

Article

Toward a Buddhist Ecological Ethic of Care

Colin Harold Simonds 

School of Religion, Faculty of Arts and Science, Queen's University at Kingston, Kingston, ON K7L 3N6, Canada; 11cs77@queensu.ca

Abstract: This article thinks alongside the feminist ethic of care tradition to articulate a Tibetan Buddhist ethical approach to the more-than-human world. It begins by unpacking the characterization of Tibetan Buddhist ethics as a moral phenomenology before highlighting the major parallels between Buddhist moral phenomenology and the ethic of care tradition. Having made these parallels evident, this article then looks at how the ethic of care tradition has been applied to issues in animal ethics and environmental ethics to similarly think through how a Buddhist moral phenomenology might function in these more-than-human contexts. To further nuance this ecological application of Buddhist ethics, this article then takes up the question of veganism and argues that a Tibetan Buddhist care ethic would ideally adopt the positions of ethical veganism while also recognizing the socio-economic barriers to doing so in certain contexts. Ultimately, this article argues that when Buddhist moral phenomenology is applied to the more-than-human world, it presents as a Buddhist ecological ethic of care which recognizes the interconnected nature of *duhkha*, the necessity of approaching situations with care as one's primary conative mode, and an emphasis on context, relationships, and positionality.

Keywords: eco-Buddhism; care ethics; Tibetan Buddhism; Buddhism; ethical veganism; environmentalism; moral phenomenology; religious ecology



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1. Introduction

In recent decades, many scholars have offered varying interpretations of Buddhist ethics. Some classify it as a deontological ethic, others as an act-consequentialist ethic, and still others as a virtue ethic. Unsurprisingly, these interpretations have extended to how scholars interpret Buddhist environmental ethics as well. More so than the other interpretations, the categorization of Buddhist ethics as a virtue ethic has largely informed the field and can be seen in the work of Simon P. James, David E. Cooper, and Damien Keown. These interpretations are useful for thinking through possible Buddhist approaches to the more-than-human world, but I nonetheless hold that they do not perfectly reflect the Buddhist approach to the environment or to ethics more broadly. Instead, I argue that Buddhist ethics (especially in the Tibetan tradition) should be understood as a moral phenomenology, wherein experience lies at the center of moral cultivation and Buddhist practice primes an individual to respond spontaneously and compassionately to situations as they present themselves. When applied to questions of nonhuman animals and the environment, this kind of ethic finds company in the ecological care ethics of ecofeminists and in formulations of animal ethics such as 'entangled empathy' posited by Lori Gruen. This paper will therefore tease out these similarities in order to better understand how Tibetan Buddhism can navigate ecological issues today. I will first articulate what a moral phenomenological ethic looks like in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition before dialoguing this ethical theory with that of care ethics. Then, I will think through how a Buddhist moral phenomenology might address issues of nonhuman animals and the environment by looking to the ethic of care tradition's prior articulations of animal and environmental ethics. Finally, I will take up the idea of ethical veganism from a Buddhist moral phenomenological perspective to nuance this theory's application in more-than-human contexts. Ultimately, I

will show how the Tibetan Buddhist approach to the more-than-human world accords well with ecofeminist care ethics and argue that Tibetan Buddhist environmental ethics should be read as an intersectional, ecological ethic of care.

2. Buddhist Moral Phenomenology

To begin, while classifying Buddhist ethics according to Western systems of moral theory can be useful for uncovering and thinking through certain ethical implications of the tradition, scholars have cautioned against subsuming Buddhist ethics to Western standards. Peter Harvey (2000, p. 51) writes that “the rich field of Buddhist ethics would be narrowed by wholly collapsing it into any single one of the Kantian, Aristotelian or Utilitarian models” and Barbra Clayton (2006, p. 112) echoes this concern in her analysis of Śāntideva’s *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. There are two possible alternatives to this kind of hermeneutical exercise: one could conclude that Buddhist ethics are particularist or contextualist and vary from situation to situation or one could begin from Buddhist principles and articulate an ethical theory on its own terms. A moral phenomenological approach to Buddhist ethics engages both of these possibilities and presents a contextual moral theory unique to the Buddhist tradition.

Buddhist moral phenomenology was first posited by Jay Garfield (2010) in an analysis of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatara*, where he writes: “Śāntideva’s understanding of how to lead such a life is distinctive, and is very different from accounts of the moral or the exemplary life familiar in the Western tradition” (Garfield 2010, p. 334). It is distinctive in large part due to how it is “concerned with the transformation of our experience of the world, and hence our overall comportment to it” (Garfield 2014, pp. 278–79). This focus on *experience* over virtues, rules, or moral calculi is the central characteristic of what makes this moral theory unique. As I have written elsewhere, moral phenomenology is therefore “an ethical theory centered on the *experience* of an individual where *perception* and *affect* are the loci of moral development,” and this theory rests on the assertion “that action stems from an individual’s immediate experience of the world” (Simonds 2021a, p. 341). To change this experience of the world is, therefore, to change one’s behavior.

Garfield was the first to propose this kind of ethical theory and has since nuanced his analysis by looking for evidence of this theory across Buddhist traditions in his monograph *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration*. However, he is not the only scholar to unpack, critique, and develop this interpretation. Daniel Aitken’s dissertation “Experience and Morality: Buddhist Ethics as Moral Phenomenology” looks at the important role perception plays as a key mechanism of this ethical approach. Aitken writes that Western notions of perception often involve our sense organs receiving raw data from sensory objects, whereas in the Buddhist context “perception is always accompanied by other mental activities that shape the context of our experience” (Aitken 2016, p. 117). With reference to Asaṅga’s *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, he lists these “Five Constantly Operative Mental Processes” (Tib. *kun ’gro*) as feeling, ascertainment, intention, contact, and intention. Obviously contact between sense organ and sense object is not a place for enacting moral phenomenological transformation, and attention, being the faculty which directs perception towards particular internal or external objects, is without the ethical content required by a moral phenomenology. Thus, in my analysis of Aitken’s work, “we are left with feeling, ascertainment, and intention as the mental factors potentially involved in moral phenomenological transformation” (Simonds 2022, p. 74).

I like to call this moral locus our “default perceptual mode” which is imbued with affect, is conceptually mediated, and holds conative value (Simonds 2021a, p. 364). I define it as “the way that we experience the world as it happens, in the present, without reflection,” and use it as a way to describe how Buddhist practitioners seek to develop ethically (Simonds 2023a, p. 51). How we see the world, feel about the world, and conceive of the world has a direct effect on how we subsequently act upon the world. Thus, to refine our actions, we must refine how we see, feel, and conceive. In the Tibetan tradition, the “correct” way (as in the phrasing of the Noble Eightfold path as *yang dag pa*) to see the

world is as *ultimately* empty of independent existence and *relatively* arising in complete interdependence. In other words, under philosophical (and meditative) analysis, our experience of the phenomenal world is without any permanent, independent characteristics, and this is the ultimate view. However, we nonetheless experience the world as a process of interdependent cause, condition, and effect, and this is the relative or conventional view. Additionally, these two views are intimately related since existence in an interdependent system necessitates that a thing be empty of independent existence and vice versa. The central claim of Buddhist moral phenomenology, therefore, is that if we integrate the realization of emptiness or interdependence into our default perceptual mode, then we will naturally act more ethically towards the alleviation of the *duḥkha* (Tib. *sdug bsgnal*. Lit. suffering, dissatisfaction, unease) of all sentient beings.

Jessica Locke (2018) has argued that reflecting on the aphorisms of the Tibetan *lojong* tradition can be used to integrate these ideals of emptiness and interdependence (among other Buddhist ontological positions such as non-self or impermanence) into one's default perceptual mode and develop ethically, while Garfield has argued that moral narratives are the means for enacting moral phenomenological development (Garfield 2021, p. 54). Contrastingly, I argue that the Tibetan contemplative framework of *lta sgom spyod gsum*, or *view, meditation, action*, is the best way to articulate moral phenomenological praxis in the Tibetan tradition (Simonds 2023b). Nonetheless, Locke, Garfield, and I are in agreement that these practices of moral phenomenology culminate in *bodhicitta* (Tib. *byang chub kyi sems*) which Locke calls a “radically compassionate altruism.” (Locke 2018, p. 251). This is reflected in the primary literature, where Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen writes:

Supreme bodhicitta is desire to
Clear every fault from each and every sentient being
And to produce infinite good qualities in each of them.
Even among the wondrous this is wondrous!¹

Similarly, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche calls *bodhicitta* “compassion directed impartially toward all sentient beings, without discriminating between those who are friends and those who are enemies” (Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche 1992, p. 2). However, as Garfield writes, *bodhicitta* “centrally involves an altruistic aspiration, grounded in compassion, to cultivate oneself as a moral agent for the benefit of all beings” (Garfield 2010, pp. 334–35). Thus, we can say that *bodhicitta* is the end of ethical development in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition and involves a compassionate outward disposition, but also involves an inward and ongoing commitment to actualizing this goal.

3. Key Aspects of Buddhist Moral Phenomenology

Within this moral theory, there are three major characteristics that may dialogue well with care ethics: its spontaneity, its understanding of interdependence, and the centrality of compassion or care in its application. Going over each can allow us to engage with the ethic of care tradition more productively. Thus, first, the notion that Buddhist moral phenomenology primes an actor to respond *spontaneously* in ethical situations is the primary characteristic that makes Buddhist ethics unique. Whereas consequentialism requires moral calculi, deontology requires adherence to pre-established rules, and virtue ethics requires developing specific psychological states from which one can spontaneously act, moral phenomenology focuses on how an individual can act contextually and appropriately in a given context. Once one integrates a view such as *pratītyasamutpāda* (Tib. *rtēn 'brel*) or *śūnyatā* (Tib. *stong pa nyid*) into one's default perceptual mode, one's actions will spontaneously emerge from that view and naturally accord with its implications. This is the foundational claim of Buddhist moral phenomenology and, as I argue, relates closely to the contemplative framework of *lta sgom spyod gsum*, or *view, meditation, action*. As Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche succinctly puts it:

The first step in establishing the view is to acquire a proper understanding of the teachings about it. Then, to incorporate the view into our inner experience,

we put it into practice over and over again; this is the meditation. Maintaining our experience of the view at all times and under all circumstances is the action. (Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche 1992, p. 9)

In other words, Buddhist ethical action is characterized by how it closely relates to its ontological commitments. *Duḥkha* and *pratītyasamutpāda* are meditatively adopted into how one directly experiences the world, and then one acts from that experience in a spontaneously altruistic manner which the Tibetan tradition calls *bodhicitta*.

In Tibetan contexts, the view which grounds compassionate ethical action is emptiness or interdependence. The most explicit evidence of the link between these views and ethical action can be found in Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* which contains the phrase *śūnyatā-karuṇā-garbhā* in Sanskrit or *stong nyid snying rje'i snying po can* in Tibetan (Hopkins 2007, p. 218). This roughly translates to "emptiness is the womb of compassion," and can also be found in the work of Sakya (2002, p. 40) and Kongtrul and Thayé (2008, p. 148) among others. "Emptiness is the womb of compassion" points to the idea that once emptiness becomes the central perceptual mode of a practitioner (through its meditative experiencing), their conative or intentional mode naturally becomes compassion. This is also the case with *pratītyasamutpāda*, often translated as dependent origination, interdependent arising, or interdependence. In Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, emptiness and interdependence are equated when he writes:

That which arises in dependent origination
Is explained as emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation
Is itself the middle way.
That being so, a thing which is not dependently arisen
Does not exist.
Therefore, a thing that is not empty
Does not exist.²

There is a good reason for why the meditative realization of these two views leads to compassionate activity. As Garfield writes, "once one sees oneself as nonsubstantial and existing only in interdependence, and once one sees that the happiness and suffering of all sentient beings is entirely causally conditioned, the only rational attitude one can adopt to others is a caring and careful one" (Garfield 2014, pp. 296–97). Thus, in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, we might say that the radical relativity of phenomena posited by the notion of emptiness or *pratītyasamutpāda* lays the groundwork for a Buddhist moral phenomenology. Once these ontological positions are incorporated into one's default perceptual mode and one actually *experiences* the world as interconnected (through a practice such as meditation) then one acts accordingly and responds to ethical situations with spontaneous compassion (Simonds 2023b).

However, this word "compassion" does not necessarily cover the semantic range of the Buddhist term *karuṇā* (Skt.) or *snying rje* (Tib.). Compassion means to feel or suffer alongside another and to feel concern for their suffering, and this certainly is a factor in *karuṇā*. But *karuṇā* also implies an active engagement with that suffering such that one does not just *feel* concern for the suffering of others but actually *does* something to alleviate it. For this reason, Garfield prefers to translate the term as "care." His reasoning is thus:

Karuṇā connotes not just an emotive response to another, but a commitment to act on behalf of others to relieve their suffering. The standard translation is hence etymologically paradoxical, and can be misleading. The term *care* nicely captures this commitment to act, as in the case of *caregiving*, *caring for*, and other such expressions. (Garfield 2014, p. 289)

Care, therefore, should be considered the principal conative disposition of the *bodhicitta* at the heart of Buddhist moral phenomenological development. The ideal state of *bodhicitta* is understood in the Tibetan tradition as having two aspects: aspiration and application. While wishing for others to be well has value (*bodhicitta* in aspiration), actually addressing

the causes of *duḥkha* and working towards their alleviation is necessary in Buddhist ethical and soteriological traditions.

This necessity of applying *bodhicitta* by engaging with worldly ethical situations is clearly seen in the hagiographical story of Asaṅga who, wanting to meet the bodhisattva Maitreya, meditated on compassion in a secluded retreat for twelve years. Having failed to meet Maitreya in this retreat, he returned to civilization, where he came across a starving dog covered in maggots. In the words of the Padmakara Translation Group:

Asaṅga was overwhelmed by compassion, and for want of anything to feed the dog, he cut a piece of flesh from his own leg for it to eat. He then turned his attention to its appalling wounds, but soon realized that all attempts to remove the maggots might save the dog but would kill the maggots. The only solution he could think of was to use his tongue to coax the maggots out of the stinking flesh. Shutting his eyes, he bent down to do what he could to heal the animal, only to find himself licking the dust by the side of the road. When he opened his eyes, he found the dog had disappeared. In its place, before him stood Maitreya. (Asaṅga 2018, p. 14)

Only when Asaṅga actually put *bodhicitta* into practice did he meet Maitreya, demonstrating the absolute necessity of engagement and application in Buddhist ethics. In Buddhist ethics, compassion is not something that one feels while simply watching conflict from the sidelines or meditatively cultivates by one's lonesome self. Compassion and *bodhicitta* must be active, engaged, and applied to be considered fully developed.

The contemporary scholarship on Engaged Buddhism is rife with debate surrounding whether the application of *bodhicitta* entails altruistic kinds of charity and/or engagement with broad socio-political issues, and whether this latter kind of engagement is necessarily a modern innovation or has precedent in pre-modern Buddhist texts. For example, Main and Lai (2013) argue that Engaged Buddhism is socio-politically oriented, necessarily modern, and is distinct from altruistic action, whereas Christopher Queen (2003) argues that Engaged Buddhism is indeed a modern innovation but can include both altruistic action and socio-political engagement. Likewise, Clayton (2018) has forwarded the idea that engaged *bodhicitta* exists on a spectrum ranging from interactions in our day-to-day life to structural change and argues that, as a consequence of rebirth being less emphasized in Western Buddhisms, there is "a corresponding idea that bodhisattvas are not meant to wait to express their compassion once they have perfected themselves" (p. 155). Instead, "she must do what she can in the present" despite the canonical precedents, wherein the "bodhisattva is in a long-term, multi-lifetime, elite training programme" (pp. 156–57). Here, I make no claim as to what *bodhicitta* in application might entail in today's world (partial though I am to Clayton's arguments). What is more important is the very necessity of application and the semantic implications of *karuṇā*. By characterizing Asaṅga's action (and the ideal of Buddhist ethics) as *care* rather than *compassion*, this active element is highlighted and the quality of Buddhist moral phenomenological ethics is more accurately presented.

4. Buddhist Moral Phenomenology and Feminist Care Ethics

Together, these three aspects create the foundation for a robust ethic of the more-than-human world inclusive of humans, nonhuman animals, and the environment. Whether someone steeped in the Tibetan Buddhist ethical tradition is confronted with an ethical situation involving humans, nonhuman animals, or the environment, their action will naturally accord with the context of the situation, be informed by an understanding of interdependence, and have care as their primary intentional mode. Given these characteristics, I argue that a Buddhist moral phenomenological approach to the more-than-human world should be considered an ethic of care and should be categorized alongside ecofeminist care ethics. In order to make this case, we must therefore dialogue these key aspects of Buddhist moral phenomenology with the ethic of care tradition to tease out their similarities.

First, however, a brief summary of care ethics is necessary for those who may be unfamiliar with the tradition. The feminist ethic of care tradition is usually traced back to

Carol Gilligan's work *In a Different Voice* which contrasts a man's "conception of morality as fairness . . . rights, and rules" with a woman's "conception of morality . . . concerned with the activity of care . . . responsibility and relationships" (Gilligan 1982, p. 19). These three pillars of a feminist approach to ethics were then taken up with great zeal by a number of feminist scholars such as Nel Noddings (1984), Sara Ruddick (1989), and Joan Tronto (1993), who developed them into a full-fledged theory of care ethics. While the particulars of these scholars' arguments may differ, we may say that, in general, an ethic of care rejects a universalist approach to ethical theory in favor of a contextualist ethic centered on relationality, situatedness, and caring for others. Such an ethic was originally articulated in human contexts but quickly was broadened by ecofeminist scholars to include nonhuman animals and nonsentient phenomena in the ecological community.

When engaging the ethic of care tradition with Buddhist moral phenomenology, parallels quickly become evident. The centering of *duḥkha* in Tibetan Buddhist contexts mirrors how care ethics center oppression and suffering as the primary objects of attention. However, neither tradition would claim that a calculus of *duḥkha* or oppression *alone* constitute an appropriate ethic. Instead, *duḥkha* is simply the source from which care and compassion emerge in context-specific ways. Utilitarian ethics in both their Buddhist (Goodman 2009) and Western (Singer 1975) articulations are problematic because of their abstraction. Lori Gruen writes:

As it is usually practiced, ethical theorizing detaches us from our actual moral experiences and practices through abstract reasoning. It sidesteps the complex social and political structures and ideologies that are always in play. It also sets aside our particular concerns, our relationships, and the other things that make life worth living. It thus can seem rather alienating, and an alienating theory will not help us to begin to solve the myriad problems that it is supposedly designed to help us address. (Gruen 2015, pp. 12–13)

In opposition to this abstract ethical theorizing, Gruen proposes a perceptual, experiential approach to care ethics which she calls "entangled empathy". In her words, entangled empathy is "a type of caring perception focused on attending to another's experience of wellbeing," and "an experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize that we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships" (3). As Garfield notes, Buddhist ethicists rarely talked about ethics in an abstract sense. He writes: "Buddhist moral theorists see ethics as concerned not primarily with actions, their consequences, obligations, sentiments or human happiness, but rather with the nature of our experience" (Garfield 2014, p. 279). Thus, Gruen's articulation of care ethics or entangled empathy as a reorientation towards "our actual moral experiences" mirrors the moral phenomenological interpretation of Buddhist ethics quite perfectly.

The spontaneous nature of Buddhist moral phenomenology also parallels ecofeminist articulations of care ethics. I argue that Buddhist moral phenomenology should be characterized as a spontaneous, caring approach to ethical situations, wherein ethical action emerges naturally from an experiential realization of particular views such as interdependence and the adoption of particular conative modes such as *bodhicitta*. This accords quite well with how Marti Kheel approaches care ethics in a more-than-human world. She writes:

The attempt to formulate universal, rational rules of conduct ignores the constantly changing nature of reality. It also neglects the *emotional-instinctive or spontaneous component* in each particular situation, for in the end, emotion cannot be contained by boundaries and rules; in a single leap it can cross over the boundaries of space, time, and species. It is, I feel, the failure of most writers within environmental ethics to recognize the role of emotion that has perpetuated within the environmental ethics literature the dualistic thinking so characteristic of Western society. (Kheel 2007, p. 45, emphasis added)

A Buddhist moral phenomenological approach to the more-than-world would necessarily involve a spontaneous component and would therefore avoid this critique in ecological contexts. In fact, William Edelglass (2006) has made this exact case and has argued that the Buddhist concept of *upāya* (Tib. *thabs*) forms the basis for a context-specific moral pluralism in ecological settings. Similarly, Clayton (2013) has observed Tibetan Buddhists in Nova Scotia caring for their forest retreat center through a “Nothing Missing” ethic of contextual naturalness informed by the notion of *tathagatagarbha* (Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa*) or buddha nature. Thus, both Buddhist moral phenomenology and the care ethics tradition articulate a kind of “moral perception,” to borrow the term from Gruen, wherein ethical responses emerge naturally from our direct encounter with others (Gruen 2015, p. 39).

Furthermore, the Buddhist emphasis on *pratītyasamutpāda* has many similarities with how care ethics emphasizes relationships, relationality, and intersectionality in its theorization and application. Other scholars of Buddhist ecology have argued that *pratītyasamutpāda* lends itself to the holistic kinds of environmental ethics found in the land ethic and deep ecology (Henning 2000; Cheng 2016), but there is an issue with this presentation. As Marti Kheel rightfully notes, the whole is consistently elevated above its constituent parts in these eco-ethical formulations. She writes:

Many holists will protest that theirs is a nonhierarchical paradigm in that everything is viewed as an integral part of an interconnected web. However, holists such as Aldo Leopold and J. Baird Callicott clearly indicate that the interconnected web does, indeed, contain its own system of ranking. Such writers have dispensed with the system of classification that assigns value to a being on the basis of its possession of certain innate characteristics, only to erect a new form of hierarchy in which individuals are valued on the basis of their relative contribution to the good of the whole (that is, the biotic community). (Kheel 2007, p. 41)

In no Buddhist tradition will you find the causal matrix of *pratītyasamutpāda* elevated above the well-being of sentient beings. In fact, the notion of the “interconnected web” of *pratītyasamutpāda* (as it is sometimes called, especially in Huayen contexts) as having a “good” that can be ascribed to it is a fundamentally flawed presentation. *Pratītyasamutpāda* simply points to the causal matrix in which all beings and phenomena are implicated. It is ethically neutral. However, atomizing individual sentient beings and treating them as the sole arbiters of ethics would also be mistaken. *Duḥkha* is an interdependent phenomenon similar to any other and cannot be addressed as an isolated experience of individual sentient beings.

The Buddhist understanding of this relationship between *duḥkha* and *pratītyasamutpāda* is actually quite closely intimated in Kheel’s own presentation of “holism” in ecofeminist contexts. She writes:

The concept of holism I am advocating here does not view the “whole” as composed of discrete individual beings connected by static relationships that rational analysis can comprehend and control. Rather, I am proposing a concept of holism that perceives nature . . . as comprising individual beings that are part of a dynamic web of interconnections in which feelings, emotions, and inclinations play an integral role. (Kheel 2007, p. 44)

In the field of animal ethics, Gruen’s notion of entanglement mirrors this holistic approach as well. She writes:

Since we necessarily exist in relation with other organisms, and since our perceptions, attitudes, and even our identities are entangled with them and our actions make their experiences go better or worse (which in turn affects our own experience), we should attend to this social/natural engagement. (Gruen 2015, p. 64)

Beyond this, Gruen’s notion of entanglement, drawing from Karen Barad’s (2007) intra-action, intimates Nāgārjuna’s notion of emptiness quite nicely. She writes:

There can be no individuals that exist prior to and separate from the entangled intra-actions that constitute them. But, importantly, the individual that emerges from her entanglements is distinctly constituted by particular intra-actions. Understanding and reflection on our entanglements are part of what it takes to constitute our selves because there is no self or other prior to our intra-actions. (p. 65)

Interestingly, how Gruen treats this entanglement in her ethical theory closely reflects the moral phenomenological work of bringing *pratītyasamutpāda* or *śūnyatā* into one's default perceptual mode. In her theory, attending to this entanglement and bringing it into our perceptual field brings about empathy through a shift in affect and cognition (p. 66). Thus, both the care ethics tradition and the Tibetan Buddhist tradition recognize how the welfare of all sentient beings is bound together in a vast matrix of cause and condition, and the relationality of these beings are centered as core aspects of ethical decision-making in both.

With this understanding in mind, rather than prioritize ecological wholes over the individual or privilege a single being over a community, *pratītyasamutpāda* and *duḥkha* must be taken together. This amounts to what Kheel calls a "circular affair." She writes:

If we allow for an element of feeling in our interactions with nature, the positions represented by these camps dissolve into different points on a circle. No point may, thus, be said to be more important than any other. The liberation of nature is, in fact, a circular affair. (Kheel 2007, p. 44)

Kheel's language here is a direct reaction to the language of J. Baird Callicott (1980) in his now-famous essay "Animal Liberation: A Triangular Affair." Callicott's contention is that human interests, nonhuman animal interests, and ecological interests occupy distinct points on a triangle and are categorically at odds with one another. By calling the liberation of nature a "circular affair," Kheel is instead arguing that not only must we not prioritize nonhuman animals over ecological communities (or vice versa), but that the interests of humans, nonhuman animals, and ecological communities are fundamentally related to one another. By moving away from abstract absolutes and towards an ethic which is contextualized, spontaneous, and informed by care, the exclusive prioritization of humans, nonhuman animals, or ecological communities becomes less relevant. Instead, ethical situations are approached with a holistic understanding of *duḥkha* informed by a deep understanding of its relationality within and across species and communities.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Tibetan Buddhism's notion of *karuṇā* mirrors the kind of care found in the feminist ethical tradition in a nearly identical way. Of course, interpretations of *karuṇā* and care may differ within each tradition, but their general understandings resemble one another in a precise fashion. The Buddhist notion of *karuṇā* goes beyond mere compassionate *feeling with* another and points to an *active, involved* care for another grounded in immediate experience. One needs to go beyond aspiration and actually *apply* one's *karuṇā* for *bodhicitta* to be completely expressed. So too in care ethics do we find an emphasis on involved engagement as a necessary factor of care. Martha Nussbaum's (2004) article "Beyond 'Compassion and Humanity'" criticizes compassion-based ethics for its supposed complacency or indifference. She writes that "the emotion of compassion involves the thought that another creature is suffering significantly, and is not (or not mostly) to blame for that suffering. It does not involve the thought that someone is to blame for that suffering" (p. 301). Nussbaum is essentially arguing that by not investigating the source of suffering and instead restricting compassion to a sympathetic feeling, one is limited in actually addressing the suffering at hand. This is a fair critique, and one that Garfield's translation of *karuṇā* as care rather than compassion helps avoid. When Asaṅga came across the wounded dog, he did not merely suffer alongside it before going back to his meditation. Instead, his compassion translated into active *care* for both the dog and the maggots. Responding to this critique in an ecofeminist context, Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams write:

the feminist ethic-of-care tradition in animal ethics, like feminist theory in general, insists on seeking the cause for the suffering—that is, attributing blame. Indeed, the care theory we advocate goes beyond compassion to include caring enough to find out who [or what] is causing the harm and stopping it. (Donovan and Adams 2007, pp. 14–15)

This is precisely what Asaṅga did in his hagiographical narrative and is how *karuṇā* manifests in Tibetan Buddhist ethical contexts. For the end of moral phenomenological development, *bodhicitta*, to be actualized it must be *applied* in context-appropriate ways, and this application consists of seeking out and addressing the causes of *duḥkha*. Thus, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition's *karuṇā* can meaningfully translated into Western ethical contexts through the notion of care as understood in the feminist tradition of care ethics.

5. Toward a Buddhist Ecological Care Ethic

It is therefore evident that Buddhist moral phenomenology and feminist care ethics parallel each other quite closely to the extent that we could call the Buddhist moral phenomenological tradition a Buddhist care ethic with little controversy. However, what remains to be shown is how each understands and approaches the human, nonhuman animal, and ecological aspects of our more-than-human world. Though there is some historical precedent for Buddhism's positive treatment of nonhuman animals in the Jātaka tales, the edicts of Aśoka, and various Mahāyāna scriptures, the Buddhist concern for ecology a relatively modern phenomenon. Articulating what a Buddhist ecological care ethic might look like is therefore a constructive, speculative endeavor. Nonetheless, we can begin to see what a Buddhist ecological ethic of care looks like by thinking alongside the ecofeminist care ethics tradition in extending this ethic to nonhuman animals and the environment.

The first thing to note in such an application is how humans, nonhuman animals, and ecological communities are treated intersectionally by care ethicists. This is perhaps unsurprising given the earlier discussion of relationality, but must be highlighted to delineate a care approach to the more-than-human world from the kinds of less-than-intersectional approaches found in environmental ethics and animal liberation contexts. In her treatment of feminism and animal ethics, Carol J. Adams writes “violence against people and against animals is interdependent. Caring about both is required” (Adams 2007, p. 22). A Buddhist care ethic would certainly agree with this evaluation and extend care to both human and nonhuman animals as a result of its belief in rebirth. From the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism, we have all been nonhuman animals (as well as gods, ghosts, and hell beings) in former lives, and we will likely be reborn in these realms again in the future. Restricting ethics to the human realm alone is therefore nonsensical. Further, the baseline for ethical considerability in Buddhist contexts has historically been sentience. Especially in the Mahāyāna traditions of Tibet, the goal of liberating *all sentient beings* from *all duḥkha* means that nonhuman animals are included in the soteriological and ethical purview of the tradition. Both human and nonhuman animals experience *duḥkha* as a result of their implication in interconnected systems of cause, effect, oppression, and flourishing. Thus, when confronted with an ethical dilemma, the *duḥkha* of humans and nonhuman animals necessarily inform how a Buddhist with *bodhicitta* as their conative mode would carefully respond.

The second thing to note is how ecology and the environment are understood in these intersectional ecological contexts. In care ethics, the environment is most often conceived through an ecofeminist lens wherein the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world are causally linked. Beyond simply recognizing the intertwined histories of the subjugation of women and nature as posited by scholars such as Val Plumwood (1993) and Jim Mason (1993), ecofeminist theorists also highlight the uneven burden that environmental degradation plays on women (especially in the global South). Deane Curtin unpacks this relationship in India when he writes:

A common sight in these countries is village women walking farther every year in search of safe water and fuel for food. In such contexts, the destruction of the environment is a source of women's oppression. The point here is not that there is a single cause of women's oppression, or that in countries like India women's oppression is always ecologically based . . . I am arguing that, in the mosaic of problems that constitute women's oppression in a particular context, no complete account can be given that does not make reference to the connection between women and the environment. Caring for women in such a context includes caring for their environment. (Curtin 1991, pp. 166–67)

This contrasts with how environmental ethics are sometimes approached in non-ecofeminist contexts. For example, natural phenomena such as rocks and waters are ascribed *intrinsic* value in deep ecology and a holistic vision of land is elevated over and above its individual constituents in contemporary iterations of the land ethic. In contrast, ecofeminist approaches to the environment do not involve a change in our valuation of nature but a recognition of the nonsentient natural world's impact on the lives of human (and nonhuman) beings.

Of course, this is not the only way ecofeminist care ethics have been conceptualized. For instance, Kyle Powys White and Chris Cuomo mobilize indigenous and feminist philosophy to reinscribe the natural world with agency and value and argue that “care ethics question canonical conceptions of nature as passive or inert and express anticolonial ethics and epistemologies based on the wisdom of relation-centered traditions and practice” (Powys White and Cuomo 2017, p. 235). However, if we think through the question of natural phenomena from the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism, the environment is conceptualized closer to Curtin's conception than Powys White and Cuomo's. The qualifier for moral considerability in Buddhist contexts is sentience which places most of the natural world outside its ethical purview. This has led some Buddhist scholars such as Daniel Capper to claim that Buddhist moral theory amounts to “compassionate concern for animals that sponsors Buddhist actions for animal welfare” but “substantially lacks the ecocentric elements required by a full environmental ethic” (Capper 2022, pp. 217–18). He is not alone in his dismissal of Buddhist environmental ethics. Ian Harris (1994) and Lambert Schmithausen (1997) have also questioned the potential of a Buddhist environmental ethic on both philological and philosophical grounds. However, despite sentience being at the center of Buddhist ethics, I nonetheless contend that a Buddhist ecological ethic of care which includes nonsentient phenomena in its ethical valuations is entirely feasible.

Elsewhere, I have taken up and responded to Capper's critiques in detail, but it is important to restate some of the resources that Buddhists today can and have mobilized towards constructing an environmental ethics. I use this term “constructing” deliberately because, as Harris has shown, Buddhist languages never had a parallel term for “environment” or “nature” (Harris 1997, pp. 380–81) and because all environmental ethics are necessarily informed by modern ecological science. Regardless, as I have argued in a piece titled “The Trouble of Rocks and Waters: On the (Im)Possibility of a Buddhist Environmental Ethic,” Buddhism indeed can be used to construct an environmental ethic through its understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* and the environment's role therein (Simonds 2023c). *Pratītyasamutpāda* points to the radical relativity of all phenomena and the *śūnyatā* (or, emptiness) of independent existence. All phenomena (and all sentient beings) arise in dependence on one another, making the flourishing of beings dependent upon not only the flourishing of other sentient beings but the stability of ecological systems. I argue that when *duḥkha* and *pratītyasamutpāda* are taken together, caring for the environment becomes a necessary component of engaged Buddhism. Though rocks or waters may not be sentient and may not directly suffer if you extract or pollute them, the many sentient beings that rely on rocks and waters for shelter, food, and drinking water *will* suffer if we do not include the environment and its nonsentient constituents in our purview of care. To borrow terms from environmental philosopher Dale Jamieson (1998), sentient beings may have *primary* value, but nonsentient nature still has *derivative* value and, at times, this derivative value may in

fact outweigh the primary value. Gruen's entangled empathy faces a similar critique to Capper's when applied to nonsentient phenomena. Gruen writes that "my relationships to the meadow or the wetland or the insects that inhabit them are profoundly different from the relationships I can be in with the animals, fish, and birds who make their homes there," because, "it isn't possible to be in an *empathetic* relation to ecosystems or organisms that exist in ways that I can't imagine . . . what it is like to be like." (Gruen 2015, pp. 70–71, emphasis in original). While scholars such as Matthew Hall (2022) have certainly argued that we can develop empathy for phenomenologically foreign beings such as plants, Gruen nonetheless notes how she feels "a deep sense of grief when humans fell old trees or pave meadows or dump toxics in wetlands" out of a "concern for the creatures that made their homes in these places" (Gruen 2015, p. 70). While she does not make the leap herself, I would argue that this grief is sufficient for establishing an emergent environmental ethic out of the more animal-centric notion of entangled empathy. Thus, when confronted with ethical situations, a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner with *bodhicitta* as their primary conative mode would have to take the environment and its relation to the flourishing of sentient beings into consideration.

Interestingly, this Tibetan ethical understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* is mirrored in much of the ecofeminist writing on situatedness and relationality. In her article "Toward a Feminist Care Ethic for Climate Change," Elizabeth Allison writes that, in feminist care ethics:

Relatedness is constitutive of all living beings, the 'first and most basic characteristic of the human person,' the primary and ultimate ground of all that exists. The individual is not a singular, atomistic being but a node in a web of relation. The individual cannot exist outside of the myriad relationships and communities that mutually produce, shape, and constrain the individual. (Allison 2017, p. 153)

Drawing from both Traditional Ecological Knowledge paradigms as well as Donna Haraway's notion of entanglement and sympoiesis (Haraway 2016), Allison argues that "we need a feminist care ethic of climate change that recognizes the interconnected and indivisible nature of justice" (Allison 2017, p. 157). Rephrased in Buddhist terms, we might say that we need a care ethic that recognizes the interconnected nature of *duḥkha* and its alleviation. This ecological understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* and *duḥkha* is also strikingly similar to Curtin's understanding of the relationship between environmental degradation and the oppression of women in India. Curtin's statement "caring for women includes caring for their environment" could be broadened out to say "caring for sentient beings includes caring for their environment" since the *duḥkha* of sentient beings (and its alleviation) depends upon myriad environmental factors.

Of course, the interests of humans, nonhuman animals, and ecosystems can (and often do) come into conflict. Capper (2022) mobilizes this conflict towards a critique of the eco-Buddhist project and writes that a Buddhist environmental ethic cannot "attend to the complexities of ecosystems with many preying individuals" (p. 217). Again, I have responded to this critique in detail elsewhere (Simonds 2023c), but it is worth restating some of my response here. Regarding the problem of predation and potential ecological issues such as the culling of an invasive species, a Buddhist approach is nonabsolutist. There is no universal formula that can be applied to an ethical situation to derive a consistent outcome and resolve conflict between and across species. Instead, the relational and contextual nature of a given moral issue must be considered in a Buddhist approach to the more-than-human world. I argue that a Buddhist approach to the problem of predation is complex such that in certain instances it may be warranted to intervene in animal predation (as Shabkar did in his famous account of saving fledgling birds from an eagle), and in others it may not be. In a more extreme case, as I argue elsewhere, there are situations where one could imagine the introduction of predator species to a new environment or the active culling of invasive species may be justifiable through a Buddhist environmental lens (Simonds 2023c). As in Kheel and Gruen's articulations of care ethics, it is unproductive to consider these problems in the abstract. Instead, a Buddhist ecological ethic of care would

resolve these conflicts in a way that accords with their situatedness in *pratītyasamutpāda* on a case-by-case basis.

Thus, I argue that the Tibetan Buddhist approach to nonhuman animals and the environment mirrors much of how ecofeminist care ethics approach these subjects. When these similarities are coupled with the parallels between Buddhist moral phenomenology and feminist care ethics in general, we can begin to see how a Buddhist moral phenomenological approach to the more-than-human world can be characterized as an ecological ethic of care. Tibetan Buddhist ethics extends care to nonhuman animals through its understanding of sentience, its belief in rebirth, and the way it addresses *duḥkha* in an interdependent way. Further, care for the environment emerges out of the care for sentient beings through Buddhism's recognition of ecological phenomena as a key aspect in the well-being of sentient beings. Ultimately, a Buddhist ecological ethic of care approaches the more-than-human world in a relational, holistic manner and addresses ethical situations with care as its primary intentional mode, with an interdependent understanding of *duḥkha*, and with an emphasis on the relational nature of liberation.

6. Contextual Moral Veganism

In his article "Toward an Ecological Ethic of Care," Curtin uses vegetarianism as a test case to demonstrate the nuances of a care ethic in ecological contexts. When the article was published in 1991, veganism was even more of a minority position than it is now and was not in any conversations about addressing climate change or environmental degradation. Today, however, we find a vegan diet at the forefront of individual responses to climate change (Poore and Nemecek 2018) and recognize animal agriculture as one of (if not *the*) leading causes of climate change and environmental destruction (Sejian et al. 2015; Eisen and Brown 2022). Dan Smyer Yü contends that "vegetarianism, as an action of spiritual environmentalism, remains a non-environmental topic of debate between Buddhists and scholars," but this is a problem, especially amongst Tibetan Buddhist diaspora and convert communities (Smyer Yü 2023, p. 11). Given what we know about the relationship between animal agriculture, climate change, and environmental collapse, vegetarianism *needs* to become an environmental topic of debate in Buddhist scholarship. Veganism therefore presents itself as a prime test case for thinking through what a Buddhist ecological ethic of care might look like in today's ecological emergency.

A Buddhist ecological ethic of care might conceive of two options as it relates to the question of veganism: its full-fledged adoption or its regrettable rejection. The full-fledged adoption of veganism (or, rather, the complete abstention from animal-based foods and goods) would be the ideal for a practitioner who wants to mitigate *duḥkha*, recognizes the reality of *pratītyasamutpāda*, and has *bodhicitta* as their operating conative mode. The most obvious reason for this adoption would be to not actively contribute to the immense suffering of sentient beings involved in the animal agriculture industry. Eating meat, eggs, and dairy involves paying others to murder sentient beings on one's behalf and is therefore perpetuating systems which subject more and more sentient beings to greater and greater amounts of *duḥkha*. Moreover, the Tibetan tradition consistently recognizes all sentient beings as having been one's mother in a past life. In the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the Buddha tells Mahāmati that "it is not easy to find someone who was not once your father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, kinsman, friend, or the like at some point during the long ages of *saṃsāra*" and that "they have now changed their form and become wild animals, domestic animals, and birds, whatever their karma dictates" (Barstow 2019, p. 39). This line of reasoning is later echoed by many prominent Tibetan vegetarians in their admonitions to their students including the likes of Shabkar (2008), Chatral Rinpoche (2007, p. 80), and the 8th Karmapa Mikyö Dorje who has a treatise on vegetarianism titled "A Letter on the Unsuitability of Eating the Meat of Our Old Mothers" (Barstow 2017, p. 263). Ecofeminism and care ethics emphasize the relational nature of our ethical lives and recognize the role of emotion and intimacy as a driving factor in ethical decision-making. In a similar way, we find the reflection on all beings having been our mothers in a past life using emotion,

intimacy, and relationship to drive home the argument for not harming nonhuman animals. If one truly wants to repay the kindness of *all* their mothers (a common trope in Tibetan religious literature) then one must extend care to all sentient beings. Given how one simply cannot at once care for nonhuman animals and pay for others to have them killed, veganism becomes the ideal default position in a Buddhist ecological ethic of care.

Despite saying earlier that an ecological ethic of care is a novel development in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, this line of reasoning for abstaining from animal-based foods actually has serious precedent in Tibetan contexts. In the history of Tibetan vegetarianism there was a contentious debate on whether the eater of meat takes on the same negative karma of the hunter or butcher, and the famous vegetarian yogi Shabkar is unequivocal in his answer. In his treatise titled *The Nectar of Immortality* he writes:

Let us imagine that there is a homestead in the vicinity of a large monastery where the monks eat meat. The inhabitants of the homestead calculate that if they kill a sheep and sell its best meat in spring to the monastic community, they will make a profit on the sheep since they will keep its tripe and offal, head, legs, and hide for themselves. And the monks, knowing full well that the sheep has been slaughtered and its meat preserved, come and buy it. The following year, the family will kill more sheep and sell the meat. And if they make a good living out of it, when the next year arrives, there will be a hundred times more animals slaughtered, and the family will get rich. Thus by trying to enrich themselves through the killing of sheep, they become butchers. They will teach this trade to their children and their grandchildren and all those close to them. And even if they do not actively teach it to others, other people will see their wicked work. They in turn will become butchers doing acts of dreadful evil, and they will set in motion a great stream of negativity that will persist until the ending of samsara. Now all this has happened for one reason only: the monastic community and others eat meat. Who therefore behaves in a more consistently evil manner than they? (Shabkar 2008, pp. 100–1)

Thus, Shabkar recognizes the market forces behind the killing of nonhuman animals and the consequences of consuming animal products in this interdependent system. But he also frames his argument in positive terms centered around *karuṇā* or care. He writes:

The Buddha has defined as evil any action that directly or indirectly brings harm to beings. And since what he says is true, it is clear that the eating of meat most certainly involves more injury to beings than the consumption of any other food . . . I believe therefore that if one wishes to commit oneself to an ongoing habit of goodness, there is nothing better than the resolve to abstain from meat. Those few monks who do actually have compassion [Skt. *karuṇā*] should keep this in their hearts! (pp. 101–2)

Shabkar argues that if one has indeed developed *bodhicitta* and is operating with care as their central conative mode then abstaining from meat is the natural outcome. Shabkar's ethical writings thus quite clearly demonstrate the positive consequences of a Buddhist ethic of care in a more-than-human world.

Knowing what we do today about the dire ecological consequences of animal-foods, we might extend our reasoning for such abstention to include the effect of animal agriculture on humans and the broader environment. Toxic pig farms are set up near working-class people of color (Wing et al. 2000) who consequently face high incidence of respiratory disease (Borlée et al. 2017), and slaughterhouse workers suffer some of the highest rates of workplace injury (and death) and leave their jobs beset with life-long mental health issues such as perpetrator-induced stress disorder (Wasley and Heal 2018; Victor and Barnard 2016). Further, beyond simply being the potential number one source of industrial greenhouse gas emissions (Sejian et al. 2015; Rao 2021), animal agriculture uses the highest amount of land (Poore and Nemecek 2018) and water (Mekonnen and Hoekstra 2012) per calorie, stifling efforts to draw down carbon emissions through rewilding (Cromsigt et al.

2018; Vetesse and Pendergrass 2022) and preserve freshwater in the face of worsening droughts (Kim et al. 2020). For these reasons, a Buddhist ecological care ethic would most certainly place veganism as an ideal regardless of if the immediate focus of one's *bodhicitta* is on humans, nonhuman animals, the environment, or (most likely) an intersectional more-than-human world inclusive of all three. As Curtin writes, "the caring-for approach responds to particular contexts and histories. It recognizes that the reasons for moral vegetarianism may differ by locale, by gender, as well as by class" (Curtin 1991, p. 96). So too might the reason for ethical veganism differ from Buddhist to Buddhist, but it would nonetheless remain the ideal approach to eating in a Buddhist ecological ethic of care.

Despite this ideal being so evident, neither veganism nor vegetarianism were major historical practices in Tibetan Buddhism, where meat was a dietary staple on the Tibetan plateau. While exceptional figures such as Shabkar advocated for and embraced vegetarianism, Geoffrey Barstow (2017) has shown how Tibetan Buddhism held an ambivalent position on killing and consuming animals. The ideal of compassion was indeed a strong force in the direction of vegetarianism, but the material realities of the Tibetan plateau and the social discourses on health and masculinity provided an often stronger counter-force in the direction of carnism. Even today, Smyer Yü notes that the vegetables now available on the Tibetan plateau as a result of Chinese modernizing efforts offer little protein, making the feasibility of a nutritionally complete plant-based diet difficult (Smyer Yü 2023, p. 11). Thus, vegetarianism was regrettably rejected due to largely material considerations by most historical Buddhists in Tibet, and this accords with the contextualism of a care ethic. Curtin writes that:

As a "contextual moral vegetarian," I cannot refer to an absolute moral rule that prohibits meat eating under all circumstances. There may be some contexts in which another response is appropriate. Though I am committed to moral vegetarianism, I cannot say that I would never kill an animal for food. Would I not kill an animal to provide food for my son if he were starving? Would I not generally prefer the death of a bear to the death of a loved one? I am sure I would. The point of a contextualist ethic is that one need not treat all interests equally as if one had no relationship to any of the parties. (Curtin 1991, p. 98)

In my estimation, this position would fairly map on to a Buddhist ecological ethic of care. While abstention from animal products may be the ideal, there may be context-specific reasons for one's care for the more-than-human world not resulting in a strictly vegan diet.

Today, many Tibetan Buddhists live outside the Tibetan plateau either in diaspora or convert communities. As such, some of the material reasons (i.e., dearth of vegetables) and medicinal reasons no longer hinder the adoption of vegetarian or vegan diets. As a result, we now find major figures such as the Dalai Lama (Central Tibet Administration 2020) and the Karmapa (2007) encouraging their followers to abstain from animal products. However, there are other barriers that may prevent an individual from realizing the ideal of ethical veganism. Food deserts are rampant across large areas of working-class (and often racialized) communities, subsistence animal farming continues to be a necessary practice in intentionally underdeveloped locales around the globe, and hunting remains a necessary practice in geographies such as the Canadian arctic, where soaring food prices contribute to some of the highest levels of food insecurity in Canada. In these cases, the contextual nature of the ethic of care would highlight the *positionality* of the individual and their capacity to adopt something akin to a vegan diet. The present Karmapa is a major advocate for vegetarianism and highlighted the necessity of reducing meat consumption in a public address of 2007, but also recognized the difficulty for some to do so, stating: "Some people give up meat altogether, but some people cannot. But at least, one should reduce it" (p. 5).

Positionality of this kind is something endemic to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition which includes a reflection on the unique capacities of a "precious human life" at the beginning of most of its practices. Humans are uniquely poised to alleviate the *duḥkha* of oneself, other humans, and nonhuman animals, and, as I argue elsewhere, reflecting

on this unique capacity can compel altruistic behavior (Simonds 2021b). Beyond this, the reflection on the preciousness of a human life also involves a recognition of how certain humans are better poised to actualize Buddhist soteriological and ethical ends than others. In Patrul Rinpoche's *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, he lists the five advantages of a human life as: being born a human, being born in a central place where you can encounter the teachings, being born with all one's sense faculties, having a livelihood that allows one to practice *dharma*, and having confidence that the *dharma* teachings work (Patrul Rinpoche 2011, p. 22). Applied to the question of veganism, we might reframe these as being born as a human which can thrive on plants, being born in a central place where you have access to plant foods, not having any medical conditions which prevent the adoption of a vegan diet (i.e., someone who is allergic to soy, nuts, gluten, and stone fruit), having a livelihood where you have time and energy to cook your own meals, and having confidence that a vegan diet is indeed the most caring way to eat. Even if these adapted advantages are a bit of an interpretive stretch, the overarching principle of positionality still rings true. There are those who have a greater capacity to achieve the ideal of ethical veganism than others, and this means that the onus to adopt a vegan diet as a consequence of one's conative mode of care is contextual according to the capacities and advantages of a given person.

Interestingly, for those who could (or would) not adopt vegetarianism in Tibet, a range of practices were developed to mitigate negative consequences of eating animals. Barstow notes how some tantric practitioners claimed that eating a nonhuman animal creates a karmic link between the animal and the *dharma* such that "eating the meat of an animal . . . was actually a form of kindness, causing some temporary suffering but ultimately benefiting the animal" (Barstow 2017, p. 105). Other adepts such as Jigmé Lingpa dismissed this line of argument, stating "it's great if someone has given rise to the power of concentration, so that he is not tainted by obscurations and is able to benefit beings through a connection with their meat and blood. But I do not have this confidence" (Barstow 2017, p. 107). Some religious leaders also instructed practitioners to recite prayers and mantras so that, in the words of Karma Chakmé, "the animal will be liberated from the lower realms" (Barstow 2017, p. 178), though this too was critiqued as mere performance by figures such as Shabkar (Barstow 2017, p. 179). Others, however, were more material in their efforts to mitigate the negative consequences of eating meat. Some such as Nyamé Sherab Gyeltsen wrote that meat is only permissible in medical contexts but not as a staple of one's diet (Barstow 2017, p. 176), while others such as Shardza Tashi Gyeltsen advocated for a kind of proto-freeganism and argued that animals who have died a natural cause were permitted to be eaten, likening them to harvesting mountain herbs (Barstow 2017, p. 174). While animal liberationists may be left wanting by these half-measures, they nonetheless express a certain degree of care when it comes to the relationship between a Buddhist practitioner and eating animals. In situations where a vegan diet is unattainable, care can still inform one's relationship to food in a context-specific way.

Thus, I argue that a Buddhist ecological ethic of care would be contextually vegan but would recognize the positionality and material barriers to achieving this ideal for certain individuals. If one is operating with *bodhicitta* as one's primary conative mode and have recognized the interdependent nature of *duḥkha*, then abstaining from animal products is the ideal way to care for humans, nonhuman animals, and the environment in one's daily consumption. However, a Buddhist ecological ethic of care also understands the contextual nature of consumption and would recognize how positionality affects one's ability to choose between consumption and abstention. Once again, there are evident parallels between a constructive Tibetan Buddhist approach to this pressing ecological issue and the care ethic approach to vegetarianism outlined by Curtin. By thinking through the case of ethical veganism, we can see how a Buddhist ecological ethic of care might manifest in the lives of Buddhist practitioners and begin to see some of the nuances of this approach to the more-than-human world.

7. Conclusions

The unique priorities of Buddhist ethicists have led scholars such as Garfield to characterize it as an entirely novel kind of ethic, a moral phenomenology, and this characterization has developed into its own subfield with various interpretations and applications of moral phenomenology being published in recent years. However, despite the distinctive nature of Buddhist ethics, I have argued that it nonetheless holds many affinities with feminist care ethics in ecological contexts. When Buddhist moral phenomenology is applied to the more-than-human world, it presents as a Buddhist ecological ethic of care which recognizes the interconnected nature of *dulḥkha*, the necessity of approaching situations with care as one's primary conative mode, and an emphasis on relationships and positionality. As such, it can sit comfortably beside other ecofeminist care ethics and ideas such as entangled empathy which center relationality and active care in their approaches to the more-than-human world.

Of course, this characterization is constructive and presents an ideal sort of Buddhist ethics. As such, it may not reflect the realities of the lived Buddhist experience either historically or contemporarily. However, there is indeed some evidence that this ethical approach can be seen in the lives of Buddhist practitioners. As Elizabeth Allison (2023) has shown, the Bhutanese program for addressing both climate change and COVID-19 country was largely informed by Tibetan Buddhist religious principles and resulted in caring practices of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness in its response to both. After unpacking several examples of this practical care ethic, Allison concludes by stating "I have brought specificity to care ethics in a particular cultural context, demonstrating the resonance of Bhutanese Buddhist values and care ethics, and have laid the groundwork for developing a more widely applicable ecological care ethic" (Allison 2023, p. 6). This present article has further explored this theoretical resonance and thus further unpacks some of the workings behind this particular Himalayan Buddhist approach to ecological issues. Of course, this present article is not exhaustive, and I hope to see more work emerge on the connections between Buddhism and care ethics in the future. Doing so can help us make sense of how Tibetan Buddhist institutions and individual practitioners have approached contemporary issues concerning the more-than-human world and offer new possibilities for addressing human suffering, the exploitation of nonhuman animals, and our collective environmental emergency.

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Notes

¹ Tib. *sems can re re'i skyon kun sel/re re'ng yon tan mtha' klas pa/skyed 'dod byang chub sems mchog ste/rmad byung las kyang 'di rmad byung*. Sourced from: (khu nu bla ma bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan 2016, p. 7).

² Tib. *rten cing 'brel bar 'bying ba gang/de ni stong pa nyid du bshad/de ni brten nas gdags pa ste/de nyid dbu ma'I lam yin no/gang phyir rten 'breng ma yin pa'i/chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin pa/de phyir strong pa ma yin pa'i/chos 'ga' yod pa ma yin no*. Sourced from: (Nāgārjuna 2016, p. 159).

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