

Reviews of Books

The Training Anthology of Śāntideva: A Translation of the Śikṣā-samuccaya. By CHARLES GOODMAN.
New York: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016. Pp. lxxvii + 433. \$105 (cloth); \$34.95 (paper).

The figure of Śāntideva, the putative eighth-century Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist philosopher-monk, has enjoyed a rapid and deserved surge of interest in the twenty-first century to date. Scholars of Buddhist ethics have experienced some frustration with a perceived lack of explicit ethical argument in classical Buddhist works; for this reason, Keown (2005) has gone so far as to claim that Buddhism is “morality without ethics.” But Śāntideva’s explicit ethical arguments give the lie to such claims, a fact increasingly recognized by Western philosophers (Cooper 1998) as well as scholars of Buddhist ethics (e.g., Clayton 2006, Siderits 2005).

Most studies of Śāntideva’s work have tended to focus on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, the pithier and more poetic of his two works; it has been more widely read in India, Tibet, and the West, and is now widely taught in courses on Buddhism and Buddhist ethics. The *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, the other work attributed to Śāntideva, has been comparatively neglected in the West, even though it is a rich resource for ethical reflection in its own right (see for example Clayton 2006; Lele 2007; Mroziak 2007). Some of this neglect likely stems from an older view of the text as merely a collection of quotations with little original insight (e.g., Winternitz 1933); Paul Harrison (2007) has done much to correct this view. But another reason for the neglect, especially in a pedagogical context, stems from a lack of good translations. Until now, the only full English translation of the text was the nearly hundred-year-old translation of Cecil Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse (1922), which was serviceable but increasingly archaic and not easily available. The style of the *Śikṣā*, composed primarily of a selection of quotes from sūtras and other texts, suggests a work intended to be suitable for beginners, and Bendall and Rouse’s translation is decidedly not that now, if it ever was.

Charles Goodman has taken on the important task of rendering this valuable text into readable twenty-first-century English—not an easy task, given the often abstract and passive prose in the text’s composite Buddhist and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. That in itself would be a major contribution, but Goodman’s effort goes considerably further. He translates the Tibetan as well as the Sanskrit text and indicates where they differ, allowing a comparison of the different extant versions even for those who cannot read the source languages. He notes those passages which are shared with the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. And he does us the service of pointing to other translations of the sūtras that Śāntideva quotes, allowing them to be compared to their original context. As a result, the translation serves as a reference work on the *Śikṣā* in a way that even the original-language editions do not.

The latter task is marred slightly by inconsistency: the translation cites Jan Nattier’s translation of the *Ugraparipṛcchā Sūtra* on some quotes (e.g., ed. pp. 78, 120) but not others (eg., ed. pp. 19, 37). Appendix C, which lists the names of the sūtras quoted in the *Śikṣā* in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and English, would also have benefitted from references to available English translations (and for that matter available extant editions in Sanskrit and Tibetan).

Goodman’s thorough and helpful introductions make it clear that he intends to see the text as a live option, something that a Buddhist and Buddhist-sympathetic audience today can see as speaking to them, even despite the presence of passages that are likely to strike contemporary readers as repulsive. This is a welcome and valuable approach which many do not take. For example, although the *Ugraparipṛcchā Sūtra* is one of the most frequently quoted sūtras in the *Śikṣā*, Jan Nattier’s translation introduces that sūtra by saying its monastic, difficult, and hierarchical path “has little to recommend it to contemporary western tastes” (Nattier 2003: 8). Goodman, by contrast, sees the value in the text for a contemporary audience, and tries to make it speak to that audience. For example, while not minimizing the *Śikṣā*’s sexist and misogynistic passages, Goodman aims to render the text’s language

gender-neutral where possible—that is, only in those passages where it is grammar rather than ideas that requires Śāntideva to speak of “he.”

In his admirable effort to make the translation address a contemporary audience, Goodman makes some daring renderings. Some of these work very well, others less well. His rendering of *puṇya* as ‘goodness’, especially, is a bold choice, and one I find entirely appropriate for a translation that aims to make Śāntideva’s ideas accessible to a modern audience. Unlike the Catholicized ‘merit’, or the ‘good karma’ I have used myself, the ‘goodness’ translation deemphasizes the potentially supernatural connections of *puṇya* and its fruition. It does not deny those connections, but allows them to be asserted within the text; it makes the connections synthetic rather than analytic. Then where a supernatural connection is not discussed, *puṇya* and *pāpa* can be read as the beneficial and harmful habits of mind produced by one’s actions, as Dale Wright (2004) has recommended. Thus the translation makes it easier in the English language to grapple with Śāntideva as an ethical thinker. I expect to use this felicitous rendering in future works of my own.

The translation of *puṇya* as ‘goodness’ suggests other translation choices that Goodman shies away from. Most obviously, if *puṇya* is goodness, why is *pāpa* not badness? Goodman rightly notes that *puṇya* and *pāpa* are the sorts of things one can accumulate. “We can, just barely, speak of a great quantity of good; but we can’t, in colloquial English, speak of a great quantity of bad” (p. lxxv). While that is true, I don’t think the same quite applies to badness. It seems to me slightly awkward to speak of badness accumulating, but I think the same applies to goodness—and it applies at least as much to Goodman’s less idiomatic rendering of *pāpa*, ‘vileness’, which also conceals the antonymic quality of *puṇya* and *pāpa*. We certainly can’t speak of a great quantity of vile.

The translation of *puṇya* is also weakened by its inconsistency. There are a number of points where Goodman inexplicably substitutes ‘good actions’ or ‘vile actions’ in places where ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ would be more appropriate. For example, the text (ed. p. 173 / trans. p. 170) speaks of one’s *pāpa* wasting away or being gone. But this *pāpa* is not the actions themselves, but their residue (whether mental, supernatural, or both) that can ripen as bad results. Sometimes the use of the “action” terminology is so inconsistent as to be misleading. For example, in ed. p. 217 / trans. p. 223, *puṇyopagāpūnyopaga* is rendered as “directed toward goodness, directed toward vile actions,” as if *apuṇya* was a plural set of actions while its exact semantic opposite was an abstract state of being.

Similarly, Goodman renders *kuśalamūla*, literally ‘root of *kuśala* [excellence, goodness, wholesome-ness]’ as ‘wholesome action’—even though the text also speaks at length of accumulating *kuśalamūlas*, which is the reason Goodman had articulated for not translating *pāpa* as ‘badness’. To speak of accumulating badness seems no more of a stretch than to speak of accumulating actions, and Goodman does not note the oddness of the latter rendering. One accumulates the mental or supernatural effects of action, but not the actions themselves.

Moreover, given that thoughtful and courageous choice to render *puṇya* as ‘goodness’, it becomes strange that Goodman’s introduction depicts the source of moral reasons for Śāntideva as ‘well-being’ or ‘welfare’—rather than as that ‘goodness’ itself. *Puṇya* (as well as its synonyms, like *śubha*) appears in the text far more often than does *hita*, the word that Goodman (p. lii) treats as the Sanskrit equivalent of ‘well-being’. Identifying ‘goodness’ as the end would reinforce the important point (p. lii) that the end is constituted by virtue as well as by happiness (or the absence of suffering).

Other puzzling translation choices include Goodman’s unwillingness to give a consistent translation to *duḥkha*, rendering it sometimes as ‘suffering’ and sometimes as ‘pain’. He is right to note that Śāntideva’s use, which effectively combines the two without making a distinction between them, contrasts with the American Buddhist slogan that “pain is inevitable, suffering is optional” (p. lxxvi), but surely the translation should have respected the absence of such a distinction in the original text. Particularly unfortunate then is the rendering of *d[aur]manasya* additionally as ‘suffering’, since the reader cannot tell whether *duḥkha* or *daurmanasya* is being used in the original—and it is with *daurmanasya* that Śāntideva comes closest to making the American Buddhist distinction, for he explicitly treats *daurmanasya* as optional (as chapter VI of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* makes clear).

I find it strange for Goodman to object that “[a]ccording to Buddhism, *duḥkha* pervades cyclic existence; and yet many English speakers in comfortable circumstances would feel inclined to deny that ‘suffering’ is an appropriate description of their experience of life” (p. lxxvi). One wants to reply: isn’t that the *point*? Of course they would feel inclined to deny this, just as a comfortable Vedic brahmin

would have felt inclined to deny it. And it is that exact inclination, that very delusion, that prevents both the comfortable ancients and the comfortable moderns from seeing their lives as they truly are. (For that matter, few comfortable English-speakers would describe their life experience as “pain” any more than as “suffering.” We all experience pain, but we all experience suffering just as much, at least to the extent we are not already liberated.)

Goodman also retains a few archaic translation choices without explanation. Notably he renders *maitrī* (literally ‘love’ or ‘friendliness’) as ‘lovingkindness’ (e.g., trans. p. 141)—an odd compound which is rarely used in modern English for any purpose other than translating Sanskrit and Pali, much like ‘nescience’ or ‘horripilation’. He also unfortunately retains one of Bendall and Rouse’s mistranslations. The text refers to those who ask for the bodhisattva’s possessions as *yācanaka*, which simply means ‘one who requests’. Following Bendall and Rouse, Goodman renders *yācanaka* as ‘beggar’, creating the suggestion that this giving is aimed at alleviating poverty even in passages when the text implies clearly that it is about anyone who asks for a gift (e.g., ed. p. 271, trans. p. 258, on giving in general). There is no particular reason to think it would be “beggars” who ask for the bodhisattva’s body parts (ed. pp. 22–26, trans. pp. 25–29).

The need to make the above criticisms feels urgent to me in part because of the very importance of this translation. Goodman’s supplementary apparatus and his eye to contemporary application bring this work above and beyond a mere retranslation, as important as the task of retranslation was. This work easily surpasses Bendall and Rouse as the definitive English translation of the *Śikṣā*, and I expect it to be used, cited, and treasured for decades if not centuries. It will enable new generations of students to appreciate both of Śāntideva’s known works rather than just one. It is because of that very status that the record should stand on those inadequacies it does contain.

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