Ethical Imagination:

Huayan Buddhism and Postmodern Ethics

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Abstract

Since its arrival in Western academia, Buddhism has been criticized for a lack of ethics. The ambiguity of ethical agents(no-self), the ambiguity of moral categories(emptiness), and the worldview of non-conflict(Huayan Four-fold Worldview) are some of major objections Western scholars make in their claim that Buddhism does not have an ethics. Contrary to this evaluation, I propose that not only does Buddhism offer an ethical paradigm, Buddhist approaches to ethics could be more viable in our time, given the diversity that contemporary society faces.

In this paper, I propose a new approach to ethics based on Huayan Buddhism. Huayan Buddhism is known for its attention to phenomena. Criticizing earlier Buddhism's preoccupation with the noumenal level of our existence, Huayan Buddhism brings attention back to the reality of our existence. The fourfold worldview of Huayan Buddhism is an effort to show how the diversity in the phenomenal world can be understood through the lens of Buddhism. Huayan emphasis on diverse phenomena also makes Huayan Buddhism relevant to our time when diversity and inclusion have been important factors in understanding and survival of our societies.

Employing the Huayan Buddhism of Dushun（杜順 557-640） and Chengguan（澄觀 738-839）, and also Korean Hwaŏm Budhdism of Ŭisang（義湘, 625-702）, I propose Huayan-Postmodern ethics and highlight the function of imagination in our ethical practice.

Ethical imagination is the idea of fundamental ethical training and deliberation being anchored in our understanding of others from their own perspectives. Normative ethics, or ethics based on rules and regulations, is premised on the idea that rational and logical thinking will lead to fair judgment of situations.

Ethical imagination proposes that the affective aspects of human existence can play a significant role in our efforts to live with other beings. Huayan Buddhism clarifies how the Buddhist teachings of wisdom（智慧） and compassion（慈悲） let us embody the qualities that are necessary for both self-understanding and understanding of others. In this context, Dushun and Chengguan explain how understanding of the nature of our existence helps us overcome the conflicts that inevitably exist in the phenomenal world, where beings have the concrete reality of bodies.

The ethical imagination that we practice with Huayan Buddhism reflects a new dimension of ethics that is needed for the multicultural and global community we live in today. Diverse groups lead their lives from different perspectives and with differing values. An effort to unify their differences will result in disaster, since homogeneity cannot be achieved without suppression and violence. Ethical imagination calls for us to cultivate our capacity for empathy, which is a capacity that Huayan teaching requires of each of us, in order to live in the diversity of the phenomenal world and overcome the conflicts that arise from this reality.

Keywords: Ethics, Fourfold worldview, diversity, wisdom, compassion

Is ethics possible in Buddhism? Since its arrival in the Western academia, Buddhism has been criticized for a lack of ethics. Is it possible that a religious-philosophical tradition of 2500 years lacks ethical dimensions? What would be the nature of Buddhist ethics? I propose that Buddhist ethics is based on the fundamental Buddhist worldview and it is much relevant to today's world. I will discuss this proposal by using Huayan Buddhism and the idea of ethical imagination.

1. Buddhism in the West

Buddhist ethics is a relatively new field in the Western Buddhist scholarship. At the earlier stage of Western Buddhist scholarship, ethics and Buddhism were considered an odd couple. There were several reasons for this suspicion.

First, modern Western ethical theory is based on the idea of rational ethical agents. The subject as a rational being is a key element for ethical deliberation in Kant's moral theory. Buddhism makes claims for a non-self. Buddhist non-self does not deny the existence of the self; it claims that the idea of the self is only provisional, and the self exists only at the conventional level. Still, a question arose: without a clear concept of the self, how are we to define the ethical agent?

Second issue that raised doubts about Buddhism's position on ethics is related to the Buddhist idea of dependent co-arising and emptiness. Ethics is considered almost a synonym for moral judgment of right and wrong. From a normative ethics perspective, deciding between right and wrong and good and evil is understood as a fundamental function of ethics. From the Buddhist perspective, no thing or being is an independent entity; things exist through a contribution of diverse factors: Things are empty. If everything is empty, how does one make moral decisions of right and wrong or good and bad?

Third, in the context of Huayan Buddhism, the fourfold worldview indicates that there should not be conflicts among phenomena. If there are no conflicts among phenomena（事事無礙）, why is ethics needed at all?

The ambiguity of ethical agents, the ambiguity of moral categories, and the worldview of non-conflict are some of major objections Western scholars raise in their claim that Buddhism does not have an ethics. They even claim that Buddhism needs to demonstrate a clearer ethical paradigm if the tradition is to survive in the West.

Contrary to these evaluations, I propose that not only does Buddhism offer an

ethical paradigm, Buddhist approaches to ethics could be more viable in our time, given the diversity that contemporary society faces.

The starting point of thinking about ethics with Buddhism in general and Huayan Buddhism in particular is to rethink the meaning of ethics. In the Western philosophical tradition, ethics began as a practical dimension of philosophy. The goal was to find a way to live with other people without conflict. Aristotle used the expression *eudemonia*, or human flourishing, to explain the goal of ethics.

In modern Western philosophy, normative ethics became a dominant form of ethics. Normative ethics deals with the formulation of moral rules that have direct impacts on the formation of institutions and human actions. It is a product of modern society, in which each nation-state needs to find the best way to create institutions and control the individuals in those institutions. Normative ethics could be an efficient way to improve the functioning of a society, through its regulatory power over the members of institutions, including nation-states.

One critical limit of normative ethics is that, like any rules and regulations, ethical laws have authors. Rules are made from the perspective of their creators, who in most cases occupy central positions in society. The power and the rules go together. And the application of normative rules can easily function as a constraint on marginalized groups. If our time is to support diversity and different cultures as it claims to be, Buddhist approaches to ethics have something to offer in envisioning ethics in our time.

2. Ethics from the Ground-up

Ethics is a practical branch of philosophy. Ethics in any time period should reflect the dominant issues and question of the time. I will therefore begin outlining some of characteristics of the world in which we live.

2-1. The Digital Age and Its Implications

One of the most visible aspects of our daily existence is the use of digital equipments and cyberspace. Cyberspace has rapidly become reality, with a strong impact on the way we see the world, encounter others, and understand the events happening around us.

Michael Hauben(1973–2001), the inventor of the term "netizen," envisioned a future for the internet as a contributor to democratic society. He and Ronda Hauben, in

their book *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* (1997) titled the last chapter "The Computer as a Democratizer." There they wrote, "This is an exciting time because the democratic ideas of some great political thinkers are becoming practical. James Mill wrote that for government to serve the people, it must be watched over by the people utilizing an uncensored press."[1] Hauben envisioned a future in which computers and the internet will play a significant role in people's participation in the communal and political realms of their existence.

Since Hauben published this book in 1997, a lot has happened. The impact of the internet on our lives has earned mixed evaluations. Some have argued, and the evidence supports them, that the internet and social media have motivated a new sense of community and social engagement.[2] Others have revealed worries in recent years that people's experience of the internet creates a life of disconnection instead of connection,[3] and that life with social media and the internet is more fragmented and lonelier[4] seen only from behind the superficial relationships of virtual friendship.

Like any other era, the digital age in which we live has both positive and negative impacts on our lives. But one thing is clear: It makes us realize the diverse views about life. It exposes us different lifestyles, diverse perspectives, and conflicting opinions. The world is not one; or, if it is one, the one is many. We will get back to this idea shortly.

2-2. The Posthuman and Its Implications

Another expression that defines our time is "posthuman." Though much less known than cyberspace, the internet, or the digital age, the posthuman emerged in recent years as a self-critical reflection on the ways human beings exist on earth with other beings as well as other humans. The idea of the posthuman is a proposal to think and rethink about humans without relying on the image of them as standing at the center of the universe. Rosi Braidotti, a Dutch feminist philosopher, says, "Posthuman theory is a

[1] Michael Hauben & Ronda Hauben. *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet.* Washington: IEEE Computer Society Press, 1997, pp. 318–19.

[2] Jiyeon Kang, *Igniting the Internet: Youth and Activism in Postauthoritairan South Korea.* Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2016

[3] Carrie James, *Disconnected: Youth, New Media, and the Ethics Gap.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014.

[4] See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.* Basic Books, 2017.

generative tool to help us re-think the basic unit of reference for the human in the bio-genetic age known as 'anthropocene,' the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet." [5]

The posthuman view critically challenges the human-centered worldview, or anthropocentrism, not only about its delusional understanding of humans' relationship with their environment, but also about the logic behind it that perpetuates itself in various formats in our lives. The desire to place humans at the center of earthly life at the expense of non-human beings is justified by a logic shared by various forms of discrimination: the discrimination against women in patriarchal society, the Western marginalization of the non-West, and the degradation of the have-nots in capitalist society. All of these rely on the logic of "me versus them," in which the self and others are clearly distinguished and their relationship is understood hierarchically.

The questions to ask are at least three: First, can we as individuals exist so independently without relying on others for the basic needs of our existence? Second, can the world we live in today be properly understood through the dualistic attitude and hierarchical valuation that are embedded in the various forms of discrimination mentioned above? Third, can ethics in our time properly play its role without consideration of the diverse reality of our society? Buddhist ethics can help us to answer these questions and as such Buddhist ethics can make a pair with postmodern approaches to ethics.

3. Postmodern Conditions

What I mean by "the postmodern" in postmodern approaches to ethics refers not so much to a theory as to the reality we live in today. Our daily encounter with cyberspace introduces us to ever more diverse lifestyles and opinions from our neighbors, societies, and global community. When we see the picture of the three-year-old Syrian boy Alan Kurdi's dead body on the beach—drowned during a boat journey in the family's long struggle to escape Syria—on the screen of our computer, smartphone, or iPad, how do we react? Before we think about what is right or wrong, we might ask how we came to this point. Is whatever we are doing in this life more important than saving a human

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[5] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013, p. 5. The periodization of the anthropocene, the period when humans have the dominant role in life on the planet, in geological time frames is still under debate. I follow the modest suggestion that it started around the Industrial Revolution in the 1740s.

being's life? When we see a picture of Aisha, an 18-year-old Afghan woman whose nose and ears were sliced off by the Taliban because she had run away from abusive in-laws, we might ask how we can allow a human being to be treated in this manner. When we see millions of people marching in the Women's March, we feel the power of people. These are scenes of life, parts of life that we might not have been exposed to if we did not live in a world of fast-moving information.

Since at least the mid-twentieth century, various issues and ways of living have challenged the universalized ways of assessing values and the meaning of existence. The women's movement has demanded that women's lives should be understood not as an auxiliary to men's lives, but as having their own sets of values and meanings. Socially marginalized groups of different ethnicities, such as African Americans, Asians, and Latin Americans, have raised their voices against white-centered social values. Sexual orientations and sexuality have rapidly become a part of discourse about one's identity and its position in our society. Animal studies, environmental studies, and studies of religion in society all tell us that our society is becoming more and more aware of the existence of diverse values and groups. This is the reality of our time, which I identify as "the postmodern."

Jean François Lyotard (1924-1998), a French philosopher who made a major contribution to postmodern philosophy, defined the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives."[6] For Lyotard, the modern "designate[s] any science that legitimates itself with reference to meta-discourse" or "grand narrative (*le grand récit*)," such as emancipation, freedom, or peace. As it is, these ideas cannot be proven wrong. The question we need to ask, as members of the global community living in the postmodern world, is in whose name these great ideas—emancipation, freedom, or peace—have been understood and executed.

In his 1991 opinion article in *The New York Times*, "Whose Culture Is It, Anyway?" the historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr., challenged the ideas of Donald Kagan, then dean of Yale College, who encouraged incoming students to be defenders of Western cultural heritage. A Harvard humanities professor, Gates pointed out that this seemingly harmless statement reveals itself as a problematic message if we are sensitive to the diversity of the constituency of our society and culture. As Gates tells us, the

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[6] Jean François Lyotard, Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. xxiv.

culture that we are proud of is for some members of our society the culture that allowed slavery and discrimination. This is a good reminder for us to think about the diversity which is the ecology of our existence today. Life is not homogeneous and engaging with diversity is not an optional element in our life anymore.

Huayan Buddhism is especially relevant to our time. The fourfold worldview of Huayan Buddhism is an effort to show how the diversity in the phenomenal world can be understood through the lens of Buddhism. The fourfold worldview and Huayan emphasis on the diverse reality can shed lights on the world of diversity in which we live.

4. Huayan Buddhist Alternative to Ethics

Huayan Buddhism has been well-known for its emphasis on phenomena. Francis H. Cook, a scholar of Huayan Buddhism, claims that one of the major achievements of Huayan Buddhism is that phenomenal diversity regained respectability in Huayan teaching, after it had been marginalized in the Mahāyāna Buddhist schools preceding Huayan Buddhism. In this context, Cook evaluates characteristics of Huayan Buddhism with the following three aspects which he considers as distinguishing the school from Indian Buddhism:

> First of all, it is a universe in which phenomena have been not only restored to a measure of respectability, but indeed, have become important, valuable, and lovely. Second, to accept such a worldview would entail a radical overhauling of the understanding of traditional Buddhist concepts such as emptiness and dependent origination. Finally, it would have meant that many of the important dogmas of Indian Buddhism would have to be abandoned, such as the belief in gradual self-purification, the difference between the noumenal and phenomenal orders, and the distinctions of the stages of progress. [7]

If Huayan Buddhism shares with Mādhyamika Buddhism in its understanding of noumenon as the Buddhist concept of emptiness, Huayan Buddhism diverges from Mādhyamika Buddhism in that it pays close attention to noumenon's manifestation in each phenomenon. The Huayan Fourfold worldview exactly meant to do that job. First conceptualized by Dushun（杜順 557-640）, and later systematized by Chengguan

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[7] Francis H. Cook, "Fa-tsang's Treatise on the Five Doctrines: An Annotated Translation," Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1970, p. 2.

（澄觀 738-840）, the fourfold worldview has been known as a culmination of Huayan Buddhist emphasis on phemonena. The paradigm neatly theorizes the Huayan version of the theory of dependent co-arising, as explained through the relationship between noumenon and phenomena or the universal and particularities.

The fourfold worldview includes: the reality realm of phenomena（事法界 *shifajie*）, the reality realm of noumenon（理法界 *lifajie*）, the reality realm of the non-interference between noumenon and phenomena（理事無礙法界 *lishi wuai fajie*）, and the reality realm of the non-interference among phenomena（事事無礙法界 *shishi wuai fajie*）.

The "reality realm of phenomena" designates the world of concrete reality in which diverse particularities co-exist. The "reality realm of noumenon," the second layer of the vision, conceptualizes an overarching principle which encompasses the diversity that is present in the phenomenal world; in the third level, since each and every phenomenon in the world commonly shares noumenon, the relationship between noumenon and phenomena is understood as non-interfering. As an extension of the third level, all the particular phenomena in the world, being illustrations of noumenon, are understood as existing without obstructing one another. This fourth level of "the reality realm of non-interference among phenomena"(or "the reality realm of mutually non-interfering phenomena") has been promoted as a culmination of Huayan Buddhist philosophy, the hallmark by which Huayan Buddhism claims the superiority of Huayan thought over other Buddhist schools, as the tradition identifies itself as the "complete teaching" or "perfect teaching"（圓敎 *yuanjiao*）.

The four layers of the fourfold worldview of Huayan Buddhism have too often been cited without critical evaluations of significant ramifications the vision entails. Seemingly simple on its surface level, a close look at the paradigm evokes questions that do not seem clearly articulated by the major thinkers of Huayan Buddhism during its inceptive period. One such issue is the idea of non-obstruction. The world is full of conflicts and why does Huayan Buddhism want to emphasize the non-obstruction and how would Huayan Buddhism deal with the conflicts in the world? One answer to this question is that the fourth level of unobstructed interpenetration among phenomena is the world seen from the perspective of those who have attained enlightenment. This explanation, from my perspective, falls far short to be satisfactory. If the ultimate message of Huayan Buddhism is only for the enlightened being, what would the tradition tell us, the majority, who are not enlightened? If Huayan Buddhism

highlights the state of the enlightened being only, it would be difficult to think about the contribution of Huayan Buddhism to ethics for our time.

The above problem occurs when we blindly apply the idea of "non-obstruction" to Huayan Buddhism. I would approach the Huayan fourfold worldview from a perspective different from the non-obstruction thesis by paying attention to the Huayan proposal for the understanding of the relational identity.

Fazang（法藏 643-712）, to whom the Huayan hermeneutic devices have been attributed, expounds on the issue in detail in his *Wujiao zhang*（五敎章 *Treatise on the Five Teachings*）.

One of the representative Huayan statements tells us that "a particle of dust contains the entire universe." This logic is counterintuitive to us who are familiar with seeing beings in the world not in a relational but individualistic way. How can a smallest unit in the world, "a particle of dust," can contain the largest in the world? Fazang explains this relational identity through an example of the numbers one through ten. Imagine that the entire numeric system has only ten numbers and try to think how each number attain its identity. Pick one number. Say the number 3. How does the number 3 functions as the number 3 in the numeric system? Number 3 is not number 1, 2, or 4, 5, 6, through 10. Then, 3 is 3, because it is not others. But at the same time without the rest nine numbers, 3 cannot function as 3. Our familiar and individualistic way of thinking claims that t 3 is 3 in exclusion of the other nine numbers. Buddhism approaches the issue differently. 3 is 3 not by excluding the nine numbers but because of the existence of the nine numbers. 3 is different from other nine numbers, but at the same time, within the 3, all other numbers are there. Fazang calls this relationality of the identity as "mutual identity"（相卽）. By the same logic, our existence is always already related to others; my existence is already indebted to various beings we meet and environment in which I live.[8]

The first Patriarch of Korean Huayan Buddhism Ŭisang（義湘, 625-702） used a diagram to explain the Huayan idea of the interconnected of things. Using 210 Chinese characters, Ŭisang draw a diagram known as the "Ocean Seal Chart"（海印圖 Haeindo） which represents interconnectedness of all beings, and he states: "One is many, many

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[8] Fazang 法藏, *Huayan Wujiao Zhang hua yan* 《華嚴五教章》 (Treatise on the Five Teachings of Huayan Buddhism). Taishō shinshū daizō kyō 《大正新脩大藏經》 45, no. 1866, pp. 503-505.

are one. … A particle of dust contains the entire universe.（一中多多中一 …… 一微塵中合十方）."[9]

As I said before, if the world is one, this one is many. The one attains its identity through the many, and vice versa. Because there is the one, the many become possible, and since the one attains its identity by being accepted by the many, the one becomes the many. The one and the many are not only closely related, but cannot be separated, which is called *mutual identity*. The one and the many are separate concepts but their identities are established by the existence of the other side. Both Fazang and Ŭisang clearly demonstrate that our identity is a relational identity and we are all indebted to others for our existence. How does this awareness help us understand the Huayan claim of non-obstruction among phenomena?

Let us go back to the idea of the Huayan Fourfold Worldview and examine its evolution from Dushun to Chengguan. The foundation of the Huayan fourfold worldview is already well developed in Dushun's *Fajie guan*（法界觀 Contemplation of the Realm of Reality）, whose existence is known about only through its appearance in the commentaries by Huayan scholars after him. In this essay, Dushun identifies three types of contemplation in relation to practicing the realm of reality in Huayan Buddhism. They are: (1) contemplation of true emptiness（真空觀 *zhenkong guan*）; (2) contemplation of non-obstruction between noumenon and phenomena（理事無礙觀 *lishi wuai guan*）; and (3) contemplation of universality and inclusion（周遍含容觀 *zhoubian hanrong guan*）.[10] The Huayan fourfold worldview is Chengguan's reworking of this threefold contemplation of Dushun. To reiterate them, the fourfold worldview consists of: (1) the realm of phenomena; (2) the realm of noumenon; (3) the realm of non-interference between noumenon and phenomena; and (4) the realm of non-interference among phenomena. Even though the fourfold worldview is a reiteration of Dushun's Threefold Contemplation, there exist delicate differences between Dushun's original proposal and Chengguan's interpretation. These differences have rarely been addressed; however, they merit our attention for us to get a better understanding of the ethical implication of the fourfold worldview. As Dushun emphasizes, in presenting the relationship between noumenon and phenomena, Huayan Buddhism underscores the

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[9] Ŭisang 義湘. *Hwaŏm ilsŭng pŏpkye to*《華嚴一乘法界圖》（Diagram of the realm of reality of Huayan one vehicle). In *Han'guk Pulgyo chŏnsŏ*《韓國佛敎全書》, 2:1a–8c, p. 1a.

[10] Du Shung and Chegngua. *Huayan fajie xuanjing*《華嚴法界玄鏡》（Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Huayan). *Taisho* 45. No. 1883:672a-683a, p. 672a.

importance of "contemplation." Whether contemplation is related to noumenon, to phenomena, or to the relationship between the two, in Dushun's paradigm, the basic position requires one to understand the existential structure of the fragmented world of actuality; only then, one is able to perceive the underlying meaning-structure of the physical reality. This does not imply that the ultimate reality exists in separation from the fragmented world of actuality. Nor does it claim that authentic understanding of the realm of reality is available only to the enlightened mind. Instead, Dushun contends that contemplation is the mode through which one encounters the objective reality without being disturbed by subjectivity. That should be the case in all three tiers of his Threefold Contemplation of noumenon (emptiness), of the relationship between noumenon and phenomena, and of the phenomena. In this sense, Dushun's paradigm is soteriologically oriented in its basic nature. When Chengguan reformulates this "contemplation" about the realms of reality into a paradigm of the fourfold realm of realities, the paradigm asserts itself as a fact; it is postulated without consideration of the subject's relation to the factual world. The dismissal of the subjective position in the understanding of reality is a path to universalize the given paradigm or mode of thinking. The implication resulting from the transformation of *contemplation* of the phenomenal world into the *reality* of the phenomenal world is significant. From the perspective of Dushun's paradigm of "contemplation" of the threefold realm of reality, the non-interference either between noumenon and phenomena or among phenomena is an awareness obtained through the subject's mental cultivation so as to be able to realize the underlying structure of reality, whereas, from Chengguan's paradigm of the fourfold worldview, the non-interference becomes factual reality itself.

The fourth level of non-interference of phenomena cannot denote that conflicts do not exist amongst each phenomenon. In fact, Chengguan himself acknowledges this. In his *Huayan fajie xuanjing*（華嚴法界玄鏡 Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Huayan）, Chengguan states: "phenomena basically obstruct each other, being different in size and so forth."[11] Chengguan, further states, "if we see only in terms of phenomena, then they obstruct one another; if we see only in terms of noumenon, there is nothing which can mutually obstruct. Now in this case, merging phenomena by noumenon, phenomena are therefore without obstruction—therefore it says that

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[11] Chengguan, *Huayan fajie xuanjing, T* 45.1883.672c; English translation by Thomas Cleary, "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Hua-yen," in *Entry into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), p. 74.

phenomena, in conformity with noumenon, merge."[12] We then go back to our primary question. If the non-obstruction applies only through the lenses of the noumenon, how do we resolve conflicts in the phenomenal world we live. Chengguan responds: "contemplating phenomena involves compassion [in addition to wisdom] whereas contemplation of noumenon is [related to] wisdom."[13]

Wisdom and compassion are known as two wings of Buddhism. Compassion as an encounter with one's existential reality is not far removed from the compassion arising from one's awareness of the suffering in life. Compassion arises when loving-kindness （metta） meets the suffering of beings. And loving-kindness is the general attitude of kindness and caring arising from one's realization that existential reality is always already a differential notion without a substantial entity on which to ground it. Suffering, the first noble truth of Buddhism, is not an individualized pain or feeling of discomfort, but the pain which has universal cause in the sense that it applies to the basic structure of existence, not to incidents occurring in isolation. An individual incident could serve as an occasion to enable one to understand suffering, but, as it is, it is not the foundation of the suffering per se.

Allow me for a moment to borrow what modern Japanese thinker Nishida Kitarō identifies as characteristics of the religious worldview, which, it seems to me, has a strong affinity with the structure of Buddhist compassion that I am trying to articulate here. In his discussion of religion and the religious worldview, Nishida challenges some of the familiar concepts of religion. To put it briefly, religion, for Nishida, is not about subjective belief because religious faith contains "something objective, some absolute fact of the self."[14] Religion, for Nishida, is not about morality because morality is socially constructed, whereas religion is about the "absolute overturning of values."[15]

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[12] Chengguan, *Huayan fajie xuanjing, T* 45.1883.680ab; Cleary, "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Hua-yen," p. 111.

[13] Chengguan, *Huayan fajie xuanjing, T* 45.1883.676 b; Cleary, "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Hua-yen," p. 91.

[14] Nishida Kitarō, "Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan," *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* (Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō), vol. 11 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1975), p. 418; English translation, "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview" in *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, trans. by David A. Dilworth (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p. 85.

[15] Nishida, "Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan," p. 410; "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview," p. 79.

Nishida contends that the religious worldview arises when an individual realizes the absolute contradictory self-identity, whereas moral values emerge when one erases such ambiguity in one's existence. Religion, for Nishida, is not about mysterious experiences because the religious worldview emerges when one "becomes aware of the bottomless self-contradiction of one's own self," which cannot, in any mysterious way, be resolved. And religion is not about peace of mind; instead, religious consciousness arises, according to Nishida, when an individual realizes the existential predicament. Enlightenment understood in this context does not mean "to see anything objectively." Instead, for Nishida, it is "an ultimate seeing of the bottomless nothingness of the self that is simultaneously a seeing of the fountainhead of sin and evil."[16]

Like Nishida's religious worldview, Buddhist compassion cannot be fully explicated if we approach it as a subjective emotion or a mystical experience or an activity which ensues from the practitioner's peace of mind. Nor can it be understood as an individual's moral capacity which enables the individual to exercise ethical obligation. Instead, compassion comes to pass when an individual realizes the ultimate absurdity of existence itself. Absurdity, in this case, does not need to be understood in a negative sense. To use the Huayan Buddhist terminology, compassion arises when one realizes the inexhaustibility of the context of each incidence as one considers the dependently arising nature of being. Huayan Buddhism's emphasis on the noumenal world, in this context, is an apt preparation for the practitioner to become awakened to the existential reality which is conducive to the exercise of compassion on the phenomenal level.

When Huayan Buddhism repeatedly employs the counterintuitive expression that in a particle of dust is included the entire world, the statement, obviously, is to be understood symbolically. That is, the existence of each entity is always in the net of excess which defies the existing referential system of the subject. This excess is called, in Huayan Buddhism, the inexhaustibility（重重無盡 *chongchong wujin*）of the realm of reality. This inexhaustibility of context is the reality of each entity in the phenomenal world, like each jewel in Indra's net. From the Huayan perspective, it does have an ethical implication. Ethics, in this case, is not just related to moral laws or moral obligation.

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[16] Nishida, "Bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan," p. 411; "The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview," p. 80.

An important point to note is that the impossibility of offering a clear structure of conflicts in the phenomenal world does not negate or dismiss the conflicts themselves; instead, the subject is required to approach the phenomenal conflict from a perspective which is different from a commonsense logic. This is what Chengguan indicates with his statement that with wisdom alone, the phenomenal world, which is charged with conflicts, cannot be fully understood; the activation of one's compassion, in addition to wisdom, is required.

Ethical imagination is the idea of fundamental ethical training and deliberation being anchored in our understanding of others from their own perspectives. Normative ethics, or ethics based on rules and regulations, is premised on the idea that rational and logical thinking will lead to fair judgment of situations.

Ethical imagination proposes that the affective aspects of human existence can play a significant role in our efforts to live with other beings. Self-understanding can be deceptive, for instance if it fails to let one see the self's relationships with others. Huayan Buddhism clarifies how the Buddhist teachings of wisdom（智慧） and compassion（慈悲） let us embody the qualities that are necessary for both self-understanding and understanding of others. In this context, Dushun and Chengguan explain how understanding of the nature of our existence helps us overcome the conflicts that inevitably exist in the phenomenal world, where beings have the concrete reality of bodies.

Imagination is a formative power. Li Tongxuan teaches us that with the awareness of Buddhahood in each of us, each practitioner should invest in the imagination of being the Buddha as she or he is. Imagination, in this case, is not fantasy but the capacity to go beyond one's reality and to lead oneself to a desired state.

The ethical imagination that we practice with Huayan Buddhism reflects a new dimension of ethics that is needed for the multicultural and global community we live in today. Diverse groups lead their lives from different perspectives and with differing values. An effort to unify their differences will result in disaster, since homogeneity cannot be achieved without suppression and violence. Ethical imagination calls for us to cultivate our capacity for empathy, which is a capacity that Huayan teaching requires of each of us, in order to live in the diversity of the phenomenal world and overcome the conflicts that arise from this reality.

5. Huayan Buddhism and Postmodern Ethics

How, then, do we define ethics? What are the elements that enable us to practice ethics in our time, as we become more sensitive to the diverse lives and species, lifestyles, and views in life?

The contemporary French philosopher Andrè Comte-Sponville made a good distinction between morality and ethics. In many cases, we use these two expressions interchangeably; however, I'd like to present Comte-Sponville's distinction, since I feel that his definition of ethics catches some of the nuance that I wanted to convey with the proposal of ethical imagination. Comte-Sponville says that morality bases itself on transcendence and deals with Good and Evil in their absolute sense, whereas ethics understands life in context and defines good and bad in relation to particular situations. Morality responds to the question of "What should I do?" while ethics responds to the question of how to live. We follow morality with a sense of duty, whereas we exercise ethics because of our love. As such, morality leads us to saintliness, whereas ethics leads us to wisdom.[17]

Earlier I proposed that ethics in our time should begin from the ground up and pay attention to the reality of our lived experience. From that premise, I would like to propose the following for Huayan Buddhist approach to ethics.

First, I propose an awareness of relational identity and interdependence. Our society and the modern intellectual history of the West has led us to think of ourselves as rational, independent, and autonomous beings. When facing the ideas of relational identity and interdependence, people tend to think that interdependence defines individuals as having no autonomy. Having autonomy, however, does not require individualism. At the beginning of the modern period, the idea of human autonomy emphasized that human beings have the capacity to make moral choices free from any transcendental or governmental influences. We have passed the stage of declaring autonomy as a human capacity. We have proven that capacity for over three centuries and arrived at a point we critically evaluate anthropocentrism. Autonomy in our time should not be a declaration of individualism, but should mean that we make choices free from our biases, self-centered views, and attachments to privileges. Buddhist practice highlights the transformation of the basis, which is a call for each being to liberate

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[17] André Comte-Sponville, *Valeur et vérité; Etudes cyniques*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994, pp. 191-192.

themselves from self-centered bias, the very obstacle that blocks our autonomy as beings. Additionally, the postmodern emphasis on small discourses and diversity is an indicator that all, not some, autonomous lives are worth our attention.

The second point I will emphasize is the call to exercise our affective capacity in our ethics. Rational capacity has been at the center of our moral discourse and our definition of human beings in separation from other species. We have discussed the limitations of that approach in the form of anthropocentrism and its impact on various types of discrimination. Even though we try to understand the interdependence of beings in theory and thinking, physically, we see ourselves as separate from others; through our habit. We constantly encounter conflicts with others as try to put ourselves ahead at the expense of others. In this context, Buddhism calls for "compassion," a capacity to feel others' suffering as if it is one's own. I call this ethical imagination, an effort to understand others beyond the physical and logical separateness. If we are to embrace diverse lifestyles and viewpoints, values will collide. When that happens, our practice has often been that the values of those who have power suppress the contending values. The end result is what Miranda Fricker calls "hermeneutical injustice."[18] This is a situation that occurs when "the larger community, a power or numerical majority, refuses to allow the experiences of a person or community to be described fairly."[19] Women's experience in patriarchal society has long been experiencing hermeneutical injustice. So have the lives of many people marginalized by the social and political realities of their times. What is needed in such a situation is to understand others through their suffering and pain, as we discussed in the case of animal suffering. In her famous report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a high officer in Nazi organizations who was responsible for sending millions of Jewish people to death camps, Hannah Arendt states that she was stunned by Eichmann's "incapacity … to think from the standpoint of somebody else."[20] Envisioning ourselves as living together with others requires ethical imagination as much as ethical reasoning.

The third call I'd like to propose is a participatory experience of ethics. Ethics is a practical branch of philosophy, after all. By ethical "imagination," I mean the affective

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[18] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

[19] Owen Flanagan, *The Geography of Morals: Varieties of Moral Possibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 138.

[20] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin Books, 1963, p. 49.

dimension of ethics, which also means a change of attitude and approaches. This self-transformation occurs through a participatory exercise of ethics. This is especially relevant to our digital age, though not limited to virtual reality. We all participate in the digital space, clicking "Like," reading news. What do we mean by participation? According to the authors of *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, participation is not just "a set of practices." It is "the promise and expectation that one can be actively involved with others in decision-making processes that affect the evolution of social bonds, communities, systems of knowledge, and organizations, as well as politics and culture."[21] We might not want to think that each and every action and decision is made with the idea of changing ourselves and the society and community we live in. However, ethics in our time should be centered in the ideas and practices through which we believe that we can change others and ourselves（self-transformation） so that we can move, even slowly, toward a better place to live for everybody.

I will conclude this article with a question of responsibility. Some might wonder where the call for responsibility comes from in the Buddhist-Postmodern world, as it denies any form of transcendental anchoring of our existence or values. I would respond using Derrida: "To *be*… means … to inherit."[22] Inheritance here does not mean that we as individuals have received something which we will make use of in the future. Instead, Derrida says, "the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it or not." The Buddhist idea of interdependence and the postmodern emphasis on the relational identity tell us that our existence is not an isolated event but instead is possible because of the inheritance we received from nature, our society, other people, and more.

Won Buddhism, a modern Korean Buddhism, explains this inheritance and indebtedness of our existence through its doctrine of "four beneficences"（四恩）: our existence is indebted to nature(the beneficence of heaven and earth); our existence is indebted to those who make our existence possible biologically(the beneficence of parents); our existence is indebted to our people(the beneficence of our siblings and community); and our existence is indebted to our social and cultural heritage(the

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[21] Darin Barney, et. Al. *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. viii.

[22] Jacques Derrida, Translated by Peggy Kamut. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 54.

beneficence of law). The four beneficences of our existence of Won Buddhism aptly point us to why we need to be concerned about environment, ecology, other beings, and our communities.

And again, as Derrida says, "There is no inheritance without a call to responsibility.[23]" The nature we inherited is not only for human beings, but for all of the beings living on earth; this society and culture we inherited is not exclusively for privileged races and ethnic groups or the privileged gender and social class. We are all in there. It is our responsibility and also a privilege to take care of our inheritance.

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[23] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 91.