Buddhist No-Self Reductionism, Moral Address, and the Metaphysics of Moral Practice: Can Buddhists be Motivated by Second-Personal Moral Reasons?

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I argue that, on a reductionist reading of Buddhist no-self ontology, Buddhists could not have sincere ethical intentions toward persons. And if Buddhists cannot have sincere intentions toward persons, they cannot have second-personal moral reasons for acting. From this I conclude that Buddhists fail to qualify as genuine members of the moral community if, as some contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophers argue, such membership depends on an individual agent's having the capacity to be motivated by second-personal moral reasons.

1. ANGLOPHONE BUDDHIST STUDIES AND ANALYTIC METAPHYSICS

POST-MILLENNIAL SCHOLARSHIP in Buddhist studies reflects increasing interest from Anglophone philosophers working within the analytic tradition.[2] Within this emerging body of work the aim has not merely been to bring the con-

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[1]The question in the title is directed only to those incarnations of Buddhism—notably Theravadan or Abhidharmic traditions—that contain reductionist no-self ontologies. See Jonardon Ganeri on this point: "Different Buddhist schools, not to mention different thinkers within particular schools, have given widely varying philosophical construals of the Buddha's claim about 'no-self,' and while some thinkers and some schools might favor a reductionist reading of the claim, others, I would argue, do not." "An Irrealist Theory of Self," *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2004): 61–62.

[2]See the anthologized works of The Cowherds (*Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* [Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 2011]; *Moonpaths: Ethics and Emptiness* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015]), Mario D'Amato, Jay L. Garfield, and Tom J. F. Tillemans, eds. (*Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009]); and Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, eds., (*Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, 1st ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011]).

ceptual toolkit of analytic philosophers to bear on topics traditionally of interest to Buddhist philosophers but also to enlist the theories analytic philosophers have developed on core topics within epistemology and metaphysics as frameworks within which to interpret the work of major Buddhist philosophers. Two recent notable examples of this interpretative enterprise is seen in the work of Siderits[3] and Hayashi.[4] These Anglophone commentators utilize theories from analytic metaphysics as frameworks for interpreting the thought of a major Buddhist philosopher, in their case that of Vasubandhu, one of the greatest Fifth century system-builders from the Indian subcontinent.[5]

Within Vasubandhu's system of thought one finds a treatment of the traditional Buddhist doctrine of the Two Truths reflected in his distinction between *conventional* and *ultimate* reality. It is within their accounts of Vasubandhu's conventional/reality distinction that Siderits and Hayashi enlist particular theories from analytic metaphysics. More precisely, it is the conventional/reality distinction as it bears on Vasubandhu's *ontology of the self (or persons)* that is of interest to these commentators. Siderits explicates his account of the self within the framework of reductionism, whilst Hayashi explicates his alternative account in terms of (weak) emergentism.

However, within Vasubandhu's thought, the issue over the nature and ontological status of the self is a derivative ontological issue that is framed by the larger issue over how to conceptualize Vasubandhu's distinction between conventional and ultimate reality. Any account of Vasubandhu's ontology of the self will therefore reflect a correlative treatment of his general distinction between conventional and ultimate reality. Hence articulating an account of Vasubandhu's ontology of the self requires tandem development of a larger theoretical framework in which the *metaphysical relation* between conventional and ultimate reality is to be conceptually explicated. Under Siderits's account, the conventional/ultimate reality relation is conceptualized as a *reduction relation*. Conventionally real things such as persons are (non-retentively or eliminatively) reduced to their reducers—the *skandhas* or *dharmas*—such that only these latter items ultimately exist. Under Hayashi's non-re-

[3]Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, 2nd ed. (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015).

[4]Itsuki Hayashi, "Persons As Weakly Emergent: An Alternative Reading of Vasubandhu's Ontology of Persons." *Philosophy East and West* 66, no. 4 (2016): 1218–1230.

[5]Buddhist philosophy has a rich and voluminous history of exegesis and so it is not surprising that it has many doctrinal incarnations. In light of this fact, I will frequently use the term "Buddhism[N]" to refer primarily (but non-rigidly) to a particular proponent of Buddhist philosophy so as to avoid an exegetically naïve and indiscriminate reference to the monolithic referent *Buddhism*. The superscript "N" is therefore to be regarded as a place-holder for the name of the particular tradition or individual philosopher within Buddhism. So, the term "Buddhism[VASU]" should be understood to pick out an individual philosopher—Vasubandhu—who is generally regarded as a reputable *representative* of Abhidharmic Buddhist philosophy.

Note that the aim of this paper is primarily *conceptual*, not interpretative. I assume that Vasubandhu's account of the Buddhist no-self doctrine is reductionist and therefore do not provide an analysis of the relevant Vasubanduan texts to establish this claim.

Note further that that the argument made in this paper may *mutatis mutandis* to any similarly reductive reading of Buddhist no-self ontology.

ductionist account, however, the conventional/ultimate reality relation is viewed as a (weak) *emergence relation*. Thus persons are, under his account, "weakly emergent."[6]

In both cases, note that it is the nature of the conventional/ultimate reality relation that largely determines the nature and ontological status of persons. And in this respect, the concerns of Hayashi's paper mirrors contemporary issues not solely in analytic metaphysics but also in analytic *meta-metaphysics*, namely, the debate over which general type of *ontological structure*—flat, layered, or some other type—constitutes the most theoretically promising philosophical explanatory framework for doing metaphysics.[7] Seen in this light, the disagreement between Siderits and Hayashi over how best to conceptualize Vasubandhu's conventional/ultimate reality distinction is tantamount to a disagreement about ontological structure. For, under Siderits's reductionist account Vasubandhu's ultimate ontology is *flat*, while under Hayashi's emergentist account it would appear to be *layered*.[8]

According to Hayashi, it is our normative moral practices that urge us to adopt an ontology of persons. Engagement in our moral practices involves use of (what he and Siderits refer to as) "the person convention." What is the person convention? Suffice it to say, that that person convention functions as an umbrella term comprising all thought and talk about persons.[9] Hayashi claims (*pace* Siderits) that the *use* of the person convention is *indispensable* or *necessary*.[10] This claim is based on a largely implicit and fairly underdeveloped argument that proceeds on the premise that the person convention's use is a necessary presupposition of our normative moral practices; it is only through the *use* of the person convention that we can conceptualize ourselves and others as *ethical agents*. So, on the implicit assumption that only persons can be ethical agents, Hayashi appears to argue from the pragmatic necessity of the person convention to the need for positing an ontology of persons as an *ancillary metaphysics of moral practice*.

[6]Hayashi, "Persons As Weakly Emergent," 1220.

[7]See Jonathan Shafer, "On What Grounds What," in *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology,* edited by David Chalmers, David Manley and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[8]I regard the "flat" versus "layered" terminology as a useful and vivid shorthand for conceptualizing the conflict between Siderits and Hayashi in regards to their accounts of Vasubandhu's distinction between conventional and ultimate reality and its correlative account of the self.

[9]Hayashi does not provide any detailed semantic analysis of "the person convention." In what follows, I will use "the person convention" as a general label for truth-evaluable person-regarding discourse within a representational semantics. What this means is that "the person convention" and/or its subsidiary concepts (analysanda) enjoy *intentionality*—a.k.a., "realist import" or "semantic aboutness" or "representational purport." Viewed intensionally, the person convention consists in being a set of person-regarding *concepts*. Viewed as such, the person convention functions as a *vehicle of content* whose purpose is the *cognitive representation* of entities *as persons* (or as having properties characteristic of persons). In short, the person convention is the vehicle of content that makes meaningful person-regarding discourse possible. See Ganeri ("An Irrealist Theory of Self," 62): "The language of self—use of personal pronouns, proper names, and so forth—is, apparently, representational; that is to say, it appears to refer to and to make claims about entities of a certain kind, claims that are assessable as true or false, and whose truth or falsity is determined by properties of the entities so referred to."

[10]Both Siderits and Hayashi agree that the person convention has a certain practical utility for ethical agents. They disagree, however, on whether the person convention is indispensable.

In particular, The Presupposition Argument under my reconstruction aims to show that because the person convention conceptually requires a *two-valued semantics of wholes*, its *use* presupposes belief in a layered (emergentist), rather than a flat, ontology. Thus, in Hayashi's hands the Presupposition Argument is used to overturn Siderits's reductionist reading of Vasubandhu's conventional/ultimate reality distinction. However this argument may be used as a *tool* to address a related, but somewhat different, issue. Instead of using the Presupposition Argument, as Hayashi does, to force Siderits to abandon his reductionist account, I use this argument to determine whether Siderits's reductionism has the conceptual resources needed to support his account of the person convention's proposed ethical usefulness.

In particular, I argue that, if the ethical use of the person convention commits the agent semantically to a certain kind of *referential ontology*—a referential ontology of *integrated wholes*—and if, moreover, this referential ontology requires an emergentist, rather than a reductionist, framework, then Siderits's account of the person convention's ethical utility is threatened with *pragmatic incoherence* as long as it remains embedded within his reductionism. For, within a reductionist framework, the Buddhist agent, *qua* no-selfer, would not, I argue, have the referential ontology that [the] use of the person convention semantically requires of her, and so she would not be capable of forming (or having) intentions of the type that would make the person convention ethically useful to her in the first place—namely, as a psychological device for adopting a sincere ethical intention toward persons. If this is right, a further question arises as to whether Buddhists could be agents having second-personal moral reasons for acting.

In this paper, I argue that it is implausible, under Siderits's reductionism, to hold that the Buddhist[VASU] could have sincere ethical intentions toward persons. From this I conclude that it seems likewise implausible that the Buddhist could qualify as genuine members of a moral community if, as some contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophers insist, such membership depends on an agent's having and responding to second-personal moral reasons.

2. PERSONS, REDUCTIONISM, AND THE METAPHYSICS OF MORAL PRACTICE

One significant and current trend in contemporary analytic metaphysics, which reflects the increasing theoretical dissatisfaction with reductionism, is the investigation of the explanatory merits of "V-frameworks."[11] A V-framework is a theoretical framework that allows for *vertical relations* between entities (or types of entities) within a *layered ontological structure* such that higher-level phenomena can be explained by reference to lower-level phenomena. Thus, within a V-framework we can usefully distinguish between *macro*-ontologies and *micro*-ontologies and link these within the framework of compositional explanation. Within a framework of this kind, a macro-ontology would refer to (types of) higher-level entities that are

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[11]See Kenneth Aizawa, and Carl Gillett, *Scientific Composition and Metaphysical Ground* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–2.

located within a hierarchical structure that are *ontologically supported* by lower-level items. Water, for instance, is an observable natural kind (odorless, colorless liquid) that is explainable by its lower-level microstructure (H_2O).

Issues concerning the *nature* of these vertical relations (or verticality) is currently being debated.[12] And while there are a number of competing theories under discussion, the theory of verticality that best matches Hayashi's account is explicated in *grounding-theoretic* terms, according to which higher-level phenomena are *metaphysically grounded* in lower-level phenomena. Yet verticality, under any theoretical account of its nature, requires "object phenomena involving vertical relations."[13] That there should be object phenomena involving verticality (e.g., water) does not only reflect a defining structural feature of vertical relations (the need for relata). Rather, the (putative) existence of such object phenomena is also the theoretical *justification* for the adoption and use of a V-framework.

In light of Buddhist[VASU] no-selfism, which may be seen to reflect a flat ontology, we may genuinely ask: What, if anything, within the Vasubandhu's ontology could be identified as an *object phenomenon involving vertical relations*? Two things—call them "OPIVRs" (oh-pee-verz)—initially, present themselves: First, as noted above, there is the evident fact that Hayashi employs a mereological framework in order to explicate Vasubandhu's distinction between conventional and ultimate reality:

> Most generally, the relation is mereological: conventional reality is a kind of whole, which is constituted by the parts that are ultimately real.[14]

Note that conventional reality is here conceptualized as "a kind of whole." Ontologically, composite entities—wholes—depend on a set of parts that stand in composition relations and composition relations are a kind of vertical relation. Thus, in explicating the conventional/ultimate reality relation in terms of mereological (part/whole) relations, Hayashi locates Vasubandhu's metaphysics within a V-framework.

A second OPIVR may be seen in what Hayashi refers to as the standard Buddhist analysis of the self:

> . . . [I]n the standard Buddhist analysis of the person, it is said that the person can be broken down (presumably) mentally into five psychophysical aggregates (*skandhas*): form, perception, feeling, volition, and consciousness. And these aggregates are in turn breakable into the ultimate elements of existence called *dharmas*. With regard to persons, then, we would judge persons to be conventionally real, while the *dharmas* are ultimately real, provided the latter do not allow further analysis.[15]

Here the type of whole under consideration is not the totality of conventional reality but rather only a part of it. It is *the self*, or the *person*, that is to be viewed as a type of whole. Under the analysis above, persons can be decomposed into an

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[12]Ibid., 6–35.
[13]Ibid., 2.
[14]Hayashi, "Persons As Weakly Emergent."
[15]Ibid., 1219.

aggregate of sub-personal parts (skandhas-aggregates), none of which are persons. There a number of points to make about these two citations. First, neither of these two citations, as explicitly stated, *entails* anti-realism about *wholes* either in general or in particular. For a reductionist theoretical framework need not be anti-realist about the phenomena to be reduced. That being the case, both conventional reality in general and the self, or persons, in particular could be thought to exist within a reductionist framework of some kind.

Vasubandhu's conventional/ultimate reality distinction is to be explicated in mereological terms. A mereological framework is, however, not inherently anti-realist about wholes. Yet, incautious reductionism *is* inherently anti-realist about the reduced. So, when Vasubandhu's conventional/ultimate reality relation, which has been explicated in mereological terms, is *placed within* the framework of incautious reductionism, the aim cannot be, in this reductionist context, just to make all values for the left and right argument-places in the relation "_ reduces to _" correspond to *wholes* and their respective *parts*. Rather, the aim is clearly to subject all wholes to thorough-going non-retentive reduction. It follows that Vasubandhu is an anti-realist about composite entities in general and the self, or persons, in particular (see Figure 1).
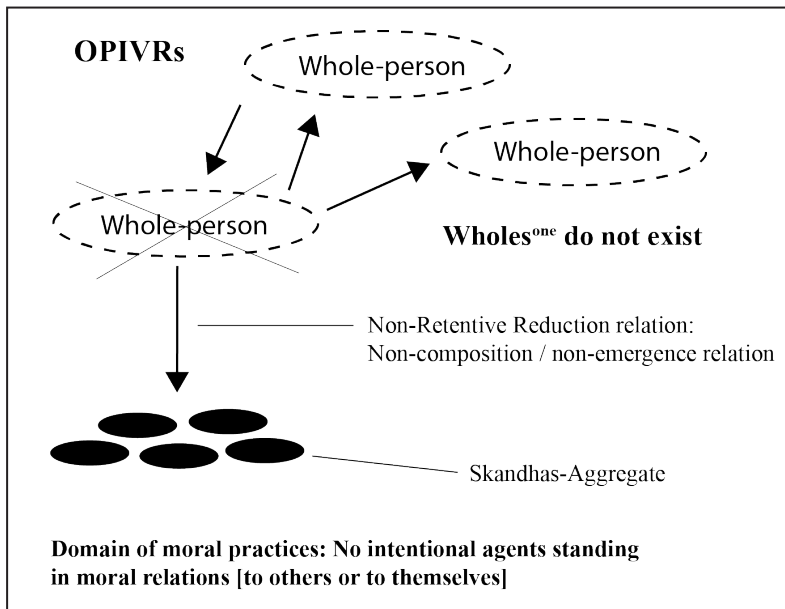

Figure 1.

So, the question that arises now is this: W*hy* might anyone want to attribute Vasubandhu, a Buddhist no-selfer, with an ontology of persons (as weak emergents)? Hayashi explains why in the following passage:

[1] So far I have been trying to point out that the person convention may be a useful fiction insofar as global welfare is better promoted with it than without it, but for precisely that reason it is not straitforwardly reducible; by adopting the convention we are making our moral life not easier but possible. [2] The result of this observation is that provided the person is supposed to be mereologically reducible to *dharmas*, the whole turns out to be *more* than the mere combination of the parts. But this means that there is at least one sense in which the person is not reducible to *dharmas*. [3] This is bad. If we want to save the person convention, reductionism will not quite capture the relationship between conventions and their underlying realities. [4] But we do not want to accept non-reductionism either, because that is tantamount to conceding that persons exist separately from *dharmas*, thus destroying the Buddhist metaphysical thesis. [5] This is why I want to suggest weak emergentism, which is a middle position between reductionism and non-reductionism.[16]

What Hayashi seems to want us to recognize in [1]–[3] is the theoretical need for a V-framework. In [1], Hayashi references our "moral life" and claims that it is made possible by the person convention and, second, links the ontological support or grounding of our moral life to the *irreducibility* of the person convention (or to persons). Relatedly, in [3] he suggests that the *relation* between the person convention (and, by extension, conventional reality as a whole) and its "underlying realities" is "not quite captured" within a reductionist framework. Jointly, [1] and [3] suggest that our moral life stands in need of some kind of *metaphysical underpinning*, and that it is not to be found within a (non-retentive) reductionist framework. In [2], Hayashi seems to zero in on a new and yet-to-be-acknowledged *conception of a whole* that is at once an *obstacle* to the person convention's reducibility (thus thwarting Siderits's reductionism) and a *source of grounding* for our moral life. Specifically, by pointing out the inadequacy of viewing persons as "reducible to *dharmas*" and instead recognizing the need to view persons as a whole that "turns out to be more than the mere combination of the parts," Hayashi appears to be acknowledging the phenomenon of *whole priority* and consequently the need for (what I call) a two-valued semantics of wholes.[17]

A two-valued semantics of the term "whole" operates within a conceptual framework in which a whole is simultaneously a *one* and a *many*, a *unity* and a *plurality*. Take, for instance, a frog.[18] A frog is simultaneously a one—i.e., a singular thing, an individual frog—and a many—i.e., a vast plurality of (frog-) parts. Now we might ask, *in virtue of which* semantic aspect—that of a whole$^{\text{one}}$ or of a whole$^{\text{many}}$—is a frog able to do the sorts of things characteristic of frogs? The answer is that both

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[16]Hayashi, "Persons As Weakly Emergent," 1224–1225: underscoring added.

[17]Here I am merely following the logico-linguistic practice of referring to "meanings" as *semantic values*. Thus, when I refer to a two-valued semantics of wholes, I am not referring to two truth-values (bivalence) but rather to two distinct intensions or conceptual contents.

[18]This example was inspired by the African "glass frog," which is so-named because of the transparency of its skin. Due to that epithelial transparency, one (mistakenly) imagines the frog, considered as an individual (a whole$^{\text{one}}$), to be nothing but a mere invisible encasement for a visible aggregation of various (unfrog-like) entities.

semantic values are needed but for different reasons. When viewed under the concept of a whole$^{\text{many}}$, the frog is represented as a multitude of (very unfroglike) parts. Yet none of these frog-constituting parts, individually or as an aggregate, is capable of engaging in activities characteristic of (whole-) frogs: swimming, leaping, croaking, swallowing flies, etc. in its level-appropriate physical environment. So, whilst the vast plurality of unfroglike parts provide the physical substrate for the whole-frog's characteristic forms of causal interaction, the causal powers that are thereby made possible do not belong to these same lower-level entities; rather they belong to and are exercised by *something else*—namely, the *frog*, considered as a whole$^{\text{one}}$.

Yet a frog can be considered an *agent* of such intentional activity (swimming, leaping, etc.) only on condition of its being a certain kind of *individual*. But in a mereologically-oriented framework such as Vasubandhu's, a frog's *individuality* would have to be metaphysically grounded in its material composition, which re-introduces a plurality of parts (a whole$^{\text{many}}$). So, how is a singular individual such as a frog *possible* in a mereological framework, where every existent is a composite entity and therefore a whole$^{\text{many}}$?

From the long Hayashi citation quoted above, we may plausibly suggest the following. In order to regard a frog as an intentional agent—as the thing that acts—it must be conceptualized as an *individual.* And in order to regard a frog as an individual, it must be conceptualized as *a whole*$^{\text{one}}$. Yet every whole$^{\text{one}}$ is conjoined with a whole$^{\text{many}}$; every whole has some set of parts. Some wholes (e.g., heaps) are such that they are ontologically *posterior* to the existence of their parts (and their relations); other wholes (e.g., frogs) are such that their parts exist for the sake of composing some single thing—namely the frog. The former are cases of *part priority*, whilst the latter are cases of *whole priority*. The frog *qua* whole$^{\text{one}}$ is *ontologically prior* to its parts; it is that *for the sake of which* a multitude of (very unfroglike) parts exist and have been materially combined in a particular (frog-like) sort of way. That a plurality of parts (and their relations) should exist for the sake of composing a whole$^{\text{one}}$—i.e., the individual frog—implies, or intuitively suggests, that the frog is a *metaphysically distinct entity in its own right*, one that exists "over and above" the multitude of parts that compose it. And since composition relations are a type of *vertical* relation, it is only through the adoption of a V-framework that we can conceptualize a frog as an instance of whole priority, thus as a whole$^{\text{one}}$, thus as an individual agent.[19]

Intuitively, what has just been argued in regards to one kind of natural organism (frogs) can, *mutatis mutandis*, be argued more generally in regards to all natural organisms, including (human) persons. Yet persons are not the sole OPIVR of explanatory interest here. For it is the use of the person convention—i.e., *our thought and talk about persons* as reflected in our normative moral practices—that also motivates Hayashi's interest in, and use of, a V-framework. The adequate metaphysical

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[19]Aizawa and Gillett, *Scientific Composition,* 20: "A V-framework may be offered of the *concept(s)* of verticality used in some area—whether in a type of explanation, or in a certain kind of theory or discourse, and so on. This might concern the concepts used in the successful explanations of the sciences, or everyday discourse, or any theory positing verticality."

grounding of our normative moral practices cannot be achieved without suitable participants, one's capable of a distinctive type of intentional interaction. A sub-personal skandhas-aggregate—i.e., what the Buddhist[VASU] no-selfer (under Siderits's account) would eliminatively reduce persons *to*—is *not* a suitable participant of a normative moral practice. Rather it is a (lower-level) whole[many], and consequently is no more capable of the distinctive type of social interaction required of a moral agent than is an aggregate of (very unfroglike) parts capable of the distinctive type of environmental interaction characteristic of an individual frog.

3. THE PRESUPPOSITION ARGUMENT

Hayashi's insight, under my reconstruction, is that the person convention can be applied only on condition of a *prior application* of a two-valued semantics of a whole. Users of the person convention would therefore incur a mandatory commitment to a layered ontology (and thus to V-framework) only if the users' use of the person convention required its users to make an *existence-claim* about persons. Within the argument, (1) is the most likely source of this implicit existence-claim. Assuming so, what is it about the *use* of the person convention that could require of its users a commitment to a person-regarding proposition with existential import?

Let us now state Hayashi's argument, under my reconstruction, in standard form as follows:

The Presupposition Argument

1) When participants in a normative moral practice use the person convention, they must make cognitive-semantic reference to themselves and others *under* the conceptual content *person*.

2) *If* x is a (physical human) person, then x is a composite entity—a whole[one + many].

3) If x is a whole[one + many], then the following logical conjunction is true of x: (a) x is a whole[one] AND (b) x is a whole[many].

4) If (3a), then x is an *object phenomenon involving vertical relations* (an OPIVR).

5) All object phenomena involving vertical relations require a V-framework to be adequately explained, explicated, and/or metaphysically grounded.

6) So, if wholes[one] are object phenomena involving vertical relations, then when users cognitively refer to themselves and others under the conceptual content provided by the person convention, they may do so only on condition of a prior commitment to a V-framework.

Notice that (2) is stated as a conditional. The Presupposition Argument can succeed in putting Siderits's reductionist account into metaphysical crisis only if there is an *additional existential claim*, stated in the indicative, *that x is a person*. In other words, users of the person convention would incur a mandatory commitment to a layered ontology (and thus to V-framework) only if the users' use of the person convention required its users to make an *existence-claim* about persons. Within the argument, (1) is the most likely source of this implicit existence-claim. Assuming so, what is it about the *use* of the person convention that could require of its users a commitment to a person-regarding proposition with existential import?

Some mental reference to entities *under the concept* PERSON is *constitutive of* the person convention's *use*. Engagement in moral practices requires users to mentally refer to others and to themselves under the concept PERSON (and its cognate notions). Such use of the person convention determines or makes possible a particular *kind* of moral reason that can be had *only through the use of the person convention*. And insofar as acting intentionally consists in acting for a reason, the person convention can thus make possible a particular kind of ethical *intention*—to wit, a *person-regarding* ethical intention. The particular kind of moral reason made possible only through the use of the person convention would reflect, it seems, the recognition of a particular kind of putative moral fact, one made conceptually available only through the use of this particular convention. Such appears to be the basis of the person convention's proposed usefulness to ethical agents. It is *through* the use of the person convention that agents can come to have person-regarding moral reasons and consequently can come to have ethical intentions *toward* persons. Having a moral reason of the particular kind that the person convention makes possible would seem thus to involve a genuine *acknowledgment* of the particular kind of moral reason that the use of this convention makes available to its users.

4. BELIEF IN PERSONS, SEMANTIC CORRECTNESS, AND THE TRUTH-NORM

How could use of the person convention make possible the having of a particular kind of moral reason (and thus ethical intention) by putting agents in a position to acknowledge a particular kind of moral fact, one that is made available through the use of this convention? The answer seems to be that it could do so *if* the use of the person convention were seen to consist in its functioning in the minds of its users as [something like a *belief*. For reasons, intentions, and desires all depend on beliefs.[20] Thus, in order for the agent to sincerely take herself to have a moral reason that regards persons (or some individual person) as the motivating ground of

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[20]Here I am assuming the thesis of *belief-dependence*. Within the philosophy of action, the thesis that the formation or possession of desires and intentions depends on the agent's having certain prior beliefs is asserted by the *causal theory of action* (or CTA). Intentional action is, in this action-theoretic context, causally explained by reference to two non-reducible types of mental states—a belief and a desire/intention. It would not be an exaggeration to say that CTA represents the dominant theory within contemporary analytic philosophy of action.

or reason for her moral action, she would, it seems, be required to have a genuine *belief* in persons.

There is a view about the nature of belief that many philosophers share. It is that belief *aims at the truth*. *Taking p to be the case* is essentially constitutive of a belief-state. Thus a truth-norm determines when it is *correct* for the agent to believe p: the agent's belief in p is correct iff her belief in p is true.

Let us now make two assumptions. Assume (plausibly enough) that the objects of beliefs are *propositions* and, secondly, the thesis of semantic compositional-ism—i.e., that a proposition's *meaning* is determined by the semantic values of its sub-sentential constituents (linguistic terms and/or their associated concepts). Given these assumptions, it follows that the concept *person* would play a necessary role in determining the *specific* (more fine-grained) *correctness conditions* for [a] *belief in persons.*

CC**person**: the agent's belief in persons is *correct* iff persons (really) exist.

The concept of a person determines *what* the agent has to believe *exists* if her belief in persons is to be genuine. This is because for an agent to genuinely believe p, she must really believe p is true. If p is false, and she goes on believing, then her belief is incorrect. But it may still be genuine. Genuineness in a subjective property of the agent's mode of belief, or *believing*, in p and does not entail p's actual truth. To be genuine, all that is required of a belief (with realist import) is that the believer *take* it to be true; and to take a belief to be true is to take there to be *some fact in the world*—call it a truth-maker—that makes it so. So the genuineness of the agent's belief would seem to entail minimally some operative referential apparatus in virtue of which she is able to believe in an *objective (mind-independent) referential ontol-ogy*. Note, further, that the conditions of genuine belief (or the genuineness of one's belief) do not operate *independently* of semantic correctness conditions. So, if to genuinely believe in persons is to hold that one's belief is actually true, and what it is for a belief to *be true* is for there to be some *existence fact* in virtue of which it is so, then one's belief in persons can be genuine iff one believes in this existence fact.

Moreover, in terms of doxastic content, *what it is* that the agent is required to believe this existence fact to *be*, or to consist in, will be semantically determined by the concept of a person. For to hold that to believe in persons is *just* to believe in the existence of some convenient "conceptual fiction" such as *the person convention,* or in a *person concept*, or in a ubiquitous *illusion* of persons, is to commit a kind of *category-mistake*. To hold a belief in these entities is not to hold a belief in (the existence of) *persons*. In other words, if an agent thinks that *all* that would need to exist for her belief in persons to be true are these types of items, none of which are persons, then she would not qualify as having a genuine belief in persons.

Now in order for the person convention's usefulness to consist, as Siderits claims, in its ethical utility, such use-properties would seem to require grounding in intentional agency; and because (human) intentional agents are composite en-tities—wholes[one]—it would appear that such use-properties require reference to a

layered, not flat, ontology. To see how, observe that the person convention purchases its usefulness by means of its *representationality*;[21] that is, its usefulness *consists in* enabling the Buddhist agent to be able to *meaningfully apply* "person" to an intentional object or object-domain determined by the term's semantic content. The user's application of the person convention therefore presumes some general referential apparatus is operative. More narrowly, all meaningful applications of the person convention involve a *conceptualization* of an object under the concept of a person. And because, as we have seen (in 3.0), the conceptualization of a person entails the *prior application* of the concept of a whole[one] (and that of whole priority), the agent's use of the person convention requires a prior application of the concept of a whole[one] (and thus a V-framework). Moreover, because *the objects in reference to which* the agent must apply the concept of a whole are ones determined by the conditions under which her belief in persons would be genuine, it follows that the object-domain to which she *must* apply the concept of a whole[one] is one that she regards as an objective (mind-independent) domain of reality. It follows, then, that the condition under which the person convention may be meaningfully used by the Buddhist[VASU] agent is, under Siderits' account, one that demands the *abandonment* of a flat reductionist ontology in favor of a layered one (like emergentism).

5. THE PROBLEM OF RENUNCIATIVE SECOND-ORDER DOXASTIC ATTITUDES

Buddhist[VASU] no-self doctrine, whatever its philosophical merits, is not a belief people have pre-philosophically. It is a sophisticated doctrine about the nature of the self at which one may arrive through philosophical ratiocination. For someone to sincerely convert to Buddhism, they must at some stage in the process of conversion come to psychologically internalize Buddhist[VASU] no-selfism and consequently come to hold a *renunciative second-order doxastic attitude* toward their former (commonsense) belief in persons. The enlightened Buddhist ethical agent *knows* (or believes she knows) that, ultimately speaking, her former belief in persons is strictly and literally false.

In the absence of Siderits's program of semantic insulation, the Buddhist[VASU] agent would be committed to an (eliminativist) reductionist framework that is hostile to the belief in persons. Buddhist no-self ontology is a consequence of a Mereological Nihilism (MN), which is a metaphysic that precludes the possibility of all composite entities; which is to say that, under MN, there could be no *substantial wholes*[one] (no OPIVRs) in our ultimate ontology (see Figure 1). And if there could be no wholes[one] (in ultimate reality), it follows that persons-*qua*-substantial wholes[one] could not exist, in which case everything in ultimate reality would be subject to description in impersonal, third-personal terms; there would be no explanatory need for a *personal level of description*. Thus, ultimate reality, under the regime

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[21]A.k.a., its representational character, a.k.a., representational purport, a.k.a., intentionality, a.k.a., semantic "aboutness."

of MN, would be a no-self world in which there is no level-appropriate referential ontology of the kind required by the use of the person convention.

That there are substantial wholes[one] expresses, it seems, a propositional content that is *fundamentally constitutive* of the conceptual-semantic understanding required to intelligibly apply the person convention. This, at any rate, would be true in a substance-causal metaphysics of personal agency (like Lowe's). And, as noted already, Siderits accepts Lowe's substance-causal metaphysics as expressive of a conventional (or "folk") truth. However, since ultimate reality (as contrasted with conventional reality) is (for Abhidharmic Buddhists) the standard of *ontological correctness*—the standard of what's really real—and since, under Siderits's account, ultimate reality is explicated in terms of Mereological Nihilism, it follows that the Buddhist stands under an objective ought to align her (commonsense) beliefs with the ultimate truth *that substantial wholes*[one] *do not exist*. It would seem, then, that the Buddhist[VASU] agent cannot coherently affirm in regards to any encounterable object, x, that x (non-illusorily) *instantiates* the concept of a substantial whole[one]. And this would seem to draw into question the Buddhist[VASU] agent's capacity to coherently apply the person convention. For if nothing the Buddhist[VASU] agent can encounter can consistently be regarded by her to stand in the relation of *instance-of* to the concept of a substantial whole[one], it follows that there is nothing that she can (in the normative sense of being semantically permitted to) regard as the *semantic referent* of the concept PERSON. For (human embodied) persons *just are* (a type of) substantial whole[one].

Up till now, we have been concerned with stating what it is that the Buddhist has an objective ought to believe about ultimate reality and with her being required to square other (commonsense) beliefs with these Buddhist ultimate truths that she, qua Buddhist, ought to believe. Now the aim is to focus on the Buddhist as a possible participant in a normative moral practice: Can a Buddhist no-selfer coherently participate in our normative moral practices if participation in such practices requires that she be capable of having (sincere) ethical intentions toward persons?

According to the standard Belief-Desire-Intention action-theory, an action is caused by two jointly sufficient components—a belief *plus* some motivator, such as a desire or intention. An important feature of this model is that the formation—thus the *having*—of certain desires and intentions by the agent are thought to depend on the agent's prior *beliefs*. Thus, on this model, we can think of the Buddhist agent as needing to meet certain prior *doxastic* conditions if she is to be creditably attributed with a sincere ethical intention toward persons. We must, for instance, first be able to ascribe to her a *genuine belief in persons* in order to secure for her a suitable object-domain to which she can (in her own eyes) be seen to be intentionally directed in the exercise of her ethical agency. But this is problematic. For the ethical agent in question is also a Buddhist[VASU] no-selfer, who stands under an objective ought to believe <persons do not exist>.

One may, in response to this conflict in belief, have the agent *consciously refrain* from taking her commitment to a referential ontology of persons (as required by her belief in persons) to be one that has objective mind-independent reality and

instead have her regard her belief in persons as a pragmatic (or "folk") belief that recruits a merely subjective agent-dependent *representational ontology*.[22] Think of Buddhist belief within the framework of a Buddha-Matrix. Becoming a Buddhist is functionally equivalent to taking the "red pill." Red-pillers are those who have ceased to regard as real what they know to be merely a highly sophisticated life-like but nevertheless non-veridical digital simulation of reality. Similarly, when someone converts to Buddhism and is informed of Buddhist ultimate truth, they, like the red-pillers, are under an objective ought to renounce their former (false) "blue pill" beliefs. Such is also the case with the Buddhist's belief in persons. Hence the "persons" the Buddhist encounters (in the Buddha-Matrix) are to be regarded as unreal—as mere *person-simulacra*. Ultimately speaking, the Buddhist's former belief in persons—which reflects a complex person-regarding cognitive simulation or phenomenology—is to be regarded as having *no objective reference*.

So, in contemplating Buddhist ultimate reality and aspiring to render her beliefs consistent with it, the Buddhist agent has a choice: Either she can regard normative moral practices, which require persons as participants, though the eyes of an error-theorist and regard all (person-dependent) moral phenomenon as ultimately *unreal*—as an illusory pseudo-phenomenon; or, she can own up to her moral obligations. Yet even were she to opt for morally owning up, the Buddhist[VASU] agent would *qua no-self reductionist* nevertheless be required to *mentally abstract away* all the features of her moral life that refer her to *persons* (and any person-dependent relations) and regard her experience of these same objects and relations as ones that bear the *taint* of her unfortunate [embarrassing] cognitive reliance on a useful—but also entirely fictional—crutch, to wit, *the person convention*.

Yet by mentally abstracting away and regarding as *unreal* all the illusory features of her moral life that refer her to *persons* (and any person-dependent relations), the Buddhist agent would in effect be *morally incapacitated* by having robbed herself of the *intentional object* toward which moral reactive attitudes such as pride, guilt, resentment, and shame are directed:

> The object of a reactive attitude is always some individual conceived as free and rational in the sense of one who can recognize, freely accept, and act on the distinctive second-personal reasons the demand addresses. And what the attitude responds to is precisely the individual's exercise of these capacities, how she conducts herself in light of the relevant second-personal reasons. Since these reasons themselves structure second-personal relations, we might say that reactive attitudes respond to how an individual conducts herself *as a second person*. They respond to how she relates to and conducts herself (second-personally) toward those with the authority to make claims and demands of her. Since . . . both respect for someone's dignity as a person and, indeed, the dignity itself, are essentially second-personal phenomena, it will follow that *the very concept of person is itself a second-personal concept*.[23]

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[22]Persons would have a status analogous to that of a Lockean secondary quality (e.g., color), which is *response-dependent* and has no objective reality.

[23]Steven Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 79–80.

Some notable contemporary Anglo-American moral philosophers, such as Steven Darwall[24] and David Shoemaker,[25] hold that membership in our moral practices requires the capability to recognize, apply, and be motivated by (what they call) *second-personal moral reasons*. What is a second-personal moral reasons?

> A second personal reason is one whose validity depends on presupposed authority and accountability relations between persons and, therefore, on the possibility of the reason's being addressed person-to-person.[26]

Second personal reasons presupposes the framework of a second-person standpoint:

> Call *the second-person standpoint* the perspective you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another's conduct and will. This might be explicit, in speech, as with the performatives of J. L. Austin botanized—demanding, reproaching, apologizing, and so on—or only implicit, in thought, as with Strawsonian reactive feelings like resentment and guilt. . . . But whether explicit and voiced—"You talkin' to me?"—or only implicit and felt, as in a resentful sulk, the I-you-me structure of reciprocal address runs throughout thought and speech from the second-person point of view.[27]

I cannot do justice here to Darwall's admirably nuanced analyses of the concept of the second-personal standpoint. Suffice it say that, on Darwall's view, moral relations can evidently obtain only between relata of certain sorts—to wit, a *you* and a *me*—who are capable of engaging in a range of second-personal moral competencies all falling under the heading of "moral address." And because many of these competencies are ones traditionally thought to possible only for possessors of *rational agency*, the range of the competencies exercised under and presupposed by the second-person standpoint conceptually implicate *persons* as the unique members of a moral community.

Since only persons are deemed to be capable of morally addressing and being morally addressed by others, only persons should be recognized as genuine members of a moral community. The question thus arises as to whether Buddhist no-selfers, who would seem to be incapable of sincerely morally addressing others, could be recognized as genuine members of a moral community. Shoemaker offers a distillation of the criteria for membership in the moral community is expressed as follows:

> MRBT VERSION 5: One is a member of the moral community, a moral agent eligible for moral responsibility and interpersonal relationships, if and only if (a) one has the capacity to recognize and apply second-personal moral reasons one is capable of discovering via identifying empathy with either the affected party (or parties) or of one's behavior *or an appropriate representative*, regardless of

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[24]Ibid.

[25]David Shoemaker, "Moral Address, Moral Responsibility, and the Boundaries of the Moral Community," *Ethics* 118, no. 1 (2007): 70–108.

[26]Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 8.

[27]Ibid., 3.

the method of identification and (b) one is capable of being motivated by those second-personal moral reasons because one is capable of caring about their source (viz., the affected party/parties *or an appropriate representative*), insofar as one is susceptible to being moved to identifying empathy with that source by the moral address expressible via the reactive attitude in both its reason-based and emotional aspects.[28]

Let us pause a moment to focus on (a). Surely, "the capacity to recognize and apply second-personal moral reasons" that have come into one's awareness via an "identifying empathy with the affected party" involves a prior application of the concept *person* to the party of one's concern. But, as earlier observed, within a flat reductionist ontology such as Siderits's, there could be no VERTICALITY. Consequently, there could be no OPIVRs and thus no theoretical need for a V-framework. Hence*,* there could be no semantically level-appropriate referential ontology for the concept of a person and, thus, by extension for the person convention. So since the Buddhist[VASU] agent, from the standpoint of her renunciative second-order belief, could make no coherent mental reference to objects *under the description of a person*, it seems to follow there could be no empathy-guided "discovery" of second-personal moral reasons for action—not, at any rate, ones that the Buddhist[VASU] agent could take to be morally serious. It follows that sincere ethical intention toward persons would not be possible for the Buddhist[VASU] agent for the reason that no genuinely person-regarding intention would be possible for such an agent. The formation of sincere ethical intentions which have intentional objects [that] the agent genuinely recognizes *as persons* would seem to be short-circuited from the start.

What about (b)? The further implication for the Buddhist[VASU] agent's moral psychology, specifically her moral motivation, under Siderits's reductionism, would seem to be this. Because conventional reality is ultimately regarded as reducible to skandhas-aggregates, the Buddhist[VASU] agent's ethical intentions must be seen, by the agent herself, as either directed toward a certain class of non-existent item (persons) or toward items she believes (*qua* Buddhist[VASU]) to be essentially *sub-/non-personal*. Items of the latter type, if taken as the intentional object of her ethical intentions, would not be semantically of the right sort to enable her to have genuine motivational states whose practical intentional content is such that, *in being in such states, she can correctly take herself to have a (second-personal) moral reason for action that genuinely has its source in some (morally significant) fact about persons.*[29] In that case, insofar as "having an intention" may be conceptually explicated as "acting for a reason," the Buddhist agent could not, it seems, have a sincere ethical intention toward anything (or anyone) that she encountered in empirical conventional reality that was such that, the *reason* for her ethical concern was due to some fact she believed to be 'true of' something *in virtue of its being a person*. The Buddhist[VASU] agent's ethical action would thus have to be motivated by some fact that could have *nothing* relevantly to do with the existence of persons

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[28]Shoemaker, "Moral Address, Moral Responsibility," 107; underscoring added.

[29]E.g., acting in ways that respect the dignity of persons.

in general nor with facts concerning *particular* individual persons (e.g., family, friends, spouses, etc.). In other words, the Buddhist[VASU] agent could not be *sincerely* motivated by second-personal moral reasons.

6. CONCLUSION

So can the Buddhist[VASU] no-selfer, under Siderits's reductionist account, qualify as capable of having second-personal moral reasons for acting? The answer should, I think, be a *carefully qualified no*. Given that (sincere) *belief* in persons is a necessary prior condition of the capacity to have a sincere ethical intention toward persons and, by extension, for the *having* of second-personal moral reasons, it is implausible to think that the Buddhist[VASU] no-selfer could be a genuine participant in normative moral practices conceived on the model of Darwall and Shoemaker's Second-Personal Ethics.

One may point out, however, that there are many different ways of being morally motivated; moral reasons come in many forms and not all of them pertain directly to persons. So the inability to have sincere ethical intentions toward persons does not entail that the Buddhist[VASU] no-selfer can have *no* ethical intentions whatsoever. This observation rightly prompts us to acknowledge that ethical intentions can be directed at a range of items (ourselves, other people, future generations, valued artifacts, natural environments, etc.), including but not limited to, persons. But the issue over whether the Buddhist[VASU] no-selfer is capable of having ethical intentions toward persons is not an issue over the scope of her ethical agency; rather it is an issue that reflects a broader one about whether Siderits' Buddhist reductionism has the resources, in the absence of semantic insulation, to metaphysically ground ethical agency *as such*.

To suppose that the Buddhist[VASU] could coherently entertain the possibility of moral engagement within FLATLAND—a no-self world, under the regime of mereological nihilism, in which substantial wholes[one] and thus persons are (necessarily) non-existent—is tantamount to supposing that she can coherently entertain the possibility of both a *non-personal ethics* and an ancillary *non-personal metaphysics of ethical agency*.

What would it be for an ethics to be non-personal? To clarify, we are not now entertaining the possibility of an *impersonal* (e.g., impartial utilitarian*)* ethics but rather of a *non-personal* ethics. An "impersonal" ethics, such as can be found in consequentialist ethical theories, is not anti-realist about persons, whereas a non-personal ethics necessarily is. A non-personal ethics would therefore be under the constraint *not* to identify the *relatum* of any moral relation as a person. Thus, for all moral relations $R^M xy$, x and y are possible relata in R^M only if neither x nor y are persons.[30] A non-personal ethics thus entails an ancillary non-personal metaphysics according to which only non-personal (or sub-personal) entities, whatever they

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[30]Here the two-place moral relation is being used as a device for purposes of illustration. I'm not proposing that all moral relations are two-placed relations.

turn out to be, can be substituted as values of the argument-places in such ethical relations schematized in the following:

The pain and suffering of __ has moral significance to/for __ such that:

(a) '__ ought to *try* to eliminate the suffering of __'

(b) '__ ought to *feel sorry* about the suffering of __'

(c) '__ ought to *care* about the suffering of __ *because* __ is a *person*'

(d) '__ *resents* __ for the suffering __ has caused __'

(e) '__ treats __ (morally or immorally) by doing __'

The object-domain, under Siderits's no-self reductionism, limits the range of possible values for the argument-places in the relations (a)–(e) above to the items of Buddhist[VASU] ultimate ontology—viz., the *skandhas* or *dharmas*. I think it is a mistake not to be skeptical about the (coherence) and plausibility of adequately metaphysically grounding our normative moral practices within a dharma-theoretic framework. How could non-personal entities of this sort intelligibly be thought to stand in moral relations of the kind represented in (a)–(e)? One should certainly acknowledge the fact that moral treatment can be directed toward non-persons (e.g., non-human animals). Intuitively, it would seem, however, that, in the moral treatment relation, at least *one* of the causal *relata* would have to be a person.

However, it appears that some contemporary Anglophone Buddhist commentators do not share this intuition. For instance, Meyers[31] observers that

> [w]hereas Nagel characterizes this impersonal, external, or objective view of action as disturbing and even "debilitating" insofar as it threatens our sense of autonomy and responsibility, [some] Buddhists understand an impersonal analysis of action [in terms of *dharmas*] to be therapeutic and to even enhance our ability to control our actions, namely, to increase our autonomy with respect to the influence of unwholesome tendencies.

Yet elsewhere, in the same paper, Meyers states that

> [i]n what follows, I argue that while it does not makes sense to say that *dharmas* enjoy free will or that *dharmas* make choices or control action, one can, and Buddhists often do, explain the freedoms conventionally attributed to persons in terms of the particular dharmas operative in the sequence of events (specifically the mental states, *citta*) issuing in an action. On this view, persons enjoy the freedom to choose or control action, not *despite* the fact that their actions issue from *dharmas*, but *when* their actions issue from certain kinds of *dharmas*.[32]

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[31]Karin Meyers, "Free Persons, Empty Selves: Freedom and Agency in Light of the Two Truths," In *Free will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, edited by M.R. Dasti and E.F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 41–67, at 52.

[32]Ibid., 43.

Meyers's claim appears to be that, while *individual* dharmas cannot ground action or ethical agency, a *sequence of certain kinds of dharmas* can. What's the difference? Meyers thinks that there are additional explanatory resources to be mined from the sequence of dharmas that are not to be found in any individual dharma. Individual dharmas are essentially *ephemera*; they exist only for a relatively short while. What, then, is the explanatory payoff a sequence of (certain kinds of) dharmas is supposed to make possible? An analogy might help. Just as the illusion of bodily animation is made possible by the rapid succession of motion picture frames, so the illusory representation of a *self* or *person-continuant* is made possible by a sequence of dharmas (mental events), which in turn facilitates the production of intentional action-like outputs. These action-like outputs are then said to support creditable attributions of moral responsibility to non-personal event-causal dharma-sequences.

I cannot do justice to Meyers' philosophically nuanced interpretation of Buddhism here. Suffice it to say that on her account, a non-personal *something*—either an individual dharma (mental state) or a sequence of such dharmas—must be thought, regarded as capable of *discursive representational uptake*—capable, that is, of grasping the conceptual content of the (illusory) representation of a person.[33] Whatever this non-personal something is, the (illusory) representation of a person on which it relies in order to produce "its" intentional action-like outputs derives its semantic content from the commonsense concept of a person. This suggests that a dharma-theoretic framework such as Meyers's is, with regard to its analysis of action, unable to intelligibly state its *analysans* in purely non-personal terms; consequently it is forced to import (in the form of an illusory person-representation) *agent-causal* action-theoretic concepts from commonsense (i.e., the Buddhist's "conventional reality") in order to make a non-personal event-causal sequence of dharmas (momentary mental events) appear action-like.

Whatever we may think about the possibility or intelligibility of a non-personal ethics, it is, I think, correct to conclude at the very least that a particular *species* of moral reason (and moral motivation)—schematically represented in (c) above—is, under Siderits's interpretation, conceptually off-limits to the Buddhist[VASU] no-selfer. If this is correct, then it follows that the Buddhist[VASU] cannot be a sincere participant in a normative moral practice insofar as those practices are conceived on the model of Darwall and Shoemaker's Second Personal Ethics.[34]

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[33]Meyers is not permitted to *reify* a sequence of dharmas into a functioning "self-system." Making a move like that would require that two or more mental state-dharmas exist *synchronically* (which is not problematic) and to do so within a single, temporally-extended unitary consciousness (which is problematic). A temporally extended unitary consciousness is conceptually incompatible with a dharmic-theoretic framework. Viewed as distinct mental events, a momentary belief[person]-dharma may come into and pass out of existence successively to or may exist concurrently with a momentary intention[person]-dharma. But because the two dharmas could not exist *jointly within* a single field of consciousness even if they were co-occurring mental events, a belief in persons and an ethical intention toward persons could not combine so as to be jointly sufficient to make action possible under the standard Belief-Desire-Intention model introduced above.

[34]This is a somewhat overly modest conclusion in that, from what has been argued, it seems plausible to *strongly suspect* that, with regard to their metaphysical grounding, our normative moral practices are, in the absence of Siderits's semantic insulation, in a state of crisis.

In regards to this qualified conclusion there is at least one noteworthy implication of that may be of considerable interest to the Buddhist[VASU] ethicist. The incapacity to have sincere ethical intentions toward persons should seem at the very least to restrict the range of ethical theories within which Buddhist[VASU] ethicists can coherently theorize. In other words, it ought, it seems, to impose constraints on which *types* of ethical theory may be regarded as characteristically and consistently *Buddhist*[VASU]. Acknowledging such constraints may rule out, as theoretically incompatible, *entire systems* of ethical theory—namely, those in which persons (their characters and/or their situated relationships) play a central theoretical role. So, for instance, neither an *aretaic* virtue-based *ethics* nor a *care ethics* would seem to provide a suitable theoretical framework for a Buddhist[VASU] ethic. Then again, it may involve limiting the range within which Buddhist[VASU] ethicists may theorize to only *some* but not all ethical theories classified under a given super-type. Within *deontological ethics*, for instance, an Abelardian intention-based deontological ethic that grounds moral worth solely on the sincerity of a person's intentions (as against action outcomes) would seem to be an unsuitable theoretical framework for Buddhist[VASU] ethics.[35] In any case, Buddhist[VASU] ethicists who work within a no-self reductionist framework such as Siderits' and who wish to rationally motivate (or justify) an agent's ethical behavior may have to accustom themselves to operating within a suitably restricted range of non-person-implicating theoretical resources.

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[35]See Peter Abelard, *Ethical Writings*, trans. Paul Vincent Spade (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1995).