada Buddhist Ethics* [LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1964], pp. 177–178).

- 14 – Notably Joanna Rogers Macy, "Dependent Co-arising: The Distinctiveness of Buddhist Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, no. 1 (1979).
- 15 – See King, *In the Hope of Nibbana*.
- 16 – See Macy, "Dependent Co-arising."
- 17 – See Harris, "Buddhism and Politics in Asia: The Textual and Historical Roots"; J. W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Richard A. Gard, *Buddhist Influences on the Political Thought and Institutions of India and Japan* (Claremont, CA: Society for Oriental Studies at Claremont, 1949); Upendra Nath Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas: The Ancient Period and the Period of Transition to the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); Richard A. Gard, "Buddhism and Political Authority," in *The Ethic of Power: The Interplay of Religion, Philosophy, and Politics*, ed. Harold D. Lasswell and Harlan Cleveland (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962); Gokhale, "Dhamma as a Political Concept in Early Buddhism"; Balkrishna G. Gokhale, "Early Buddhist Kingship," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1966); Balkrishna Govind Gokhale, "The Early Buddhist View of the State," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89, no. 4 (1969); Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *The Buddhist Conception of Universal King and Its Manifestations in South and Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1987).
- 18 – Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 407–415.
- 19 – For a discussion of the relevant literature, see Steven Collins, "The Discourse on What Is Primary (Aggañña Sutta): An Annotated Translation," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21 (1993); Andrew Huxley, "The Buddha and the Social Contract," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24 (1996).
- 20 – Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 409–410.
- 21 – "Then, Vāseṭṭha, one greedy-natured being, while watching over his own plot, took another plot that was not given to him, and enjoyed the fruits of it. So they seized hold of him and said: 'You've done a wicked thing, taking another's plot like that! Don't ever do such a thing again!' 'I won't,' he said, but he did the same thing a second and a third time. Again he was seized and rebuked, and some hit him with their fists, some with stones, and some with sticks. And in this way, Vāseṭṭha, taking what was not given, and censuring, and lying, and punishment, took their origin" (*ibid.*, p. 412).
- 22 – *Ibid.*, p. 413.



- 23 – Ibid.
- 24 – Ibid.
- 25 – Ibid., p. 414.
- 26 – Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 56:11, pp. 1843–1847.
- 27 – Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Origin of the Buddha Image and Elements of Buddhist Iconography* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2006), pp. 25–34.
- 28 – Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 279–290.
- 29 – Ibid., pp. 396–397.
- 30 – Ibid., pp. 397–398.
- 31 – Ibid., pp. 399–400.
- 32 – Ibid., p. 402.
- 33 – See Gananath Obeyesekere, Frank Reynolds, and Bardwell L. Smith, eds., *The Two Wheels of Dharma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon* (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972).
- 34 – See Gokhale, “Early Buddhist Kingship.”
- 35 – See John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvādāna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
- 36 – Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 231–232.
- 37 – See the *Janavasabha Sutta* at *ibid.*, pp. 291–300.
- 38 – Macy, “Dependent Co-arising.”
- 39 – Gokhale, “Early Buddhist Kingship”; J. P. Sharma, *Republics in Ancient India: C. 1500 B.C.–500 B.C.* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968).
- 40 – E. B. Cowell, ed. *The Jataka: Or, Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), no. 385, p. 174.
- 41 – Huxley, “The Buddha and the Social Contract.”
- 42 – Steven Collins, “The Lion’s Roar on the Wheel-Turning King: A Response to Andrew Huxley’s ‘The Buddha and the Social Contract,’” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24 (1996).
- 43 – For example, Harris, “Buddhism and Politics in Asia,” p. 4.
- 44 – Gokhale, “The Early Buddhist View of the State,” p. 736.
- 45 – Gokhale, “Dhamma as a Political Concept in Early Buddhism,” p. 254. See also Gard, “Buddhism and Political Authority,” p. 45.
- 46 – See John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), § 6.

- 47 – The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. See Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 56:11, pp. 1843–1847.
- 48 – See Macy, “Dependent Co-arising.”
- 49 – This theory is laid out in many places in the PC. One clear example is the *Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta*, in Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, 3rd ed. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), pp. 354–355. For a further discussion, see *ibid.*, pp. 30–31.
- 50 – Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 4:20, pp. 209–210.
- 51 – Huxley, “The Buddha and the Social Contract,” p. 417.
- 52 – Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 41:10, p. 1330.
- 53 – This is indicated by a shift in verb tense. The periods from Daḷhanemi and his successors up to a generation that lives for 250 years are all described in the past tense, while the generation that lives for ten years and all succeeding generations is described in the future tense.
- 54 – See the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, in Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 67–90.
- 55 – See the *Kevaddha Sutta*, in *ibid.*, pp. 175–180. See also the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, in *ibid.*, esp. pp. 75–77.
- 56 – See the *Brahmajāla Sutta*, in *ibid.*
- 57 – For example, see *Anguttara Nikāya* 6.63, in Access to Insight: Readings in Theravāda Buddhism, “Anguttara Nikaya,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/>.
- 58 – For example, see the *Devadūta Sutta*, in Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 1029–1036.
- 59 – There are many references to *nibbāna* throughout the Pāli Canon. For a helpful anthology with commentary, see Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro, *The Island: An Anthology of the Buddha’s Teachings on Nibbāna* (Redwood Valley, CA: Abhayagiri Monastic Foundation, 2009).
- 60 – See Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 56:47, pp. 1871–1872.
- 61 – See *Anguttara Nikāya* 4.235, in Access to Insight, “Anguttara Nikaya.”
- 62 – See, for example, the discussion of the natural consequences of behavior in chapter 31 of the *Leviathan*, in Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 253–254.
- 63 – See Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics: Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect; and Selected Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992).
- 64 – Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 22:59, pp. 901–902.

- 65 – This is the view of the overwhelming majority of Buddhists and scholars. For example, see Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 1974), and Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). However, a small minority of practitioners and scholars have argued that the Buddha merely denied that a self could be found in particular aspects of experience, and did not directly teach that there is no self at all. For two contemporary, thorough explications of this view, see Miri Albahari, “Against No-*Ātman* Theories of *Anattā*,” *Asian Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2002), and Joaquín Pérez Remón, *Self and Non-self in Early Buddhism* (The Hague, Paris, and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1980). For an overview of earlier literature, see the Introduction to Collins, *Selfless Persons*.
- 66 – The question of what could have this quality of continuity, and whether anything does, has elicited an enormous literature in philosophy. For a recent, helpful overview, see Raymond Martin and John Barresi, eds., *Personal Identity* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).
- 67 – Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, pp. 137–138.
- 68 – *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, in *ibid.*, *Majjhima Nikāya* 22 :23, p. 231.
- 69 – Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, in *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Penguin, 1983), p. 396.
- 70 – Augustine, *Political Writings*, trans. Michael W. Tkacz and Douglas Kries (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), pp. 147–148.
- 71 – Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1252a1, p. 7.
- 72 – Augustine, *Political Writings*, pp. 147–148.
- 73 – For example:
- If man in the state of nature be so free, as has been said; if he be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest, and subject to no body, why will he part with his freedom? . . . To which it is obvious to answer, that though in the state of nature he hath such a right, yet the enjoyment of it is very uncertain, and constantly exposed to the invasion of others: for all being kings as much as he, every man his equal, and the greater part no strict observers of equity and justice, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very insecure. (Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, § 123, pp. 65–66)
- 74 – For example, Marx’s comment in the early essay “Private Property and Communism”:
- Communism as the positive transcendence of private property, or human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth

of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. [New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978], 84)

- 75 – Most fully worked out in section V of *The Human Condition* (“Action”). See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- 76 – For example, Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); George Crowder, “From Value Pluralism to Liberalism,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 1, no. 3 (1998); Crowder, “Pluralism and Liberalism,” *Political Studies* 42 (1994); Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002); Crowder, “John Gray’s Pluralist Critique of Liberalism,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (1998); Crowder, “Two Concepts of Liberal Pluralism,” *Political Theory* 35, no. 2 (2007); John Gray, “Where Pluralists and Liberals Part Company,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 6, no. 1 (1998); Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Gray, “Pluralism and Toleration in Contemporary Political Philosophy,” in *Political Ideas and Political Action*, ed. Rodney Barker (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); William A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Galston, *Liberal Purposes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Galston, “Pluralism and Liberal Democracy,” *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 4 (2006); Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 77 – Žižek, “From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism.”
- 78 – See Matthew J. Moore, “Immanence, Pluralism, and Politics,” *Theory in Action* 4, no. 3 (2011).
- 79 – On the parallels between Buddhism and Pyrrhonism, see Adrian Kuzminski, *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Reinvented Buddhism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008).
- 80 – For a more detailed analysis of Connolly’s version of immanence, see Moore, “Immanence, Pluralism, and Politics.”
- 81 – *Anguttara Nikāya* 3.65, in “Kalama Sutta: To the Kalamas,” trans. from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu (1994), in Access to Insight, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>

- 82 – See the discussion of the transcendental unity of apperception in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), A115–130.
- 83 – David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), bk. I, pt. IV, sec. VI: “Of Personal Identity.”
- 84 – See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For more on this reading, see Freny Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism: Prolegomenon to a Comparative Study*, Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung (Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1981).
- 85 – Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). See also Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, Ashgate World Philosophies series (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).
- 86 – Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (New York: Harcourt, 1999).
- 87 – See Miri Albahari, *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-tiered Illusion of Self* (Basingstoke, England and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), for an argument that William James, Owen Flanagan, and Daniel Dennett make similar denials of the reality of the self.
- 88 – See, for example, chap. 10 of William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1918).
- 89 – See the discussion of the transcendental unity of apperception in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A115–130, pp. 41–50.
- 90 – For a current list of major work in this area, see Robert A. Wilson and Lucia Foglia, “Embodied Cognition,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/embodied-cognition/>.
- 91 – Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, bk. I, pt. IV, sec. VI, “Of Personal Identity.”
- 92 – See Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. For more on this reading, see Mistry, *Nietzsche and Buddhism*.
- 93 – For a helpful critical overview, see Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- 94 – The Invisible Committee makes a polemical claim that we could do without a self and that we would be better off without one, but without any sustained argument. See The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e); Cambridge, MA: Distributed by MIT Press, 2009).