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# Buddhism as Reductionism: Personal Identity and Ethics in Parfitian Readings of Buddhist Philosophy; from Steven Collins to the Present

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**Abstract**
Derek Parfit's early work on the metaphysics of persons has had a vast influence on Western philosophical debates about the nature of personal identity and moral theory. Within the study of Buddhism, it also has sparked a continuous comparative discourse, which seeks to explicate Buddhist philosophical principles in light of Parfit's conceptual framework. Examining important Parfitian-inspired studies of Buddhist philosophy, this article points out various ways in which a Parfitian lens shaped, often implicitly, contemporary understandings of the *anātman* (no-self) doctrine and its relation to Buddhist ethics. I discuss in particular three dominant elements appropriated by Parfitian-inspired scholarship: Parfit's theoretical categories; philosophical problems raised by his reductionist theory of persons; and Parfit's argumentative style. I argue that the three elements used in this scholarship constitute different facets of one methodological approach to cross-cultural philosophy, which relies on Western terminology and conceptual schemes to establish a conversation with non-Western philosophy. I suggest that while this methodology is fruitful in many ways, philosophy as a cosmopolitan space may benefit significantly from approaching Buddhist philosophy using its own categories and terminology.

**Keywords** Buddhism · Buddhist ethics · Comparative philosophy · Derek Parfit · Personal identity · Reductionism · Śāntideva

The history of modern scholarship on Buddhist philosophy suggests that Western scholars have tended to draw on the conceptual schemes and categories of Western traditions of thought. Andrew Tuck, referring to the Western interpretation of Nāgārjuna, describes this practice critically as a reflection of 'philosophical fashions'

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(Tuck 1990). Interpretive efforts of the kind identified by Tuck use Western technical terminology to explain Buddhist thought, looking to Asian traditions for answers to Western philosophical problems. In this way, Tuck notes, they introduce their own presuppositions and agendas. Inasmuch as they are comparative, these readings encapsulate a tension — perhaps intrinsic to all philosophical interpretation — between striving for an objective description of Buddhist philosophy and producing new meanings which reflect the interpreter's cultural and personal viewpoint. This is the eisegetical tension.

My aim in this paper is to examine a Western theoretical category which has often served as a lens through which contemporary philosophers and scholars of Buddhism approached early Buddhist thought: the reductionist theory of personal identity introduced and developed by the philosopher Derek Parfit. While I am sympathetic to the analogies between Parfit's reductionist theory and Buddhist philosophy, my intention in what follows is to explore the ways in which the Parfitian perspective shapes, often implicitly, contemporary philosophical understandings of the doctrine of *anātman* (no-self) and, specifically, this doctrine's relation to Buddhist moral theory.

The eisegetical tension raises broader methodological questions in cross-cultural research. The majority of the works that I discuss below draw on Parfit's conceptual scheme to establish a conversation of equals between Buddhist and Western philosophers, and to demonstrate the relevance of classical Buddhist thought to contemporary philosophy. In doing so, these works raise questions about a methodology that relies on recognizable Western models to explicate Buddhist ideas (and non-Western philosophy, more broadly). To what extent does this methodology provide a full and faithful depiction of Buddhist philosophy and, on that basis, facilitate a genuinely evenhanded cross-cultural dialog?

Derek Parfit's theory of personal identity consists of two primary elements: the reductionist view and the psychological criterion of identity. In his early work, which culminates in the 1984 book *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit rejects the commonsensical, non-reductionist view of persons.[1] According to this view, a person is a distinct entity that exists beyond the basic psychological and physical entities which constitute persons. The identity of persons, accordingly, is a basic fact that cannot be described using other facts. Parfit gives the Christian soul and the Cartesian thinking substance as examples of this entity, which he names the 'further fact'. According to the reductionist view, however, only the person's physical and psychological events and the relations between them exist. Consequently, persons can be reduced to more basic entities. In other words, the fact of personal identity can be expressed by reference to other, more basic facts. When we know these impersonal facts, we know all there is to know about the person.

Parfit's reductionist view of persons is supplemented by his psychological criterion of personal identity, sometimes called the 'Identity Doesn't Matter' view (Shoemaker 2016). Parfit maintains that what matters in personal survival is not the endurance of a distinct entity, like a physical body or a mental substance. Rather, what matters are the relations that connect between a person's psychological states. Such relations include the connection between an experience and its direct memory, the connection between

[1] The position is articulated in a number of other places, most importantly Parfit 1971a, 1971b, 1982, and 1995.

an intention and the act that it leads to, and the connections between beliefs and desires which are held over time. If a sufficient number of relations is maintained, this entails the survival and endurance of the person; in other words, the person remains one and the same. The reductionist view and the psychological criterion of identity underpin Parfit's approach to many of the ethical issues he considers throughout his early work, including moral desert, distributive justice, our obligations to future generations, and the grounding of his utilitarian ethical theory.[2]

In what follows, then, I identify some of the ways in which these Parfitian developments seem to have influenced contemporary interpretations of Buddhism. I focus on three aspects of his thought that became dominant in the works surveyed below: first, the theoretical categories that Parfit formulates in his work; second, the philosophical problems raised by his reductionist view, in conjunction with the utilitarian moral theory he defends; and third, his argumentative forms and styles. Methodologically, each of these three aspects assists the comparative purpose of the works discussed below. As such, they all fulfill a similar intellectual function, and constitute different facets of a single cross-cultural methodology.

I begin by introducing the theoretical categories of the Parfitian-Buddhist discourse, pointing to the intrinsic eisegetical tension that this discourse exhibits. I then examine two instances in which contemporary scholarship has used the doctrine of *anātman*, construed using Parfitian categories, to provide Buddhist answers to Western philosophical problems.

In the final section, I focus on one example of an interpretation that explicitly incorporates arguments by Parfit: the work of Charles Goodman (2009), who advanced a consequentialist interpretation of Buddhist ethics, within a normative ethical framework. I argue that a Parfitian perspective guides, in an unacknowledged manner, Goodman's interpretation of the relation between the *anātman* doctrine and Buddhist ethics. Against this reading, I examine five verses from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*) by the eighth-century Buddhist philosopher Śāntideva, which illustrate an alternative approach to understanding Buddhist ethics in the context of the *anātman* doctrine.

## Borrowed Categories: Reductionism, Non-Reductionism, and Eliminativism

Parfitian-inspired readings of Buddhist philosophy began to gain prominence during the second half of the 1980s. Steven Collins's studies of Theravāda Buddhism played a key role in suggesting Parfit's philosophy as an interesting Western parallel to the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*. In *Selfless Persons*, his seminal work on the *anātman* doctrine (*anattā* in Pāli), Collins finds similarities between the early Buddhist theory of

[2] While Parfit's analysis of personal identity had a direct influence on Parfitian readings, the broad sense and significance of his claims are to be understood in their historical and thematic contexts, on which this paper will not elaborate. Historically, Parfit's inquiry into personal identity is embedded in a philosophical tradition that goes back to thinkers such as John Locke and David Hume, and engages with contemporary philosophers such as Bernard Williams, Christine Korsgaard, and Susan Wolf. Thematically, the concepts of reductionism and eliminativism draw their significance from a wider set of debates in Western philosophy, particularly in metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of science.

persons and Parfit's notion of qualitative identity. He suggests that Parfit's language of 'successive selves' is comparable with the Buddhist understanding of persons on the conventional level of reality and that, consequently, Parfit's analysis can illustrate Buddhist ideas effectively. Collins also notes that the Buddhist negation of the self has similar ethical implications to Parfit's position, namely that both lead to an altruistic attitude (Collins 1982, pp. 177, 193–194, and 294 n. 22).[3]

Parfit himself was one of the first scholars to produce a Parfitian reading of Buddhism. In various passages from early Buddhist texts, Parfit discovers an Indian version of his reductionist theory of persons, and takes it as evidence for the universal validity of the view he advances (Parfit 1984, p. 272).[4] Characterizing the Buddhist position as reductionist, therefore, is especially important to him, as such a claim substantiates his own position. In this spirit he writes, for example, that

> Buddha's claims are strikingly similar to the claims advanced by several Western writers [i.e., Bundle Theorists, who explain the continuity of persons without asserting a separate self]. Since these writers knew nothing of Buddha, the similarity of these claims suggests that they are not merely part of one cultural tradition, in one period. They may be, as I believe they are, true. (Parfit 1987, p. 21, bracketed addition mine)

A decade later, however, Parfit reformulates his claim. In this later work he takes the position that there is an essential difference between the two views: in reductionism, persons exist but can be reduced to more basic facts, whereas Buddhist texts maintain that persons are entirely non-existent (Parfit 1995, p. 17).

Yet Parfit does not go on to assert that his theory of persons is entirely distinct from the Buddhist *anātman* doctrine, as some of his critics have argued. Instead, he remaps the reductionist territory in such a way that leaves room for different variations of the metaphysical stance. In this new, more nuanced taxonomy, Parfit names the Buddhist

[3] Collins's view changed over time. A number of years after first comparing Parfit and Buddhism, he embraced it more vehemently, noting that Parfit's reductionist position is very close to the Buddhist one, both in theory and in the practice of most ordinary Buddhist believers (Collins 1985, pp. 482–483). A decade later, however, he retreated from this strong claim and subscribed to a more restrained version, according to which the Buddhist *anātman* (*anattā*) doctrine, despite certain similarities, is not fully reductionist; while the reductionist view can offer a complete description of reality without asserting the existence of persons, in Buddhism the conventional level of truth (the level at which the existence of persons is admitted) is required for a complete description of reality, both for social discourse and for the overall coherence of Buddhist thought (Collins 1997, pp. 477–480).

[4] Parfit's knowledge of early Buddhism was based chiefly on the *Milindapañha*, Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, and Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, as translated in Stcherbatsky 1919. He quotes passages from these works in appendix J of *Reasons and Persons* (Parfit 1984, pp. 501–502), as well as in Parfit 1987 (p. 93), 1995 (pp. 16–17), and 1999 (p. 260). I use the umbrella term 'early Buddhism' throughout the paper, as it reflects the tendency (albeit not a uniform one) of the literature surveyed to consider different non-Mahāyāna traditions collectively as holding the same version of the *anātman* theory. There is, however, room for subtler distinctions here. For example, Jake Davis (2017) shows that the understanding of personhood expressed in the Pāli Nikāyas is at variance with Parfit's version of metaphysical reductionism, in that the former is interested in the lived experience of selfhood, not in a given ontological entity.

view 'eliminative reductionism' and his own position 'constitutive reductionism,' alluding to the different attitudes they hold towards the existential status of persons.[5] According to Parfit, eliminative reductionism agrees with constitutive reductionism in claiming that personal identity can be reduced to more basic facts about the person, but holds that the reducibility of persons means that a 'person' is a redundant concept that should be eliminated from our foundational ontology. Simply put, while reductionists believe that persons exist on some level, eliminativists maintain that persons do not exist at all.

Considered from an interpretive point of view, rather than a strictly philosophical one, this move seems to serve Parfit's philosophical objectives. It enables him to invoke Buddhism in support of his own view, despite the difference in philosophical meanings he recognizes and despite his disagreement with the Buddhist eliminativist view.[6] What Parfit here attempts to do, I suggest, is to bridge the eisegetical discrepancy. He does this by reformulating the Western category under which he classifies the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, so that it agrees more accurately with Buddhist textual sources without completely losing its relevance to his own philosophical concerns.

Parfit's inquiry into the metaphysics of persons, then, yields three kinds of theories about the nature of persons and personal identity: constitutive reductionism, eliminative reductionism, and non-reductionism. Following Parfit's initial engagement with Buddhist thought, various scholars of Buddhism employed his scheme to explicate the Buddhist *anātman* doctrine. Unlike Parfit, they found the distinction between reductionism and eliminativism important, and considered the question of which of these two categories served as a better description of the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*.[7] Here, as Charles Goodman (2005, p. 381) notes, the disagreement between the two camps emerged not only because they had different opinions on the appropriate classification, but also because they understood the classifications themselves differently: as in a comedy of errors, what some authors called reductionism others understood as eliminativism, and while certain authors were unanimous on the appropriateness of a single classification, they used it in different senses.

Such disagreements are hardly surprising, since the categories of reductionism and eliminativism do not themselves emerge from Buddhist thought. They are borrowed from an outside conceptual scheme and, hence, are not fully isomorphic with the conceptual field of the Buddhist view. This non-overlapping area is at the

[5] In addition, Parfit introduces a third variation, 'identifying reductionism,' but he says very little about this view and it is of less interest to our current discussion. I therefore set it aside.

[6] Later still, Parfit rejected this stance as distinct from reductionism. See Parfit 1999, p. 260.

[7] For the evolution of this inquiry see, in chronological order, Bastow 1986, Stone 1988, Giles 1993, Duerlinger 1993, Basu 1997, Siderits 1997, Perrett 2002, Siderits 2003, Stone 2005, Ganeri 2007, Ch. 6, and Siderits 2015 (some of which will be discussed below). Generally, non-reductionism has a secondary importance in these works. Nearly all of the above studies which discuss non-reductionism regard it as a rival view to mainstream early Buddhism, attributable to non-Buddhist schools of thought as well as to the Buddhist Pudgalavāda school. However, see Siderits 1996 for a self-contained treatment of the Pudgalavāda as non-reductionism, and Carpenter 2015 for a reconstruction and philosophical defense of the motivation underlying the Pudgalavāda theory of persons, with reference to Parfitian non-reductionism.

heart of the eisegetical tension.[8] This has not gone unrecognized in the discourse: some studies have displayed a remarkable awareness of the hermeneutical aspect of their enterprise. They define their interaction with Buddhist ideas using such terms as 'rational reconstruction,' 'interpreting,' or 'reeducating,' which bear a subjective flavor, rather than aiming at a neutral historical representation. However, this does not dissolve the eisegetical tension. In such cases, the tension takes on a subtler form, negotiating between the demands of a faithful reconstruction and a creative, philosophically relevant interpretation. The eisegetical tension seems to be intrinsic to any comparative endeavor.

Therefore, many of the authors who endorsed Parfit's taxonomy were compelled to modify it in certain ways (just like Parfit himself) in order to bridge the conceptual discrepancy. And, like Parfit, some of them hoped to develop an account with relevance to Western philosophical discourse. James Duerlinger (1993) seeks to demonstrate that the *anātman* doctrine, as set out by the Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu, is reductionist. Duerlinger opens his argument by characterizing reductionism as a position that expresses two principles: (1) the existence of persons can be reduced to the existence of a brain and a body, and a chain of physical and mental events; and (2) personal identity over time can be reduced to more particular, impersonal facts. Non-reductionist theories, on the other hand, reject these two theses. This account is largely consistent with Parfit's framing of his own theory.

At a certain point, however, Duerlinger seems to deviate from Parfitian reductionism. Whereas in Parfit's thought the two principles concern personal identity over time, or diachronic identity, Duerlinger extends the sense of reductionism to the synchronic level, namely, to the unity of persons at a given moment. In this second meaning of reductionism, persons can be reduced to a number of particular concurrent elements at any given instant. To justify this restatement, Duerlinger suggests that a synchronic reductionism is tacitly contained in Parfit's thesis:

> Parfit's characterization of the reductionist view of our existence implies an implicit reductionist thesis concerning our unity. For if our existence is reducible to that of our bodies or brains, which are made up of parts, and a series of physical and mental events, more than one of which can occur at any given moment in the series, our unity at any given moment must also be reducible to a relation between our bodily parts and the collection of our physical and mental

[8] The question of the crucial differences between the Parfitian categories and Buddhist *anātman* doctrine remains beyond the scope of this study, but here are several remarks on the issue: Matthew Kapstein (1986, p. 297 and 2001, p. 50, n. 21) points out that the teaching of rebirth, accepted by all major Buddhist schools, is in disagreement with Parfit's version of reductionism, which sees transmigration as a supporting claim of non-reductionism. According to Goodman (2005, p. 381), neither reductionism nor eliminativism is able to fully explain the Buddhist view, since they do not acknowledge the distinction between conventional and ultimate truths – an important theoretical principle in Buddhist accounts of the person and the self. Mark Siderits (2003, p. 76) mentions that one significant difference between the Buddhist teachings and the Parfitian versions of reductionism is that the former reduces wholes in general, while the latter applies this view to persons only. Finally, Robert Ellis (2000) offers a more radical analysis of the discrepancy, claiming that any apparent similarity between reductionism and the Buddhist view is purely superficial. The crucial difference between the two, according to him, is that Parfit's categories deal with self-identity – a matter of ontological fact – whereas the Buddha's position is essentially about self-identification, which is a psychological and epistemological issue, comprising desire and belief.

> states at that moment. In what follows I shall take it for granted that the reductionist theory of our existence has this further reductionist thesis as an implication and that the nonreductionist denies it. (Duerlinger 1993, p. 82)

This modification is important for Duerlinger's philosophical purposes. Whereas the synchronic aspect of identity is not of great interest to Parfit, it is central to Buddhist scholasticism (*abhidharma*), whose metaphysical suppositions concerning the self are accepted by Vasubandhu. Having argued for this theoretical framework, Duerlinger then goes on to analyze the problem of synchronic and diachronic personal identity in Vasubandhu's explication of *anātman*, classifying it as reductionist. He mentions in passing that Vasubandhu, unlike Parfit, did not explicitly formulate a reductionist theory (1993, p. 83), thereby revealing a gap in the modern reductionist interpretation of the *anātman* doctrine.

James Giles's recourse to Buddhist philosophy is, much like Parfit's, a way of defending the theory of identity he advocates within contemporary Western conversations on personal identity. Giles rejects various Western accounts of personal identity as untenable. These include persisting identity theories, as advanced by Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid; biological theories of identity, as maintained by Terence Penelhum; and psychological theories of identity, such as Parfit's (Giles 1997). The most compelling theory of identity, according to Giles, is the 'no-self theory' (not to be confused with the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*), which is an eliminative view, ascribed by Giles to David Hume and to Buddhism. One of Giles's main philosophical concerns, therefore, is to establish an eliminativist reading of Buddhism against the reductionist interpretation. As he writes:

> I hasten to add […] that I am not here attempting a scholarly exposition of Buddhist thought; for my present interests are confined to an exposition of the no-self theory of personal identity. It is just that Buddhism has some valuable contributions to make here. There are, of course, problems involved in the cross-cultural discussion of ideas; Hume and the Buddha, after all, lived their lives in very different social and historical contexts. And yet I do not think that these difficulties need detain us; for when we go to the texts where Buddhist thinkers are grappling with the problem of personal identity, we find their concerns are essentially the same as Hume's. (Giles 1993, p. 185)

To accomplish this task, Giles offers his own definitions of reductionism and eliminativism. Reductionism and the Buddhist view are similar in that both reject the idea of a self that exists beyond 'the bounds of experience' (1993, p. 175). One major difference between the two views, however, is that reductionist theories are about the self, and as such, seek to provide an account of personal identity, whereas eliminativist theories are not about the self. On the contrary, they reject this idea and any theory about it. According to Giles, this fundamental difference leads to two philosophical distinctions. First, after reducing the self and its identity to their most basic components, reductionism proceeds to reaffirm their existence, whereas eliminativist accounts, such as the Buddhist *anātman* doctrine, do not. Second, whereas reductionist theories presuppose a certain view of the self into which they 'force the structure of human existence', eliminativist theories do not commit themselves to views of this kind.

Following this description of the two categories, Giles characterizes the Buddhist view as eliminativist, arguing that Buddhist philosophy negates the existence of the self both on the ultimate level and on the conventional level of reality.

Finally, Mark Siderits, who has unquestionably formulated the most sustained and influential reductionist interpretation of early Buddhism, situates the concepts of reductionism and eliminativism in a rather different framework. His explication of these terms, and consequently of Buddhist thought, emphasizes the semantic and linguistic properties that indicate an entity's mode of existence. Siderits's account (1997, 2003, and 2015) elaborates on Parfit's (1995) in suggesting that reductionism is an approach according to which certain concepts in our language are superfluous. Concepts are redundant when they can be replaced by more particular ones, in a way that allows for a complete description of reality. When such a complete description is possible, the entities designated by the superfluous concepts prove to be ontologically nonessential and, consequently, have no place in our ultimate ontology. These concepts, nevertheless, can still be more or less accurately translated into the terms of our ultimate ontology, so they need not be eliminated from our language altogether (Siderits 1997, p. 455–456).

Eliminativism, on this definition, is an equivalent philosophical approach to reductionism, since it prescribes the elimination of those discourses which make use of concepts that are not part of our ultimate ontology. However, the eliminativist razor pertains only to those instances in which redundant concepts cannot be systematically reduced to the basic concepts of our ultimate ontology. Thus, reductionism and eliminativism are not mutually exclusive; we can apply a reductionist approach to some concepts, while adopting an eliminativist approach towards others (p. 456–457).

Siderits acknowledges that certain adjustments may be required for the Parfitian taxonomy in order for it to accommodate the Buddhist view (p. 461), and he does in fact revise it. For instance, in addition to the general semantic distinction between the two views, he also emphasizes another contrast between reductionism and eliminativism, concerning the utility of concepts. Concepts that can be reduced to our ultimate ontology are useful in some ways to human discourse and communication. Eliminated concepts, on the other hand, are not useful to us, since they cannot be systematically reduced to the basic concepts of our ultimate ontology. This additional criterion, on the one hand, slightly distances Siderits from Parfit's account; on the other hand, it echoes Buddhist expositions of the *anātman* doctrine as expounded by the *Milindapañha* (*The Questions of King Milinda*), a Pāli para-canonical work. In this work, conglomerates designated by conventional concepts, like chariots and persons, are said to be ultimately non-existent. Nonetheless, the concepts remain in common use because they have some utility, they are so-called 'convenient designations'.

Siderits develops this idea in two directions. First, for purposes of verbal communication, concepts prove to be advantageous because single terms are more efficient in referring to such conglomerates than lengthy descriptions involving the many facts these conglomerates consist of. Secondly, convenient designations have a utilitarian benefit. They are helpful in maximizing the welfare of persons and should be retained. Other concepts, which are less advantageous in this regard, should be eliminated (Siderits 2003, pp. 38–39). Under this understanding of the categories, Siderits classifies the *anātman* doctrine as reductionist, since discourses about persons and personal

identity can be systematically translated into our ultimate ontology and are thus useful to human life in the two aforementioned senses.

These four examples above are telling in several ways. First, they reveal that while Parfitian-inspired works show an interest in understanding the Buddhist stance on its own terms, they are also – sometimes primarily – guided by considerations stemming from contemporaneous Western intellectual debates. These debates affect the way these scholars approach the Buddhist texts through a Parfitian taxonomy. Second, we see that in some cases, Parfitian categories have been tailored to the Buddhist position, as well as to the interpreter's desired reading. Finally, endorsements of the Parfitian scheme, despite the modifications made by these scholars, result in different understandings of the Parfitian categories themselves. All of these features emphasize the inherently eisegetical nature of the interpretive efforts described above, and thus suggest that cross-cultural conversations established on the extension of Western categories may involve significant conceptual gaps.

## Western Questions, Buddhist Answers

According to the critical history of Indological scholarship, the exercise of looking for answers to Western philosophical questions in Asian literature tends to involve the introduction of external agendas into the texts. At least under certain circumstances, this practice has the potential to project an interpreter's cultural and personal presuppositions onto a given classical work. In Parfitian-inspired readings, the *anātman* doctrine, understood as a form of reductionism, has been used for such cross-cultural endeavors, thereby adding a second layer (alongside the Western theoretical categories) to the method of explicating Buddhist views in reference to Western conceptual frameworks. To claim that Parfitian readings invariably assumed that Buddhist authors were answering precisely the same philosophical puzzles that occupy Western thinkers would be unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, these interpretations have asserted the intellectual proximity between the Western questions and the Buddhist answers with varying degrees of conviction, from the weaker claim that Buddhist texts offer new perspectives or tools for addressing themes in Western philosophy, to the stronger claim that Buddhist arguments anticipate Western questions, or even offer direct answers to them.

In what follows, I discuss questions related to Buddhist ethical theory and how these questions were treated in Parfitian-inspired readings. First, I survey two accounts, by Roy Perrett and Mark Siderits, that express a weaker position vis-à-vis cross-cultural proximity. In the following section, I examine Goodman's account, which leans to the stronger position. These treatments meld classical Buddhist principles with elements from modern Western philosophy in an attempt to find new answers to current philosophical concerns.

Roy Perrett's Parfitian account seeks to demonstrate how Indian philosophy, specifically Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, can offer a different perspective on the theme of our moral responsibility towards future generations (Perrett 2003, p. 35). The issue is also discussed by Parfit at length in the final section of *Reasons and Persons*, where various related questions are considered. For example, what weight ought we to give to the interests of future people? And to what extent should the identities of future persons constitute a factor in the formations of present generation's policies?

To address the question of our obligation to future persons, Perrett turns to an argumentative section in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, now increasingly referred to as the Śāntideva Passage (chapter 8, verses 90–103). In this section, which has been discussed at length in various places,[9] Śāntideva argues for the inconsistency of a selfish attitude and seeks to justify an altruistic position. He argues that since selves do not ultimately exist, there are no essential criteria for distinguishing between one's own experiences of suffering and those of others. Consequently, one ought to eliminate suffering as such without consideration of suffering-owners. Moreover, if the basis for a discrimination between experiences of suffering is the harm they cause the agent, 'me', then for the sake of consistency, one ought to treat one's own future experiences of suffering in the same way one treats current sufferings of others. That is, one ought to either strive to eliminate both or not to be concerned about any of them, since neither type of suffering harms the agent now.

In his reading, Perrett conflates the premises that guide Śāntideva in this argument with those of reductionism, after which he claims that the passage offers an Indian answer to our moral obligation to future generations. In Perrett's words:

> The argument is contentious. To go through it requires not only the truth of Reductionism about the self, but also that such Reductionism really does entail that one should be equally concerned for the well-being of all. Of course, if both claims can be vindicated, then presumably we will have an Indian justification of our obligations to future generations that follows from a particular metaphysics of the self. (Perrett 2003, p. 35)

Perrett explains that Śāntideva's argument is founded on the universalizability principle, which states that moral judgements must have a universal applicability, and on the prescriptive nature of moral judgements, which makes such judgements immediately applicable to actual and hypothetical cases. Accordingly, Śāntideva's altruistic rule is to be asserted with respect to any individual, in any situation. From another perspective, by asserting that a given action is to be done to others, one asserts that, all other things being equal, the same ought to be done to oneself. This principle grounds the attitude that we must give equal moral weight to our interests and to those of others. Other persons, Perrett concludes, include future persons.

At the heart of Mark Siderits's Parfitian engagement with Western philosophical questions is the idea that the Indian tradition developed tools that can assist in reevaluating those questions (2015, p. 1). One of the themes he addresses in this way is the 'alienation problem,' an objection to consequentialist moral theories in the field of Western moral philosophy. The gist of the objection is that in the name of impartial benevolence, the demands and suppositions of these theories lead to an alienation from everything that is personal: one's personal commitments, feelings, and sentiments, and the people who stand in special relation to oneself. This objection, Siderits notes, is pertinent to reductionism in its Western and Buddhist versions, and to the consequentialist principle that Siderits recognizes in the Śāntideva Passage. A moral theory that

[9] On the different interpretations of the Śāntideva Passage and for an overview of works that investigate it philosophically, see Garfield et al. 2015.

prescribes the maximization of welfare through the eradication of ownerless experiences of pain disregards the distinct personhood of agents and their individual life.

Siderits first discusses several ways that consequentialists may answer this objection. One such answer is 'indirect consequentialism', which says that in acting morally an agent need not choose the act that best maximizes welfare, but the one that promotes overall welfare in conformity with the agent's character and life narrative. Another answer consists of a denial of alienation in the consequentialist procedure. According to this answer, the agent's care and concern towards others is not a means for the maximization of welfare. Instead, the end is the promotion of the wellbeing of those for whom the agent cares, thereby contributing to the overall welfare. Hence alienation does not arise.

Siderits goes on to reconstruct a Buddhist answer using elements from the two answers of indirect consequentialism and the denial of alienation. A Buddhist, according to his account, would adopt an attitude of 'ironic engagement', entering into wholehearted interactions with conventional, unified persons, while acknowledging the whole time that these are ultimately nonexistent. A moral agent who devotes herself to an engagement of this kind would maintain her personal projects, relationships, and so on, while realizing that these are only instrumental for the maximization of happiness. She would also adopt a reductive attitude towards the moral concept of overall welfare, understanding that this is merely a convenient way of designating an aggregate of individuals and their welfare, including the agent's close connections.

According to Siderits, in the Buddhist reply to the alienation objection, person-regarding attitudes would be considered as instrumental to the overall welfare of beings. Such attitudes would also be seen as preserving an ontological equilibrium between the ultimate truth, in which persons do not exist, and the conventional truth, in which persons are real; as well as an ethical equilibrium, between nihilistic detachment and a substantial identification with one's personal projects, feelings, commitments, and relatives. In sum, this brief overview suggests that the accounts of Perrett and Siderits bring Buddhist philosophy into a Western setting by incorporating elements from the latter into their reconstructed answers. One question this technique poses, therefore, concerns the degree to which this cross-cultural method permits for an autonomous and authentic depiction of the Buddhist viewpoint.

## Parfitian Arguments for Buddhist Ethics

As we can see, Derek Parfit's philosophy inspired more than a few studies on Buddhist ethics. In this final section, however, I confine my remarks to the work of Charles Goodman – one of the most original and interesting current voices in the field of Buddhist ethics – as an example of an interpretation that explicitly incorporates arguments by Parfit. As mentioned above, this constitutes a third way in which Western philosophical characteristics are appropriated for the purpose of shedding light on Buddhist views, alongside the adoption of Western categories and philosophical problems. Parfit's theory of personal identity, I argue, implicitly shapes the way Goodman conceives of and emphasizes certain aspects of the relation between the doctrine of *anātman* and Buddhist ethics. By modeling his understanding of this

relation on Parfit's theory of identity, Goodman, I suggest, overlooks other important aspects of the relation between these elements.

Goodman can be seen to be following Parfit's model in these three ways:

(1) By favoring *anātman* as a principle that serves to *ground* ethical theory**.** By placing the emphasis on this aspect, it appears that Goodman's interpretation tends to overlook the ways in which the principle of *anātman* may pose difficulties for ethical theory. This aspect, I argue below, corresponds with Parfit's thought, which primarily uses the deconstructed self to justify certain normative moral ideas, particularly in order to develop utilitarian principles (Parfit 1984, pp. 321–347).

(2) By favoring the *deconstruction* of the person and its significance to ethics**.** By emphasizing this aspect, Goodman's interpretation seems to disregard the relevance of the positive reconstruction of identity to ethics. In this case, there seems to be a correlation with Parfit, who takes pains to ground his position that the person can be reduced to its components (pp. 219–266), while devoting relatively little attention to what, positively, this person consists of (pp. 204–209).[10]

(3) By favoring the *ultimate truth* and its significance to ethics. This means that the ultimate level of reality, in which the self is dismissed from the ontological system, is understood as that aspect of *anātman* which bears the greatest relevance to normative ethics. This presupposition results in giving less attention to the ways the conventional meaning of the self can have benefits for ethical theory. I argue below that this aspect corresponds with Parfit's claim that personal identity is not what matters in normativity (p. 217).

There seems to be a natural overlap between these three aspects: employing the principle of *anātman* as a means of justifying ethical principles shifts focus to the deconstruction of identity; and placing the emphasis on the deconstruction of identity naturally draws our attention to the perspective of the ultimate truth. But as I argue below, they do not necessarily entail each other.

Bearing this in mind, I turn now to examine in detail how the Parfitian point of view is manifested in Goodman's reading of Buddhist ethics. In his book *Consequences of Compassion*, Goodman classifies three forms of compassion, which he sees as a motivation that articulates Buddhism's consequentialist approach (Goodman 2009, p. 5). While the first level of compassion is directed towards living beings and leans on a distinction between individuals, the second level of compassion encompasses the insight of *anātman*. This compassion, he explains, is based on the realization that 'the boundaries between the lives of sentient beings are conventional, and do not reflect any

[10] Goodman's explicit rejection of the value of unified identity in ethics makes it clear that he favors this side of the equation. His rejection is directed at claims made by Western thinkers such as Christine Korsgaard (1989) and Charles Taylor (1989), who argued – against Parfit – that a unified identity is essential for ethics on practical grounds. Thus Goodman writes, in response to Taylor, 'That we must not only realize the ultimate nonexistence of any substantial self but also overcome the whole phenomenon of having an identity is an important message of the Mahāyāna scriptures' (2009, p. 11), and, commenting on Korsgaard's argument, says that 'Rejecting and abandoning the psychological processes that, for Korsgaard, help to constitute a persisting self may not just be a demand of Buddhism; it may, under certain circumstances, be a demand of consequentialism itself. The kinds of identification that Korsgaard regards as necessary and inevitable will sometimes prevent people from responding in ways that would benefit sentient beings.' (2009, p. 213)

really existing unity of an individual life, or separateness of distinct lives' (Goodman 2009, p. 5). Consequently, this type of compassion is directed not at beings, but rather at *dharma*s, namely, the momentary physical and psychological building blocks that together constitute the conventional person (and composite entities, more generally).[11] It is at this level that the doctrine of *anātman* is harnessed in support of Goodman's consequentialist interpretation.[12]

Goodman introduces the principle of *anātman* from a metaphysical and a semantic perspective. According to the metaphysical account, composite entities like persons do not exist on the level of ultimate reality. Composite entities, according to this account, are entities that are related to parts and are dependent on minds to conceive them. On the ultimate level, only *dharma*s exist. Composite entities like persons, however, may be said to exist on the conventional level, where they play a useful part in human discourse. In his semantic account, Goodman explains that the difference between the two levels of reality lies in the linguistic modes of expression used to describe them. Statements which describe *dharma*s are true in the ultimate sense, whereas statements which describe composites like persons (in other words, collections of *dharma*s) are not ultimately true.

Following his first definition of *anātman*, Goodman shortly explains what nonetheless connects the momentary events in a person's life. Personal continuity is a process constituted by causal links. What passes in this process, particularly from one lifetime to another, is what Goodman calls 'karmic information'. The passing of karmic information in a causal way accounts for our personal identity over time: it makes it appropriate to describe a person's experiences today as the continuation of the past beings she was in previous lives. Goodman does not further examine what reconstructs the person, and does not draw any philosophical implications for moral theory from this aspect of *anātman*.

After defining the principle of *anātman*, Goodman defends at length the validity of the deconstruction of the self. At this point, his Parfitian perspective emerges more clearly. In order to show that the realist view of the self as a distinct entity is untenable, Goodman draws on Classical Buddhist arguments against the existence of a permanent self, alongside arguments by Western thinkers, including three thought experiments borrowed from Parfit.[13] In Parfit, these thought experiments served to demonstrate that in certain cases there is no clear answer to the question of whether personal identity was maintained or not. For example, the 'Combined Spectrum' thought experiment involves an imaginary case in which scientists gradually and continuously replace the body cells and psychological states of one person with those of another person. According to Parfit, at a certain point during the process, the question of whether the person has retained her original identity or is now the other person will have no clear yes-or-no

[11] See Jenkins 2015 for a more detailed overview and philosophical discussion of the three objects of compassion in Madhyamaka thought.

[12] In a critique that references Parfit's two kinds of moral units – derived from the Extreme Claim and the Moderate Claim (on which, see Parfit 1984, pp. 306–311) – Vishhnu Sridharan claims that Goodman's reading of Śāntideva's ethics oscillates between the two levels of compassion in Śāntideva. For the critique and Goodman's response, see Sridharan 2016a, Goodman 2016, and Sridharan 2016b.

[13] 'The Combined Spectrum' thought experiment – Parfit 1984, pp. 236–243; Goodman 2009, p. 94; 'My Division' thought experiment – Parfit 1984, pp. 254–261; Goodman 2009, p. 95; and 'The Branch-Line' thought experiment – Parfit 1984, pp. 287–289; Goodman 2009, p. 95.

answer. This case is an extreme example of the daily transformations that occur in people's bodies and minds over time.

The 'Combined Spectrum' thought experiment is one formulation of the sorites paradox, which emerges from objects with unclear boundaries whose precise conceptual category is ambiguous. Goodman advances it along with other thought experiments in order to clarify the sense in which, according to Buddhism, selves are 'vague,' as he calls it (following Siderits 2003), and therefore do not ultimately exist. Siderits defines a vague term as a term that allows for borderline cases; namely, cases in which it is logically and semantically indeterminate whether the term applies or not. In the same breath, however, he adds that sorites paradoxes played no role whatsoever in the arguments used by Buddhists to support their ontological views, or (as he nicely puts it), 'the Indian tradition as a whole has no Chariot of Devadatta problem to parallel with the Ship of Theseus puzzle' (2003, p. 96, n. b). Buddhist philosophers rely on other argumentative methods and styles to defend their metaphysical positions, including the *anātman* doctrine.

By applying these Parfitian arguments, Goodman thus not only buttresses the non-realist view of personal identity, but also extends the range of the original meaning of *anātman*, which now incorporates Parfit's reductionist understanding of personal identity. This philosophical extension, it should be noticed, concentrates on the deconstruction of the person, and (in Buddhist terms) on the way in which beings exist according to ultimate truth. Goodman delves into arguments that support the deconstruction of concrete identity and the validity of ultimate truth. However, by doing so, other aspects are overlooked: the positive reconstruction of the person, the conventional mode of existence, and the relevance of conventional identity to ethics.

After defining and defending the principle of *anātman*, Goodman connects this principle to his reading of Buddhist ethics as a consequentialist moral theory. His line of reasoning is as follows: (1) the deconstruction of identity effaces the dividing line between self and other; (2) this breaking of barriers between the practitioner and others serves, then, as the basis for views and attitudes, which are indispensable for a consequentialist ethical behavior; (3) it follows that, from an ethical point of view, the doctrine of *anātman* serves to advance a consequentialist approach to ethical living.

One particular level at which this reasoning is applied is the level of moral sentiments. Goodman indicates the relation between the insight of *anātman* and the four *brahma-vihāra*s or 'sublime states': *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (joy) and *upekkhā* (equanimity). These states of mind, which are considered wholesome from a Buddhist point of view, also contain the materials to articulate a form of consequentialism, according to Goodman (p. 50). He explains that an experiential realization of the absence of a permanent self reduces our selfishness and removes false views, which interfere with the *brahma-vihāra*s (compassion, in particular). In this way, the principle of *anātman* assists in the development of moral sentiments. Moral sentiments, in turn, prepare the ground for a consequentialist approach to ethics. As we can see, the doctrine of *anātman* is seen here by Goodman as a principle that advances and supports Buddhist moral theory.

Goodman also presents the principle of *anātman* at the level of moral reasons (pp. 92–93), in order to show how the *anātman* doctrine can provide a ground for these moral reasons. Here, as in Roy Perrett's account, Goodman enlists Śāntideva's arguments from selflessness in chapter 8 of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (the Śāntideva Passage).

Goodman detects a striking similarity between Parfit's and Śāntideva's arguments, both in their metaphysical and ethical implications. As he notes,

> What Śāntideva offers us, I would argue, is not merely a version of consequentialism, but a well-thought-out and philosophically quite interesting version. One striking measure of the level of his reasoning is the degree to which he anticipates a key development in recent Western ethical theory [...]. Derek Parfit has argued that his reductionist views about personal identity can be used to support a consequentialist view of ethics. Though Parfit was unaware of this when he wrote *Reasons and Persons*, Śāntideva had made analogous philosophical moves more than a thousand years earlier. (Goodman 2009, p. 92)

These arguments, then, lead to similar conclusions in terms of ethical theory. According to Goodman, they both imply that the maximization of happiness as a moral end overcomes considerations of distributive justice (that is, considerations of how we should distribute resources between different people or groups of people). Because ultimately there are no experiencers of suffering, we can legitimately act in a way that produces small harms for some people, but benefits others, so long as the total amount of welfare is maximized. This conclusion, which openly echoes ideas developed by Parfit, exhibits once again the threefold presupposition that I mentioned earlier: Goodman's move focuses on the ultimate reality of the person and the deconstruction of identity, and shows how they can ground and justify moral principles.[14]

I have claimed that the three emphasized aspects overlap, but are not inseparable, and that the threefold presupposition is not inescapable. I conclude this discussion by suggesting an alternative way of considering the relation between the doctrine of *anātman* and Buddhist ethics. I take as an example an excerpt from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the same source that Goodman uses in his work. A few verses after the aforementioned arguments in favor of altruism, Śāntideva proposes a different approach to the cultivation of altruistic attitude. His argument runs as follows:

8.111 Due to habituation, there is a sense that 'I' exists in the drops of blood and semen that belong to others, even though the being in question does not exist.

8.112 Why do I not consider another's body as myself in the same way, since otherness of my own body is not difficult to determine?

[14] Conventional persons do figure in Goodman's defense of consequentialism, for example, in his Buddhist reply to the objection of excessive demands. It is important to note, however, that this use is not directly linked to the theoretical lines of the *anātman* doctrine (although, naturally, persons being conventional entities, the idea is in the background). Goodman's 2015 defense of consequentialism and his corresponding reading of Śāntideva's arguments rests more substantially on conventional distinctions between persons, though this reading still seems to favor the other two points I enumerated above (the deconstruction of identity and the ethically grounding role of this deconstruction). However, the conceptual framework underlying this reading is considerably different. On the Buddhist side, the focus is on Madhyamaka philosophy and emptiness, rather than non-Mahāyāna thought and the *anātman* doctrine; and on the Western side, it is not Parfit but other contemporary thinkers who inform the interpretive model and challenge the consequentialist theory (Richard Boyd on the one hand, and Margaret Urban Walker, Robert Nozick, and John Rawls on the other).

8.115 Just as the notion of a self with regard to one's own body, which has no personal existence, is due to habituation, will the identity of one's self with others not arise out of habituation in the same way?

8.117 Therefore, just as you wish to protect yourself from pain, grief, and the like, so may you cultivate a spirit of protection and a spirit of compassion towards the world. (Translated in Wallace and Wallace 1997, pp. 103–104)

The first verse lays the ground for justifying impartial benevolence, by pointing to the fact that there is nothing inherently personal in one's own body, even on the conventional level of reality. The body is itself nothing but a product of components that are not 'me', the sperm and eggs of one's parents. The association of the feeling of 'I' with that particular body is only due to familiarity and unconscious 'practice'. The second verse relies on that insight to create a sense of alienation towards one's body, which acts against the intuitive identification we ordinarily have towards it. Then, in the third verse, Śāntideva proposes that since 'my' identification with that body is merely due to habituation, I can just as well habituate myself to identify in the same way with the bodies of 'others'. He thus concludes, in the last cited verse, that it is rational to cultivate an attitude of altruism (compassion and protection) towards oneself and towards others in equal measure.

Why is this philosophical move necessary? What is its spiritual and ethical import? Śāntideva explains:

8.120 One who wishes to protect oneself and others quickly should practice exchanging oneself for others, which is a great mystery. (Translated in Wallace and Wallace 1997, p. 104)

One of the Buddhist meditative practices for altruism, still prevalent in the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, is the initially esoteric meditation of exchanging self and others. In this practice, the meditator visualizes other sentient beings, and generates the wish to take upon herself all of their suffering and difficulties, and to give in return all of her good fortune and spiritual merit. This practice is said to quickly eradicate self-attachment and boost the practitioner's *bodhicitta* (spirit of awakening), but it is, of course, highly counter-intuitive. The verses above provide a rational justification for the practice in the form of a philosophical argument.

In this argument, I suggest, Śāntideva focuses on the conventional side of the doctrine of *anātman*, rather than its ultimate side. Even though there are no selves or persons on the ultimate level, self and other exist according to conventional truth, and are conceptually distinct from one another. Śāntideva preserves this conceptual distinction, but shows how conventional truth can actually advance a Buddhist moral principle. Although he does not say this explicitly, it seems that this playful approach to individuals requires a certain philosophical understanding of what a person is, both ultimately and conventionally. It requires us to understand that our concepts of 'I' and 'self' are merely concepts, and hence – at least as Śāntideva argues – can be assigned at will to other living beings. In other words, this argument demonstrates how the conventional level of truth can also be philosophically significant for normative ethics.

Furthermore, Śāntideva's argument is based upon the positive reconstruction of the person under the term 'I', rather than upon the deconstruction of the person into basic *dharma*s. In this light, the experiences of suffering that one ought to alleviate with

compassion are not ownerless experiences. They belong to conventional persons. And it is precisely because they belong to non-reduced, unified persons that this argument has force and supports the view that we ought to cultivate compassion.[15] While this argument appears at first to be susceptible to the objection of alienation, it eventually reveals a sophisticated strategy for generating the highest degree of intimacy and identification in ethics – not only with one's own personal life, relatives, and projects, but with those of all other sentient beings.

Finally, it should be noted that although Śāntideva's argument justifies a moral principle, it is not devoid of difficulties: ironically, this argument evokes one well-known objection *against* the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*. According to this objection, a distinct self must exist as a support for the notion of 'I'. If there is no separate self as the object of the notion of 'I', how is it to be explained that we never use the word 'I' to talk about the bodies of others, but only about our own body?[16] In other words, the objection points out that the concept of 'I' must be founded on a real object, otherwise it is simply arbitrary. This objection naturally concerns ethical issues, such as the nature of agency and the boundaries of autonomy, which fall outside the scope of this discussion. But we can see how this objection may be reinforced by the premises of the quoted argument.

Thus, Śāntideva's argument uses the reconstruction of the person and the conventional level of truth to justify moral principles. At the same time, it shows that as much as the doctrine of *anātman* may support the principles and values of Buddhist ethics, it may also challenge some aspects of normative ethics. It is in such ways, I want to claim, that Parfit's argumentative forms may differ meaningfully from their Buddhist equivalent. A recourse to Western-style arguments in cross-cultural dialog can establish a connection between Western and Buddhist thought, but in the process may also obscure the latter.

## Conclusion

This article has been an attempt to look at Parfitian-inspired works as a chapter in the history of Western scholarship on Buddhist philosophy, an intellectual era that was inaugurated in many ways by Steven Collins. I have surveyed representative studies which integrated various elements from Parfit's thought into their interpretation of the *anātman* doctrine and Buddhist ethics. My survey has not exhausted the full range of contributions to the Buddhist-Parfitian conversation over the past four decades, nor has

[15] For an extensive defense of the position that the reconstructed person is a vital component in Śāntideva's soteriology and ethics, see Todd 2013, especially pp. 40–41, 143–163. See Fan (forthcoming) for a comparative study that considers the reconstruction of persons in Buddhist philosophy in light of Parfit's criterion of personal identity.

[16] Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*: '[Vaiśeṣikas:] – If the "idea of I" has [only] color-form and the other aggregates for its cognitive object [*ālambana*] [and not a self], why is it that this idea does not arise in regard to the color-form of others? [Vasubandhu:] – Because there is no connection [*saṃbandha*] between the stream of aggregates [of others] and this idea. When the body (*rūpa*) or thought (*citta-caitta*) are in connection with the "idea of I" —a cause-and-effect [*kāryakāraṇa*] connection—this idea arises towards this body and this thought; but not in regard to the aggregates of others. The habit of considering "my stream" as "I" exists in "my stream" since beginningless *saṃsāra*.' (Translated in La Vallée Poussin and Sangpo 2012, pp. 2572–2573; interpolated Sanskrit terms in original)

it treated any of them in their entirety. I selected my sources in order to highlight specific interpretive elements – typical characteristics, as I see them – that feature in this literature.

The first significant feature of the accounts surveyed above concerns the Western categories used in the explication of Buddhist principles. This results in a conceptual discrepancy between the Parfitian terms of interpretation and the Buddhist view in its Indian context. The second feature relates to the exercise of reconstructing Buddhist answers to Western philosophical problems. The examples considered above show that such formulations tend to base themselves on Buddhist philosophical principles, while incorporating, in addition, various ideas developed and discussed in Western philosophy. Finally, I have discussed the method of employing Parfit's reductionist arguments in the interpretation of the *anātman* doctrine and Buddhist ethics. When Parfit's argumentative forms and styles are transferred to Buddhist exegesis, they have an effect on how the doctrine of *anātman* and its affinity to ethics are understood.

In my view, these elements are all facets of one methodological choice, one which, when employed in cross-cultural research, instantiates the general problem stated at the beginning of this article. The problem can now be reframed as follows: while enabling a philosophical fusion, the techniques for interpreting Buddhism through Western conceptual schemes may weaken the autonomy of the Buddhist side and, consequently, undermine the foundations of an impartial conversation. It has been argued (Taber 2006, p. 8) that extracting philosophical elements from Buddhism in a selective manner as part of a cross-cultural exchange may cause us to miss valuable aspects of the Buddhist system. This study suggests further that interpreting Buddhism through Western categories may have a similar effect.

We can respond to this problem in various ways. One response is to claim that the imposition of external personal and cultural frameworks is an integral part of doing any type of philosophy, comparative and non-comparative alike, since it is always the case that we approach philosophical texts from our own social and personal backgrounds (Vaidya 2017, p. 930). A related claim is that, in using the vocabulary of Western philosophy to interpret Buddhist concepts, one broadens the senses of Western terms in a natural and necessary way; hence, applying them does not distort the Buddhist view (Garfield forthcoming). One might further argue that, with the advance of Western philosophy and the multiplicity of philosophical perspectives yielded by this process, we are now better equipped to understand the meanings of ancient Buddhist philosophical texts (Biderman 2008, p. 322, n. 12). A different response is to admit that Buddhist philosophy does indeed undergo transformations when it is analyzed through Western lenses, but that these transformations are salutary consequences of comparative interpretation, in the process of which each of the sides – Western and non-Western – absorbs something of the other (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, p. 19).

I do not seek to deny the merit of the methodology discussed in this paper, especially under historical circumstances in which the use of familiar Western terms can make non-Western philosophy more accessible to the broader discipline. However, this methodology does run the risk of transforming Buddhist ideas in a way that they are only partially present in cross-cultural discussions. In the long run, I believe, cosmopolitan philosophy has a lot to gain from approaching Buddhism using its own frameworks and terminology when these are available; in other words, from

'decolonizing' Buddhist philosophy (to use the terms of Ganeri 2017) by privileging its rationality and broad intellectual contexts.

The interpretive efforts described in this article have left their mark. In the course of the last decades, the Parfitian analogy has become a standard reading of the *anātman* doctrine both among scholars of Buddhist philosophy and among Western philosophers interested in Buddhism. A clear indication of this is the emergence in recent years of numerous philosophically sophisticated and methodologically conscious studies that intuitively draw on the Parfitian perspective to explicate the theory of *anātman*.[17] The Parfitian chapter in the history of Buddhological scholarship, it appears, is still being written.

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[17] Fasching 2011, Garfield 2015, Harris 2018, MacKenzie 2011, and Sauchelli 2016, to name a few.

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