# The Prophet and the Bodhisattva: Vision and Virtue in the Ethics of Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh

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*In the ethics of Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh, the article presents an approach towards peace through the images of the Prophet and the Bodhisattva. The virtues of the Prophet and Bodhisattva and the horizon of peace that they place before our eyes are welded together and could forge a path of peace in the midst of a history of violence and conflict that has continued to unravel in the world.*

## Introduction

I Begin this article with two narratives whose imaginative reach outlines two different but complementary approaches to the moral life.

Mrs. Curren, the protagonist of *Age of Iron*, Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee's searing indictment of apartheid South Africa, is dying of cancer. But more than life is being stripped from her. A retired, liberal professor, she is plunged into the full horror and violence of the apartheid system; she is made to confront the depths of her complicity with it. At a crucial point in the novel she confronts the glaring face—bunched and closed—of a woman in a passing car. "A thickening of the membrane between the world and the self-inside," she reflects. Further, she adds:

> A thickening become thickness. Evolution but evolution backward. Fish from the primitive depths... grew patches of skin sensitive to the fingerings of light, patches that in time became eyes. Now, in South Africa, I see eyes clouding over again,

> scales thickening on them, as the land of explorers,
> the colonists prepare to return to the deep.[1]

I call Mrs. Curren's experience "moral devolution," the eclipse of the moral life. "How do I know," she concludes, "that the scales are not thickening over my own eyes?"[2] Indeed. How do any of us know? My hypothesis in this essay is that it is the prophet, as she may arise in any tradition, who performs laser surgery on the thickening scales. Our eyes, our moral sensitivity, must be peeled back.

The second narrative comes from Native American writer, Leslie Marmon Silko. *Ceremony* is her richly detailed story of the healing of Tayo, a Laguna World War II veteran. Tayo is suffering from what my colleague John Dominic Crossan calls a "sociosomatic" illness, in which the individual's sickness mirrors a collective derangement.[3] Tayo is visited by a Laguna holy man, Old Ku'oosh, who offers this diagnosis:

> But you know, grandson, this world is fragile." The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with the strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning the sun becomes entangled in each filament of the web.[4]

Tayo's healing, Old Ku'oosh concludes, is important "[n]ot only for your sake, but for this fragile world." Tayo, however, whose moral journey has barely begun, at this stage sees only how one person's action can tear the fragile web.[5] Repairing the fragile web and, just as importantly, weaving new connections requires a different orientation to the moral life than performing laser surgery. My hypothesis here is that the bodhisattva tradition is

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[1] John Maxwell Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 127.

[2] Ibid.

[3] John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2007), 19-21.

[4] Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 35-36.

[5] Ibid., 38.

geared towards web-repair. To revert to Coetzee's image, the bodhisattva is one who patiently evolves new forms of moral perception, new eyes of compassion by tracing our interconnections.

Both Daniel Berrigan and Thich Nhat Hanh envision ethics through the lens of a poet. Each lays out the moral landscape through what Mark Johnson calls "multiple metaphoric mappings." Rather than dictating a set of moral propositions, each sees the larger task of ethics as "the cultivation of the moral imagination."[6] Imagination, in turn, discloses a path, a way of being moral. This exercise of following two different paths can enrich whatever tradition of the virtuous life, whatever path we find ourselves walking.

Peter Ronald Gathje points out that Berrigan's lack of a systematic development of his ethics has meant that he has been largely ignored by academic ethicists. Gathje seeks to remedy this situation by treating Berrigan's ethics as a species of virtue ethics.[7] But this is a very different type of virtue ethics than Aristotle's in which seeds are nurtured so that they reach their inner telos. Gathje, instead, compares Berrigan with the work of Stanley Hauerwas. While the two are similar in terms of seeing the Christian community as a community of resistance sustaining a way of life alternative to the dominant culture, Gathje argues that Berrigan holds out the possibility that the Church can be a transforming force.[8] To understand that transforming role, we will have to discuss the sacramental power of the acts of resistance that Daniel and his brother, Philip performed. Wrestling with the prophets became an extension of these performances. Re-imagining the moral landscape of the prophets' own performances, Berrigan confronts the reader with the need to act.

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[6] Mark Johnson, *The Moral Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), xii, 2.

[7] Peter Ronald Gathje, "The Cost of Virtue: the Theological Ethics of Daniel and Philip Berrigan," Ph.D. dissertation, (Emory University, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Service, 1994), 6.

[8] Ibid., 8-10, 14, 16. Gathje argues persuasively that the Berrigans' commitment to the Mystical Body of Christ, as articulated in an incarnational theology, kept them from a wholly sectarian ethics. Ibid., 139-40.

> What then of us, living as we do in a contemporary Babylon...? Can a community of conscience offer a measure of hope and light, when the public light is all but quenched, and the law of war and weaponry bears down hard...? [S]ymbolic, nonviolent acts of resistance are in order. Our instructor in these is Jeremiah himself—bearing the yoke, breaking the jar, witnessing the vision of the basket of figs, the signs of drought, the vine devoid of grapes. Each of these bespeaks a nonviolent effort of conscience.... They challenge the tyranny implicit in "things as they are...."[9]

Similarly, I will argue that Thich Nhat Hanh offers a distinctive form of virtue ethics. This argument is consistent with that of Damien Keown who argues persuasively that Buddhist ethics most closely resembles Aristotelean ethics with its cultivation of the self to reach an inner perfection. Buddhism shares with Aristotle this commitment to further an innate human potential. "But the virtues are not simply instrumental means to an end which transcends them," Keown insists. "What is distinctive about the virtues is that they participate in and *constitute* the end..." The Buddha exemplified this life of virtue both *before and after* his experience of enlightenment.[10] This teleology is conveyed in the Third and Fourth Noble Truths, i.e., the core of Buddhist soteriology: There is a path and you have the ability to walk it.[11] Thich Nhat Hanh follows the Zen tradition in seeing that simply walking the path is already reaching the goal. Practice and realization, as Zen master Dogen taught, are one.[12] The Buddhist

[9] Daniel Berrigan, *Jeremiah: The World, The Wound of God.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 133-34.

[10] Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 193-94.

[11] Ibid., 2.

[12] Eihei Dogen, "Guidelines for the Study of the Way," in *Moon in a Dew Drop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 131-43.

precepts in Thich Nhat Hanh's rendering become "mindfulness trainings." Where Berrigan focuses on sacramental performances, Thich Nhat Hanh counsels practice. Simple practices—mindful breathing, walking, drinking tea can transform our civilization.[13]

## DANIEL BERRIGAN: OVERCOMING DEATH AS A SOCIAL METHOD

In *Isaiah: Spirit of Courage, Gift of Tears,* Daniel Berrigan writes of his boyhood experience during the Great Depression, following in his father's footsteps as he plowed a field:

> The whole world, the boy thought, must be like this, pregnant with new life. "I had," the man reflects, "much to learn." Before many more springs, four of his brothers went off to fight a World War and "[l]ife came to this. As long as swords were drawn, we humans lost our bearings . . . . The social fabric was torn; the war ended through abominable deeds, mass murder." And then? "My lifetime was to be a perpetual war time.[14]

Daniel Berrigan was born on May 9, 1921, the fifth of six sons born to Thomas and Frida Berrigan. Raised in rural Minnesota and upstate New York, Berrigan joined the Society of Jesus after high school. The Jesuits took Berrigan in hand, cultivated his sharp mind and bent his spirit to long discipline. Bright though he was, the young priest, ordained in 1952, still had much to learn. Reflecting on a stint as a chaplain to GIs in Germany in 1954, Berrigan confesses to being completely oblivious to the nuclear standoff, East and West poised for mass murder at that very place.[15] Introduction to the worker priests of France, eventually Vatican II, the American civil rights movement but,

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[13] See, *inter alia,* Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step.* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 47.

[14] Daniel Berrigan, *Isaiah: Spirit of Courage, Gift of Tears.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 15-17.

[15] Daniel Berrigan, *No Bars to Manhood.* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 6.

above all, his friendship with the two icons of late 20th Century American Catholicism, Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day, along with the constant prodding of his younger brother Philip, would remold the young Jesuit. The war in Vietnam completed this transformation.

The pivotal experience in Berrigan's life came in May, 1968 when he, Philip and seven other peace activists committed civil disobedience by burning draft files from a Selective Service Office in Catonsville, Maryland. "A sense . . . of immense freedom," Daniel recalled of his decision, "as though in choosing, I could now breathe deep, and call my life my own. A sense, also, of the end of a road, or a fork, or a sudden turn and no telling what lay beyond ... [A]nd no looking back."[16] At more than forty years remove, it may be difficult for those who did not experience those years of resistance to the Vietnam War to understand how charged the action was. It resonated because it—using homemade napalm to burn the files--was solemnly liturgical. The Catonsville Nine had gone beyond words to convey a more visceral truth. Transforming the trial of the Catonsville Nine into a drama, Berrigan wrote:

> Our apologies good friends for the fracture of good order the burning of paper instead of children the angering of the orderlies in the front parlor of the charnel house We could not so help us God do otherwise For we are sick at heart our hearts give us no rest for thinking of the Land of Burning Children.[17]

As the Vietnam War wound down, the Cold War heated up. Indeed, through the 1980s the nuclear arms race would run wild. Released from prison, but in no way repentant, the Berrigans turned their attention towards America's vast arsenal of nuclear weapons which Daniel called "a demonic anti-sacrament." "The moral fog was indivisible: all one. Some breathed shallow, others

[16] Berrigan, *To Dwell in Peace*: An Autobiography (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1987), 217

[17] Daniel Berrigan, *Poetry Drama Prose* (Maryknoll, NY: 1988), 249-51.

deep. But we were all enveloped in the same miasma a machine that was churning out moral impenetrability."[18] On September 9, 1980, eight men and women entered a GE factory in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania where the Mark 12A nuclear missile reentry vehicles were manufactured. Armed with hammers and bottles of their own blood, they moved quickly into the heart of the labyrinth and proceeded to hammer away at the nose cones of missiles destined to carry nuclear warheads. The "Plowshares Movement" was born. Daniel recalls:

> Hammers and blood. The blood, we thought, was a reminder of our common life, our common destiny, the bloodline that joins us to one another, for good or ill. The blood, as Exodus reminds us, is a sign of life, and therefore of the Life-giver, and therefore sacred. A sign also of covenant, a common understanding, that the blood of Christ, once given, forbids all shedding of blood. "This is the new covenant in My blood, given for you." A gift, a wellspring of justice and peace.[19]

In that one phrase, "the blood of Christ, once given, forbids all shedding of blood," Berrigan conveys the kernel of his ethics and the command that compels him to act. In the more than three decades that have followed Berrigan has continued to engage in acts of nonviolent resistance but not of the high-stakes order of Catonsville and King of Prussia. Indeed, it is in his writings, especially in the incandescent commentaries on the prophets, that Berrigan has concentrated his agency. These works are moral acts of the highest order.

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[18] Berrigan, *To Dwell in Peace,* 345.

[19] Daniel Berrigan, *Testimony: The Word Made Fresh.* ( Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 18.

## THE PROPHET'S VIRTUE

Berrigan spent twenty-five years wrestling with the prophets. He eschewed the cautious taxidermy of biblical scholarship, scholarship that left the prophets "[d]ead on the page."[20] Instead we experience a wrestling match to the third power: Isaiah (or Jeremiah or Ezekiel) wrestled with God and Berrigan wrestled with Isaiah while we wrestle with Berrigan. "Lacerating, relentless and intemperate," each prophet lays hold of us as he "strives for a divine . . . breakthrough in the human tribe."[21] Rabbi Abraham Heschel, a close friend of Berrigan, argued that the prophet is a person attuned to God's *pathos*. Like a tuning fork, the prophet vibrates, undergoes God's suffering. Berrigan's careful tracing of the prophetic narratives undergoes the same passion and we, in turn, must grapple with this claim upon us of God's *pathos*.[22] The message could not be clearer: Like Jacob, no one who wrestles at whatever degree of separation emerges unscathed. Wrestling is an apt metaphor for coming to terms with the cost of virtue. The chain of wrestlers—the prophets with God, Berrigan with the prophets and we with Berrigan--is a metaphor for the process we call "tradition" in which a life of virtue finds its context and meaning.

There is an even more disturbing image of what is going on in Berrigan's purgatorial wrestling. Berrigan reflects on Yahweh's command to Ezekiel to eat the scroll before going to speak to the people (Ezekiel 3,1-3). The command is repeated in Revelation 10:10 and Berrigan, again, sees there a paradigm of the prophet's *pathos* from which the moral imagination emerges. In "A Chancy Encounter with an Angel," he invents a dramatic interchange between "Myself" and an "Angel" over an insane demand:

M. What an image—someone crouching in a corner, half mad maybe, chewing away at an inky foolscap.

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[20] Ibid., 33.

[21] Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, xi.

[22] See Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 221-31.

> A. A touch of madness in a mad time. Try it. It might drive you sane.
> M. Sanity, maybe, catastrophe for sure. *Contra naturam*, that diet. Followed by belching. Vomiting even.
> A. Eat the scroll. Something might happen. Imagine it. The Word gets inside you, down and down. An emetic. Maybe that's the meaning here. You rid yourself of a slow-working, permeating poison. Call it moral paralysis, inhibition, dead images, conscience gone to rot. Who knows, maybe you'll see something for the first time. . . .[23]

"Empires," Walter Brueggemann argues, "live by numbness."[24] Inured to endless warfare, blind to the global reach of exploitation, we stumble on like moral zombies. Only the perpetrators fail to see that they have blood on their hands.[25] So, moral awareness is not a quiet awakening from sleep. Laser surgery on thickening membranes is required. The prophets'—and Berrigan's—contribution to ethics is, first, an electric shock, a lacerating word "No." "Everything begins with that no...," Berrigan insists, "a suffering and prophetic word...."[26]

But no to what? The most consistent refrain, repeated throughout the full breadth of Berrigan's writings is no to "death as a social method." In *No Bars to Manhood,* published shortly after Catonsville while the war in Vietnam was still in full flood, Berrigan elaborated this cryptic phrase. It is the choice of bloodletting, destruction and division as the preferred method of social change. It is the orientation of huge sectors of our economy to the

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[23] Berrigan, *Testimony: The Word Made Fresh.* 195-96.

[24] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* 2nd Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 88.

[25] Berrigan, *Isaiah*, 33; Daniel Berrigan, *Exekiel: Vision in the Dust.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 60.

[26] Daniel Berrigan, *The Dark Night of Resistance* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 2.

preparation for killing. It is the wanton napalming of nature. Death invades our consciousness. Public speech under the aegis of death becomes religious mystification. Death as a social method is "the extinction of . . . the power of imaging alternatives to death itself."[27] This last is crucial; imperial numbness anesthetizes the prophetic imagination whose primary task is, in Brueggemann's words, "to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."[28] Roped together as we are on this treacherous glacier—death's ubiquitous slippery slope—one—at least one—must ram an ice pick home if we are not to slide into the abyss. The prophetic no is that ice pick. No moral ascension is possible without a repeated, uncompromising no. That no strikes hard against the very mainspring of modern political life rooted as it is in revolution giving birth to the nation state. "Modern revolutions, like all revolutions, start out affirming liberty; they consummate their efforts in tyranny. Pleading for a more abundant life, they ended under a single sign; hecatombs of political victims. Murder becomes the privileged means of pursuing a relentlessly receding utopian end and, in this process revolution becomes "merely the retooling of the old murderous machinery."[29] Like Camus' rebel, we must say no to this method of social change in all of its manifestations.

As if to twist the multiple coils of evil into one Gordian Knot, Berrigan, well into his eighties, tackled the two *Books of Kings*. His subtitle, "The Pathology of Power," tells the tale. He puzzles over how such unremitting accounts of "mayhem, slaughter, betrayal and bravado" could be thought to be divinely inspired. He concludes that these books offer "a harsh, even shaming pedagogy:" "[W]e must come to know the worst of our ancestry—as well as the worst that lurks in ourselves."[30] We must learn the truth about the

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[27] Berrigan, *No Bars to Manhood*, 60-67.

[28] Brueggemann, 3; Berrigan, *Isaiah*, 87.

[29] Berrigan, *No Bars to Manhood,* 131.

[30] Daniel Berrigan, *The Kings and Their Gods: The Pathology of Power* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 1-2.

systems that harbor power's deadly virus. Even the god, especially the god of *Kings* must be unmasked as a projection, the mirror image of the kings themselves. Or, as Berrigan puts it most damningly, "a ventriloquist's dummy."[31] The prophetic no is ultimately focused on this idolatrous pretension of power. The business of empires and the business of idolatry are one and the same. Aping the God of life, the kings and their gods make of the world a killing field. Death as a social method is the work of idolatry.[32] The lesson of the *Books of Kings*: Read it and weep. Beyond the prophet's unequivocal no, we plead: "O, grant us a life that merits the name human."[33]

It is tempting to think of moral perception as an awareness that can be switched on at will. Coetzee's parable of moral devolution suggests otherwise. The scales might thicken over our eyes imperceptibly and we might lose all memory of what it meant to see the world through a moral lens. Those of us who live within a mighty empire must assume that laser surgery is an immediate necessity. The fog of endless wars, the moral blur, is a function of our own cataracts. This treatment of Berrigan's ethics of resistance suggests that opening ourselves to the prophetic imagination with its uncompromising no is what cuts through the moral fog.

The prophetic no unmasks as counterfeit any ethics that does not take seriously the way in which the kings, with the blessing of their gods, are given over to death as a social method. The two prime candidates for such an ethics of resignation are the just war theory and what Berrigan labels as an "interim ethics." In his mind the theory of a just war is always an exercise in casuistry that serves only to vindicate the sword.[34] Just war thinking overturns the "plain sense" of the Bible and offers us instead the Bible as a "military manual." It justifies war as "practical atheism."[35] Gathje points out that the rule-guided propositions of the just war theory ignore the

[31] Ibid., 4, 93.
[32] Berrigan, *Isaiah,* 125-26.
[33] Berrigan, *Kings and Their Gods,* 2, 194.
[34] Berrigan, *Isaiah,* 13.
[35] Berrigan, *Testimony,* 57.

formation of a moral character in attunement with Christian narratives. Berrigan pushes further in suggesting that the theory ignores how militarism creates "a nuclear winter in our souls."[36] In a more comprehensive vein, Berrigan challenges what he refers to as an "interim ethics." This ethics suggests that Jesus' teaching on war and peace were intended for the Kingdom of God. In the meantime another ethics must prevail, an ethics which resigns itself to war until the end of time. The Christian is called only to play out a "bad deal of cards." The end result: The Sermon on the Mount has been "nuked." Lacking faith in the presence of the Kingdom among us, we "taste the death before death which we name despair."[37]

Along with the no to this interim ethic and the traditional just war ethics, there is a no directed to liberal theology and the ethics of reform. Something more profound is required, a bending of the "instruments of death and the structures of injustice into a new form."[38] By contrast Berrigan points to Isaiah for whom ethics arises out of a vision of hope. Vision and command are conjoined. This is not deontological ethics, the fruit of practical reason. The vision overturns expectations. For Berrigan and the Plowshares Movement, the link to Isaiah and thence to God is through a commanding text, "a word that sets the human in motion."[39] But this command delivers us from resignation, moral numbness and despair: "Arise and walk."[40]

In contrast to both just war theory and any interim ethics, Berrigan offers an "Ethic of Resurrection." His essay by that title is as close as Berrigan comes to a formal presentation of his ethical framework and the guiding principles derived from it. They include:

[36] Gathje, *The Cost of Virtue*, 252-53; Berrigan, *Testimony,* 7.
[37] Berrigan, *Testimony,* 5-6, 86-87.
[38] Ibid., 16.
[39] Berrigan, *Isaiah,* 5-6, 12.
[40] Berrigan, *Testimony,* 5.

- The operative principle is that the "Realm of God" transcends all political systems.
- The Gospel is utterly incompatible with all forms of warfare.
- There can be no just war. "We are done with that theory forever."
- No praxis can be called Christian which avoids suffering.
- There must be no complicity with secular power through acknowledging the legitimacy of laws that protect "the realm of death."
- The Christian is called to be a martyr, i.e., a "witness of the resurrection." "We practice resurrection."[41]

Speaking of Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day as well as the Berrigan brothers, Lisa Sowle Cahill observes that the tendency to see Catholic pacifists as bound by absolute rules misunderstands their position. What is at the core of their ethical pronouncements is their view of the Reign of God. The mainspring of moral life is not the "absolutization of any . . . rules but . . . a converted life in Christ that subsumes . . . every 'natural' pattern of behavior."[42]

Berrigan's own clue as to how we should interpret these seemingly absolute principles comes at the end of his series of pronouncements in "An Ethic of Resurrection." "When we spread ashes at the Pentagon, we mime the death-ridden pollution of the place. The drama contains the ethic. When we dig graves on the White House lawn, we pay tribute to the empty grave of Easter, even as we show forth the universal grave to whose brink humanity is being pushed. *The drama is the ethic.*"[43](Italics added). What could be plainer? The Christian is called upon to participate in a drama.

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[41] Ibid., *221-23.*

[42] Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 211-13.

[43] Berrigan, *Testimony,* 223.

Ethics is mimesis. Berrigan links these dramatic actions with such classic moral engagements as Gandhi's march to the sea to gather salt in defiance of British imperial laws.[44] Principles are, at best, stage directions. The drama is the ethic. Here we see a shift from ethics as the pronouncement of moral principles to ethics as the performance of the truth. Berrigan takes as his model Jesus before Pilate. The truth, if it is to set us free, must undergo a trial. A similar drama is enacted in Gandhi's *satyagraha.*[45] In the passion of Jesus, the drama focuses on death as a social method: "The ethic of Jesus. . .," Berrigan affirms, "issues from the ever so slight edge He grants to life. He grants the edge in the 'life versus death' conflict of the Easter hymn (better, He was the edge) from the edge."[46]

An ethic of resistance stems from a life with an edge, lived on the edge. Berrigan's ethic of resistance, Gathje argues, is less optimistic about the possibilities for radical social transformation than that of liberation theology.[47] There is, after all, the miming of the Fall which is the fate of all empires. "The empires rise, the empire does unutterable harm in the world, then the empire declines and falls."[48] As history repeats itself, the prophetic no, an edgy truth spoken from the edges, must continually be reiterated. Only from this no does a genuine yes arise.[49]

I mentioned earlier Gathje's argument that Berrigan's ethics of resistance is specifically different from Hauerwas' countercultural Christian ethics. Both speak of the Church as a community of resistance which sustains an alternative way of life. Both see the hankering for efficacy as a temptation to abandon discipleship. But Berrigan is committed to actions which are both public and political and which, in the words of a recent Protestant

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[44] Ibid., 224.

[45] Gathje, 161-63; Berrigan, *No Bars to Manhood,* 45-47.

[46] Berrigan, *Testimony,* 220.

[47] Gathje, The Cost of Virtue, 155, 288-89. Gathje sees a change in Berrigan's thought as the Vietnam War ground on symbolized in the shift of the prominence of Teilhard de Chardin to that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Ibid., 143.

[48] Berrigan, *Testimony,* 175-76.

[49] Berrigan, *Jeremiah,* 5.

manifesto of resistance, "hold up a picture not just for the church but also for the world."[50] Gathje sees the Berrigans as sectarians neither in their theology nor in their ethics.[51] Their actions also were intensely public performances, declarations of resistance directed to the whole American public. These public acts of resistance are grounded theologically in a hope against hope. "For us, all these repeated arrests, the interminable jailings, the life of our small communities, the discipline of nonviolence; these have embodied an ethic of resurrection. Simply put, we long to taste that event, its thunders and quakes, its great yes. *We want to test the resurrection in our bones*"[52] (italics added). In marvelous concision Berrigan singles out a) acts of resistance, b) alternative communities and c) the spiritual discipline of nonviolence as the three-pronged overcoming of death as a social method in the experience of resurrection.

[50] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Foreword," in *Resistance: the New Role of Progressive Christians* ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) xii. Cobb's edited volume is presented as a challenge to liberal Christians. It recognizes that *in some respects* reform of key political institutions is not a real possibility. "In the early church," George Pixley reminds us, "Christians could not affect the imperial policies and teachings. They could, nevertheless, refuse to accept the imperial ideology and could organize their lives around different principles.... Similarly in Nazi Germany those Christian who joined the Confessing Church had no expectation of reforming the government. Resistance meant refusal to conform to Nazi ideas and to the practices of the too-compliant recognized churches." "The Bible's Call to Resist," in Ibid., 25. In such a situation Christians are called to resist the "principalities and powers" but, in contrast to Hauerwas, they continue to practice reform through building alliances with other progressives wherever possibilities arise. Cobb, "Foreword" In terms of possibilities for reform, Berrigan is far more agnostic than Cobb's vision of progressive Christians and Berrigan did not practice the politics of building alliances to seek reform after the mid-60s.

[51] Gathje, *The Cost of Virtue*, 8.

[52] Berrigan, *Testimony,* 224-25.

## Thich Nhat Hanh: Tapping our Innate Capacity to be Peace

In *Being Peace*, Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of the remarkable adaptiveness of Buddhism. The Dharma in each new country speaks in a new idiom and a new Buddha is born. He then reiterates a challenge that he presented to an American friend. "Where is your bodhisattva?"[53] Explicitly presented in early Mahayana texts written in the century before the Common Era, the figure of the bodhisattva came to embody the ideal of universal liberation. "The word *bodhisattva* comes from the Sanskrit roots *bodhi*, meaning "awakening" or "enlightenment," and *sattva*, meaning "sentient being." *Sattva* also has etymological roots that include "intention," meaning the intention to awaken, and "courage" or "heroism," referring to the resolution and strength involved in this path. Bodhisattvas are enlightening, radiant beings who exist in innumerable forms, valiantly functioning in helpful ways in the middle of the busy-ness of the world." [54]

The emphasis here is on the gerund "enlightening," for the bodhisattva is one who has overcome the dualism of self and other. He or she embodies *bodhicitta* (enlightening mind), the mind of one dedicated to seeking enlightenment for the benefit of all. Seeking the liberation of self and other is one inconceivable practice.

Thich Nhat Hanh was born on October 11, 1926. When he was nine years old, he saw an image of a sitting Buddha in a magazine and was immediately attracted. An older brother had chosen to become a monk, and at sixteen Thich Nhat Hanh followed him and became a novice at the

Tu Hieu Pagoda near Hue in central Vietnam.[55] Thich Nhat Hanh's writings draw an idyllic picture of his new life. The

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[53] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2005), 85-86.

[54] Taigen Dan Leighton, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 26. Leighton notes that the figure of the bodhisattva was presented in the Pali scriptures as representing the previous lives of Shakyamuni. Ibid., 46-47, 50.

[55] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the Mind of Love* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2008), 11-13.

young novice spent his days memorizing the rules for monastic living while tending grazing cattle.

The idyll did not last. In the aftermath of World War II, the French, seeking to restore their colonial grip on Vietnam, fought a war with the Viet Minh who struggled for independence between 1946 and 1954. For a time the novice and his fellow monks were forced to evacuate their temple. When they returned, the temple was scarred with bullet holes. There would be no returning to the previous idyll. The young monk saw before him a momentous task, nothing less than a thoroughgoing reform of Buddhism.

> The task of reforming Buddhism demands a revolution in the teachings and regulations of the Buddhist institutes.... We have no choice but to bring Buddhism back into everyday life. War has waged disaster. Separation and hatred [have] reached a high degree. There are so many agonizing cries of death, hunger, and imprisonment. How can anyone feel peace of mind by dwelling undisturbed in a monastery?[56]

In the midst of war Thich Nhat Hanh pursued this dream of a reformed Buddhism, what he would later call "Engaged Buddhism." But he repeatedly met with rejection at the hands of the elder Buddhist monastic establishment. Encouraged by friends who feared for his safety because of his writings in opposition to the Diem regime's prosecution of war, Thich Nhat Hanh accepted a fellowship to study at Princeton and left for the States in autumn 1961.[57] With the fall of the Diem regime in late 1963, one of the elder monks, Thich Tri Quang, a former opponent of Thich Nhat Hanh's proposals for an engaged Buddhism, pleaded for him to return to Vietnam, which he did in December. Shortly thereafter

[56] Thich Nhat Hanh, *My Master's Robe: Memories of a Novice Monk* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2002), 77.

[57] Sister Chan Khong, *Learning True Love: Practicing Buddhism in a Time of War* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007), 30.

Thich Nhat Hanh proposed to the Buddhist hierarchy a three-point plan involving: 1) calling publicly for an end of the war, 2) creating an institute for the study of Buddhism in an atmosphere of openness and 3) developing a training center in methods of nonviolent social change.[58]

The next two years were a whirlwind of activity within the belly of the beast. The reluctance of the conservative hierarchy did not deter Thich Nhat Hanh. After establishing the Buddhist institute as Van Hanh University, he created a School of Youth for Social Service within the university, fulfilling the third point of the proposal. Before long several hundred graduates of the SYSS were working alongside peasants in self-help development efforts, rebuilding bombed villages. Simultaneously, in fulfillment of the first point of his proposal, he published a number of books grieving the suffering of the Vietnamese people and calling upon all sides of the conflict to make peace. The most famous of these publications, *Lotus in a Sea of Fire,* was denounced by the Saigon regime as "communist propaganda."[59]

In the spring of 1966 while the bombs rained on Vietnamese villages, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a consortium of religion-based peace organizations, invited Thich Nhat Hanh to take part in a lecture tour in the US Feeling that the war would end only when America saw the endless suffering it caused, Thich Nhat Hanh left Vietnam with a five-point peace proposal in hand. During his time in the States, Thich Nhat Hanh met and became close friends with Daniel Berrigan. The decision to leave Vietnam proved to be momentous. He was denounced as a traitor by the South.[60] In 1969 Thich Nhat Hanh was named chair of the newly formed Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation to the Paris Peace Accords by the Vietnamese Buddhist hierarchy. What followed were several years of intense activity. After the takeover of the

[58] Ibid., 47-49.

[59] Ibid., 50-54, 72; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves: Journals 1962-1966,* trans. Mobi Warren (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 150, 185-87, 199.

[60] Thich Nhat Hanh returned to Vietnam in January, 2005. Chan Khong, 274.

South in April, 1975, the North Vietnamese regime suspected Thich Nhat Hanh of being CIA agent. Return to Vietnam became impossible.[61]

The next few years were a time of spiritual searching. In October 1982, Thich Nhat Hanh and a small group of followers moved to southern France to what became Plum Village. There a core *sangha* of monks, nuns and lay people began to flourish. Also in 1982, Thich Nhat Hanh began to offer retreats worldwide.[62] "*Sangha* building," he would say later, "is what we do. It is the practice."[63] True *sanghas*, he insisted, cannot be a place to hide but a place where we collect and transform the world's sufferings. Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, he often said, would take the body of a community, not of an individual. Practicing together, we bring Maitreya to life. "All of us," he insisted, "have the duty to bring that Buddha into being, not only for our sake but for the sake of our children and the planet Earth."[64] For the past forty years Thich Nhat Hanh has indefatigably engaged in the practice of building *sanghas*. Through his retreats and many writings his message has spread across the globe.

## THE BODHISATTVA'S VIRTUE

Earlier I suggested that Buddhist ethics must be considered within the soteriological framework outlined in the Four Noble Truths.[65] The dis-ease (*dukkha*) is diagnosed in the First and Second Truths and the Third Noble Truth turns our minds to our own capacity (in Mahayana teaching grounded in our Buddha Nature) to heal ourselves. A moral life comes into play as an intrinsic

[61] Ibid., 126-29, 134-35, 151-53, 165-66.

[62] Ibid., 216, 230-32, 242.

[63] Thich Nhat Hanh, "Go as a *Sangha*," in *Friends on the Path* ed. John Lawlor (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2002), 46.

[64] Ibid., 17.

[65] See Christopher Ives, "Deploying the Dharma: Reflections on the Methodology of Constructive Buddhist Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 15 (2008): 23-43.

element of the Fourth Noble Truth—the Eightfold Path. Moral life, therefore, is developmental in character and part of a systematic training.[66] Practice, not adherence to a deontological command, anchors the moral life. To understand this argument that Buddhist ethics is a species of virtue ethics let us look at a fuller version of the passage from Damien Keown's *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* that I cited earlier:

"The virtues are not simply means to an end which transcends them. What is distinctive about the virtues is that they participate in and *constitute* the end. . . . The virtues are means to the gradual realization of the end through the incarnation of the end in the present. Living in accordance with the end, is . . . "a progressive articulation of the end itself...." The Buddha displayed this clearly in the exercise of the moral virtues both before and after his enlightenment—they were a necessary and central part of his life.... It is because of this internal relationship between virtue and the *summum bonum* that the Aristotelian and... Buddhist ethical schemes are teleological rather than consequentialist."[67] In making this argument Keown explicitly rejects those scholarly interpretations of Buddhist moral life that see it as akin to the raft that takes one to the other shore—at which point the raft is left behind. Morality (*sila*) and insight (*prajna*), compassion and wisdom are mutually supportive. Neither can be reached or sustained in isolation from the other.[68]

While Keown focuses primarily on the Theravada tradition, he sees the Mahayana tradition as maintaining the same marriage of ethics and insight, wisdom and compassion. The paradigm shift in ethics that comes with the Mahayana is a shift from self-control leading to personal development to "the function

[66] Sallie B. King, S*ocially Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 30-31. The Noble Eightfold Path is traditionally divided into three categories: *sila, samadhi* and *panna*; morality, meditation or concentration and insight. Keown sees *samadhi* as "a means for the promotion of and participation in the basic goods of morality and knowledge." Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 38.

[67] Ibid., 193-94.

[68] Ibid., 108-10.

of moral virtue as a dynamic other-regarding quality."[69] In the Mahayana tradition the "field of activity," what we might call the reach or scope of ethics, becomes infinite. The first Bodhisattva Vow is to liberate all sentient beings: "[A]nd this is why," an early Mahayana text proclaims, "any failing by the *bodhisattva* is extremely serious: by his failing he places the welfare of all beings in jeopardy."[70] Sallie King points out the numerous implications of the understanding of Buddha Nature as it was developed originally in China. It grounds a root confidence in our capacity to follow the Eightfold Path and removes all hints that Buddhist practice is world-denying. Ultimate reality and everyday reality are "not two." In such a universe—as it was expressed in the Chinese Hua-yen school—all reality interpenetrates.[71]

Because the concept of Buddha Nature radicalizes the Third Noble Truth, there is a new twist to the understanding of virtue and the training that accompanies it: The cultivation of virtue gets us nowhere. It gets us nowhere because we, like all sentient beings, are Buddhas. The cultivation of virtue is not for the purpose of creating some other state of being. "Why then do we practice?" asked Dogen, the 13th Century Japanese Zen master. Imagine a muddy pond. Gradually the mud may settle and the water becomes clear, transparent. But it never becomes something other than what it has always been—water. Practice and realization, Dogen argues, are nondual.[72] Every act can be part of a practice and every practice is the realization of our Buddha Nature. Our moral life is not a raft to get to the other shore.

Keown's argument for the interdependence of a virtuous life and an awakened life is contested by some Buddhist and non-Buddhist scholars. Darrel Fasching and Dell Dechant, in their important work, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach,* take as their key to interpreting Buddhist ethics a single article by the renowned Zen Buddhist scholar, Masao Abe. In their reading,

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[69] Ibid., 131.

[70] Ibid., 155.

[71] Sallie B. King, *Buddha Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 159-68.

[72] See above #12.

Abe argues that ethics rests on the judgment of good and evil and, as such, is a form of dualistic thinking. Dualism must be and is transcended in the experience of enlightenment. Abe uses Kierkegaard's expression, "the teleological suspension of the ethical," to convey this transcendence. Moreover, Fasching and Descant quote a very unfortunate interpretation of karma by Abe in which he seems to assign some responsibility for the Holocaust to the victims themselves—an idea that Fasching and Descant, rightly, consider abhorrent. After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, they contend, there must be a bright line separating good and evil.[73]

For our purposes, whether or not Fasching and Descant have fairly interpreted Abe is of less importance than the fact that they read Thich Nhat Hanh as drawing the same conclusions as Abe about the dualistic nature of ethical judgment. However we interpret Abe, this is a somewhat odd conclusion to make regarding Thich Nhat Hanh given his explicit development of the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Inter-being that I will discuss later. The Mindfulness Trainings are binding on all members of the Order, monks and nuns as well as lay people. Nowhere in Thich Nhat Hanh's writings is it even hinted at that for some advanced practitioners they would be suspended. It would be as if the Buddha, after his enlightenment experience, had dispensed with the moral requirements embedded in the Eightfold Path.

Fasching and Descant come to this conflation of Thich Nhat Hanh's position with Abe's based on their reading of Thich Nhat Hanh's signature poem, "Please Call Me By My True Names." At the heart of the poem is a stanza that reads:

[73] Darrel J. Fasching and Dell Descant, *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Co., 2001), 77-80. It should be clearly stated that engaged Buddhists uniformly reject such interpretations of *karma*. See, *inter alia*, David R. Loy, *Money Sex War Karma* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 53-63. It also should be noted that the actual passages that Fasching and Descant quote from Abe, while problematic, are more nuanced than these authors acknowledge.

I am the twelve-year-old girl,
refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean
after being raped by a sea pirate.
And I am the pirate,
my heart not yet capable,
of seeing and loving.[74]

In Fasching and Descant's reading the Mahayana teaching of emptiness and interdependence enacted through compassion means that the self becomes the other—Thich Nhat Hanh becomes the sea pirate such that "the very categories of 'good' and 'evil' disappear.... [R]efusing to judge others, [Thich Nhat Hanh expresses] an enlightenment that carries him beyond dualistic judgments of good and evil."[75]

The two authors argue, moreover, that Thich Nhat Hanh's commentary on the poem would seem to exonerate the sea pirate because of his conclusion that he himself might have become a sea pirate if subjected to similar "causes and conditions." In their judgment Thich Nhat Hanh fails to acknowledge that not everyone raised in impoverished conditions becomes a sea pirate. "Karma is rooted in choice," Fasching and Descant conclude, "not fate." That is what makes us responsible for our karma."[76] So, while Thich Nhat Hanh does not blame the victim—the twelve-year old girl—in any sense, his conclusions, these authors contend, do undermine our moral responsibility for our own actions.

I argue, to the contrary, that Thich Nhat Hanh and Engaged Buddhism in general seek to enhance our sense of moral responsibility by forestalling any implicit claims to moral superiority. Read the poem aloud, as I ask my students to do, and then ask yourself, how did it alter your consciousness to chant: "I am the sea pirate/ my heart not yet capable/of seeing and loving?" The poem is not about some abstract ethical theory; it is about my

[74] Thich Nhat Hanh, "Please Call Me By My True Names," in *Call Me By My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1993), 72-73.

[75] Fasching and Descant, Comparative Religions 156-58.

[76] Ibid., 161.

heart. The sea pirate has failed to see and to love and so have I. I am also the twelve-year old girl; the world's violence *in some sense* is shared by me. Do I then despair? No, the logic of interdependence is to empower the self as a moral actor, not to suspend the ethical. The Pali Canon puts it bluntly: "This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises; this not becoming, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases" (*Majjhima Nikaya* 2:32; *Samytuta Nikaya* 2:28). We can paraphrase this famous statement of interdependence in this way: Because Charles Strain is as he is, sea pirates come to be and young girls suffer grievously. Charles Strain ceasing to be as he now is, sea pirates may also cease to be and young girls no longer suffer. To think through the meaning of the saying in this way is not to inflate my sense of efficacy—I alone do not cause sea pirates to cease their piracy—rather it is to say that my actions, my inactions, and whom I become matters. The ripples of my actions, my becoming who I am spread out indefinitely. The Dalai Lama refers to this moral sense as an ethic of "universal responsibility."[77]

Another way to address Fasching and Descant would be to ask "What does it mean to say that I am *not* the sea pirate?" After all, I have not performed such heinous actions. From Thich Nhat Hanh's point of view in segregating myself from such evil I create a deluded perception of my own moral superiority. Ethical judgments that create such a deluded understanding fail to acknowledge the many hidden (and not so hidden) ways in which I am complicit in horrendous crimes. (Without the Vietnam War, and the inadequacy of my efforts and others' to resist it, there would not likely have been the massive exodus of the Vietnamese "boat people" to which the poem directly refers.)

Sallie King has, perhaps, given more attention to this poem and to the ethics of Engaged Buddhism in general than any other scholar. She argues that engaged Buddhist ethics are non-judgmental and non-adversarial but they are not suspended in the enlightenment experience. "Since there is no fixed human self, there is no fixed thing or essence in us that would be appropriate

[77] The Dalai Lama, *Ethics for a New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Publishers, 2001).

to label 'good or 'bad' in a static way, as if that defined the being of the person. Obviously the rapist has severely harmed the girl. Since causing pain is always wrong in Buddhism, *we can certainly label this action of the pirate's 'wrong,'* but we cannot take this one act as defining the being or innermost essence of the pirate.... [W]e have all together constructed this world... in which people can be born into crushing poverty and hopelessness.... The pirate is responsible for his actions.... [However,] I cannot arrogate to myself a superior place, looking down from the distance of my moral superiority upon the pirate.... Yet it is proper for me to regard his action as wrong (because it harmed another) and to take action to prevent such actions from occurring....[78] (Italics added).

"We are determined not to kill and not to let others to kill" reads the Twelfth Mindfulness Training. What could be a blunter injunction to ethically discern which acts are to be supported and which resisted? The teaching of non-dualism in Thich Nhat Hanh's case does not suspend the ethical. On the contrary, it greatly broadens its scope and intensifies my sense of moral responsibility. The poem ends:

> Please call me by my true names,
> so I can wake up,
> and so the door of my heart can be left open, the door of compassion.[79]

As part of this analysis of the ethics of the bodhisattva, I want to look at *Being Peace*, perhaps the classic expression of the dharma of engaged Buddhism. The talks that comprise *Being Peace* are clearly directed to an audience of peace activists. They reflect Thich Nhat Hanh's experience in the late 60s with an American peace movement full of vitriol, torn by internal ideological conflicts and every bit as much directed towards victory over enemies as the Pentagon that it fought. "A fresh way of being peace, doing peace

[78] King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism,* 27-30.
[79] Thich Nhat Hanh, "*Please Call Me By My True Names*," 73.

is needed," Thich Nhat Hanh affirms and *Being Peace* lays out an alternative—peace work as the *practice* of being peace.[80]

Oddly enough for a Buddhist who is thoroughly aware of the First Noble Truth and a Vietnamese monk who lived and struggled through the horror of the Vietnam War, Thich Nhat Hanh begins by affirming that "Suffering is not enough." Presumably peace activists are well aware of the pain and suffering wreaked by the endless conflicts across the globe. The fulcrum of Buddhist practice, as I have argued, is the Third Noble Truth—our innate capacity to wake up, to understand what is going on, within us and without, and to love. It is this capacity— referred to in the Mahayana tradition as our Buddha Nature—that grounds our efforts to be peace.[81]

If we are constantly churned up, thrown off kilter by the world's suffering, worried about when the bombs will explode, we are not of much use. The ideal peacemaker, Thich Nhat Hanh affirms at the beginning of his second talk, is the one person in a small boat caught in a storm, who remains calm. That person practices the action of non-action. "Sometimes if we don't do anything, we help more than if we do a lot."[82] Later Thich Nhat Hanh elaborates that mind and situation are reciprocally related. "The nature of the bombs, the nature of injustice, the nature of the weapons and the nature of our own being are the same."[83] If we would work for nuclear disarmament, we must defuse the bombs in our own hearts. The real truth is that the world situation is a reflection of how we lead our daily lives.[84]

In this light Thich Nhat Hanh's guidance runs in two complementary directions. The first is to elaborate our innate capacity by exploring what it means to take refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The second is to ground a Buddhist approach to ethics in a Buddhist psychology.

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[80] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*. (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2005), 81-82.

[81] Ibid., 13-18.

[82] Ibid., 21, 33.

[83] Ibid., 77.

[84] Ibid.

When I say that "I take refuge in the Buddha," Thich Nhat Hanh argues, what I mean is "I go back and rely on the Buddha in me." We should think through what it means to "go back." Here the bodhisattva collects herself and, returns from dispersion. "Anything that can help you wake up has Buddha Nature. When I am alone and a bird calls to me, I return to myself." The universe itself becomes the *Dharmakaya*, the body of the dharma, so that everything can wake me up. Similarly, when we practice we are linked to the *Sanghakaya*. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, in truth, are only realized in practice; *they* take refuge in us.[85]

Thich Nhat Hanh believes, misinterpretation leads to feelings that cloud our minds, upset our bodies and warp our actions. He gives the example of a man in a boat who yells repeatedly with increasing anger at another boat coming straight for him until he realizes that there is no one in the boat (41-42). Correct perception involves an awareness of how all reality dependently co-arises. When we objectify phenomena, treat them as entities for our manipulation, we misperceive the way in which we are not disconnected but interconnected. To truly understand we must practice seeing the ways in which my reality and that of the other are "not two."[86] Alienation begins with our own reality.

> If I have a feeling of anger, how would I deal with it...? I would not look upon anger as something foreign to me that I have to fight, to have surgery in order to remove it. I know that anger is me and I am anger. Non-duality, not two. I have to deal with my anger with care, with love, with tenderness, with nonviolence.... If we annihilate anger, we annihilate ourselves. Dealing with anger in that way would be like transforming yourself into a battlefield, tearing yourself into parts, one part taking the side of Buddha, and one part the side of Mara.... We

[85] Ibid., 23, 32, 36.

[86] Ibid., 41-42. "Not two" should be understood in tandem with "not one." Thich Nhat Hanh indicates that is why Buddhists speak not of oneness but of non-duality. Ibid., 42-43.

> cannot destroy the energy [of anger]; we can only convert it into a more constructive energy.[87]

This commentary on dealing with our feelings says a great deal about Thich Nhat Hanh's approach to the moral life, about why being peace is the only truly effective way to make peace. First, one begins with oneself. What Sallie King said about engaged Buddhist ethics being nonjudgmental and non-adversarial must be practiced in our relationship with our own self. Second, notice the martial metaphors that Thich Nhat Hanh employs in showing us how *not* to relate to ourselves: fighting our anger, annihilating it, turning our psyche into a battlefield. These are not "merely metaphors," rather they are indicative of an understanding of nonviolence that is coherent whether we are speaking about our inner conflicts or the conflict between nations. Taking sides does not work. The energies that manifest in conflicts at all levels cannot be annihilated; they can be transformed.

Being awake means knowing the myriad ways in which our lives are intertwined with others who suffer and acting on that awareness. The non-duality of practice and enlightenment is a constantly renewed process of deepening and expanding awareness that, in turn, calls forth transformative action.[88] Taking a stand, say, by adopting a vegetarian diet and encouraging others to do so as well does not entail taking sides, e.g., by demonizing the agribusiness industry. It, after all, co-arises with my food habits and could co-cease in its present form through my eating more mindfully. Such an understanding, it must be insisted, does not preclude organizing for collective as well as personal action.

This model for taking a stand without taking sides was invented during the Vietnam War by the Buddhist peace movement. It did not seek victory for either side but an end to hostilities and reconciliation. Given the dualistic ideologies of both sides during the war, each side misperceived the Buddhist

[87] Ibid., 46-47.
[88] Ibid., 68-69.

peace movement as collaborating with the enemy.[89] Genuine reconciliation involves interpreting for each side the suffering that is undergone by the other side. The Buddhist sangha, over centuries, has developed specific tools (*upaya* or skillful means) for reconciling conflicts in which step by step anger and antipathy are de-escalated.[90]

During the Vietnam War, Thich Nhat Hanh established the Tiep Hien Order as the communal expression of engaged Buddhism. As he explains the term, *"tiep"* means to be in touch and to continue. To be in touch with the reality of the world is to be in touch with all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Enlightenment is not a transcendent identity, a leaving behind one's immersion in this very messy world. To continue is to carry forward the practice of buddhas and bodhisattvas. *"Hien,"* on the other hand, means "the present time" and "to realize." "To practice Buddhism does not mean to endure hardship now for the sake of peace and liberation in the future.... The purpose is to have peace for ourselves and others right now, while we are alive and breathing. Means and ends cannot be separated... Based on the insight that means *are* ends, all activities and practices should be entered into mindfully and peacefully."[91]

When he was exiled to the West, Thich Nhat Hanh changed the name of the order to the Order of Inter-being so that it would be more intelligible to Western audiences. He also created fourteen "mindfulness trainings."[92] "Mindfulness trainings are

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[89] On the Buddhist peace movement during the Vietnam War, see Sallie B. King, "Thich Nhat Hanh and the Unified Buddhist Church, in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* eds. Sallie B. King and Christopher Queen (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 321-63.

[90] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace,* 72-73, 77-81.

[91] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1998), 3-6. See also Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace,* 86-88.

[92] The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings are based on the 58 precepts for both monastic and lay Buddhists developed in China and presented in the *Brahma's Net Sutra.* According to that Fifth century, CE document, these trainings are "the source of all Buddhas; the root of all bodhisattvas; and the original Buddha-nature itself." Because our Buddha nature is always present these trainings came into

practices not prohibitions." We freely take it upon ourselves to transform ourselves. Again, we do not seek a stage when these trainings would be set aside.[93] Moral action is not obedience to a divine will or the application of principles derived from reason. It is a response to an open investigation of reality. All fourteen begin with awareness. "Aware that looking deeply at the nature of suffering can help us develop compassion and find ways out of suffering," reads the Fourth Training, "we are determined not to avoid or close our eyes before suffering." This process, in fact, epitomizes what occurs with each of the trainings. Becoming aware of the specific traits of suffering, the moral agent begins, as it were, with the First and Second Noble Truth. But in his commentary on the Fourth Training, Thich Nhat Hanh takes pains to note that the First and Second Truths must be balanced by the Third and Fourth. We must nurture and safeguard our capacity to love. "When we are peaceful and happy we will not create suffering in others. When we work to alleviate suffering in others, we feel peaceful and happy. Practice is not just for ourselves but for others and the whole of society." This, he concludes, is the bodhisattva way.[94]

So, what is the purpose of these trainings? When asked what may be accomplished through the practice of mindfulness, Thich Nhat Hanh responded by quoting a stanza from a poem that he had written:

> The work of building will take ten thousand lives,
> But dear one, look—
> That work has been achieved ten thousand lives ago."

Then he comments: "Do you need to become a Buddha...? The wave does not have to seek to become water—she *is* water, right

being. *The Path of Compassion, The Bodhisattva Precepts: The Chinese Brahma's Net Sutra,* trans. Martine Batchelor (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield Publisher, 2004), 54; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Opening the Heart of the Cosmos* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2003),11.

[93] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing,* 7; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace,* 90.

[94] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing,* 30-31.

here and now. In the same way, you are already... a Buddha.... What is essential is to enter the path of practice to realize this truth and help others realize it too."[95] To undertake a Buddhist practice is to enact a paradox. On the one hand, Thich Nhat Hanh says, "The bodhisattva vows are immense...." They are the work of ten thousand lives. On the other hand, he equally affirms: "[T]he very moment we make the determination to live according to these trainings and practices, joy, healing and transformation become possible right away."[96] The work of ten thousand lives is already accomplished.

## THE VIRTUE ETHICS OF THE BODHISATTVA AND THE PROPHET

Let us return now to the hypothesis that we opened this article with, namely, that Thich Nhat Hanh, the bodhisattva, and Daniel Berrigan, the prophet, although they have a broader intent than creating a formal ethics, do offer us two species of virtue ethics. Martha Nussbaum argues that the heterogeneous group of philosophers who seek to develop a "virtue ethics" are united by their attention to agents and not simply actions, to the internal springs of action and to the development of moral agency over long periods of time.[97] Clearly, Thich Nhat Hanh fits with this set of reflective inclinations. Since Keown juxtaposes Buddhist ethics to Aristotle's understanding of virtue, it might be helpful to view Thich Nhat Hanh in juxtaposition to Nussbaum's conscious effort to craft a neo-Aristotelean social ethics. She points to four traits that, taken as a set, distinguish in her mind this form of virtue ethics from its rivals.

- The internal goods sought through human action are multiple and qualitatively different. Think of the difference among friendship, meaningful work and social justice.

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[95] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Opening the Heart of the Cosmos,* 80-81.

[96] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing,* 51; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Opening the Heart of the Cosmos,* 183.

[97] Martha Nussbaum, "Virtue Ethics: A Misleading Category?" *The Journal of Ethics* 3, no. 3 (1999), 170.

- Reason plays a key role in prioritizing among these goods and harmonizing them.
- Emotions and passions are "complex forms of intentionality" that can be shaped by reason.
- Our present understanding about the good, especially as developed through "pernicious fictions," shapes defective passions that must be critiqued and reshaped.[98]

Certainly Thich Nhat Hanh's Mindfulness Trainings discuss a reasonably comprehensive variety of human internal goods from peace to justice, from patterns of consumption and simple living to forms of communication, from intimate sexual relationships to the care of our children. Yet these various goods are unified by the telos of emancipated awareness. Each of the training begins with an awareness—most frequently of a form of suffering caused by an absence of virtue; each seeks an awakened form of agency. Apart from mindfulness, the different pursuits of internal goods cannot be called virtuous.

Second, awareness, insight or wisdom (*prajna*) is much broader than Aristotle's reason. It arises through meditative concentration (*samadhi*) as well as from the cultivation of virtue (*sila*). It goes well beyond the philosopher's discursive reason to include the way in which we eat a tangerine or drink a cup of tea. It is much closer to Aristotle's practical wisdom (*phronesis*) except that the *samadhi* that is necessary for Buddhist wisdom involves spiritual disciplines not found at least in neo-Aristotelian philosophies.

Third, Thich Nhat Hanh certainly agrees with Nussbaum's understanding of the intentionality of emotions and passions. We "compost" our anger and thereby retain and redirect its energy but, again, composting involves a wider range of spiritual disciplines (stopping, looking deeply, treating our anger with compassion etc.) than is generally comprised in a rational critique. Fourth, Thich Nhat Hanh would agree completely that our society (as infected by

[98] Ibid., 180. Nussbaum develops the idea of "pernicious fictions" in *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 413.

the three poisons of ignorance, greed and hatred) shapes defective passions which when crystallized in ideologies can lead to the killing of millions. When it comes to actually reshaping our passions, the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings are more practical and more ambitious than anything that even a wide-ranging philosopher as Martha Nussbaum has come up with. The practice of the trainings draws upon a two and one half millennia tradition of healing our poisoned selves and societies. Finally, it should be noted that a basic confidence in human capacity underlies Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelean ethics and, as we have seen, there is a similar confidence to Thich Nhat Hanh's ethics grounded in our Buddha Nature.

> What I am suggesting, then," Martha Nussbaum concludes, "is that the education of the emotions, to succeed at all, needs to take place in a culture of ethical criticism, and especially self-criticism, in which ideas of equal respect for humanity will be active players in the effort to curtail the excesses of the greedy self." By contrast, Thich Nhat Hanh sees the training of one's emotions taking place in a community of practice. Apart from a multitude of such communities, we can never hope to create a "culture of ethical criticism. [99]

In a time of moral devolution a more strenuous life of virtue is called for. Daniel Berrigan turned to the writings of the Hebrew prophets in order to understand the times.

> Everyone goes about the appointed tasks in a tranquil, apparently responsible spirit. It is as though sleepwalkers were abroad.... We have the socializing of sin, its mimetic power, the passage of quite normal, quotidian activities into perilous areas: the normalization of the abnormal.... "[100]

[99] Martha Nussbaum, "Compassion and Terror," *Daedalus* 132, no. 1 (Winter, 2003), 25.

[100] Berrigan, *Jeremiah*, 43.

In such a context the kind of cultivation of virtue through reason that characterizes Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelianism seems naïve when moral devolution is in full sway. Nussbaum's fourth point about misshapen passions is intensified; her "pernicious fictions" appear to be perfectly rational. It is the prophet, "towering in moral stature, ardent and harsh in love, clairvoyant, fiery," who appears to be mad.[101] Sweet reason is hardly up to the task of transforming these passions in such a context. It is the prophet's ardent and harsh love that dispels the pall, removes the scales, grapples with the normalized abnormal passions. The slower work of reason that Nussbaum affirms in her third point is replaced by the prophet's lacerating denunciations. While most of us seek to cultivate multiple goods and to harmonize and prioritize among them when we must, as in Nussbaum's first and second points, the prophet follows Soren Kierkegaard's admonition: Purity of heart is to will one thing. That one thing is God's justice.

In *Testimony*, Berrigan records his own litany of saints and martyrs: Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Thomas Merton, Archbishop Romero, Abraham Heschel, Brother Philip. The list goes on, each a person of "towering moral stature." In his introduction to an essay on the peacemaking church, Berrigan quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Now it will be necessary simply to hold on, to light the fires of truth here and there, so that eventually the entire structure will collapse."[102] It is hard to imagine a position further from Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelean account of virtue in its relationship to a just society than this quotation from Bonhoeffer. It hardly fits with the essentially reformist assumptions of Nussbaum's position or, at least, her presupposition that reason, not being fatally compromised, is capable of transforming the pernicious fictions which construct the unjust society. And yet, to hold on, to light fires of truth must be considered virtuous action. Virtue *in extremis*. None of Berrigan's saints and martyrs adopted nonviolence as an abstract moral principle. Rather they came to love and to act nonviolently in the midst of a violent world—even

[101] Ibid.

[102] Bonhoeffer quoted in Ibid., 175.

when they themselves were met with violence. "We are to stand somewhere, and let come what may," Berrigan says capturing these remarkable lives in one pithy aphorism.[103] As the American civil rights movement's anthem put it: "Just like a tree that's planted by the water, I will not be moved." With their ruling metaphor of "cultivation" many species of virtue ethics focus on the long haul growth of practical wisdom. But Berrigan's saying alters our understanding of virtue ethics. Before a shoot, a wisp of a tree, can begin to grow, it must root itself and withstand the shock that that entails. If *phronesis* in Thich Nhat Hanh's vision is the opening of the doors of one's heart to the cosmos, in Daniel Berrigan's case it is the knowledge of when and where to act and the courage to stand firm "come what may."

Virtue *in extremis* is what Coetzee's Mrs. Curren comes to embrace in and through her dying body. The brutal reality of apartheid South Africa stripped the scales from her eyes. Daniel Berrigan faced the brutality of the Vietnam War and the nuclear brinksmanship of the 1980s. He with Brother Philip and a few followers threw themselves into the breach and brought the wrath of the war-making state upon themselves. In the process they stripped the scales from the eyes of more than a few. For his part, Silko's Tayo learns painfully how not to tear apart the fragile web and how to weave it anew. Thich Nhat Hanh, torn from his homeland, began the slow process of building *sanghas*, communities of refuge where monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen could return to themselves and learn the practice of being peace. Then he offered us the fourteen mindfulness trainings to set us on the long path of virtue.

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[103] Ibid.