

**On Altruism and Rebirth**  
**Philosophical Comments on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8: 97–8**

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It is normal, in Indo-Tibetan Madhyamaka, to portray analysis as involving the investigation of whether  $x$  can be found under analysis, in other words—at least for Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka—whether  $x$  has inherent existence or not. This investigation is, of course, central to Madhyamaka, and forms the concern of insight meditation leading eventually to *prajñā*, seeing things the way they really are. However, much of what comes under the range of analytic inquiry in Western philosophy is not simply a matter of the search for putative ultimate reality. Ethical inquiry, for example, is not *in itself* a matter of such ultimates. Clearly, in Buddhist meditation, and debate also—even in Madhyamaka writing—critical analytic reasoning is not only employed in the area of ultimate investigation, the investigation of whether something can be found under analysis and, therefore, has ultimate, i.e., inherent, existence. A Madhyamaka meditation manual, like Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, shows from the beginning how its author gives arguments, appeals to reason, in order to convince initially himself, and then any other reader (see 1:2–3), to adopt a radically new vision and perspective. For Śāntideva, as a follower of Mahāyāna Buddhism, this new vision more often than not moves from his relationship to himself, his own concerns and projects, towards his relationships with other sentient beings. It is a move from self-centered egoism to an anticipated perfect altruism, but a move which is accomplished perhaps initially and in part, but certainly fundamentally, through appeals to reason, the *rationality* of the Buddhist spiritual path and ultimately, the complete rationality of altruism.

In *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:89ff.—the Chapter on Meditative Absorption (*dhyānapāramitāpariccheda*) which occurs immediately prior to his chapter on *prajñā*—Śāntideva develops a meditation which involves an analysis that has become central to the Tibetan vision of how to cultivate the Bodhisattva aspiration and path. This meditative analysis is known as ‘equalising of self and other’ (*bdag gzhan mnyam brje*), and in it Śāntideva starts to touch on some rather interesting issues of practical philosophical ethics.

Śāntideva was no doubt a very nice person, the sort of person who—provided he did not float up into the sky and disappear *too* often—it would be delightful to have as a counsellor and Good Friend.<sup>1</sup> But the fact of niceness does not in itself explain *why* one should be nice. Put more pointedly, why should we care if other people are suffering? What does it matter to us? The point is raised by Śāntideva’s opponent, and it might be thought to be the very foundation question for a construction of an ethical system. In attempting to remove the *pūrvapakṣa*’s objection, Śāntideva wants to argue that for himself, at least, the Buddhist vision implies altruism as a necessary consequence and is not (as has sometimes been argued by Western commentators) antithetical to it.

Śāntideva had already urged that suffering is to be removed simply because it is suffering (8:94–6). He appears to want to say that it makes no rational difference, and, therefore, for Śāntideva no moral difference, who actually experiences the suffering. The fact that the suffering is *mine* does not make it morally more significant. I am neither rationally nor morally justified in removing my own suffering rather than the suffering of another just because it is my own suffering. *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 8:97:<sup>2</sup>

“Supposing one says that the suffering which happens to that [other] person does no harm to *me*, therefore, (s)he should not be protected against [it].

Then since future suffering (Skt.: ‘the sufferings of future bodies’) is also doing no harm [to you now], why is that to be protected against?”

The opponent is putting forward an argument, indicated in the Sanskrit by the conclusion marker *ato*, ‘therefore’. Possibly our earliest Tibetan commentary, the *Byang chub sems pa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa’i ’grel pa* by the second Sa skya hierarch bSod nams rtse mo (1142–1182), brings out the opponent’s argument here very clearly and felicitously. Someone might argue that the grounds (*rgyu mtshan*) by which something is to be protected against are the fact that it causes

<sup>1</sup> On the story well-known to Tibetans of Śāntideva floating up into the sky and disappearing while teaching the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, see for example *Tāranātha’s History of Buddhism in India*, tr. by Lama Chimpa & Alaka Chattopadhyaya, ed. by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970, 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 8:97:

*tadduḥkhena na me bādhety ato yadi na rakṣyate |*  
*nāgāmikāyaduḥkhān me bādhā tat kena rakṣyate ||*  
*gal te de la sdug bsngal bas | bdag la mi gnod phyir mi bsrung |*  
*ma ’ongs pa yi sdug bsngal yang | gnod mi byed na de cis bsrung ||*

The Sanskrit text of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is taken from *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva with the Commentary Pañjikā of Prajñākaramati, ed., P.L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts Series 12, Darbhanga, Mithila Institute, 1960. The Tibetan is included in *Shānti Deva’s Bodhisattva-Charyāvatāra and its Commentary by Ngulchu Thogmed*, Sarnath, Sakya Students’ Union, 1982.

harm to me. The grounds are not simply that it is not desired by another. Therefore, the opponent continues, because it is another's suffering which is doing no harm to me, it is not to be protected against.<sup>3</sup> Śāntideva's reply is in the form of a rhetorical question embodying a *prasaṅga* counter-argument. The opponent's position is inconsistent with his or her own tenet and presumed behaviour. The opponent holds that it is rational to guard oneself against future sufferings and yet, Śāntideva argues, those sufferings are not causing pain to oneself. For bSod nams rtse mo, Śāntideva's concern is to refute the suggestion that the grounds for claiming that something is to be protected against are merely that it harms me personally. Rather, the grounds why something is to be protected against are [simply] that it is undesirable, unwanted.<sup>4</sup>

Prajñākaramati, in his commentary, consistent with the Sanskrit reference to future bodies, implies that protection against the suffering of rebirths in the hells and so on after death is strange on his opponent's premisses, since there is not the slightest suffering caused to the body which is here in this lifetime. This is because they are simply other.<sup>5</sup> Prajñākaramati is referring here to the obvious fact that the *body* of the reborn being is different from that of the one who died. But as we shall see in looking at the next verse, there is more to it than this. What Prajñākaramati is saying is that the reborn being and the one who died are other in the same relevant way as myself and contemporary others are other. Thus, for Prajñākaramati, Śāntideva appeals to an implicit assumption that

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<sup>3</sup> Text contained in the *Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum*, Tokyo, Tōyō Bunko, 1968, vol. 2, 488a: *gsum pa khyab pa'i rgyu mtshan nyid bsgrub pa | gal te gang zhig bdag la gnod pa de bsrung bya yin pa'i rgyu mtshan yan (= yin) gyi gzhan mi 'dod pa tsam gyis bsrung bya yin pa'i rgyu mtshan ma yin te | des na gzhan gyi sdug bsngal gyis bdag la mi gnod pa bsrung bya ma yin no snyam na |*

bSod nams rtse mo seems to have followed in his commentary *Phywa pa Chos kyi seng ge* (1109–1169), who was apparently critical of the Prāsaṅgika approach and, therefore, presumably a Svātantrika. It is noticeable in his discussion on these two verses how much bSod nams rtse mo employs the structures, terminology (*khyab*, *rgyu mtshan*, etc.) and flavour of the *pramāṇa* tradition in a way perhaps familiar from much later dGe lugs writing but absent from all the other commentaries examined on these verses (with perhaps the exception of Bu ston), including that by rGyal tshab rje.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*: *bdag la gnod pa tsam bsrung bya yin pa'i rgyu mtshan yin pa bkag pas 'dod bya ma yin pa bsrung bya yin pa'i rgyu mtshan shugs las grub pa'o | de'ang dngos su bdag la mi gnod pas bsrung bya ma yin pa'i rgyu mtshan du 'dod pa 'gags so ||*

<sup>5</sup> See Prajñākaramati's *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*, ed., P.L. Vaidya: *yato nāgāminah kāyasya paralokabhāvino narakādijātasya duḥkhātmakasya [ duḥkhānme ] tasyopāt-tasya kāyasya kācidbādhā sambhavati, tasya anyavāt |*

Corresponds to Tibetan Cone *bsTan 'gyur*, microfiche edition produced by The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, New York, mDo, vol. 26, folio 165b: *gang gi phyir | ma 'ongs pa ste 'jig rten pha rol gyi lus dmyal bar skyes pa'i sdug bsngal gyi bdag nyid 'dir skyes pa'i lus po 'di la cung zad kyang gnod par mi srid de | de gzhan yin pa'i phyir ro ||*

there is no relevant moral difference here between myself and contemporary others on the one hand, and myself now and my future rebirths on the other. If I protect against suffering in the one case, to be consistent, I am obliged to protect against suffering in the other.

In spite of the differences in wording between the Sanskrit and the Tibetan versions of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97 over whether the argument refers simply to future sufferings, or to the sufferings of future bodies, both Indian and Tibetan commentators seem, in the main, to take Śāntideva to be referring to future bodies, mentioning explicitly either the hells or unfavourable destinies (*ngan song*). We might speak of this restriction of Śāntideva's argument to future bodies as the narrower application of 'future sufferings'. There is indeed much which can be said for this restriction to the narrower application as an interpretation of Śāntideva. From a textual point of view, it must be correct, for it is stated in the Sanskrit version and appears to be confirmed by both Sanskrit and Tibetan of the very next verse. It is, moreover, quite clear that future bodies will be different from the present body. Thus, as Prajñākaramati develops the argument, Śāntideva can point to a clear-cut case of otherness where everyone with even a rudimentary religious and, therefore, moral sense does indeed care for the sufferings of others—that is, future lives—sufferings which are not affecting one's present state of being. However, in the Buddhist context it might be possible to develop an interpretation—or perhaps a use—of Śāntideva based on a wider application of 'future sufferings'. If Śāntideva's opponent is saying that there is no need to protect against sufferings which do not affect me, then given mutability, why do I need to take precautions now against future sufferings which will come later in *this* life? Myself later in this very life can be seen as other in relationship to myself now, and that otherness is arguably for a Buddhist the very same morally significant otherness as I bear to contemporary others. Clearly this radical wider interpretation would be more difficult to defend than the narrower application, since the otherness of bodies between incarnations gives a sense of 'otherness' not possessed by stages within one life, where there is a bodily continuity which is rather dramatically shattered by death.<sup>6</sup> We might want to argue that it would be consistent to protect myself against future sufferings in this life, while ignoring the sufferings of contemporary others, in a way that would not be consistent if I also protect myself against the sufferings of future lives. Yet

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, in Tibetan Tantric theory, there is a physical continuation into future lives through the very subtle wind. This is an interesting theory, but the very subtle wind is so different from the normal gross bodily continuum as to be irrelevant here. The very subtle wind explains the medium of consciousness transference, it does not provide in the case of normal (say, human or animal) rebirth any coherent sense of continuity between the body that has died and the one reborn, and it certainly would not deny a radical gap between the one who dies and the one reborn, a gap which does not normally exist within *one* lifetime of bodily continuity.

Buddhists have had a tendency to diminish, if not to dissolve, the significance of this distinction, arguing that, in fact, the continuum from one life to another is in no significant way different from the continuum within one life (see *Milindapañha* 2:2:1). In both cases, the subsequent stage is said to be neither the same nor different from that which has gone before, by which is clearly meant that the subsequent is not the same as the preceding, but also is not radically separate and intrinsically different from it either. Rather, the subsequent exists in causal dependence upon the preceding. As Buddhaghosa puts it in the *Visuddhimagga*, if there were identity, curds could not come from milk, for there can be no causal relationship between two things which are numerically identical, but the same unwelcome consequence would also apply for different reasons if there were absolute otherness as well. Absolute otherness involves a denial of all causal relationships (*Visuddhimagga*, 17:167). It is clear, therefore, that the denial of difference here is a denial of complete acausal otherness. It is not a denial of what we usually mean by ‘otherness’, the sort of otherness which is normally thought to exist in the context of causation, the otherness which in everyday life we all say exists between, for example, seed and sprout. As we have seen, in the case of rebirth, otherness is clearly admitted by the Buddhist between the body which died and that (re)born. We shall see subsequently that this otherness is also accepted by at least one commentator, between the *person* who dies and the *person* who is reborn. In both cases, it is thought to be the otherness of the subsequent to preceding in a causal continuum, but the causal continuum is not thought by Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati to annul the moral significance of—the moral use which can be employed by—the fact of this otherness, an otherness in the same morally significant way as applies to contemporary others. Moreover, following the *Milindapañha* the same relationship as occurs between the being who dies and the one who is reborn also applies to stages within the life of one being; from which it would seem to follow that my relationship to myself at future stages in my very own life is also other in the same way that my relationship to my future lives is other, and if I concern myself with my own future stages, I am also morally obliged to concern myself with contemporary others. Thus, in the Buddhist context, it is indeed possible to construct an argument based on the wider application of ‘future sufferings’. The fact that this seems to deny a clear phenomenological difference between the otherness possessed by cases of rebirth, and otherness within one life stream where bodily continuity seems to provide a stronger sense of personal continuity (if not identity), may, nevertheless, itself be taken as an argument against the Buddhist position.

As we shall see, Tsong kha pa’s pupil rGyal tshab rje, writing in the fifteenth century, in his *sPyod ’jug rnam bshad rGyal sras ’jug ngogs* clearly and explicitly adopts an understanding of Śāntideva which embraces what we have called the wider application, although there is no evidence that he was aware of the dif-

ferences between the wider application he espoused and the narrower application of most other commentaries, including those which came from India. The Sanskrit text of Śāntideva’s verse makes the narrower application all but inevitable, since it refers to the sufferings of future bodies. In spite of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:98, this inevitability is perhaps less obvious to someone using only the Tibetan. rGyal tshab rje was not however innovating. A wider application of ‘future sufferings’ is also found in bSod nams rtse mo’s commentary. bSod nams rtse mo comments that if it necessarily follows (*khyab*, pervasion) that what does no harm to me is not to be protected against, then it would follow absurdly that I should not protect myself against the suffering of a later life (*tshe phyi ma*) and such time as my own old age and so on. This is because it is not doing any harm to my present body, just like the suffering of another.<sup>7</sup> The reference to ‘my present body’ (*da ltar gyi lus*) is interesting, since if ‘present body’ is simply being contrasted with ‘future body’, in other words the body of this present life, then, of course, the suffering of my old age and so on will indeed occur to my present body, even if it is a future stage of my present body. It will not occur only to the body of a future life. Thus, ‘my present body’ should not be taken here to contrast with the bodies of future lives, but rather with *any* future state—that is, future in relationship to the present moment—of a body identified as mine. In other words, the stress in Śāntideva’s argument is taken to be on ‘present’ rather than ‘body’. Future suffering is not present, and is, therefore, doing no harm *now*. So, on the opponent’s premisses, it is not to be guarded against. This understanding of the contrast drawn as one between present and future, rather than present and future lives, contrasts with the use of ‘now’ (*da lta*) found in the commentaries of Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290–1364) and Sa bzang mati pañchen ’Jam dbyangs blo gros (fourteenth century), both of whom add ‘now’ or ‘present’ (*da ltar*) to their gloss, but clearly imply that the ‘now’ referred to is the present body, the body of this life, rather than the body at the very present moment. Not surprisingly, these commentators also take the narrower application of ‘future sufferings’, in contrast to bSod nams rtse mo’s wider application. Thus, Bu ston comments that on the opponent’s premisses it absurdly follows that one does not protect the present body against the suffering (Bu ston uses the Sanskrit *duḥkha* throughout) of the body which, in a later future birth, is born in hell. This is because the harm is not caused to the present body.<sup>8</sup> Bu ston reiterates, therefore, a point made strongly by Prajñākaramati,

<sup>7</sup> bSod nams rtse mo, 488a: *mi gnod pa la bsrung bya ma yin pas khyab na tshe phyi ma dang rang nyid rgas pa la sogs pa’i dus kyi sdug bsngal de chos can | bdag gis ma bsrungs par thal | da ltar gyi lus mi gnod pa’i phyir gzhan gyi sdug bsngal bzhin no ||*.

<sup>8</sup> *Byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa’i ’grel pa Byang chub kyi sems gsal bar byed pa zla ba’i ’od zer*, included in Lokesh Chandra, ed., *The Collected Works of Bu-ston*, part 19 (*Dza*), Śatapiṭaka Series, 59, New Delhi, International Academy of Indian Culture, 1971, 469: *ma ’ongs pa skye pa phyi mar dmyal bar skyes pa’i lus kyi duḥkha chos can | da ltar gyi lus des ci ste srung mi srung bar thal | da ltar gyi lus la gnod pa mi byed pa’i phyir ro ||*.

that the being who dies and the one who is reborn are different, at least as far as their bodies are concerned. Sa bzang mati pañchen agrees, and adds the moral implication—that, absurdly on the opponent’s grounds, one would make no effort to give up unskillful acts in order to protect oneself against future sufferings, that is, the sufferings of future unpleasant rebirths.<sup>9</sup> The point is important, since it follows that the opponent’s position—the suggestion that I should not concern myself with the sufferings of others because they do not hurt me—has the same negative moral implications as *ucchedavāda*, the teaching that there is no future life, a cardinal wrong view for all Buddhists, and one which is thought to have rather unpleasant consequences in the hellish rebirth which comes, no doubt, as a considerable surprise to the one who would undergo it. Likewise, of course, Śāntideva wants to argue that the reverse applies. The denial of *ucchedavāda*, the acceptance that there are future lives, and our happiness or unhappiness in those lives depends upon deeds done now, has the same moral implications as the suffering of contemporary others. To protect ourselves against future sufferings by giving up unskillful acts is no more rational, and no more morally acceptable, than protecting contemporary others against contemporary sufferings. They have the same rationality and moral acceptability.

Bu ston has, nevertheless, a problem. He has argued that an absurdity would follow on his opponent’s premisses, that one would not protect the present body against the suffering of future lives. But, we might reply, actually it is not the present body which is protected against those sufferings, since the present body will not endure the sufferings of future lives. We have seen that commentators seem to agree that the body which dies and the one (re)born are different. This is accepted by Bu ston. While we can speak of the present person protecting him or herself against sufferings in future lives—speaking conventionally and ignoring

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<sup>9</sup> *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad gZhung don rab gsal snang ba*, New Delhi, Distributed by the Tibetan Bonpo Monastic Centre, Dolanji, H.P., 1975, 276: *de lta na ma 'ongs pa yi dus su bdag nyid ngan song du skye ba'i sdug bsngal yang da lta'i lus 'di la dngos su gnod pa mi byed pa'i phyir na de cis srung ste bsrung ba'i don du mi dge ba spong ba la 'bad pa mi byed par thal bar 'gyur ro ||* Another commentator who adds *da lta(r)* to his gloss is the great sixteenth century historian dPa' bo gTsoṅ la phreng ba in his *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod 'jug rnam bshad Theg chen chos kyi rgya mtsho zab rgyas mtha' yas snying po*, apparently published in Delhi, 1975, by the rGyal ba Karma pa's Rumtek monastery. Like Bu ston and Sa bzang, he seems to take *da lta* to refer to present lives, although he is not as explicit (page 589): *gal ste gzhan gyi sdug bsngal sel mi dgos te bdag la da lta mi gnod pa'i phyir snyam na | 'o na bdag gi ma 'ongs pa ngan song gi sdug bsngal srung pa'i phyir sdig pa spong ba yang mi rigs par thal ste des bdag la da lta mi gnod pa'i phyir ro ||*.

the issue of what is exactly being protected here—we cannot speak of protecting the present *body* against sufferings in future lives. Thus, if Bu ston’s addition of ‘present’ refers to the body, he faces problems not faced by bSod nams rtse mo in using ‘present’ for the present time, the present moment, with reference to the wider application. We can make sense in conventional terms of acting in the present moment to protect oneself from future sufferings, without specifying any particular further reference either as to when in the future the sufferings would be expected or to what will be the subject (body or not) which might otherwise undergo the sufferings, in a way that we cannot make sense of protecting the present body against sufferings in future lives. Let us note, moreover, that only one of the Indian commentators adds ‘now’ to his gloss, presumably because the reference to the ‘sufferings of future bodies’ in the Sanskrit text implicitly but clearly contains a contrast with the body of this present life. The Tibetan, on the other hand, refers simply to ‘future’ (*ma ’ongs pa*), even though this expression is usually taken to mean future lives. The one Indian exception is the commentary by Vibhūticandra of Jagaddala, whose *Bodhicaryāvatāratātparyapañjikā Viśeṣadyotanī* was written in about 1200. He comments that if the other is not to be protected then, since one is not harmed now by the suffering of a future body in the hells, why is that to be protected against by turning away from unskillful acts? Clearly, the contrast he draws is between this life and future lives.<sup>10</sup> Vibhūticandra himself visited Tibet in 1204, and his commentary is later than that of bSod nams rtse mo. Nevertheless, he makes no attempt to introduce the wider application which we have found stated in the latter’s work. In general, it is Tibetan commentators who make explicit the contrast with now/present, but it is left to bSod nams rtse mo and rGyal tshab rje to tease out the apparent absurdity (albeit implicitly) of restricting these terms to the present lifespan or present body alone, and draw a contrast instead between simple present and any other future time.

bSod nams rtse mo sees the issues of future lives and future suffering within this present life as being for Śāntideva’s argument exactly the same, and both are here identical in the relevant sense with the suffering of contemporary others. If the opponent wishes to argue that I should protect myself against only whatever is causing harm to me now, then there is no difference between referring to suffering in future lives, and suffering which will occur at any time whatsoever in the future. In both cases, there are no grounds for protecting myself against those sufferings which are future and, therefore, not happening now.

In commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97, rGyal tshab rje seems hardly concerned with future lives at all, and his argument is based solidly on what he sees

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<sup>10</sup> Cone, mDo, 27, f. 249b: *gal te gzhan mi bsrung na dmyal bar ma ’ongs pa’i lus kyi sdug bsngal gyis da lta mi gnod pas de ji ltar bsrung | mi dge ba las log pas so ||*.

to be a noncontroversial everyday attitude. From fear of suffering which will arise in old-age, he points out, we accumulate wealth while still young. But it is clear that rGyal tshab precisely wishes gradually to narrow down the gap between precedent and subsequent, that any future related to what has preceded—no matter what the time gap—will serve his purpose in indicating the desired relationship. Thus, he adds, from fear of suffering which will arise tomorrow, or in the late afternoon, we busy ourselves today, or in the early afternoon, as a means to overcome that suffering. On the opponent's grounds, this must be unreasonable. rGyal tshab rje then generalises and here, perhaps, he makes mention of future lives in passing. Future lives are just a particular example of the general principle: "It would follow absurdly that if the suffering of later time, or future time (*ma 'ongs pa'i sdug bsngal* presumably equals here future rebirths) does no harm to the former person (*gang zag*), then why is that to be protected against? Such protection would be unreasonable."<sup>11</sup>

The wider application is philosophically different from the narrower application, although I have argued that in the Buddhist context it is a natural development. It is apparently attractive, for not all believe in future lives, and even those who do profess a nominal belief do not, in fact, exert themselves to avoid the sufferings of future rebirths. Just about everyone, however, takes pains to avoid future sufferings which will come in this life. On the other hand, the wider application has problems in that it portrays as irrelevant the apparent difference between my normal experience of continuous survival in one life, accompanied (although by no means necessarily identical with) bodily continuity, and the sort of survival which is claimed to occur in the case of rebirth, normally with a very different bodily form and some rather radical breaks in continuity. Śāntideva wants a case which he can point to where we all agree that it is one of otherness and yet we still have concern. This might be supplied by sufferings in future lives, the narrower application. If we adopt, instead, the wider application and refer simply to future sufferings whenever they occur, it becomes debatable whether any opponent would willingly accept a suggestion that all my future sufferings bear to me now the same relationship as do the sufferings of contemporary others. The bodies of my future lives and their sufferings may be different from my body now, as are contemporary others and the sufferings

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<sup>11</sup> *Byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug gi rnam bshad rGyal sras 'jug ngogs*, Sarnath, Pleasure of Elegant Sayings Printing Press, 1973, 182: *rgas pa'i tshe sdug bsngal byung dogs nas gzhon pa'i tshe nor gsog pa dang | de bzhin du sang dang phyi dro sdug bsngal byung dogs nas di ring dang snga dro'i dus nas sdug bsngal sel ba'i thabs la 'bad par mi rigs par thal | phyi ma'i dus kyi sdug bsngal ma'ongs pa'i sdug bsngal yang snga ma'i dus kyi gang zag de la gnod par mi byed na de byung dogs nas cis bsrung bsrung mi rigs par thal lo ||*.

which occur to them, but it is not obvious that the same applies in exactly the same way to my body tomorrow, and the sufferings which will then beset me.

rGyal tshab rje's comments are noteworthy not only for his explicit adoption of the wider application, but also for his employment of the term *gang zag*, person (*pudgala*) in glossing these verses. In this, he is alone among our commentaries, for the term is not used either by other Indian or Tibetan sources.<sup>12</sup> For the dGe lugs tradition, a *gang zag* is defined as an 'I' which is conceptualised in dependence upon whatsoever of the five aggregates may be the substratum for conceptualisation,<sup>13</sup> and its emphasis in rGyal tshab rje's commentary reflects the dGe lugs stress on the established status of the conventional world which is found in all dGe lugs writings.<sup>14</sup> A person is a conventional entity, for it is dependently originated, conceptualised in dependence upon one or more of the five aggregates. Although the person in this sense can sometimes be spoken of as a conventional 'self' (*ātman*, *bdag*), and, therefore, the *ātman* is not totally negated in dGe lugs Madhyamaka, the term *ātman* has other usages connected with inherent existence, a True Self, usages which are not accepted in any sense by Madhyamaka.<sup>15</sup> rGyal tshab's use of the term *gang zag* makes it clear that he does not see the opponent's position or Śāntideva's counter-argument as one involving the sufferings of bodies as such, but rather as one between persons, which is much wider in scope than a concern for bodies. Bu ston had argued that the opponent would be unable to protect the present *body* against the sufferings of future bodies. We have seen that this is problematic, for it seems unlikely that anyone could argue coherently for protecting the present body against the sufferings of future bodies. *Prima facie*, rGyal tshab could argue much more plausibly for protecting the present person—in other words, say, Archibald—against the sufferings of future persons, that is, the person Archibald will be in his future life/lives. Moreover, rGyal tshab rje's use of *gang zag* enables him to develop Śāntideva's argument more clearly, since in removing the sufferings of contemporary others, I aim to remove the sufferings of other persons, not only of other bodies. Finally, in

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting the use of *gang zag* and the adoption of a wider application in rGyal tshab rje, for it is often thought that one of the features of the dGe lugs tradition has been a return to a rather faithful and perhaps even slavish adherence to the Indian sources. Clearly, rGyal tshab rje knows his Indian sources, but his commentary is very much his own with some rather important aspects lacking in the Indian materials.

<sup>13</sup> See Geshe Rabten, *The Mind and its Functions*, Mt Pèlerin, 1978, 131: *gdags gzhi phung po lnga po gang rung la bsten nas btags pa'i nga*.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed study of the status of *saṃvṛti* in the work of Tsong kha pa, see now Helmut Tauscher, "Saṃvṛti bei Tsong kha pa", *WZKSAP*, 34, 1990, 227–54; 35, 1991, 169–202.

<sup>15</sup> See Joe Wilson, *Chandrakīrti's Sevenfold Reasoning: Meditation on the Selflessness of Persons*, Dharamsala, 1980, especially 13–14.

employing *gang zag*, rGyal tshab indicates how his argument is firmly anchored to the level of conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*): there is for him no danger that any of his discussion will be confused with the question of a truly existent Self (*ātman*). But rGyal tshab's apparent innovation in interpreting Śāntideva also leads to some important philosophical differences. For it is one thing to speak of my present body as other, in relationship to future bodies, in the same significant way that I am other to contemporary others. It is quite another thing to refer to me as a present person as bearing the same relationship to the persons of my future lives as I bear now to contemporary others. The problem would be even more acute were rGyal tshab to apply the notion of personhood across the wider application. For surely my relationship to contemporary other persons could not be the same as my relationship to other persons at any time in the future in my own present-life continuum? Can it make sense to speak of future other *persons* in my own continuum?

The opponent had started by suggesting that there is no need to protect against the sufferings of others, for they do not hurt me. Śāntideva countered by concluding that, on the opponent's premisses, there should be no actions to protect against sufferings in future lives (or future sufferings), since they too do not hurt me. Of course, the opponent, like anyone with common sense, is going to point out to Śāntideva that my relationship now with my own future psycho-physical states is by no means the same as my relationship with the psycho-physical states of contemporary others. The suffering that is at present happening to someone else is happening to an *other*; the suffering which will come to me tomorrow (on the wider application) or in a future life will happen to *me*. Śāntideva's argument appears to require that:

- (i) The relationship between myself at any time in this life, including the last moment, and myself in future lives, including the first moment of my next life (or the intermediate state for some Buddhist traditions), is the same relationship between myself now and contemporary others (the narrower application);
- (ii) The relationship between myself now and contemporary others is the same as the relationship between myself now and myself at any time in the future (the wider application).

The opponent is going to deny both of these. Clearly, the relationship between myself in this life and myself in future lives, or myself now and myself in the future is different from that to contemporary others, for in the first two cases we are talking about myself, in the other case about my relationship with others. It is rational to protect myself in the one case against sufferings, since they will be experienced by me. In the other case, they will be experienced by others, and Śāntideva's argument in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97 precisely begs the question. The

issue is not what is harming me now (or in this life), but what harms me full-stop. Śāntideva has given no grounds for showing that I should concern myself with the sufferings of others. Thus, Sa bzang mati pañchen has his opponent observe with eminent common sense that: “The cases [of future suffering and the suffering of contemporary others] are dissimilar. The suffering of another is not experienced by someone else, and my suffering is always experienced by only me”.<sup>16</sup> So, rGyal tshab rje points out, it is coherent to act now in order to avert future suffering, since, if I do not, it is me who will surely experience the recompense.<sup>17</sup> The opponent’s position does not collapse into that of an immoralist. Śāntideva, a Mādhyamika, could scarcely be convinced by common sense. *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:98:

“If you consider that ‘I will experience that’, such conception is false.  
Indeed, other the one who died; other, also, is the one who is born.”<sup>18</sup>

Note that to say that my future sufferings are to be guarded against because otherwise they will actually happen to me, and naturally I do not want to experience suffering, is not in itself to make any metaphysical or ontological claim about who or what the ‘me’ is—an enduring Self, for example—to whom these sufferings might happen,<sup>19</sup> and the opponent’s argument does not in itself require such a claim. When I tell my children that they should clean their teeth regularly before going to bed because otherwise they will experience toothache, I am not *as such* committed in any way to an acceptance of a metaphysical claim about my children’s ultimate nature, the existence perhaps of an ultimate and continuing Self. Likewise, when I wake up in the morning and claim to be the same person who went to sleep, I am not making any claim about an ultimate enduring

<sup>16</sup> Sa bzang, 276: *mi 'dra ste gzhan gyi sdug bsngal gzhan gyis mi myong zhing bdag gi sdug bsngal de ni bdag gcig pus rtag tu myong ba 'i phyir ro snyam na* |.

<sup>17</sup> Gyal tshab, 182: *tshé dir bdag gis phyi ma 'i sdug bsngal gyi rgyu ldog par ma byas na phyi mar bdag gis sdug bsngal myong dgos pas* |.

<sup>18</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 8:98:

*aham eva tadāpīti mithyeyam parikalpanā |  
anya eva mṛto yasmād anya eva prajāyate ||  
bdag gis de ni myong snyam pa 'i | rnam par rtog de log pa ste |  
'di ltar shi ba 'ang gzhan nyid la | skye ba yang ni gzhan nyid yin ||.*

<sup>19</sup> Of course, those who hold to metaphysical Self claims usually maintain that suffering precisely *does not* happen to the enduring and truly real Self. So for many, if not most Self-claim-holders, the existence of a Self is not relevant to the claim that “I will experience suffering in the future”. This is not to say, however, that it may not be relevant to making sense of the claim that I have survived *death*, such that derivatively I can speak of experiencing suffering in a future life. But the relationship between the ‘I’ that we speak of when we say “I have survived death”, and the ‘I’ when we say “I shall receive suffering in a future life” must clearly be a complex one (and not one of simple identity) for those Self-claim-holders who hold that the Self does not experience suffering.

Self.<sup>20</sup> What it is to be the same person who went to sleep is tied up with the social, psychological, linguistic and perhaps even political construction, the place in the Life World, which is me. Structurally, it is not to wake up and be *someone else*. The psychologist, Susan Blackmore, has commented that from the point of view of contemporary psychology:

“There is the self-image. We know our names and we attribute personality characteristics to ourselves. We know who we are by all the social and linguistic processes by which people develop ideas about themselves and each other. As we grow throughout our lives, we have an ever changing concept of who we are ... [The self] is a process in flux and dependent upon a functioning brain. ... There is no self, only a process of self-construction.”<sup>21</sup>

If I woke up in the morning and I was someone else, then I would not be me. If I do not wake up as someone else, then it is me. Looked at one way this is, of course, tautologous, but to state it, is not useless. What is to count as being someone else, or not being someone else, depends upon many factors. One of the least relevant candidates, however, I suggest, is having the same unchanging absolutely real Self. Looked at another way, perhaps we do not have tautology here. To be me is to be the focus of ‘me-constructions’ from myself and others, and arguably to be the focus of these constructions requires no further explication in this context than *not* being the focus of ‘other-constructions’. If I woke up as Archibald, I would not be the same person as the Williams who went to sleep. If I do not wake up as Archibald or anyone else, then I am the same person as Williams. What more do we need?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> This is not to say, of course, that the Buddhist (a Mādhyamika, for example, with his or her understanding of latent, innate Self-grasping) could not argue that our behaviour shows an un- or subconscious assent to concepts of an enduring Self. It might be argued that certain behavioural patterns (the cult of the new, for example) can only be rendered systematically coherent by assent to a Self, and once this is pointed out to a person, he or she, in order to act rationally, would either have to abandon certain behaviour patterns (abandon grasping after new material goods) or abandon the claim not to hold to a permanent enduring Self. It is arguable that not all philosophical beliefs need to be held consciously in order to be held. I have touched on this issue again in a different context—once more in a footnote—in my “Non-conceptuality, Critical Reasoning and Religious Experience: Some Tibetan Buddhist Discussions”, in M. McGhee, ed., *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life*, Cambridge, 1992, 203.

<sup>21</sup> From her “Beyond the Self: The Escape from Reincarnation in Buddhism and Psychology”, in Arthur & Joyce Berger, eds., *Reincarnation: Fact or Fable*, London, 1991, 119. On page 123, Blackmore comments that the sense when we wake up in the morning that we are the same person who went to sleep is largely based on bodily continuity, familiarity of place and setting, and memories.

<sup>22</sup> This is not a matter of simply changing names from Williams to Archibald, of course. And the expressions ‘me-constructions’ and ‘other-constructions’ are just devices here. Obviously, from the other’s point of view, I am the focus of ‘other-constructions’ as the other, Williams.

So, it seems that the opponent is not committed to any notion of an enduring Self in claiming that the one who will get toothache will be me, and, therefore, I am justified in guarding now against toothache by cleaning my teeth regularly. Why should I care about the toothache of others? Quite clearly, when I clean my teeth, I am not thinking that I am preventing the toothache of another person. Even if on Buddhist premisses, one claims that the I who will experience toothache will actually be different from the I who now cleans the teeth, arguably that ‘I’ could not be different *in the same way* that contemporary others are different, and speaking of them both as being different in the same way is simply a cause for confusion. It is quite clear that, in the one case, pain will occur to me, that is, among other things certain brain processes will take place which form part of the continuity which contributes a major part to ‘me-constructions’, and in the other case, the pain sensations will not occur to me but to another.<sup>23</sup>

When we come to the issue of rebirth (the narrower application), however, the opponent begins to face problems. And in spite of bSod nams rtse mo and rGyal tshab rje’s treatment of the previous verse, it is rebirth and the narrower application which Śāntideva has in mind in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:98. This is clear from the second part of the verse where Śāntideva specifically refers to death and rebirth. The opponent’s problem is serious although, as we shall see, it is not clear that Śāntideva’s treatment of it will give him the result he wants. What Śāntideva appears to be claiming here is that the relationship between me in this life and ‘me’ in ‘my’ future lives is one of complete otherness, like contemporary others. The fact of causal continuity is not relevant to issues of identity and otherness. For Śāntideva, the opponent is simply not rationally justified in claiming that ‘I’ in a future life will experience future sufferings which result from my deeds now. Whoever will experience the results, it will not be *me*. It looks as though Śāntideva is right. Given the characterisation of self derived from Susan Blackmore as a fluctuating construct dependent upon bodily, social, psychological factors and so on, it is difficult to see how it could make any sense to speak of the (re)born being—even supposing one accepts the coherence of the process

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<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that I could not have sympathetic pain sensations, or even, supposing I was a great yogin and the other had great faith, I could ‘take-on’ the other’s pain such that the other ceases to have pain and I have pain instead. But I am not literally receiving *their* pain. Their pain has ceased. Mine has started. And there could be problems. If I am a great yogin with a good set of teeth (perhaps I practise the *Lotus Sūtra*, where it is specifically stated that good teeth come to the *sūtra*’s practitioners), and I start to hurt and the other’s pain ceases, the other’s teeth will continue to decay. Perhaps mine will be extracted. But, we say, it is the *other* who has bad teeth, the result of the other not cleaning them. Precisely!

which is usually called one of ‘rebirth’—as being me. It will not be the same person as the person who died. rGyal tshab rje makes this point very clearly. That person who has died, he comments, is one thing. The later person who is born is another. It is not at all suitable to see these two as one. Since the two are separate it would be irrational on the opponent’s premisses for him or her to argue for the removal of the suffering of the one person by another person.<sup>24</sup> Thus, rGyal tshab continues to base his discussion of Śāntideva on the *gang zag*, and what he says is of crucial philosophical importance. It is not just that the body of the reborn being is different from the one that died. Rather, we are dealing with a completely different person. Since the *gang zag* is conceptualised in dependence upon the aggregate(s), rGyal tshab rje is saying that the conceptualisations which enable the construction of a person—Blackmore’s self—are different in different lives. We are dealing with a different set of constructions and, thus, for rGyal tshab rje’s interpretation of Śāntideva, there is no sense in which I survive death. For the I (the self), in the only way in which it can exist, is a conceptual construct for rGyal tshab rje and Blackmore, and that construct does not survive death.

It is doubtful that the I, which is me, could survive even in the sense of felt psychological continuity. In what is probably the most influential contemporary writing on the philosophy of personal identity, the Oxford philosopher Derek Parfit has attacked the importance of the whole notion of personal identity, arguing that what is important when talking about whether I am the same person is not whether I am *identical* with the person Williams when he was six years old but rather whether I have survived as Williams or not. What makes for survival is a matter of experience. It is precisely not identity but experiences of psychological continuity, and survival. Unlike identity, it is not a matter of either/or but can rather be a question of degree. Identity, on the other hand, is a matter of all-or-nothing. The Williams who was six has survived, but not as someone who is identical with the six year-old Williams. That Williams has without a doubt changed, and I do not know that there would be any mental or bodily state of the present Williams which still remains from the six year old. Over just one lifetime, I can change completely; there could, in a sense, be a series of selves, I might well look back on earlier actions and say that the person who did those is no longer me, but through psychological continuity I could still coherently be spoken of as Williams.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> rGyal tshab rje, 183: *'di ltar shi ba'i gang zag de'ang gzhan nyid la skye ba phyi ma'i gang zag de'ang ni gzhan nyid yin pas de gnyis gcig tu mi rung ba'i phyr ro | 'di ni so tha dad yin pas gcig gi sdug bsngal cig shos kyis sel mi rigs pa la |*.

<sup>25</sup> For Derek Parfit see in particular his *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, 1984, and “Personal identity”, *PR*, 80, 1, 1971, 3–27. The connection of Parfit’s work with Buddhism is noted by Parfit in *Reasons and Persons*, 273, 280, 502–3. It appears that the first Buddhist to explicitly notice this connection was Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons*, Cambridge, 1982, 177. Collins, influenced I think by Parfit’s work, subsequently speaks of past selves as in fact subjectively the same as contemporary others (page 190). Śāntideva would appear to agree, although his concern is rather with future selves since those are the selves which we now attempt to protect against future sufferings. Collins seems unaware of the support from Śāntideva. His very valuable book goes into a number of these and other issues in great detail from the point of view of the Theravāda tradition, and seems to have been read by Parfit himself. This is one area where Buddhist thought is of direct and explicit relevance to the very latest controversies in Western philosophy. Recently the relationship of Parfit’s views to Buddhism has been the subject of a philosophically sophisticated study by Nigel Tetley, “The Doctrine of Rebirth in Theravāda Buddhism: Arguments for and Against”, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bristol, 1990. Tetley argues that Parfit’s views are in certain crucial respects not as close to those of Buddhism as Parfit seems to think. For a clear, but respectfully critical summary of Parfit’s views, see the very readable book by Jonathan Glover, *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity*, London, 1991 reprint, 101–6.

It seems unlikely that any meaningful sense of psychological continuity could be experienced from life to life in most cases of rebirth as it is understood in Buddhism, particularly when conjoined to the radical break of physical continuity which everyone agrees happens at death. What could it mean to speak of psychological continuity between an old man who dies and a foetus? Let alone, say, a beetle.<sup>26</sup> There are problems as to whether the nervous system of a foetus or a beetle could support a form of consciousness which could provide psychological continuity with the person (in this case, a human) who died. Of course, it could be claimed that consciousness does not depend upon the structure of the nervous system. But I still find it very difficult to make sense of a meaningful continuity which will enable one to speak of *survival* (in a Parfitian sense) of the old man (or a young man who has died) in the foetus or beetle.<sup>27</sup> The upshot of all of this

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<sup>26</sup> I think I can make sense of continuity through the death process as it is usually understood and into, say, an intermediate state, at least if the intermediate state body is held (and often it is not) to be akin to the present body—like, say, the astral body spoken of by certain writers—and there are no radical discontinuities in the mental continuum. And I do not think that I have a problem with cases of rebirth—maybe in certain god or hell-realms—where there is psychological continuity of a coherent type with the being who died, even if the new bodies do differ. And I can accept that the (re)born being arises in causal dependence upon the being who died. But the break between “me in an intermediate state body” and “me as a beetle” is just too great for *any* meaningful sense that it is me who is reborn. In the case of (re)birth, someone is born in causal dependence upon me in a different way, certainly, from the way my children who are contemporary others are born in dependence upon me. But that someone is not me. Arguably that person is no more me than my children are me. We can speak this way sometimes (“his children are him reborn”) as a manner of speaking, but that is all.

<sup>27</sup> I ignore the issue of purported ‘memories’ of previous lives. This is a large and complicated topic. To call them memories is of course to beg the question. Clearly, I could not remember being another person in a previous life. I am not sure it makes much sense to talk of a beetle remembering it was a king, or a king a beetle. Does it make much more sense to talk of a foetus remembering it was a king, or even a king remembering being another king in a previous life? The point here is, I think, a conceptual one. I am not here denying that (re)birth may be conditioned by a previous life, that the (re)born being may have inherited certain habits and talents, and may even have mental events relating to the lives of other persons who died before this person’s birth which are in certain respects *like* memories, although few if any of these could occur in cases of radically different species (king/beetle), and it is debatable whether they could occur in the case of radically different types of beings from the same species (king/foetus). This last point is rather important, for it suggests a radical psycho-physical discontinuity even in the case of rebirth within the same species (king/king). If there is a radical discontinuity, I suggest, we can talk of birth, but not *rebirth*.

is to lend support to Śāntideva's contention, as clarified by rGyal tshab rje, that the being who is (re)born is a different person from, albeit causally dependent upon, the one that died.<sup>28</sup>

We should note, that for rGyal tshab rje, this whole discussion has nothing to do with the (inherently existing, isolated, permanent) Self as such. He makes no mention of there not being a Self, and he states categorically that the refutation taking place here is based on the principle of separation between earlier and later moments (stages of a continuum) and has nothing to do with issues of ultimate truth, which is what is at stake for those who hold to the existence of a Self.<sup>29</sup> Once more, rGyal tshab rje is out of line with other commentators, including Indian commentators like Prajñākaramati and Vibhūticandra, all of whom seem to think that the essence of Śāntideva's refutation lies in the Buddhist denial of a Self. rGyal tshab rje does not simply follow his Indian predecessors, and here as elsewhere his apparent innovations are philosophically sophisticated and stimulating, if sometimes problematic. In hinting at the irrelevance of the issue of the Self to Śāntideva's argument at *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97–8, rGyal tshab rje is, I think, making good philosophical sense. Whether I can speak of the (re)born

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<sup>28</sup> It might be objected here that I am looking to base rebirth on a rather Western and egoistic idea that the reborn being has to be *me*. But, in Buddhism, it is said that the reborn being is neither the same nor different from the one who died. This would be to miss the point. I have argued that the sense in which the reborn being is said to be not different from the one who died is in the sense of causal connection, which is not what we normally mean by 'not different'. When a cause produces an effect, normally this is a case of difference, although a difference where there is a causal connection. In fact, for the Buddhist, the reborn being is, indeed, not the same as the one who died, i.e., is different in all relevant and meaningful senses of 'different'. The reborn being will not be me. In fact, the reborn being will be as different from me as contemporary others, although different in a different sense (the reborn being will exist in causal dependence upon me in a way that contemporary others do not). And this is what Śāntideva and rGyal tshab rje say, too.

<sup>29</sup> rGyal tshab rje, 183: *skad cig snga phyi so so tha dad pa'i mgo mtshungs kyi rigs pas 'gog pa yin gyi | don dam la ltos nas 'gog pa gzhung gi don min no ||*  
rGyal tshab uses the word *bdag* a number of times in his discussion, but each time it is being used simply for the personal pronoun (*bdag gis*).

being as in some sense me, whether I have survived death, depends on whether there is a psychological continuity of experience which would enable me to live through the death process and still feel that it is me.<sup>30</sup> One alternative explanation of why it would still be me is to have recourse to an unchanging Self. But this is just one explanation among others, and rGyal tshab rje's opponent does not appeal to that explanation, nor do rGyal tshab rje's comments require recourse to such an explanation. His point is simply that if the (re)born being is a different person—in whatever way we normally understand the concept of person—from the one who died, then the person who died has not survived the death process. And if the person does not survive the death process, then it makes no sense to say “I will experience that in a future life”. The future being whom we seek to protect by our actions now would be no more me than contemporary others. No more me, not in the sense of not the same Self as me, but rather not the same person in our ordinary everyday sense of ‘person’. The opponent might *now* have recourse to a theory of Self in order to explain why in a future life, although I would not be the same conventional person, still it would be the same identical ‘me’ who is receiving the results. But rGyal tshab's opponent has not yet done so, and it would not be difficult to show that such a reply is inadequate.<sup>31</sup>

While rGyal tshab rje's use of the wider application in interpreting *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97 was philosophically interesting and stimulating, it was probably not what Śāntideva had in mind. rGyal tshab's complete neglect of the issue of the Self in interpreting 8:98, on the other hand, may well fit Śāntideva's intentions. Śāntideva makes no mention of the *ātman* in his verse. The opponent simply says “I (*aham*) will experience that”. Neither the opponent's nor Śāntideva's counter argument requires any reference to the Self. rGyal tshab rje is not at variance with Śāntideva's verse, and he is here philosophically more sophisticated than his rival commentators. Whether he is at variance with Śāntideva's intention we cannot tell for certain. The latter's use of ‘conception’ (*parikalpanā*, *rnam par rtog*), which is an expression often used in the Buddhist

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<sup>30</sup> Of course, I could not live through the death process and yet feel in any real meaningful sense that it is *not* me. But I could fail to have psychological continuity at all, in other words my sense of ‘me’ could fail to survive the death process. The (re)born being would then be a different person. This appears to be what rGyal tshab rje is saying.

<sup>31</sup> For example, even if I did have a Self and it were the same Self in future lives, the Self is not the conventional person, and it is the conventional person who experiences the sufferings of future lives. The person who does the deed is different from the person who receives the results even on a Self theory, unless the Self is held to be an active doer and experiencer. But this would have other doctrinal problems for Self-theorists, and the more nearly this putative Self approaches the status of ‘doer/experiencer’ the more it becomes another name for the person, and the less likely this Self could be the same in future lives.

context to refer to a wrong view about the nature of things, a philosophically wrong understanding, could provide some evidence for an argument that Śāntideva is thinking here of more than just a misunderstanding concerning the conventional person who dies and the one who is reborn.<sup>32</sup> The only other evidence is that of the commentarial tradition. Tibetan commentators will often follow in broad direction their Indian predecessors. But Indian commentators may well embody a venerable lineage of interpretation which could go back to, in this case, Śāntideva himself.

The evidence of the commentarial lineage for Śāntideva’s actual intentions is very far from being conclusive, but should not be lightly dismissed. Thus Prajñākaramati has his opponent objecting that “the I (*aham*, *bdag*) is always one, it is not differentiated for [different] bodies”.<sup>33</sup> Bu ston’s opponent makes the interesting additional claim that not only is the Self always one, but because of that, its body is also said to be me, so that I can say that ‘I experience suffering’.<sup>34</sup> Of course, for a Buddhist there is no such Self. “If we examine it”, Sa bzang mati pañchen says, “[we will find that] there is not established a single permanent Self. The grounds for this are as follows: The aggregate(s) of the one who has died here are other with reference to the future life, and the aggregate(s) of the subsequent (re)birth are other with reference to the present life”.<sup>35</sup> Sa bzang mati pañchen may well be quite right. The aggregates of this life are different from the aggregates of the future life. Thus, as rGyal tshab rje points out, we are dealing with different persons, and this is all that matters. But as it stands,

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<sup>32</sup> The Tibetan *rnam par rtog* is usually a translation of *vikalpa*. For a discussion of these terms in Buddhism, see my paper “Some Aspects of Language and Construction in the Madhyamaka”, *JIP*, 8, 1980, 1–45. In favour of interpreting Śāntideva’s argument in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:98 as concerning the *ātman* I might cite what I say there: “In all Mahāyāna texts *parikalpa* tends to be specifically associated with the *ātman* as a unity created out of the *skandhas*” (page 29).

<sup>33</sup> Sanskrit text: *aham eka eva sarvadā, tenātra bhinnatvaṃ nāsti śarīrayoḥ* | = Tibetan: *bdag ni dus thams cad du gcig yin te | lus dag la tha dad pa yod ma yin la* | That *aham* here is taken as equalling the Self (*ātman*) is clear from subsequent comments (*ātmano* ...), and, in Tibetan, the same word *bdag* is used throughout. But as we have seen, the Sanskrit of Śāntideva’s verse uses *aham* and thus, (like rGyal tshab rje), it does not explicitly mention the Self.

<sup>34</sup> Bu ston, p. 469: *bdag ni | dus thams cad du gcig pas de’i lus de yang bdag yin pa’i phyir bdag gis duḥkha de ni myong ngo*. Thus, Bu ston’s opponent wants to deny that the Self itself experiences suffering (see note 17 above). We can say that I will experience suffering in the future life because although it is the body which experiences suffering, and the body will be different, there is an underlying continuing and unchanging Self, such that we can call the future body derivatively ‘I’.

<sup>35</sup> Sa bzang, 277: *dpyad na bdag rtag pa gcig pu ma grub pa’i phyir ro | de’i rgyu mtshan ’di ltar ’di nas shi ba’i phung po’ang ma ’ongs pa la ltos te gzhan nyid yin la phyi mar skye ba’i phung po yang ni da ltar ba la ltos te gzhan nyid yin pa’i phyir ro||*.

Sa bzang mati pañchen is just making an (unnecessary) assertion against the opponent. He simply states, without evidence, that there is no Self. Apart from the commentarial tradition, he had no need to introduce the Self here at all. Simply mentioning the different sets of aggregates would have been enough. The same applies to other commentators. Vibhūticandra makes the direct assertion that the very five aggregates which die in this life are not what is (re)born later (*phung po lnga gang 'dir 'chi ba de nyid kyi phyis skye ba ma yin no*). This may be true, and indeed, with rGyal tshab rje, sufficient to make Śāntideva's point, but such an assertion will not serve as a counterargument to one who has (according to Vibhūticandra) just maintained the existence of a Self which is held to ensure identity between the one who dies and the one who is reborn. As an argument, Vibhūticandra's assertion seems to *presuppose* that there is no Self and therefore the one who is reborn is also, because of being a different set of aggregates, not the same person as the one who died.<sup>36</sup>

Both bSod nams rtse mo and dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba have interesting additional comments to make here, although in the last analysis they fare little better. The former remarks, with reference to the statement that the one who died is other than the one who is born: "The mental moment has ceased, and the continuum has [also] ceased" (488b: *sems skad cig 'gags pa dang rgyun 'gags pa'o*). Without a subcommentary, it is difficult to see quite what bSod nams rtse mo means here. Certainly the last mental moment of the preceding life has ceased, but it is not clear in what sense the continuum has also ceased. It would not be normal for a Buddhist to say that the mental continuum has ceased. It is possible that bSod nams rtse mo is thinking here of the *physical* continuum of this present life, which ceases at death. Thus, with the cessation of the last mental moment of this life, and the cessation of the coarse physical continuum, it is going to be hard (although not impossible) for the opponent to argue that the reborn being is the same person as the one who died.

dPa' bo gTsug lag phreng ba gives by far the fullest and in many respects the most coherent explanation of Śāntideva's argument from the *anātman* point of

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<sup>36</sup> Prajñākaramati does not make the situation any better by going into some detail on how the referent of the Self-notion is simply the five aggregates, like an illusion (*māyopamaṇḍopādānaskandhamātrāmbanatvād asya = sgyu ma lta bu nye bar len pa'i phung po lnga tsam dmigs pa'i phyir ro*), and giving the traditional Buddhist explanation of how the (re)born being is born in dependence upon contaminated actions. This asserts how rebirth comes about on the Buddhist explanation without reference to a Self. It states that there is no Self, but does not argue that the opponent is wrong to think that in a future life it will be me who will receive the results of present actions. The matter is one of conventional persons, not Selves. It could be that, in a future life, it will be me receiving the results in the same way that it will be me tomorrow who will receive the results of what I do today, if in a future life I am the same person. It has nothing (here, directly) to do with the Self.

view, an explanation unparalleled in any other commentary, an elaboration which it is likely springs directly from his own understanding of Śāntideva's text. dPa' bo seems to want to show his opponent that there can be no Self, rather than simply assert it to him or her. As for the Self, he tells his opponent, the thought that it is true as one in past, future, and present is a great perverse conception. At birth, we have the (grasping) apprehension "I am born". That apprehension of a Self (*bdag 'dzin*) at the time of birth ceases in that very moment, and after that for a long time we have the apprehension "I am becoming strong". That apprehension also having ceased we think "I am old"; that having ceased, we think "I am dying". Such apprehensions certainly occur in succession. We see that on the cessation of the former apprehensions of a Self, later ones arise. Because of this, we experience directly (in our very own awareness) that there is not just one apprehension of a Self. Moreover, dPa' bo continues, take the mind or body which are (perhaps) apprehended as a Self. Immediately after birth, the mind lacks clarity and the body is feeble. When one is becoming strong, the mind is clear and the body is physically hard. In old age, both are weak. And at the time of death, the power of both collapses. Because of this, we see directly in our experience that the former way of existing subsequently ceases. Certainly, we see ourselves directly that body and mind are impermanent.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, what dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba is saying is that we all know from our experience (i) that when we use the word 'I', its meaning and, indeed, its referent depends upon the context in which it is uttered, and this context will differ from stage to stage in our life—the word 'I' does not have a univocal meaning; and (ii) neither mind nor body, which might normally form the referents of the word 'I' are single, inherently existing and unchanging, they do not fit the description for a Self. dPa' bo wants to say to his opponent that we all agree from our own everyday experience that our use of the word 'I' does not in fact refer to the Self which the opponent seems to require. What dPa' bo does not show here, however, is that there is no such Self. It is open to his opponent to claim that there is indeed a Self which is absolute, unchanging, and *not* that which is referred to (at least directly) in our normal everyday use of the word 'I'.

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<sup>37</sup> dPa' bo, 589–90: *bdag ni 'das ma 'ongs da ltar thams cad na gcig tu bden no snyam pa 'di ni phyin ci log gi rnam rtag (rtog) chen po yin ste | 'di ltar bdag ni skye'o zhes 'dzin pa skye ba'i dus kyi bdag 'dzin de skad cig de nyid tu 'gag la de nas ring zhig na bdag ni ngar la bab pa'o zhes dang de yang 'gags nas bdag ni rgas pa'o zhe dang de 'gags nas bdag ni 'chi'o snyam pa dag rim par skye mod kyi bdag 'dzin de dag snga ma snga ma 'gags nas phyi ma phyi ma skye bar mthong (590) bas bdag 'dzin gcig ma yin par mngon sum gyis myong ba'i phyir dang | bdag tu bzung bya'i lus sems kyang skyes ma thag pa na sems mi gsal lus nyam chung | ngar la bab pa na sems gsal zhing lus mkhregs | rgan po'i tshe gnyi ga mthu chung | 'chi ba'i tshe gnyi ga'i stobs nyams pas phyi ma'i tshe snga ma'i gnas skabs 'gag par mngon sum gyis myong bas lus sems mi rtag par rang gis mngon sum gyis nges pa'i phyir ro ||.*

dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba has clearly shown to the opponent what the opponent is claiming when he asserts a Self, and he could now of course continue to charge the opponent with introducing an unnecessary metaphysical factor. Since this Self is not what is referred to in our normal use of the word 'I', it is not our *self*, and is completely redundant. But dPa' bo does not go on to say this, and, as it stands, his refutation of the opponent's Self remains on the level of an appeal to the latter to see its absurdity, rather than a direct disproof.

Unlike the other commentators, apart from rGyal tshab rje, dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba does not simply assert that there is no Self but tries to get his opponent to see that this is, in fact, the case. Nevertheless, on another level, his argument remains with assertion, for he does not show that there is no Self beyond our everyday use of the word 'I'. I have argued, however, that dPa' bo does not need to show that there is no Self, for the opponent's assertion in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:98 need not be taken to rest on an assertion of Self. The opponent simply thinks that I will be the same person in my next life. What is strange, however, is that in commenting on 8:98, which seems clearly to refer to the process of rebirth, dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba makes no reference to different lives at all, but rather as did rGyal tshab rje on 8:97, he concentrates on the changing use of 'I', and mind/body continuum, in this one life. Clearly, dPa' bo thinks that by showing that there is no Self in this one life, it follows that there could also be no Self to carry on into future lives. But what dPa' bo is adding is that even in this one life, it would not be correct to say with the opponent that "I will experience that", for the uses of 'I' vary depending on context. dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba is very close here to rGyal tshab rje's employment in his commentary to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97 of the wider application. Even within one life, my own future states could be other 'I's in relationship to myself now, as with contemporary others.

In actual fact, we can separate dPa' bo's discussion from the context of his own treatment of the opponent's putative Self and combine it with the perspective of rGyal tshab rje. dPa' bo shows how in everyday life—within one lifetime—the word 'I' lacks univocal usage, and the conventional person is a construct created for pragmatic purpose out of many different contexts of use. We do not consider in everyday life, that our uses of the word 'I' refer to an inherently existing and unchanging Self. rGyal tshab's perspective supplements this. As rGyal tshab states, this conventional person does not continue into future lives, for the constructions will certainly then be different from those which are now occurring. There is no unchanging Self, and, moreover, there is not even a relatively stable person who survives the death process.

I have argued that Śāntideva's attack on his opponent in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:98 does not logically depend on a denial of the permanent inherently existing

Self, the *anātman* doctrine, and this point seems to be appreciated, at least through his treatment of the verse, by rGyal tshab rje. There is also a further way in which rGyal tshab's reading of Śāntideva could be of particular value to Mahāyāna commentators. Śāntideva claims to be writing not only for an opponent but also, and probably primarily, for himself (1:2–3). He is himself following through the meditations he develops. Śāntideva sees his text as a guidebook for the Bodhisattva path, and those who do not concern themselves with the sufferings of others are not just worldly hedonists, nor even non-Buddhist teachers. One form of eliminating the suffering of future lives is to attain *nirvāṇa*, the one-sided *nirvāṇa* which is simply the cessation of rebirth and is associated by the Mahāyāna with the attainments of arhats and pratyekabuddhas. In aiming for *nirvāṇa* one on the arhat path aims to destroy forever not just present but also future sufferings, sufferings which are not now being experienced. In the light of this, and in its context in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and Śāntideva's vision of the complete spiritual path to Buddhahood, Śāntideva's argument at *Bodhicaryā-avatāra* 8:97–8 can be taken as applying not just to Hindu and other thinkers who hold to the existence of an *ātman*, but also to other Buddhists who deny the *ātman* but still follow what Mahāyāna is pleased to call a 'Hīnayāna' and also, in the last analysis, fail to concern themselves with the sufferings of others. This, for Śāntideva, is at least in part because they do not see that it is as rational to eliminate the sufferings of others as it is to eliminate those of their own future lives. In the light of this, we can imagine Śāntideva asking the person seeking for the goal of arhatship why he or she strives for the elimination of his or her own future sufferings while neglecting to strive at the same time and just as much for the elimination of the sufferings of others? If the 'Hīnayāna' opponent thinks he or she will experience sufferings in future lives if they are not eliminated, this is mistaken (8:98) since the person in a future life is not the same as the person in this life. Rather, the future-life person is other in just the same way as contemporary others are other. "Thus, O follower of Hīnayāna, it is as rational and, therefore, morally to be expected to strive for the elimination of the sufferings of all contemporary others as it is to strive for the elimination of your own sufferings by becoming an arhat." If we take 8:98 as appealing to a Self, not only is it philosophically less satisfactory but also an argument which Śāntideva would surely want to make against fellow religionists who have not developed the impartial and altruistic mind of a Bodhisattva would be lost.

To sum up. Śāntideva has argued that the person who receives the results of my actions in future lives will not be me, and that person is as much other to me in this present life as contemporary others are other than me. It may even be the case that the one who receives the results of my actions in *this* life is as other to me now as contemporary others. Thus, if I strive to eliminate future sufferings, I should also strive to eliminate the sufferings of contemporary others. Because

survival is a matter of degree, Derek Parfit is prepared to accept that, even within one lifetime, it may be quite possible to speak of a series of different selves. So many changes may have occurred to me and my outlook, between now and when I am ninety, that from my present perspective the ninety year old me may be no different from one who is for me now a contemporary other. As Jonathan Glover points out, if this is true, it may have rather dramatic ethical and even legal consequences. We might argue that it would be unjust to try and punish, say, a Nazi war-criminal some fifty years after the original crimes, for he is no longer the same person (self) as the one who committed the crimes.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, we would have to treat our own future selves in just the same moral way as we might be expected to treat contemporary others. Thus, to use Glover's example, to take up smoking now—which could injure me in thirty years' time—may be seen as one self harming another self. The fact that the later self is 'my' self does not make it morally different from harming by inflicting, say, bronchitis, on a contemporary other.<sup>39</sup> If I should have compassion for contemporary others then I should also and equally have compassion for my future selves. Likewise the reverse occurs. I am no more justified in considering my own future than the present (or indeed future) of contemporary others. If—and this is crucial to Śāntideva's argument—I concern myself with my own future (selves), then rationally and, therefore, morally I am obliged to concern myself equally with contemporary (and future) others. Parfit himself has claimed that "I find the truth liberating, and consoling. It makes me less concerned about my own future, and my death, and more concerned about others. I welcome this widening in my concern",<sup>40</sup> although Glover has commented that he fails to see why Parfit's work ("one of the finest pieces of work in contemporary philosophy") should be particularly consoling as a way of thinking about death.<sup>41</sup> Parfit himself does not

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<sup>38</sup> Note also that, as he points out, Parfit's position would also support abortion, 'abortion is not wrong in the first few weeks, and ... it only gradually becomes wrong' (Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, 1984, 347). This would not be acceptable to (traditional?) Buddhism, but this is just one of a number of morally unwelcome conclusions (euthanasia?) for Buddhists which could follow from thinking through fully the view that in one life there can be a series of selves (complete impermanence), and the being in a future life is a different person from the one who died. If a continuum entails different persons, if personhood is the result of an imputation, a construction upon a series of aggregates, then personhood can be acquired gradually and lost even within one lifetime, and certain moral repercussions which are repugnant to most Buddhists *may* follow. Not necessarily, of course, for additional premisses could be brought into play. For example, wherever there is consciousness aggregate (rather than full personhood), killing should not take place. But it is worth thinking about.

<sup>39</sup> J. Glover, *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity*, London, 1991, 103–4.

<sup>40</sup> D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, 1984, 347.

<sup>41</sup> J. Glover, *op. cit.*, 105.

offer much reflection on rebirth, although it would follow from what he says that if there were rebirth, the level of ‘my’ survival would be much more problematic than in this life, where we have bodily continuity and, I would argue, a measure of psychological continuity which I cannot see occurring in most cases of (re)birth as understood by Buddhism. It seems clear that for Parfit, as for Śāntideva, my relationship now to ‘my’ future births must be the same as my relationship to contemporary others, and rational moral concern should extend to contemporary others if it extends to my ‘own’ future lives. On Parfitian grounds, Śāntideva’s argument in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97–8 would appear to be correct.

And yet the Buddhist cannot help feeling a certain unease here. Śāntideva has argued that if it is proper to concern oneself with future lives, one should also concern oneself equally with contemporary others. But in arguing that the future person is different from the person who dies, rGyal tshab rje (aided by the other commentators) has thrown into very considerable doubt the whole question of whether one should concern oneself with future lives at all. Not only will those lives not be *me*, but I have argued that there is likely to be a break in psychological continuity, and certainly in physical continuity, between me in this life—both now and when I die—and the (re)born being. Thus, the sort of factors which ensure a continuity in this life will be lost. ‘My’ future lives will indeed be others. They will not be me in any sense whatsoever. I will not have survived death. But in that case, the opponent of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97 will ask why we should be concerned with our future lives at all? The problem is not the same as regards future selves within one lifetime, because of physical and psychological continuity. Śāntideva had argued that we should be concerned with contemporary others because we have concern for future lives which are also other. But seeing and truly understanding that future lives are other, with arguably not even psychological continuity at least in most cases, the opponent is likely to conclude that it is no longer rational to concern himself, or herself, with future lives. Thus, the result of Śāntideva’s argument, as developed by his commentators, particularly rGyal tshab rje, is to stress the otherness between this life and future lives, and thereby, also to create a situation where it would seem to follow that one person does the deed and another gets the result. This is a conclusion much feared by Buddhist thinkers, among other things precisely because it will lead to a suggestion that there is no need to concern ourselves with future lives. And that is the dreaded *ucchedavāda*, with the immoral consequences which are thought to flow from ceasing to concern ourselves with our future lives. Rationally, Śāntideva, rGyal tshab rje and others are in a dilemma. The more they stress otherness between this life and future lives, the more they open themselves to the reply that there is no need to concern ourselves with future lives. After all, one who argues that we have no need to concern ourselves with contemporary others will not stop at denying the need to concern ourselves with future lives. The more it is

argued that there is a need to concern ourselves with future lives because it will be us, the fewer grounds there can be for arguing a concern with contemporary others.

Of course, it could be suggested that this denies the context of Śāntideva's argument. Śāntideva's opponent already engages in actions in order to ensure favourable future (re)births. Therefore, Śāntideva is simply saying (like a good Mādhyamika) that this is incompatible with neglect of contemporary others. Such is undoubtedly true, but Śāntideva's opponent is perfectly free to seek consistency by modifying behaviour through neglecting future (re)births rather than through helping contemporary others. What Śāntideva's argument shows is an incompatibility. If the opponent is to be rational and consistent, something has to be modified. Śāntideva is caught in a dilemma, and he has given no grounds here in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8:97–8 for showing that the opponent should adopt the behavioural modification Śāntideva wishes, rather than unwished-for conclusions. If I am a good and virtuous altruistic person, then I will indeed agree with Śāntideva that I should concern myself with contemporary others as much as with 'my own' (re)births. And even 'my own' future (re)births, I will treat with exactly the same loving compassion as I treat contemporary others. Moreover, because these future lives will be determined by actions done by me, at least in part, in this life, I have a very direct way of ensuring that those lives at least will be lives of happy beings. And as one who is *already* a Bodhisattva, or even aspiring Bodhisattva, one should, indeed, concern oneself with those future lives as well as contemporary others. *If* I am moral, then my morality should include 'my own' future lives. But clearly, this is by no means the direction of Śāntideva's argument. Why I should concern myself with future lives when they will not be me, Śāntideva has left undetermined, and it is a very real problem, particularly for Buddhists in the modern world. Alas, without giving good reasons here, it is difficult to see how Śāntideva's argument could be taken to support the generation of the Bodhisattva's altruistic mind of enlightenment for the benefit of others. If that mind is to be developed, Śāntideva needs to convince us with other and rather more effective arguments. I, for one, profoundly hope that he succeeds.