Introduction

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IT IS APPARENT to those who have paid attention to developments in both traditions, that the contemporary Anglophone Western philosophical tradition and the Buddhist philosophical tradition have a lot to say to one another. Their central concerns overlap sufficiently to determine a domain of shared interest; their histories and idioms are distinct enough that each has something to learn from the other about that domain. The contributors to this volume are committed to advancing the dialogue between these two traditions that is now well underway.

This volume is a successor to *Pointing at the Moon* (D'Amato, Garfield, and Tillemans 2009), which collects essays directed specifically at the interface of contemporary logic and analytic philosophy and Buddhist philosophy. That volume addresses a wide range of topics at this interface, deploying a common analytic methodology. The present volume, many of whose contributors also contributed to the previous volume, focuses more specifically on the Buddhist concept of emptiness—primarily, though not exclusively as it is deployed in the Madhyamaka tradition—exploring its implications for contemporary philosophy and the ways that contemporary philosophy can illuminate classical texts and problems in the Buddhist tradition.

Emptiness—roughly, the lack of essence, or substance, in things—is one of the central conceptions in Mahāyāna Buddhist metaphysics, and represents one of its distinctive contributions to world philosophy. Following Nāgārjuna (second to third centuries CE), Mādhyamikas argue that the

idea that things have intrinsic nature, or any kind of independent existence, or the idea that reality has a privileged foundation, is necessarily false. Instead, they argue, we can make sense of reality only as a complex of impermanent, interdependent, conventionally existent entities, states, and processes. While this may be an unfamiliar way to think about ontology in the West, it has proven, in the last few decades of Western-Buddhist interaction, to be fecund.

The analysis of emptiness and its implications, however, raises difficult and subtle questions. Many of these, of course, were addressed extensively in the classical Buddhist philosophical traditions of India, Tibet, and East Asia. However, contemporary logic and analytic philosophy can bring to the study of these issues a range of tools and techniques that were unavailable in the Asian Buddhist traditions. Just as these techniques have advanced debates in Western philosophy, they can advance debates in Buddhist philosophy. Using these analytical techniques, we can provide more precise accounts of the meaning of emptiness, and sometimes deeper explorations of the implications of this doctrine, hence contributing to the development of Buddhist philosophy in the contemporary world. Moreover, just as Buddhist analyses have advanced philosophical debates in Asia, they can advance such debates in the West.

The chapters collected in this volume address three principal and interrelated domains in which emptiness matters: the nature of the person, the nature of impersonal reality, and the nature of truth and cognate notions.

One of the best-known and most distinctive doctrines in Buddhist philosophy is the doctrine of *anātman*, or no-self. It is central to a Buddhist soteriology and metaphysics that a personal self—an independent, enduring subject of experience and owner of body and mind—is chimerical. On this view, a person is nothing more than an interconnected sequence of physical and psychological states and processes, with no core or owner. How to understand the details of this view and its implications is a matter of considerable debate in the Buddhist world, and a matter for debate between Buddhist and non-Buddhist interlocutors in India.

One early Buddhist school—the Pudgalavādins, or proponents of the reality of the person—argued that while at an ultimate level of analysis all that we find are sequences of evanescent impersonal phenomena, nonetheless, supervenient on those is a real entity—the *pudgala*, or person—which has clear identity conditions and properties of its own. This view was subject to trenchant critique as a relapse into orthodox *ātamavāda* and

eventually fell out of favor in Buddhist India. Amber Carpenter, in her contribution to this volume (chapter 1), argues that this rejection may have been premature, and that using contemporary metaphysical approaches to personhood, we can see that *pudgalavāda* has resources which the tradition may have underestimated. Persons may be empty, she argues, but are not, for all that, eliminable from our ontology.

While Carpenter uses Western analyses to clarify and rehabilitate an early Buddhist idea regarding a kind of reality for persons, Tom Tillemans uses a Buddhist analysis to intervene in contemporary Western discussions of eliminative materialism (chapter 2). He argues that modern eliminativism—appearances to the contrary notwithstanding—is inconsistent with the view of emptiness. This is because eliminative materialism privileges a physical level of description as having a convention-independent reality which denies a personal level of description. Tillemans argues, instead, that a Madhyamaka analysis demonstrates that these levels of analysis are interdependent and equally necessary. The emptiness of the person does not entail the nonemptiness of the physical. Just as Western metaphysics, in Carpenter's hands, reinvigorates a classical Buddhist position, so does Buddhist metaphysics, as Tillemans advances it, provide resources to resist an influential Western position.

In many ways, later Buddhist philosophy takes the earlier Buddhist position on the nature of persons, and generalizes it to all things. The selflessness of the person becomes the selflessness of phenomena: all things are empty of intrinsic nature; there is no ground of being. Ricki Bliss examines the implications of the doctrine of emptiness for the Madhyamaka analysis of the crucial notion of causation (chapter 3). A number of recent scholars in philosophy and Buddhist studies have argued for a close analogy between Hume's treatment of causality and a Buddhist understanding, trading on the emphasis by both Hume and Nāgārjuna on the emptiness and conventional nature of the causal relation. Bliss argues that this analogy is not as close as some have suggested, and that taking Buddhist theories of causation to be Humean may run afoul of the emptiness of the causal relata themselves. Her analysis evidences the utility of taking contemporary metaphysical approaches into Buddhist discussions and of bringing a Buddhist sensibility to contemporary metaphysics.

Emptiness is often glossed in Western discussions as *essencelessness*. This reading raises the question of the relation between the Indian concept denoted by *svabhāva* and Western metaphysical notions such as *essence, necessity*, and *ground*. Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (sixth century

CE) argue that all phenomena are empty of any intrinsic nature and that that is their intrinsic nature. Roy Perrett argues (chapter 4) that this apparent paradox can be resolved by disambiguating *svabhāva*. Drawing on contemporary understandings of necessity and grounding, he argues that, on one reading, *svabhāva* is the *metaphysical ground* of a thing; on another it is its *necessary quality*. Hence, he argues, the Mādhyamika can maintain nonparadoxically that all things necessarily lack a metaphysical ground.

Emptiness in China has a subtly different flavor from emptiness in India. When Buddhism was transmitted to China it was adopted into a culture already redolent with a metaphysical framework inherited from the Daoist and Confucian traditions. Chinese Buddhism is inflected by these ideas. The Huayan tradition universalizes the idea of interdependence. According to philosophers in this tradition, it is not merely that everything depends upon *some* other things, but that every thing depends upon *all* other things, and that each phenomenon interpenetrates every other phenomenon. This is represented in Huayan literature by the metaphor of the net of Indra, an infinite network of perfectly reflective jewels, each of which reflects the entire network. Graham Priest provides an interpretation of this doctrine in terms of modern graph theory (chapter 5), demonstrating the utility of contemporary logical-mathematical tools for making precise classical Buddhist doctrines, and for defusing suspicions of mystical incoherence.

Nicholaos Jones deploys the Huayan conception of interdependence, referred to in that tradition as *round fusion*, against the mereologically reductionist interpretation of emptiness developed by some recent analytic commentators on Buddhist metaphysics such as Mark Siderits. His essay (chapter 6) is a nice example of how competing analytic interpretations of Buddhist doctrine find precise articulation using the tools of analytic Western metaphysics.

It is one thing to talk about reality—whether personal or impersonal—but quite another to talk about talking about reality. And philosophy demands the latter as well. Buddhist philosophers as well as Western philosophers hence take logic, the philosophy of language, and epistemology as central areas of concern. Indeed, these are areas in which fruitful dialogue is possible as is shown by the next contributions.

Emptiness plays a key role in the thinking of a number of members of the Kyoto School. Nishitani, in particular, took it that a certain understanding of logic was a key element in his views on emptiness. The logic was

never developed in a formal way, however. Drawing further on ideas of Jízāng, one of the most important thinkers in the Chinese San-lun school of Buddhism, Yasuo Deguchi shows how one may do this, applying techniques of contemporary paraconsistent logic (chapter 7), thus showing how contemporary developments in Western logic can be applied with illumination to more traditional Buddhist thought.

The logic deployed by Deguchi is a three-valued logic. It can be seen as a special case of a four-valued logic which, arguably, characterizes the traditional form of argumentation deployed in Buddhist thought, for example, by Nāgārjuna in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. This is the *catuṣkoṭi*, according to which, a sentence may be true, false, both, or neither. The four-valued structure provides the basis of the most fundamental relevant logic, called First Degree Entailment. Aaron Cotnoir (chapter 8) asks whether this logic can in fact provide an adequate analysis of Nāgārjuna's arguments and positions, and argues that it does not. He suggests a different way of proceeding, involving the distinction between conventional and ultimate truth (reflected in a distinction between two forms of the *catuṣkoṭi*), showing how reflection on Madhyamaka metaphysics can inform the philosophy of logic.

Conventional truth describes things as delivered by ordinary experience; ultimate truth captures the way that things are independent of our interests, practices, and cognitive faculties. It is notoriously difficult to provide an adequate analysis of either conventional or ultimate truth, however. Indeed, Buddhist philosophers are at odds with one another on these matters. Laura Guerrero addresses the problem of making sense of conventional truth—in particular, in the context of the great Buddhist epistemologist Dharmakīrti's (seventh century CE) philosophy (chapter 9). She argues that the only way to make sense of his view is to take a pragmatist reading of a deflationist account of truth. We see here the virtues of bringing the most recent work in Western semantics and the philosophy of logic to bear on the philological project of understanding classical Indian Buddhist literature, and the virtue of taking Indian Buddhist epistemology seriously in a Western philosophical context.

One might worry that any account of conventional truth that really represents it as *conventional* lapses into relativism. That is, if what we know and take to be true is unavoidably enmeshed with our interests and our ordinary epistemic practices, there seems to be no real sense in which knowledge can count as a norm that governs rational inquiry. Candrakīrti addresses the nature of conventional truth and defends its normative

status more directly than any other Indian Mādhyamika. Elena Walsh (chapter 10), drawing on recent work on epistemic norms, considers the plausible charge that even his account is, in the end, a mere relativism. She argues that it is not. Candrakīrti's account of epistemic warrant, she argues, saves his account from arbitrariness and provides a coherent understanding of conventional truth as *true*. This discussion shows how a consideration of epistemological problems such as relativism can benefit from drawing on both Western and Buddhist literature.

Collectively, these chapters demonstrate three things. First, they show the value of taking seriously a philosophical idea—in this case, that of emptiness—deriving from one tradition, to enrich the philosophical reflections of another. Second, these essays demonstrate the importance of bringing different traditions and their texts together for mutual enlightenment. Third, they show that the resulting dialogue benefits both partners. Buddhist philosophical problems and insights come into sharper focus through the lens of contemporary Western analytic techniques; Western philosophy acquires from Buddhist philosophy new problems, new directions of inquiry, and new conceptual resources for understanding its own problematic. Of course, how best to pursue this philosophical interaction is itself an interesting philosophical question—ideally, itself to be negotiated in that very interaction. The methodological issues raised by this project are explored by Jay Garfield in his essay (chapter 11), with which we conclude the volume.

Each of these chapters advances an important debate, and sheds light on a significant philosophical problem; each of these debates and problems is of interest to Western and to Buddhist philosophy. We offer them, however, not only to further current discussions, but principally in the hope that they will inspire and encourage other philosophers, Western and Buddhist, to join us in this exciting cross-cultural intellectual endeavor.

The Moon Points Back