MORALITY AND THE NATURE OF THE SELF

A THESIS

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1. Introduction

The relationship between morality and the self has been a subject of both philosophical and theological speculation. In the religious sphere these two concepts—morality and the self—often hold great significance as they tend to correlate at least somewhat directly with either temporal happiness or soteriological beliefs. As a pragmatic and philosophical issue, then, the question must be asked, is a belief in a permanent self necessary for moral agency? Philosophers and religious scholars alike have investigated the relationship pertaining to specific religions. My thesis is thus: *A belief in a permanent self that is subject to personal everlasting soteriological repercussions is not necessary for moral agency (moral agency entailing responsibility, accountability, and motivation).*

Much of Western philosophy and theology, it appears, tends to affirm an underlying (or transcendent) sense of a continuous or unchanging self, often designated as a soul, in order to establish an inherent locus of moral responsibility and moral accountability especially with regards to soteriological retribution or reward. Immanuel Kant, e.g., argues for the existence of God and immortality of the soul as necessary postulates to explain moral conscience. Kant asserts that

> the realization of the summum bonum [highest good] in the world is a necessary object of a will determinable by the moral law. But in this will the perfect accordance of the mind with the moral law is the supreme condition of the summum bonum. This then must be possible, as well as its object, since it is contained in the command to promote the latter. Now, the perfect accordance of the will with the moral law is holiness, a perfection of which no rational being of the sensible world is capable at any moment of his existence. Since, nevertheless, it is required as practically necessary, it can only be found in a progress in infinitum towards that perfect accordance… this endless progress is only possible on the supposition of an endless duration of the existence and personality

> of the same rational being… the summum bonum, then, practically is only possible on the supposition of the immortality of the soul.[1]

Kant accordingly argues that the summum bonum as a whole includes happiness proportionate to the highest morality since, if morality is good, the combination of morality and happiness is better. However there is no necessary connection between morality and happiness because happiness is the harmony of nature with one's desire. Morality, however, ought to be independent of nature and of its harmony with our desire. Because the summum bonum must be a possible achievement, though, "the existence of a cause of all nature, distinct from nature itself and containing the principle of this connection, namely, of the exact harmony of happiness with morality"[2] must also be postulated. Therefore, "it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God."[3] Kant's argument is a presentation of the necessity for a supreme being, a soul, and an afterlife in response to the drive of moral duty.

Some scholars find it so difficult to let go of the notion of a permanent self that they misunderstand and dismiss deep and complex religio-philosophical traditions. J. Perez-Remon, for example, declares in his book, *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism*, that without "the reality of the moral agent as depository of inner strength and freedom of choice… a life of renunciation and spiritual endeavor becomes senseless and even absurd."[4] The book continues with phrases like "it is

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (Pennsylvania: A Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, 2010), 126.
[2] Kant, *Practical Reason*, 129.
[3] Kant, *Practical Reason*, 129.
[4] Steven Collins, " Review of *Self and Non-Self in Early Buddhism* by J. Perez-Remon," *Numen* 2 (1982): 253.

difficult to conceive…"or "one finds it impossible to think…" The point here is that the concept of a lack of a permanent self that retains moral responsibility, let alone moral accountability, can be difficult to conceive.

My argument will employ the use of two religio-philosophical systems, one presented by Tsongkhapa, a Madhyamaka Buddhist, and the other by Charles Hartshorne, a process theist. These systems assert the lack of a permanent self as well as coherently justify moral agency and provide evidence, both philosophical and pragmatic, to the argument at hand, i.e., that a permanent self is not necessary for moral agency.

2. Madhyamika Buddhism: Tsongkhapa on Reality, the Self, and Morality

In order to discuss the nature of reality (which entails the nature of the self) according to Madhyamaka Buddhists, and especially to Tsongkhapa (ca. 1357 – 1419 CE),[5] it is necessary to begin with arguably the most influential Buddhist philosopher since the Buddha himself, Nagarjuna (ca. 150 – 250 CE).[6] Founder of the Madhyamaka tradition, Nagarjuna's groundbreaking work, the *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (translated as *The Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*), is an exposition on the nature of reality especially with regards to the relationship between the two truths and a clarification of the meaning of emptiness. Because much or all of Tsongkhapa's philosophy on the nature of reality is a commentary on

[5] Sonam Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007), 1.
[6] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 2.

and interpretation of Nagarjuna's philosophy, I will deal here only with Nagarjuna's clarification on emptiness as it is a pivotal point in understanding the entire Madhyamaka philosophical system. There is much overlap between Nagarjuna and Tsongkhapa but, because of the subtle differences between the two, it is best to credit Nagarjuna with defining and explaining the notion of emptiness and then using that basis as a foundation for laying out Tsongkhapa's philosophical system.

2.1 Nagarjuna on Emptiness

The notion of "emptiness" (Sanskrit *sunyata*) is an essential concept in Mahayana and specifically Madhyamaka Buddhism and an understanding of what emptiness is and what it means for something to be empty is necessary to understand the nature of reality and thus the nature of the self. As Jay Garfield notes in his commentary on the *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, "the interpretation of the entire Madhyamaka system depends directly on how one understands the concept of emptiness. If that [concept of emptiness] is understood correctly, everything else falls into place."[7] Emptiness, however, is often interpreted differently and even misunderstood by several Buddhist schools of thought as well as philosophers outside the tradition. Abhidharma literature, for example, posed that, while conventional existents (e.g. tables, trees, etc.) were empty, *dharmas* (in this case the smallest building blocks of reality, i.e., particles) were not. As a result, all entities (excluding *dharmas*) are coalescences of *dharmas* conceptually perceived as independent entities. This claim

[7] Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 301.

was an attempt by the Abhidharma Buddhists to establish a permanent ontological grounding of reality and was challenged by the landmark Mahayana text, the *Prajnaparamita sutra* (translated as *The Perfection of Wisdom*). The essential thesis of the *Prajnaparamita sutra* is that all phenomena, including and especially *dharmas*, are empty. This claim proved to be problematic in that many opponents criticized the *Prajnaparamita sutra* as descending into nihilism, thus discrediting all Buddhist claims including even the Four Noble Truths. In light of these criticisms Nagarjuna developed an elaborate systematic philosophy on the nature of emptiness. The *Mulamadhyamakakarika* can thus be viewed as a pedagogical supplement to the *Prajnaparamita sutra* in that it defends, elaborates, and clarifies what emptiness is.

The best means of understanding what emptiness is, according to Nagarjuna, is in a negative sense, that is, what emptiness is not. Emptiness is not a claim that perceived entities do not exist at all but rather that perceived entities do not exist in a certain way. To say that something is empty is to say that it lacks *svabhava, svabhava* being inherent existence—an essence of an individual thing's own being that is "permanent, inalienable, and intrinsic."[8] In other words *svabhava* is "changeless… not originated… and not dependent on something else."[9] Emptiness is the ultimate nature of everything, it is the ultimate truth—no thing has *svabhava*. No thing is self-produced, independent, or immutable, i.e., no thing ultimately exists in and of itself. Under analysis it can be found that no thing exists in this way, all perceived things that exist arise interdependently and conditionally in an

[8] John S. Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations, 3rd Edition* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 2007), 154.
[9] Jan Westerhoff, *Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 41.

interdependent series of causal relationships, thus negating the quality of *svabhava* in any thing, as all things exist dependently and impermanently.

Further, emptiness as the ultimate nature of all phenomena is, in fact, the only way anything could exist at all. If all things were unchanging, permanent, and self-produced, the world would be chaotic and no motion or change would be possible. For soteriological purposes, *dukkha* could not be extinguished, liberation from *samsara* could not be achieved, and *nirvana* could not be realized. (*Dukkha* often translated as "suffering" or "anxiety," can best be understood as a wheel on a cart that makes a depression in mud and, when that mud dries, another different sized wheel travels along that depression and does not quite fit; it is a sense of dis-ease or dissatisfaction. *Samsara*, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, is driven and characterized by *dukkha*, i.e., "psychological bondage, moral corruption, and a state of constant restlessness induced by craving, aversion, and delusion."[10] *Nirvana* is liberation from *dukkha* and *samsara*, it is characterized by "psychological freedom, and… moral perfection as well."[11]) Emptiness as the ultimate reality of all phenomena is a necessary condition given how the world works and is a source of hope in the ability to change one's current situation of *dukkha* and *samsara*—*dukkha* and *samsara* (as well as *nirvana*) are empty and impermanent.

Lastly, emptiness is not itself a thing or entity. It is, rather, a characteristic of all things. Emptiness is better understood in its adjectival form of "empty," as in "entity x is empty." Emptiness connotes the type of ultimate existence an entity

[10] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 160.
[11] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 160.

has—it is empty of *svabhava*. Emptiness "is not itself an ultimate existent"[12] but rather is empty itself. This is because emptiness is a potential realized through the arising and ceasing of empty phenomena; emptiness is dependent on empty phenomena and does not intrinsically exist. It is a quality that is the condition that allows for things to exist yet the quality of emptiness itself only arises in dependence upon empty things. Thus, although an ultimate truth and universal nature, emptiness does not have *svabhava*.

2.2 Tsongkhapa on Reality

Tsongkhapa holds a view of emptiness that is the same as Nagarjuna's, as ultimate truth and as the ultimate nature of all things. Tsongkhapa's greatest addition to the Madhyamaka philosophical system is his reaffirmation of the importance and reality of conventional truth. The two truths are presented as two *truths*, not as a truth and a falsehood or even a truth and a lesser truth. He thus holds conventional truth to be of equal importance and does not establish a hierarchy of value of ultimate truth and conventional truth as does, for example, the Madhyamaka philosopher Gorampa (ca. 1429 – 1489 CE),[13] who holds ultimate truth to be of greater significance than conventional truth.

As explained above, emptiness in Madhyamaka Buddhism is not a nihilistic claim. All phenomena and entities that exist simply exist in a certain way, that is, in

[12] Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations, 2nd Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 78.
[13] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 1.

absence of *svabhava*—as empty. Thus things do indeed exist, and all things that exist, exist only conventionally. Tsongkhapa firmly asserts the conventional existence of phenomena, as existing merely in that way, conventionally. Tsongkhapa asserts that each phenomenon "has two natures: an ultimate and a conventional nature."[14] Sonam Thakchoe translates conventional nature as "empirical nature,"[15] referring to that which is experienced through sense perception. Further, "each phenomenon has two natures, the ultimate is the one that is found by the cognitive process that apprehends reality, and the conventional is the one that is found by the cognitive process that perceives that which is unreal."[16] Thus, each phenomenon embodies both natures, one of appearance and one of emptiness. Tsongkhapa holds that there are two kinds of cognitive processes that perceive conventional phenomena, "the cognitive process associated with an acute sensory faculty, which is not impaired by any extraneous causes of misperception… and the cognitive process associated with a defective sensory faculty impaired by extraneous causes of misperception."[17] Here Tsongkhapa is affirming the validity of sensory perception that experiences phenomena but is misinterpreted by a false cognitive understanding of the way phenomena exist. Sensory perception, while ordinarily mistaken about the nature of a thing's existence, is still a valid and empirical source of information regarding whether a thing exists or not on any level; one can see, touch, hear, smell, and taste an object, thus experientially validating the existence of

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[14] Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 483.
[15] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 10.
[16] Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 483.
[17] Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 484.

the object, albeit often providing a false sense of the way in which the object exists. The means of discerning the way a phenomenon exists is through analysis of the phenomenon to the point of understanding the ultimate nature of the phenomenon, i.e., that there is no inherent existence, *svabhava*, of the phenomenon.

In the same vein of thinking as the Buddha's chariot example, Guy Newland presents a slightly more modern and relatable example of a table to illustrate the way in which a phenomenon exists. A table's conventional nature lies in the fact that people can talk about the table, see the table as a distinguishable object, and even use the table, e.g., by putting other objects on the table while still being able to distinguish the table from the objects. A table is constructed of, say, wooden legs and a flat wooden top. When assembled in a specific combination, it is a recognizable object that one would identify as a table. However, when one attempts to analyze and deconstruct the table, one cannot find any notion of "table-ness," or any one aspect that makes it "table." One would be able to deconstruct the table into parts, and the parts into molecules, and the molecules into particles, and so on without being able to find the *svabhava* of a table. The recognition of a thing as an inherently existing "table" is a misunderstood conceptual formulation. There is an existing thing there that we can interact with and use and talk about, which we refer to in conventional terms as "table," but this thing as a "table" is dependent upon a linguistic identification of the table as "table" as well as a common perception and experience of the table as an independent and usable thing. Thus conventional things appear to have a distinct, independent, inherent nature and this perception entails a mistaken conceptual understanding of the way a thing exists. Despite this

lack of intrinsic existence, though, a table can still be used and talked about conventionally. This experience and understanding of a table corresponds to the relationship of the two cognitions (the empirical—or conventional—and the ultimate). The table is empirically verifiable as a conventionally existing object yet, when subjected to philosophical analysis, no *svabhava* of the table can be found. As Newland puts it,

> The conventional mind that finds a table is not discredited by the ultimate mind that finds the emptiness of the table. The first is valid because the table (a conventional truth) does exist; the second is also valid because the table's real nature is an emptiness of inherent existence (ultimate truth).[18]

For Tsongkhapa, the two truths (which respectively correspond to the two natures, ultimate and conventional) are ontologically mutually entailing and are interdependent. Tsongkhapa employs Nagarjuna's profound and highly significant verses in the *Mulamadhyamakakarika* to highlight this understanding.

> 18. Whatever is dependently co-arisen
> That is explained to be emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation,
> Is itself the middle way.
>
> 19. Something that is not dependently co-arisen,
> Such a thing does not exist.
> Therefore a nonempty thing
> Does not exist.[19]

According to Tsongkhapa, these verses explain that "the meaning of 'emptiness' is *being dependent on conditions*—that is, being essentially unable to stand on one's

[18] Guy Newland, *The Two Truths* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1992), 49.
[19] Garfield, *Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*, 67.

own. Thus the very meaning of 'dependent origination' is the same as the meaning 'emptiness of essence.'"[20] Dependent arising corresponds to conventional truth while emptiness corresponds to ultimate truth. Dependent arising is essentially the claim that things are not produced intrinsically, but dependently; no thing is intrinsically produced that is new but rather a thing dependently arises as a re-arranged coalescence of other conventionally existing empty phenomena. A more semantically appropriate term for these arisen things would be "dependent arisings" (pl. noun). Dependent arising is thus a dynamic flux of causal relationships and an interdependence of ever-changing empty phenomena. No dependent arisings have *svabhava* but rather they exist relationally and dependently. This existence is conventional and passing, it is the arising in and out of conventional existence in terms of a re-arranging of empty causal phenomena. It is important to understand that the two truths are still distinct, however, and not one single truth; the two exist interdependently and only arise from dependent arising. Emptiness is dependent on empty phenomena to arise, and empty phenomena (all phenomena) can only arise because they are empty. "Since the two natures are ontologically mutually entailing, [a phenomenon's] ultimate truth cannot exist without its conventional truth, and vice versa. In other words, neither truth could exist without the other."[21] Thus for Tsongkhapa the two truths pose no hierarchical order and are equally important; the two truths share the same ontological status. In the words of Tsongkhapa in verse 27 of his *Essential Eulogy of the Dependent Arising*, "despite the fact that whatever is dependently arisen is primordially devoid of essence, it nonetheless

[20] Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 478.
[21] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 29.

appears."[22] Understanding the dual nature of all phenomena, the ultimate and the conventional, is the middle way of avoiding the extremes of nihilism and essentialism, i.e., the belief that nothing exists at all and the belief that things exist permanently.

2.3 Tsongkhapa on the Self

Tsongkhapa's view of the self can be derived from his philosophy on the nature(s) of reality. Tsongkhapa, as well as all Madhyamaka Buddhists, hold that what is perceived to be the self, that which refers to "I," "me," or "mine," can be broken down to what are often referred to as the five aggregates (Sanskrit *skandhas*). This is not necessarily an existential claim but more of an analytic one to establish the self as composite and dependently arisen. The five aggregates are form (or matter, as in the body and its parts), sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. Basically, as opposed to the conventional belief that there is a substantial self, a substantial "I," the self as one believes it to exist, i.e., as having *svabhava*, does not exist. Rather, the apparent self exists as a composite of mutually interdependent aggregates. The self is thus empty and exists only conventionally, that is, as a referent for a person to be talked about and have conventional agency with regard to other conventionally existing entities.

Tsongkhapa sets out to prove the emptiness of form (the body), and extrapolates this emptiness to the rest of the aggregates, all of which are

[22] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 31.

dependently arisen from one another and none being arisen on its own; none of the aggregates have *svabhava*. As with all dependently arisen phenomena, the body is empty. It is not self produced, not unchanging, and not inherently existing—it is conditional and constantly changing through age and development. So as with the body, none of the other aggregates exist inherently, unchangingly, or are self-produced. The mind changes over time through, e.g., development, acquiring new and different knowledge, or the ability of the senses.

Tsongkhapa employs the knowledge of Manjusri, the Mahayana bodhisattva of transcendent wisdom, from the *Maharatnakuta sutra.*

> The five aggregates belong to causes and conditions. If they belong to causes and conditions, they not belong to oneself or others. If they do not belong to self and others, they have no owner. If they have no owner, there is no one who grasps them.[23]

Here Manjusri is explaining that the aggregates are dependently arisen and that there is no inherently existing "I" that owns or ultimately corresponds to them.

The belief in an intrinsically existing self, for Tsongkhapa, is not just a false understanding of the way in which a person exists. Tsongkhapa holds that all *dukkha* is rooted in the false sense of self. This sense of self leads to grasping and psychological bondage to the self that is extrapolated to all other perceived objects. *Dukkha* arises from a false sense of reality and of the self, of reality and life functioning differently from the way one wants them to. Grasping is a sense of desiring things to last forever and to not cease, for example the death of a loved one,

[23] Garma C.C. Chang, *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras: Selections from the Maharatnakuta Sutra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 32.

the loss of a favorite possession, or jealousy of another. *Dukkha* arises from a self-centered view of reality and only ceases when one can acknowledge the lack of *svabhava* in the self (and all phenomena). As Manjusri says later on:

> The basic nature of the five aggregates is emptiness. If that nature is emptiness, there is neither 'I' nor 'mine.' If there is neither 'I' nor 'mine,' there is no duality. If there is no duality, there is neither grasping nor abandoning. If there is neither grasping nor abandoning, there is no attachment. Thus free of attachment, one transcends the [conventional] world.[24]

Saying the non-dual realization "transcends" the conventional world is, for Tsongkhapa, not a metaphysical event, but rather an epistemological one. It is a means of knowing, of seeing the conventional world as it truly exists, i.e., as empty, while still maintaining some existence of a thing; it is holding the empirical cognition and the ultimate analytic cognition together in the same instant. With regards to the self, this non-dual realization is achieved, according to Tsongkhapa, through meditation, the means of coming to realize ultimate reality. Meditation allows one to notice the "bodily and mental processes as they arise and cease… [and] also discerns the arising and passing away of the aggregates."[25] Eventually the bodily and mental processes become unapparent to the meditator, and the ultimate nature of the perceived self and the aggregates, as well as all phenomena, become realized. This, of course, is very advanced meditation. This form of analysis, along with logical investigation, enables one to realize the empty nature of the self. As Tsongkhapa claims, "the mode of realization of the selflessness of the person that arises after a search that does not find the essence of the self, which is the basis of 'I

[24] Chang, *Maharatnakuta*, 32.
[25] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 103.

am,' should apply to all phenomena."[26] This is the practice of wisdom, an ultimate transcendent wisdom that realizes the emptiness of all phenomena to the point that it is cognitively and conceptually understood and lived by, not just discursively understood. It is ultimate cessation of attachment from empty phenomena and a cessation of *dukkha.*

Thus the "self" only exists conventionally, as a conventional agent that has true conventional action within the conventional world. It is important to keep in mind, however, that conventional truth *does* exist, but in a certain way; one does not simply leave conventional reality behind. "A single cognitive agent is potentially capable of verifying both the truths,"[27] and it is important to keep this in mind when it comes to morality and compassion, as they pertain to conventional truth.

2.4 Tsongkhapa on Morality

"Morality corresponds to conventional truth while wisdom corresponds to ultimate truth. Because of the harmonious and interdependent relationship of the two truths, a unity of wisdom and morality naturally arises."[28] Tsongkhapa's assertion of the ontological equality of conventional truth and ultimate truth allows him to retain a cogent compatibility between morality and emptiness by which a sense of moral responsibility is retained through the absence of a self that has *svabhava*.

[26] Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 147.
[27] Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 11.
[28] Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 163.

Because of the ontological entailment of the two truths, other living beings are understood as empty, but this understanding does not negate their conventional existence or their experience of *dukkha*. The notion of emptiness here provides a sense of hope in that a being's condition of *dukkha* is neither inherent nor fixed—it can be changed and eliminated. The notion of an empty self is thus a source of happiness because of the possibility to liberate oneself from the *dukkha* that results from the attachment to the self.

In fact, emptiness and the realization of the self as empty can support and inspire compassion for other living beings. Realizing the emptiness of the self can support compassionate action by "seeing that there is no inherently existent difference between the self and other… [and this realization also] undermines [one's] self-cherishing sense of 'looking out for number one.'"[29] Further, "by seeing that [one] shares with all beings a fundamental nature of emptiness, [one] strengthens the deep sense of closeness and relatedness to others that is critical to [one's] closeness and compassion."[30] Finally, when one realizes that it is possible to become a Buddha, there is an understanding that this "present, limited capacity to help others is not inherent in [one's] very nature."[31] Conversely, selfless moral action and compassion can strengthen the sense of the non-self and aid "wisdom's undercutting of self-centeredness";[32] by living for others, the sense of attachment to the self is weakened. The practices of wisdom (i.e., meditation) and compassion (i.e.,

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[29] Guy Newland, *Introduction to Emptiness: Tsong-kha-pa's Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2008), 9.
[30] Newland, *Introduction to Emptiness*, 9.
[31] Newland, *Introduction to Emptiness*, 9.
[32] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 121.

moral action) thus support and reinforce each other. In addition, selfless moral action and compassion are themselves sources of happiness. When one is not attached to the self and lives selflessly and morally for others, happiness is derived from bringing happiness to others. Morality also helps to purify one's mental state and helps one strive for the attainment of enlightenment, which becomes for the purpose of helping others.

There is another motivation, however, for moral action that is not necessarily tied to the realization of the emptiness of the self. This motivation is the notion of *karma*, which provides a sense of moral responsibility and moral accountability both for those who have realized emptiness and for those who have not. The term *karma* often implies a "sense of the relationship between an action intentionally performed and its effect, an effect experienced—usually, but not necessarily—in a future lifetime by an entity who is in a significant way a continuation of the performer of the action."[33] Moral action is based on intention and, when one has developed skillful means, actualization of the intention—one cannot effectively help another being if one does not know how, yet the intention in the heart of the helper is what is karmically accumulated. *Karma* can take effect at any time, and provides moral retribution on the agent. For Tsongkhapa, the nature of the universe "is a 'moral universe' shaped by religiously significant *karma*"[34] where "whatever pleasant or unpleasant experiences we have, whatever sort of worlds we are born

[33] Joe Bransford Wilson, "The Monk as Bodhisattva: A Tibetan Integration of Buddhist Moral Points of View," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24 (1996): 381.
[34] Wilson, "The Monk as Bodhisattva," 397.

into, these are the result of wholesome and unwholesome actions."[35] Thus there is a cosmic incentive for those to act morally who have not realized the ultimate nature of reality.

It should be noted here that *karma* is itself empty as well; it is not an inherent cosmic force. Rather, *karma* arises dependently based on moral and immoral actions performed by agents; it is an effect arising from causes. The dependent arising of *karma* helps to highlight the importance of Tsongkhapa's status of conventional reality. Although all phenomena are empty, including the self, there is a conventionally existing and acting agent that acts and thinks and feels. Thus, moral actions towards others have a real effect on their conventional wellbeing and happiness (and, of course, vice versa).

While the incentive of a favorable rebirth may suggest a means of personal soteriological happiness, favorable rebirth is only a temporary solution to the *dukkha*/suffering that occurs in other realms of samsaric existence. One is bound to continue to suffer in other realms unless one is liberated from the cycle of *samsara*. Liberation from *samsara* is achieved through realization of *nirvana* and attainment of Buddhahood. The realization of *nirvana* is not, however, dissipation from complete existence but is rather an extinguishment of the self and of total personal identity. Tsongkhapa holds a belief in non-abiding *nirvana*, which understands *nirvana* not as a place but as a state of moral perfection and complete psychological liberation from *dukkha*. Furthermore, becoming a Buddha is not an everlasting

[35] Wilson, "The Monk as Bodhisattva," 389.

existence—a Buddha "does not exist forever"[36]—for, in the Mahayana tradition, one strives for Buddhahood for the sake of helping others. This Mahayana aspiration of Buddhahood for the sake of others is known as the path of the bodhisattva. The premise of Mahayana Buddhism holds that "all sentient beings throughout the universe will eventually attain enlightenment, although it will take some of them eons to do so."[37] Thus the status of a Buddha is not an everlasting form of personal salvation and existence, since the status of a Buddha is selfless and exists for the liberation and happiness of other yet-to-be enlightened beings.

The problem remains, however, that if a being is empty and only exists conventionally, what/who gets carried over in rebirth that would feel karmic effects? *Karma* can affect a being in the current life as well, but a major incentive for acting morally (with and without practicing wisdom and meditation) is the notion of rebirth. However, ordinary beings do not remember past lives, which would seem to negate the motive for being karmically conscious with regard to rebirth. There is, though, a sense of personal continuity with regard to the conventional self. For the conventional self "is the ground of personal continuity and thus the entity that carries the seeds left by actions/intentions."[38] The karmic "seeds" that are carried result in "a shared I that exists over many lifetimes, past, present, and future."[39] A helpful analogy in understanding the sense of continuity between karmically arisen beings is that of time and memory. If a person hurts oneself when that person is

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[36] Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 125.
[37] Wilson, "The Monk as Bodhisattva," 385.
[38] Joe Bransford Wilson, "Pudgalavada in Tibet? Assertions of Substantially Existent Selves in the Writing of Tsong-kha-pa and His Followers," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14 (1991): 175.
[39]Wilson, "Pudgalavada," 173.

seventeen, for example, that pain and suffering is a very real experience. Years later, however, only the memory of that pain remains. The pain does not exist anymore, as it is in the past, nor does that instance of oneself as a seventeen-year-old. One does not remember the pain itself but rather only remembers what the pain was like, i.e., that it was bad. At the time of the pain, though, it was a very real and bad experience. This experience may have affected the person years later with regards to how that person acts and the choices that person makes but that person cannot tap into the pain because it has ceased. It was empty, and it does not exist in any way anymore (except as a memory, which is empty—a memory, that is—and can be changed, forgotten, and left behind as not having power to affect the current state of the person). This example of the past and present conditions of an agent is similar to the idea of karmic seeds leading to future rebirths in that the different empty dependently arisen karmic manifestations are not the same being, as the seventeen-year-old is not the same as the seventeen-year-old years later, but the experiences in the present reality are real, i.e., the pain experienced in another life is being experienced by an instance of one's conventional personal continuum. This continuum is empty, however, in that it is dependently arisen based on actions and intentions and one's residing in *samsara*. Thus there is no substratum of a self that is retained through karmic rebirths just as there is no substratum of a self in an individual's lifetime. With regards to time,

> The future is that which has not yet come to be in the present. The past is that which is gone by in the present… Since the present is now being perceived, it is most important. But positing the two temporal periods—

> the future and the past, that which has not yet come to presence, and that which passed out of presence—is not as important.[40]

The past self has thus ceased to conventionally exist and the future self has yet to conventionally arise; the conventional self exists in the present in a series of interrelated dependent arisings and ceasings. Thus there is only present experience, either of happiness or *dukkha*, which is realized through conventional moral action.

3. Process Theism: Charles Hartshorne on Reality, the Self, and Morality

Here we are presented with a theological and philosophical system that maintains the notion of a lack of a permanent and inherent self while also including a notion of God in the scheme of reality. This idea of God, however, is a unique understanding of the way God exists and how God is related the to world. In discussing Charles Hartshorne's (1897 – 2000) theological and philosophical system, it is important to employ the theology and philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861 – 1947), the founder of process metaphysics. In his pivotal work on the subject, *Process and Reality*, Whitehead presents a new understanding of God in relation to the world as well as a new way of understanding reality. Hartshorne diverges from Whitehead in some key places, however, especially with regards to morality, love, and the nature of God.

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[40] Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, 399.

3.1 Hartshorne on God

Hartshorne asserts, in following Whitehead, that God has two natures: an absolute and a relative (or, in Whitehead's words, a "primordial" and a "consequent"). Hartshorne argues that God, as the perfect being, must include all perfect things but also all non-perfect things because "the total reality which is 'the perfect *and* all existing imperfect things' is a greater reality than the perfect alone."[41] Thus God's dual nature allows God to exist as an absolute perfect being while also embodying the imperfections of the universe such as suffering or evil. Because God—as a perfect being that includes all perfect as well as imperfect things—has two natures, an absolute and a relative, God is "in one aspect of his being strictly or maximally absolute, and in another aspect no less strictly or maximally relative";[42] God has absolute perfection as well as relative perfection. Hartshorne defines perfection as "an excellence such that rivalry or superiority on the part of other individuals is impossible, but self-superiority is not impossible"; the perfect is the "self-surpassing surpasser of all."[43] The relative perfection and absolute perfection of God thus hold in common the quality of surpassing all others in all conceivable states of existence. Further, according to Hartshorne,

> The surpasser of all others must be a single individual enjoying as his own all the values of all other individuals, and incapable of failing to do so. For this, it is enough to suppose that the being is bound to have adequate knowledge of events when and as they occur, and thereafter.

[41] Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 19.
[42] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 32.
[43] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 20.

> For adequately to know values is to possess them; and to surpass the values of other beings it is enough to possess the values of every one of them from the time these values exist. There is no need to possess them in advance of others.[44]

The absolute nature of God, Hartshorne argues, exists as an abstraction of conceptual perfection. God is "so far from 'eminent reality,' that in this abstraction he is 'deficiently actual…' His feelings are only conceptual and so lack the fullness of actuality… [and] conceptual feelings, apart from complex integration with physical feelings, are devoid of consciousness in their subjective forms."[45] Since an abstraction cannot actually know but rather can only be known, it is an object of knowledge. This assertion is similar to Kant's claim that "thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind,"[46] meaning that understanding cannot intuit anything on its own and the senses cannot think at all; only by the two in unison can knowledge arise. Thus "the absolute is a divine object in the divine subject and for the divine subject. It is an essence, not an existence."[47] The divine subject here is the relative nature of God; the relative nature of God is the "highest actualized level of concreteness."[48] The relative nature of God is, as Whitehead puts it (referring to what he calls the consequent nature of God), "the realization of the actual world."[49] In other words, the dual natures of God correspond with conceptual

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[44] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 20.
[45] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 343.
[46] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193–194.
[47] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 87.
[48] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 88.
[49] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

and physical realities. Thus, "God is being in both its opposite aspects: abstract least common denominator, and concrete de facto maximal achieved totality."[50]

3.2 Hartshorne on God and the World

For Whitehead, the fundamental, irreducible building block of reality is known as an "actual entity" or "actual occasion" (the latter of which I will be favoring, as it suggests more accurately the nature of these phenomena, i.e., as relational events), aggregates of which are referred to as "societies" (or "societies of actual occasions").[51] These are not inert, imperishable, material things, but rather "vital, transient 'drops of experience, complex and interdependent.'"[52] Actual occasions are "units of process that may be linked to other [actual occasions] to form temporal strands of matter."[53] Thus all perceived entities are coalescences of the event-based actual occasions, and to consider an aggregate of actual occasions as a final and ultimate reality, i.e., an irreducible inherently existing thing, is to "commit the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness."[54] Finally, an actual occasion only exists instantaneously in the moment of its becoming, immediately perishing to allow for new actual occasions to come into being.

Hartshorne affirms actual occasions as the fundamental event-based building blocks of reality. He, however, refers to all physical realities as "creatures," which

[50] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.
[51] Donald W. Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 205.
[52] Sherburne, *Key to Whitehead*, 205.
[53] Sherburne, *Key to Whitehead*, 206.
[54] Sherburne, *Key to Whitehead*, 206.

term includes both actual occasions as well as societies of occasions. Similar to Whitehead's building blocks of reality, these are neither matter nor nothing at all. Hartshorne claims that "social structure is the ultimate structure of all existence"[55] and that "all life whatsoever has social structure. All organisms on the multicellular level are associations of cells… cells themselves are associations of similar molecules and atoms"[56] and so on and so forth; there is an "ascending scale of emergence"[57] from the basic level of event-based actual occasions. In fact, according to Hartshorne, creatures are "unconscious, but *not* insentient."[58] This assertion of the sentient quality of creatures suggests a whole new level of social structure of reality in that, even at the most microcosmic level, there is a degree of freedom, experience, and sentient relational social activity. It follows then that because social structure is the ultimate structure of reality, God, as perfect being, would therefore be "eminently and supremely"[59] social.

As an eminently social being, God experiences the world as the sum of the multiplicity of events and creaturely experiences in the world. Whitehead's term, the consequent nature of God, is appropriate here because God's experience is dependent on (consequent on) the experience of every creature in the world. This part of God is thus relative as it is subject to change through its experience of the world and is in relation to all creatures; the relative nature of God is the source of God's love for the world. God shares in the experience of every creature in the world

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[55] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 28.
[56] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 27.
[57] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 27.
[58] Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 75.
[59] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 29.

and sympathizes with the experience of each creature. Also, because of the sentience of even the most fundamental of creatures, God also shares in the experience of seemingly insentient creatures such as trees or flowers. There are no creatures devoid of feeling or responsiveness; even the smallest particles have a faint form of experience. As Hartshorne states, "to God each of us is dearer than wife to husband, for no human being knows the inner experiences of another human being so intimately as they are known to God. And to know experiences is to appreciate them."[60]

God is also social in another sense, however. God, as the supreme embodiment of metaphysical opposites, constitutes the "essential object of our awareness."[61] Because a mind is influenced by what it knows, i.e., its objects of awareness, God, through partial self-determination, is able to change the essential object of our awareness, i.e., himself, to influence us to make the most beneficial choices and actions in a given situation. In other words, God persuades creatures to actualize the most favorable potential in any situation by making the best choice the most alluring. This persuasion is done out of God's goodness and love and sympathy for all creatures and is not coercive, but, as stated above, persuasive; persuasion is, for Hartshorne, the highest form of personal influence. For any given creature, then, God persuades the creature towards the greatest possible actuality given the complexity of the creature and the degree of freedom available to it (more complex creatures have a greater degree of freedom than simpler ones, e.g., a human has more freedom than a tree). Ideally, a possibility a creature is persuaded towards

[60] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 47.
[61] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 139.

would either be loving in nature or simply just creative, inspiring creatures "with novel ideas for novel occasions."[62] God and the world thus exist in a symbiotic creative relationship in which God offers all potential possibilities that are in turn actualized freely in the world and affect God experientially. The world is thus a dynamic series of events that is in constant flux and subject to change while God is also constantly changing. As Hartshorne explains, "We influence God by our experiences but do not thereby deprive him of freedom in his responses to us. This divine response, becoming our object, by the same principle in turn influences us, but here, too, without removing all freedom."[63]

Hartshorne differs from Whitehead here in that Hartshorne asserts that God's abstract absolute nature and relative nature are both subject to change. Both thinkers hold that the relative nature of God/consequent nature of God is subject to change as the experience of the world changes. For Whitehead, however, the primordial nature of God (the Whiteheadian equivalent to Hartshorne's abstract nature of God) is similar to Plato's realm of Forms in that all potentials and ideals are present in the primordial nature and that creatures meet these potentials and ideals as the process goes on; the primordial nature of God does not change. For Hartshorne, however, the absolute nature of God changes with process. New potentials and ideals are added to the abstract nature of God when new potentials are made possible to be actualized by the creatures in the process world; these new ideals and potentials add to the absolute nature of God and add to absolute

[62] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 142.
[63] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 141.

perfection. God's changing as the essential object of our awareness is the change of ideal potentials we strive to achieve and actualize.

Hartshorne employs a useful analogy to help illustrate the relationship of God and the world by positing God as the mind and the world as the body. As Hartshorne explains, "Each cell in our body is almost as nothing in comparison with ourselves as conscious individuals. Yet each may contribute something directly to our awareness."[64] The way in which cells act and function, i.e., well or poorly, affects the way we feel. This applies conversely in that the way in which we treat our cells affects our bodies. The two thus exist in a symbiotic manner; each able to change and influence the way the other acts and feels (ourselves as conscious individual agents and our coalescence of cells and particles). A person's "experience exercises a creative influence upon the development of brain cells," and therefore it follows that "the human individual to some extent *presides over the coming to be of its cells*."[65] The mind-body relation is a one-to-many relation, and the same applies to God's relationship with the world. God's cosmic body is, like a human body, a society of creatures rather than one single individual. However all together, again like a human body, "the world as an integrated individual is not a 'world' as this term is normally and properly used, but 'God.' God, the World Soul, is the *individual integrity* of 'the world,' which otherwise is just the myriad creatures."[66] As noted above, an individual has some, but not total, control and influence over the formation of one's cells. This is analogous to the way in which God influences the world and each

[64] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 55.
[65] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 60.
[66] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 59.

creature to develop. Hartshorne puts this analogy in perspective, though, by adding that "God is superior to all these [creatures] in a manner of which the person-to-cell analogy gives only a faint idea."[67]

3.3 Hartshorne on the Self

Hartshorne's philosophy is a process philosophy, and the "the basic presupposition of the whole system is ongoingness: generation after generation of actual entities succeeding one another without end."[68] Hartshorne's process is thus not a teleological system leading up to a final purpose but simply an explanation of the everlasting, ever-changing (for better or worse), process of reality.

A person, for Hartshorne, is a complex society of actual occasions. As Hartshorne claims with respect to the composition of our bodies, "the mind-body relation is not a one-to-one relation but a one-to-many relation. The body is a *society* of billions of cells, each a highly organized society of molecules and particles and wavicles. At any given moment each of us, as a conscious individual, is a single reality; but our body is no such single reality."[69] He goes on the describe white blood cells as like tiny animals and nerve cells as single individuals. The social and relational nature of sentient event-based actual occasions and societies of actual occasions that human beings are comprised of seems to undermine the notion of a body or even—with regard to nerve cells—a mind that could be regarded as the self.

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[67] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 59.
[68] Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead*, 218.
[69] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 59.

The notion of the process system as ongoingness also seems to suggest a constant change in the make-up of the person, as generation after generation of actual entities succeeds one another without end.

With regard to personal identity and continuation of identity Hartshorne argues that there is no identity of a person in the strict sense of the term, i.e., "with all properties the same"; however an individual does have what he calls a "nonstrict identity."[70] The nonstrict identity is the recognizable continuum of a person through time and change. Hartshorne holds that "with each change we have a new concrete reality, not simply an identical reality with new qualities. There is numerical, not merely qualitative, alteration."[71] Hartshorne's notion of time is presented as a sequence of momentary instances of experience and action rather than a continuous singular stream of existence that changes qualitatively. Each successive moment of experience is an actualized potential by an agent. The agent is not the same thing as he/she was successive moments ago; however the agent retains a sense of continuity via the stream of continuous and successive actions. Reality is thus an "apparently continuous succession of realities."[72]

Person A on Monday and Person A on Friday are two separate realities, numerically and qualitatively different. Person A on Friday is a different person from on Monday by virtue of the fact that Person A had new experiences, made new choices, and is in a different locus in space-time from Person A on Monday—Person A on Monday no longer exists as a reality and never will again. The two are related

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[70] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 105.
[71] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 104.
[72] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 108.

in that there is a successive series of actions that link the two through temporal moments and the fact that Person A on Friday has a memory of himself on Monday. "A-now includes A-then, for A-now-remembering-A-then is not complete without A-then."[73] As Hartshorne puts it, "there is a genuine—though only partial and nonstrict, yet numerical—identity of a person through change. Only I remember my very past in the inward way in which I remember it… I-now cannot be fully described without mentioning that past of mine."[74]

In the vein of selfless action, Hartshorne asks the question, "apart from our interest in others, what are we?" In response to this question, he states, "Start with those others that are our bodily cells, and go on to our sympathy with characters in history and fiction, our love for relatives and friends, other lesser animals, plants. Apart from all this, we have no self." [75] Hartshorne is here establishing that because human beings are social beings (as is the ultimate structure of reality—social, that is), a person does not have any identity apart from other people and external objects of interaction. All of one's interests and relationships constitute who a person is; there is no internal or transcendent permanent self. As Hartshorne romantically states, "It is our loves that make us anything worth mentioning."[76]

Thus it appears that, for Hartshorne, there is no permanent, inherent self. The person is a coalescence of socially interacting event-based phenomena that exist in various levels of complexity. Furthermore, one is physically and mentally changing through time and action in the sense that one experiences and inhabits

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[73] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence,* 105.
[74] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 105.
[75] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 108.
[76] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 108.

new realities and processes; these realities are qualitatively and numerically different, meaning that rather than experiencing one flow of time that simply changes in quality, one experiences successive numerical instances of reality. One is thus the same person as established through memory and successive actualizations but is not the same thing as the past has ceased to exist and thus that instance of one's being also ceased to exist. One fails to stay the same, yet manages to retain a sense of connection through a series of consecutive related actions and through memory. Finally, what gives a person one's sense of identity is only a relation to others and exterior objects; we are social beings and are shaped by that nature.

3.4 Hartshorne on Death

While many, if not most, theological systems posit and defend an afterlife, especially one that salvifically preserves an everlasting sense of self, Hartshorne's theological system does not.

Hartshorne does not establish any notion of a soul or a transcendent essence in his theological system. Human beings, as well as all creatures, exist contingently and have come into existence through the process of evolution (albeit with the guidance of God's persuasion but nonetheless still freely and amazingly by chance). Hartshorne, in describing how God and the world affect each other, states that "the radical difference between God and us implies that our influence upon him is slight, while his influence upon us is predominant. *We are an absolutely inessential (but not*

inconsequential) object for him; he is the essential object for us."[77] While God, in a sense, depends on the world, and the world also depends on God, God does not, in any sense, depend specifically on human beings. Our advanced sense of consciousness and ability to act creatively, morally, and lovingly is a profound and great contributor to the divine enjoyment, but human beings are not necessary existents for reality or for God.

Also, there is no soteriological event or continued existence that humans experience upon death. There is an everlasting sense of contribution, though. The good, moral, loving, and creative actions of a person can produce value in the world which is thus experienced and enjoyed by God as well as added to the total perfection of his being. These valuable actions exist in a "uniquely intimate continuity of purpose and memory of the one divine life."[78] Any contribution of value that one actualizes is enjoyed and eternalized in the memory of the loving and sympathetic God. These things are added to the process of reality and exist forever as having altered reality for the better, as God only accumulates value. Thus in the face of seemingly futile existence, "divine omniscience overcomes the seeming fragility of the achievement and renders it immortal. Thus each moment of true salvation is a thing of beauty and joy forever in the divine life."[79]

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[77] Hartshorne, *Omniscience*, 141-142, [my emphasis].
[78] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 157.
[79] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 134.

3.5 Hartshorne on Morality

Hartshorne holds selfless moral action, especially in the forms of altruism and selfless love, as being the greatest contributor of value in the process universe. The essential motivations for selfless moral action and selfless love are intrinsic happiness and satisfaction, reciprocated love from God and others, adding to the divine enjoyment and eternal memory of God, and the reciprocal relationship between individual actions and God as the essential object of awareness.

In Hartshorne's system of process, actualization of potentials is crucial to augmenting value in the world and adding to the divine enjoyment. Thus Hartshorne emphasizes the value of the actualization of a good or moral action over simply knowing goodness or morality. Thus Hartshorne's moral philosophy is action based, although he does hold intention to be important as well. Hartshorne holds that there are two basic ways in which human beings can act morally and lovingly towards one another: (1) "they will learn to love one another and wish well to one another as intrinsically valuable," or (2) "that they will be led by rewards and punishments to act toward others somewhat as if they wished them well; but for the very different reason that they wish well merely to themselves, with reference to future rewards and punishments to be visited upon them."[80] Hartshorne abhors the idea of a God who punishes beings for eternity for lack of empty moral actions. Further, if there is no sincerity and honesty behind what one does (with regard to moral action), then that person is likely to be unhappy and possibly living in fear

[80] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 127.

and anxiety of the afterlife. Hartshorne sees the first option as incomparably better, for "a man who does good to others because he wishes good to them, if that is really his motive, needs no future reward for himself."[81] Intention thus leads to intrinsic reward and genuine happiness in this life. Intrinsic satisfaction is a major incentive for Hartshorne.

Hartshorne also praises selfless love, as it is the greatest divine principle. As Whitehead states, "love neither rules, nor is it unmoved… it does not look to the future; for it finds its own reward in the immediate present."[82] Due to Hartshorne's action and intention based moral system, it makes sense that selfless love entails selfless moral action, as love is a feeling and disposition towards another. Because Hartshorne establishes personal identity as unstrict and unqualified, as subject to change and changing from moment to moment, he argues that through this understanding of the self one is able to "love God with all [one's] being (heart, mind, strength) and [one's] neighbor *as* [oneself]."[83] Understanding the non-permanent self allows one to act selflessly and morally towards others with sincerity. Self-love is not satisfying as we are social creatures and part of how "we experience every day [is] how much we enjoy being enjoyed by other human beings."[84] Selfless moral action and the love of others is indirect self-love as the love and enjoyment are reciprocated.

Selfless moral action and selfless love also produce value that is enjoyed by God and immortalized in the divine memory. By producing value that is enjoyed by

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[81] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity,* 127.
[82] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.
[83] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 106.
[84] Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 141.

God one is adding to perfection (both relative and absolute), to the perfect being, and to the possibilities of novelty and process. Living selflessly also allows one to love God as fully as possible. Therefore, increasing the divine enjoyment as well as providing novelty in process is the ultimate source of intrinsic satisfaction and altruistic action. "To find one's satisfaction in satisfying God, as that one who finds greatest satisfaction in the utmost possible satisfaction of all—higher than this no feeling of satisfaction can go."[85]

Finally, selfless moral action and selfless love, in producing value, assume an agent that is actualizing the persuasive potentials that God is alluring the agent to. God, as the essential object of our awareness, will change to provide the agent with more and, presumably, greater, potential choices. Good potential choices result from actualizing previous favorable potentials. The converse of this is true as well—bad choices leave one limited in the choices one can make. The more good choices, the more freedom, and the more creativity, and the more one can enhance the world of process but also add to the enjoyment of the supreme everlasting existence of God.

4. Conclusion

It has been shown that these two religio-philosophic systems deny any form of permanent self, transcendent or underlying, yet still uphold a deep sense of moral action.

[85] Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 122.

4.1 Conclusion of Tsongkhapa

Tsongkhapa presents a religio-philosophical system that emphasizes an empty self and moral action. Tsongkhapa holds that all things are empty in that they lack *svabhava* yet they do exist in an empirically verifiable way. *Dukkha*, the characteristic of *samsara*, is caused by a false understanding of the way in which phenomena exist, i.e., as appearing to have *svabhava*, and especially by a false understanding of the nature of the self. Tsongkhapa holds that attachment to the self is the root of all *dukkha* and that understanding the self as empty is source of happiness in that one ceases to experience the psychological effects of *dukkha*, e.g., suffering when things do not go as one wants them to. This is achieved through the practice of analysis and wisdom, i.e., meditation, as well as selfless moral and compassionate action. Selfless moral action and meditation on the emptiness of the self (and all phenomena) mutually support each other and motivate one to strive in these practices. Selfless action is a source of happiness in that one experiences happiness by making others happy or alleviating others' *dukkha*. One is thus perpetually motivated to act selflessly and morally through the practices of wisdom and through selfless action itself. One is further motivated to act morally because of the repercussions of *karma*, which holds an agent morally accountable for one's actions. There is no eternal salvation of a permanent self, only the blissful alleviation of *dukkha* and impermanent empty Buddhahood for the sake of alleviating all other sentient beings from *dukkha* and from *samsara*. Thus Tsongkhapa has shown that the lack of a permanent sense of self is not only coherent with moral action, but that

the lack of a permanent self is optimal for moral action. Furthermore, a permanent sense of self is actually viewed as harmful to one's experience of life.

4.2 Conclusion of Hartshorne

Charles Hartshorne thus presents a theological and philosophical system that denies a permanent self yet retains moral action. Hartshorne views the world as fundamentally consisting of event-based sentient creatures that comprise all things in varying degrees of complexity. A person, for Hartshorne, is therefore a society of creatures whose complex combination has resulted in human-level consciousness. There is no self to be found apart from the society of creatures that is a body and the consciousness of individuality that arises from that; both are needed to constitute a human being. There is thus no permanent self, but there is a continuum of a nonstrict identity that persists over different numerical and qualitative moments in time (an individual is the same person over time, but not the same thing); each action actualizes a new reality and new available possibilities offered by God. God relates to the world as a mind does to the body, respectively, as symbiotic. The two depend on one another and change in relation to each other; each has a degree of influence over the other but each still retains a level of freedom. God influences, or persuades, creatures towards the best potential available at any given time while the experiences of creatures constitute God's experience of the world and change the ideals and potentials present in the absolute nature of God. As a fundamentally social being, a person's identity is based on external objects and people; other things

and other people constitute who a person is with regards to an identity. Hartshorne argues that selfless moral action and selfless love provide intrinsic happiness for the agent, as one becomes happy through others' happiness. One also receives reciprocated love from others and God, and is able to add to the divine enjoyment and the process of the world through actions of value, i.e., selfless loving and moral actions. One is incentivized to act selflessly moral through God's ability to alter himself as the essential object of our awareness and therefore incentivize one towards the best decision at hand. One thus reaps what one sows in the sense that good actions lead to more good possibilities and bad decisions lead to limited possibilities. Lastly, there is no soul of an individual but rather an immortalization of one's actions of value in the divine memory and in the process of the world. Living selflessly thus allows one to love others and God to the greatest extent and to derive an ultimate sense of value and happiness in contributing to God's perfection and the possibilities for others, especially loved ones. Hartshorne's system thus not only supports a lack of a permanent self as coherent with moral action, but also holds selfless action as key to one's happiness and as the means of achieving the greatest level of morality.

4.3 Final Thoughts

Thus it can be seen that both systems not only argue that a permanent self is nonexistent, but that the lack of a permanent self leads to a greater degree of moral action and even happiness. In addition, these systems also assert that self-

centeredness and a belief in a permanent self lead to unhappiness and are illogical given each philosopher's respective nature of reality. Understanding of the self as non-permanent is not a moral hurdle by any means but rather seems to inspire selfless moral living towards others. There is no need for a locus of moral responsibility that is the permanent self, for each system compensates for that lack by arguing that selfless moral action is a source of happiness and eases suffering and dissatisfaction. Both Tsongkhapa and Hartshorne argue that once one begins to really live for others, one not only receives intrinsic satisfaction and happiness from helping those around oneself, but one's own problems seem to slowly dissipate; attachment to the self is a constant source of dissatisfaction while understanding the self as non-permanent alleviates self-centered problems.

Furthermore, each system provides a means of moral retribution through *karma* for Tsongkhapa and the perpetuation of good and bad experiences through our actions (via God as the essential object of our awareness) for Hartshorne. These forms of moral retribution provide that one is not only motivated to act selflessly moral to be happy, but that there are cosmic forces at hand that ensure the moral responsibility of the agent. These are not everlasting repercussions but instead affect the agent's present or soon-to-be present temporal experience as a good or bad experience. The recipe for good and happy experience, though, is to live selflessly and morally.

These systems both argue in contrast to Kant, who holds that there is no connection between morality and happiness. This is not to say that one cannot be moral and happy, but the two do not necessarily entail each other. This lack of

connection is not necessary because, for Kant, happiness is nature in harmony with one's will. It is important to note here that it is nature that is meant to be in harmony with one's will, and not one's will in harmony with nature. Tsongkhapa and Hartshorne have both argued that if reality (or nature) is properly understood and one acts accordingly, i.e., selflessly and morally, then one's desires will not conflict with nature. Nature clashing with the will of the individual is a source of unhappiness, but, if one understands the self as non-permanent and acts selflessly, one's desires dissipate and are replaced with the needs of others. As explained above, replacing the needs of the self with the needs of others entails happiness and lack of personal suffering.

The problem appears to arise here, however, that if others are suffering, the selfless agent will suffer. This, however, would suggest that selfless living is a vicarious experience, which it is not. Through pragmatic social participation one comes to know what is moral and what is not or, more accurately, what works and what does not. Action and intention are important for Tsongkhapa and Hartshorne, and one learns to act appropriately through experience, coupling the desire to help others with knowledge of whether one can in fact help. This, however, is the pragmatic side of things, and moral action can be as much about not being hurtful or ill mannered when one wants to be; moral action can simply be restraining oneself from immoral action.

The similar conclusion of both Tsongkhapa and Hartshorne—that selfless morality leads to happiness and eases suffering—indicates that a belief in a permanent self is unnecessary for moral action. These two unrelated philosophical

systems, separated by hundreds of years and thousands of miles, each proposed similar solutions in different religious systems to the problem of morality and the self. Their coherent and consistent systematic philosophies also show that selfless moral action can be philosophically justified, rather than just experientially justified. The continued practice of these religio-philosophical systems (as they are pragmatic systems) further indicates that the practices and beliefs of these systems appeal to and work for many people. This final point helps to highlight the understanding of the diversity of human dispositions and experiences. Different religious systems and different understandings of the self can provide for moral action and joyful experiences. It is important to note that the aim of this thesis is not to disparage or undermine a belief in a permanent self, but simply to argue that a belief in a permanent self is *not necessary* for moral agency; there does not need to be an individual locus of permanent moral responsibility (such as a self or a soul) for one to act morally or be motivated to do so. Nor does there need to be any soteriological incentive for one to act morally, as selfless moral action can provide a joyful temporal life with minimal suffering. Thus, as highlighted through the religio-philosophical systems of Tsongkhapa and Hartshorne, *a belief in a permanent self is not necessary for moral agency.* Or, more specifically, *a belief in a permanent self that is subject to personal everlasting soteriological repercussions is not necessary for moral agency, including moral responsibility, accountability, and motivation.*

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