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The Worlds We Shape through Habit:
On Ethical Self-Cultivation
in Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle and the Tibetan Buddhist Lojong Tradition

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By

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M.A., Boston College, 2007

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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By Jessica E. Locke

This dissertation is a cross-cultural philosophical work that examines the role of habit in shaping our experience of the world and, based on that, how we respond ethically to it. Further, my dissertation inquires into the prospects that we have for re-habituating ourselves in ever more ethically felicitous ways. The main resources that shape my approach to these questions are Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Aristotle's virtue ethics, and the Tibetan Buddhist Lojong ('Mind-Training') tradition. I read these perspectives on habit alongside one another, addressing the puzzle of what it means to re-habituate ourselves. In the works of Merleau-Ponty and Aristotle, I find detailed accounts of how habit shapes our lived experience and defines us as ethical agents. In Lojong I find a set of practices that claims to effect a moral-phenomenological shift in its practitioners, revising the habitual structures that underwrite both ethical action and conscious experience. While each of these articulations of habit speaks in its own voice about the obstacles and opportunities that lay before the person who wishes to re-habituate herself, I argue that together these three philosophies of habit indicate the ever-unfolding futurity of our ethical subjectivity. Habit shows us not only how our ethical subjectivity takes shape historically and culturally; it also invites self-cultivation in the interest of ethical growth.

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May it be of benefit!

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Introduction

Habit and Ethical Self-Cultivation

People…are much freer than they feel.
- Michel Foucault

I. Making Experience an Ethical Project

This work is motivated by the question of what it means to change ourselves at the dispositional level. Admittedly, the aspiration to cultivate ethical subjectivity in this way is bold. It asks more of us than subscription to moral norms; it makes experience itself an ethical project. The qualities of my experience – the valuations that I bring to the objects of my experience and my affective responses to those things – comprise the scene in which my moral life unfolds. I am disposed to the world – pushed and pulled by certain ideas, objects, people and courses of action – because of the meanings that supervene on all of these things. These meanings guide my navigation of the world; they comprise the frames of reference within which I think, feel and act.

The reciprocal implication of my ethical character and my experience of the world suggests a number of questions for the person who wishes to work on her ethical subjectivity: what do I do when I find an infelicity in my ethical life – some way in which my response to the world either fails to conduce to flourishing or is otherwise morally blameworthy? What makes it possible to work on myself by working on my experience of the world? What trajectories are available for the person who wishes to work not only on her character but also on her very experience of the world? Is such a radical proposition feasible at all?

These questions call upon us to consider how fixed our ethical subjectivity truly is. I do not want to develop just the moral strength to overcome my morally dubious

proclivities; I am more interested in problematizing my experience of the world, making that experience something that can be worked on, developed, shaped. That is indeed a radical proposition, but one worthy of our pursuit if we hope to grow and develop as ethical characters.

This aspiration toward ethical self-cultivation – and the doubts it provokes – call to mind Foucault's comment in a 1982 interview that people "are much freer than they feel" (Foucault 1988, 10).[1] Here I hear Foucault saying, first of all, that part of the human condition is that we are less fixed, less permanently structured than the seeming immutability of the terms of our experience might indicate. Furthermore, we also have the capacity to confront that lack of fixity and to work with the mutability of the structures through which our ethical lives and our experience of the world arise. It is possible to take up seemingly settled states of affairs – including even the shape of our character and the qualities of our experience – and make them sites of contestation and experimentation. Foucault's tantalizing remark can inspire us to question the freedoms and limitations of ethical self-cultivation. Feeling less free than we are means we have failed to adequately imagine what about our world and our selves could feasibly be rendered otherwise. By contrast, we can experiment with the openness of our ethical

[1] This comment emerges within a broader reflection: "My role – and that is too emphatic a word – is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people – that's the role of an intellectual" (Foucault 1988, 10). This is part of his response to a series of questions from his interviewer, Rux Martin, about how Foucault identifies as an intellectual and how he understands the broader significance of his work.

subjectivity's future and extend our view toward the field of untested feasibilities that lay beyond our established practices and quotidian orbits.

But *how* radically can we depart from the conditions under which we presently think, feel and act? What would be required to pursue such a departure? Simply acknowledging that our moral subjectivity is un-fixed, contingent, underway and subject to revision does not yet tell us how we can exploit that fact in the interest of telic self-cultivation. We are still susceptible to the accidents of history and the influences of our milieu, and it is not quite clear how radically responsible we can become for transforming our own dispositional orientations. Reworking the very structure of our ethical subjectivity is a formidable task, albeit one required of any of us who hope to become better by continuing to pursue the task of living well.

II. Habit as a Site for Ethical Self-Cultivation

Habit is the unifying concept through which I investigate the prospects for ethical self-cultivation. While habit may not be the only node of our ethical selfhood that we could engage in order to experiment with its revisability, it is especially helpful as such because it toggles between everyday activities and the more deeply embedded styles of thinking and behaving that ground those activities. Habits are acquired; they have histories and require repetition to take root, and they can undergo constant refinement and change. Much of the apparent stability of the lives we lead – stability that allows us to dwell within a familiar and reliable world – comes from the habitual nature of our dwelling. At the same time, the experience of our world that proceeds from habituation belies its historicity; the stable qualities and significations that we found for ourselves in

habit appear intrinsic, not subjective. Habit therefore gives us access to two aspects of our experience: how we are constituted as ethical subjects and how we produce the structures that give shape to our world. Habit places the un-fixedness of our ethical subjectivity within reach, in front of us, among the objects of our experience and our quotidian routines. The aspiration to work on ourselves by working with habit thus brings to the fore a tension: habit presents both the problematic with which we must contend when we seek to undo the seeming permanence of our ethical selfhood as well as the path by which that apparent permanence would be undermined.

The preponderance of mass market literature peddling instruction on how to transform one's work habits, one's eating habits, one's relationship style or one's synapses speak to a pop-cultural passion for self-cultivation pertaining to habit.[2] Although the present work aims not to propose a regimen of new habits in the interest of some specific type of social success (which is the main thrust of the self-help literature), I do find this widespread interest in habit formation theoretically inviting, as it seems basically agreed-upon that habit offers a potent opportunity to change our lives in meaningful ways. Though the popular account of habit may not take up its phenomenological or ethical consequences in the way I intend to here, its use of habit as a tool for personal transformation underscores a valuable feature of our conventional approach to habit: that it is, in fact, something to which we have practical, daily access, and its mundane ubiquity belies habit's profound consequences for our flourishing. In that respect, habit is

[2] See, for example, the self-help staple, Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), as well as, more recently, Charles Duhigg's *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (2014) and Richard O'Connor's *Rewire: Change Your Brain to Break Bad Habits, Overcome Addictions, Conquer Self-Destructive Behavior* (2014).

a hopeful domain, inviting us to work with the practical patterns of how we live in order to become 'better,' however that is conceived.

On the other hand, what this popular literature on habit misses is any tenor of radicality in the scope of change that its habit-therapies promise. This is due to a fairly thin understanding – not surprising given the mass-market audience – of the significance of habit as a force for phenomenological world-formation and in shaping our character. At most this literature encourages its readers to take better advantage of what the present feasibilities of their world offers them – to "work" the status quo system more skillfully to maximize its payoff. This still amounts to playing within the relative unfreedom that Foucault wants to disrupt. It does nothing to actually contest the field of possibilities itself; it just demands better judgment and greater discipline to choose "correctly" from among existing possibilities.

The seeming accessibility of habit is what makes projects of ethical re-habituation both appealing and challenging. They are appealing because habits are already a fact of our daily life whose importance makes easy enough sense to us. On the other hand, the familiarity of habit likely obscures how it actually works on us and within us in shaping our worlds. The seeming ubiquity of habit in our daily discourse does not immediately indicate if or how we can use habit as a method for radical self-cultivation. While we might admit that who we are is in some respect an historical product of the behaviors that have shaped us, it might not be altogether clear *how* our own actions and even interventions into habit have shaped us just so. The explanatory lacuna here makes it difficult for us to take up processes of habit-formation skillfully. Furthermore it means that even the most basic projects of revising our habits such as those proposed by

mainstream thinkers of habit cannot give an account of the full range of consequences for the cessation or adoption of particular habits.

When it comes to critical self-cultivation, then, habit is both the obstacle and the antidote. It provides part of the content of what must be overcome in order to realize the contestability of our moral-psychological situation, because we dwell in such a deeply habituated way. On the other hand, the access that we have to the mundane manifestation of habits as a path for self-cultivation make processes of re-habituation a fruitful tactic for seeing into the range of motion that might be afforded by the un-fixedness of our ethical selfhood and our world.

Accessing the problem of self-cultivation by way of habit engages a rich aspect of our lived experience. Habit can help us understand how our world has acquired the qualities it has – qualities that seem so stable to us – while the practical, down-to-earth presence of habit in our lives belies many of its less obvious machinations in shaping our lived experience. Habit therefore gives us an entry point for investigating whether and how our experience and therefore our character might be susceptible to crafting and shaping. By thinking more deeply about habit and by working more skillfully with habituation, we can learn about what it means to be what we are and how we can become freer within that kind of being.

This is the trajectory I will be taking up in investigating habit as a site for ethical self-cultivation. Beyond maximizing the possibilities of the present state of our moral-psychological landscape, I am interested in finding out how much 'moral moxie' is justified when it comes to regimes of re-habituation and how far we can push and contest the state of our ethical subjectivity.

III. Methodology of Cross-Cultural Philosophy and Outline of Chapters

A number of philosophical traditions offer considerations of habit that speak to these interests. In this work I bring together three: Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Aristotle's virtue ethics, and the Lojong (Mind-Training) tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Each of these traditions offers a distinct perspective and set of tools for examining the ethical and phenomenological impact of habit and for considering our prospects for ethical re-habituation.

This is not a work of 'comparative' philosophy per se; rather, this is a problem-oriented project of cross-cultural philosophy that employs culturally and historically disparate philosophical concepts and traditions to converge upon a shared question. While I recognize the limitations entailed by certain conceptual and cultural incommensurabilities between philosophical traditions, I nonetheless seek to mine common concerns and insights that these traditions share in the interest of a more refined and robust account of what room there is for self-transformation through re-habituation and how that room may be proactively taken up in the interest of ethical growth. Rather than conflating Eastern and Western philosophical traditions or casting them as foils so distinct they can hardly have a meaningful exchange at all, in the following chapters I aim to foster a mutually enriching conversation across philosophical traditions in which phenomenology, virtue ethics, and Buddhist ethics can both challenge and complement one another.

Each of my interlocutors brings specific resources to this inquiry: I use Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological register to articulate how habituation structures our conscious

experience; in Aristotle's virtue ethics, I find a rigorous exposition of habituation as an ethical phenomenon as well as an account of the difficulties we face in attempting to re-habituate ourselves; and I read Lojong texts as accessible yet profoundly radical ethical instructions for revising the habitual structures through which we perceive and respond to our world. Together, these three interlocutors show in their ways how habit underwrites our perceptual and ethical rapport with our world, and they inform the problem of how to relate with our habits in order to change the parts of ourselves that might be both ethically problematic and intrapersonally inaccessible under ordinary circumstances.

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I trace the development of Merleau-Ponty's concept of "world" from his philosophical predecessor, Edmund Husserl, into the question of how our habits shape our world from Merleau-Ponty's first major work, *Phenomenology of Perception* through his 1959-1960 lecture course at the Collège de France and *The Visible and the Invisible*. I side with the commentators who read Merleau-Ponty's articulation of "world" as an extension of the concept of the "life-world" from Husserl's final works. Both of these phenomenologists show us that even though we experience the world as if it were primordial, what structures our experience is in fact subjective and historical. Merleau-Ponty extends and refines this thesis and further argues that habit is part of how we subjectively "stylize" our world and make it "ours." This stylization of our world has a history; we form and reinscribe it over time through our repeated actions and engagements. I argue that we should regard these insights from Merleau-Ponty on what gives rise to our experience of the world in an ethical light. If our habits are what invest our world with particular meanings and values, and if the way we apprehend and experience the world influences our ethical action within it, habit is in fact

an ethical phenomenon.

In my second chapter, I turn to Aristotle's virtue ethics to show what obstacles might beset a project of ethical self-cultivation through habit. The key ethicist of habit in the Western tradition, Aristotle argues in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that our ethical character is the product of habituation, which sets the conditions for how we perceive and act within the world. There is a curious tension in his account of the source of our habituation, however; at first he seemingly deterministically attributes habituation to our upbringing and our social milieu, claiming that our habituation in early childhood "makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference" (*NE* 1103b24-25). Later, we find him striking a different note, arguing that we are also "ourselves part-causes of our states of character" (*NE* 1114b24); because we *choose* to reinscribe our habituation every time we act in a way that confirms it, we do in fact shape and cultivate our own character. Although I argue that the core claims of his moral psychology lie in the exhortation to become "part-causes" of our character, what I find most productive about this puzzle is the fact of the tension itself. Aristotle's ambivalence shows us why we should be concerned with the problem of contesting the habituation with which we are bestowed by our culture and our social milieu. This tension in Aristotle shows us what a serious task it is, in fact, to attempt to re-habituate ourselves; it underscores the troubling fact that though it seems that we *should* cultivate our character, it is not altogether clear *if* we can do so or how.

In my third chapter, I turn to the Lojong tradition, which aims to train its practitioners toward the Mahāyāna Buddhist ethical ideal of *bodhicitta* (the 'mind of enlightenment' or 'awakening mind'). Following Jay Garfield's articulation of Buddhist

ethics as moral phenomenology, I read Lojong as a method of ethical re-habituation. I analyze the pedagogical strategies of two seminal Lojong texts, the *Seven-Point Mind Training* and the *Wheel-Weapon*, from a phenomenological standpoint, arguing that the discursive and non-discursive strategies of Lojong access its practitioners at profound levels of their ethical subjectivity, allowing them not only to overcome the habituated orientation toward self-cherishing that causes their suffering *and* to re-habituate themselves toward other-centered *bodhicitta.* As a practice of ethical re-habituation, Lojong transforms not only the ethical character of its practitioners but also the phenomenological orientations that shape their experience of the world in a broad sense.

In the fourth and final chapter I conclude with a more general analysis of what these three traditions tell us together about the freedoms and limitations of our projects of critical self-cultivation through re-habituation. I begin by retracing the central insights emerging from the articulations of habit in Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle and Lojong. I focus on how each of these accounts illuminates the role of habituation in shaping moral subjectivity and what reasons each of them give us to be either cautious or bold when it comes to ethical re-habituation. In the second half of the chapter, I reflect synthetically upon what this cross-cultural study can offer to the person who wishes to transform herself at the dispositional level. I argue that the un-fixedness that is at the heart of our moral subjectivity can inspire us toward optimism when it comes to projects of self-cultivation. While habit underscores the role of our histories in shaping the qualities of our experience and our ethical lives, it points out the futurity of those things as well. We can take up that futurity of habit with some ambition and even moxie, looking to the openness to which our ethical selfhood is bound, keeping in mind the good reasons we

have for engaging in re-habituation and critical self-cultivation.

Chapter 1

Acquiring a World through Habit

Is it not evident that, precisely if my perception is a perception of the world, I must find in my commerce with the world the reasons that induce me to see it, and in my vision the meaning of my vision?
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 30

I. Introduction

This chapter has three principal aims: to outline the shape that Husserl's concept of the life-world takes in Merleau-Ponty's thought; to explain Merleau-Ponty's account of habit and its relationship to the life-world; and to make a case for reading habit – and, most specifically, the perceptual habit of the gaze – as a phenomenological concept with ethical stakes. I will proceed in that order, beginning with a brief overview of Husserl's life-world and the debates about whether and how it came to influence Merleau-Ponty. I side with those who argue that Merleau-Ponty makes extensive use of Husserl's concept to explain how we dwell within a world imbued with meaning. I then draw upon Merleau-Ponty's detailed explication of habit in *Phenomenology of Perception* to explain how our practical, mundane discourses are the foundation of the meanings and values that comprise our world. From there I consider the ethical implications of these findings. If our behaviors and routines shape our world, then the world that we apprehend is, in fact, a reflection of ourselves, and we must take responsibility for that process.

II. Origins of the Life-World

The life-world as a philosophical concept is primarily associated with Husserl, but my focus here is on how Merleau-Ponty inherits this concept from Husserlian phenomenology, and retains it in spirit (if only occasionally by name). My main concern

is to establish what it means to 'have a world' through Merleau-Ponty's use of Husserl's articulation of the life-world. From the description of the constituent aspects of lived experience that we see in *Phenomenology of Perception* to the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible* as well as his penultimate course at the Collège de France, where Merleau-Ponty still shows himself to be drawing from and commenting upon Husserl, Husserl's life-world provides a conceptual undercarriage for Merleau-Ponty's concept of habit and its role in shaping our experience of a world. The specific Husserlian inheritance upon which I focus lies in Merleau-Ponty's affirmation that to 'have a world' is to make sense of that world according to the prepredicative self-evidences that it holds for us, which are a manifestation of a subjective structure of experience rather than an objective feature of the world itself.

Husserl's treatment of the life-world figures most centrally in his final works, namely *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and the posthumous *Experience and Judgment*. Husserl describes the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) in §§10 and 11 of *Experience and Judgment* as "the world in which we are always already living and which furnishes the ground for all cognitive performance and all scientific determination" (1973, 41). His argument in these sections is that logic and scientific reasoning do not strike upon a bedrock of meaning inherent in the world but are grounded in a more fundamental world of experience, what he calls the "life-world." It is this life-world and the constellation of self-evidences that it proclaims to which logical predication takes recourse as the guarantor of its claims.[3] It is "always pregiven,"

[3] The overall project of these sections, and of *Experience and Judgment* generally, is to take logicians to task for their failure to appreciate the fact that the 'idealizations' that

"entirely original and originally established" and the "domain of ultimate originality to which exact cognition returns for its sense" (Husserl 1973, 41). The pregiven sensibility afforded by the life-world allows our life experience to be intelligible for us. In short, all scientific thinking and its claims of objectivity are built upon this foundation of the life-world, which is ahistorical – that is, neither acquired nor becoming but rather pregiven and primordial. It is the a priori, hidden ground of all logical and linguistic elaboration.

Much of the discussion of the life-world in the *Crisis* strikes similar notes. In §37, for example, Husserl refers to the life-world as "always already there, in advance for us, the 'ground' of all praxis whether theoretical or extratheoretical" (1970, 142). In the *Crisis* we see Husserl characteristically committed to transcendental egology, arguing that the rational accomplishments of scientific thought spring from the subjective structures that make a world of objectivity available as valid in the first place.[4] But alongside this vintage Husserlianism, there seems to be something different. He undermines the seeming universality of the framework of the life-world with the following:

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they have taken to be fundamental, cognitive structures are, in fact, superimpositions upon original experiences of the life-world. Such logicians do not look beyond the immediacy of their predications to get to the true source of logical self-evidence, the life-world: "It is always overlooked that this universe of determinations in themselves [of logic], in which exact science apprehends the universe of existents, is nothing more than a garb of ideas thrown over the world of immediate intuition and experience, the life-world" (Husserl 1973, 44–45). In short, we should not take the conclusions of the logicians as an objective expression of the world "in itself," because they fail to drill into a truly original experience of the world.

[4] On this point, Husserl argues, "Transcendentalism…says: the ontic meaning [*Seinsinn*] of the pregiven life-world is a *subjective structure* [*Gebilde*], it is the achievement of experiencing, prescientific life. In this life the meaning and the ontic validity [*Seinsgeltung*] of the world are built up – of that particular world, that is, which is actually valid for the individual experiencer" (Husserl 1970, 69). This expresses the transcendentalist position most frequently associated with Husserl.

> We have a world-horizon as a horizon of possible thing-experience [*Dingerfahrung*]. Things: that is, stones, animals, plants, even human beings and human products; but everything here is subjective and relative, even though normally, in our experience and in the social group united with us in the community of life, we arrive at 'secure' facts… But when we are thrown into an alien social sphere, that of the Negroes in the Congo, Chinese peasants, etc., we discover that their truths, the facts that for them are fixed, generally verified or verifiable, are by no means the same as ours (1970, 138–139).

What Husserl seems to be saying here is, on the face of it, contradictory: first he says that we experience the world as self-evidently reasonable because our experience is grounded in the universal structure of the life-world, but then he says that the "'secure' facts" of our world are culturally mediated and relative.[5] He then goes on to explain that "the life-world does have, in all its relative features, a *general structure*. This general structure, to which everything that exists relatively is bound, is not itself relative" (1970, 139). What we have, then, is a life-world that is universal in its structure *and* culturally relative, a priori *and* historical.

This gesture toward a historical life-world is at odds with the transcendentalist position commonly associated with Husserl and has led some commentators to offer a deflationary reading of this move in his later works.[6] David Carr gives a deft explanation

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[5] This cultural relativity is surpassed only when we "set up the goal of a truth about the objects which is unconditionally valid for all subjects" (Husserl 1970, 139); the 'setting up' of objectivity takes us out of our subjective, culturally-inflected world in order to establish a world in common, the world of objective sciences.

[6] In what follows I discuss David Carr's interpretation, as a clear example of a deflationary reading. Dorfman seconds Carr on this point; he sees in Husserl a "long

of this interpretive snarl, maintaining that Husserl is at worst imprecise in his presentation of the life-world in the *Crisis* and overall the text is conceptually continuous with the rest of his corpus, a rearticulation of the same themes we have found in Husserl since *Cartesian Meditations* and *Ideas I*.[7] Carr turns for further clarification to Husserl's essay, *Origin of Geometry* (which was almost surely meant to be an appendix to the *Crisis*).[8] There he finds within the life-world two strata: one with the pregiven structures of cognition and another with the cultural facts that we integrate into the concrete unity of our experience. Husserl's concern throughout his articulation of the life-world has been to draw into relief the structure of subjective experience that is prior to scientific thinking. Carr holds that in the *Crisis,* Husserl is arguing that the transcendental structure of our prepredicative, immediate experience *and* our cultural world both precede and shape scientific thinking as, together, a stratified life-world. The cultural life-world is something to be moved through in order for us to reach the general structure shared by all, the pure life-world.

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hesitation" on the question of the historicity of the life-world but holds that Husserl ultimately affirms that the life-world is immutable and ahistorical (Dorfman 2009, 299). Føllesdahl also argues for the overall unity of Husserl's corpus, explaining the life-world as simply a rearticulation of the natural attitude, not a novel concept that departs meaningfully from any previous Husserlian position (Føllesdal 2009).

[7] "I am convinced that there are many faults and confusions in his exposition [of the life-world] which need to be sorted out and examined…" (Carr 1970, 331–332); "It must be said that in the context we have been describing, the *Crisis* offers us little that is new… Husserl's greatest innovation in this context, in fact, concerns not so much his characterization of the life-world as his assessment of the status of science" (Carr 1970, 334).

[8] The term "life-world" hardly appears in the *Origin of Geometry*, which therefore might appear to be an odd resource for the present discussion. Dorfman notes, however, that the text was meant to explain only a middling stage of Husserl's linear approach from ideation toward the life-world, not his arrival there (Dorfman 2009); in short, the *Origin of Geometry* is Husserl's investigation of the cultural, historical world that sets the conditions for our thinking as the first overlay upon the structure of the pure life-world.

Although this kind of deflationary reading might pacify Husserlians concerned about the unity of his *oeuvre*, it is possible to take Husserl's move in his later works seriously and derive different, and perhaps more productive results. Merleau-Ponty, for one, reads Husserl's late work as a definitive turning point, where the circularity of Husserl's phenomenological method finally forces the question of the limits of the phenomenological reduction and the project of delineating the transcendental structure of subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty sees the late Husserl turning in earnest toward an inquiry into the historical nature of the structures through which we know and experience the world.[9] Merleau-Ponty also uses the *Origin of Geometry* to develop this point, even choosing it as the centerpiece of his 1959-1960 course at the Collège de France, now published as *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. Here Merleau-Ponty affirms that the structure of our primary sense "*had* to appear in history" (2001, 6).

Ideation – which gives us the sedimented meanings and concepts that we develop and deploy to apprehend our world – does not proceed in a simply linear fashion from the life-world into complex reasoning and meaning-construction; it takes place in a reciprocal fashion – "offered to us with a wake of historicity" (2001, 6). Ideation is rooted in history while it also *becomes* the history from which future ideation proceeds. What we think and experience itself becomes the part of the foundation, part of the origin of future experience such that our world is saturated with value and always evolving.

[9] Bettina Bergo also sees in the life-world a meaningful departure by Husserl from his previous articulations of the transcendental ego. Following Jacques Garelli, who argues that there are in fact, two poles in Husserl – one that is concerned with identifying the ground of thought in transcendental egology and one that acknowledges that such a ground is never fully reducible (Garelli 1998) – Bergo suggests that there are, in fact, "two Husserls" (Bergo 2001, 159).

Following Husserl's discussion, Merleau-Ponty focuses on the historicity of geometry and the fact that it is a cultural artifact – something that developed in history, in a community and toward specific projects.[10] The meanings through which we have a world come from us – they are developed and transmitted historically and bear all the contingencies that that process portends. The present thought of the geometer has both a "reverberation of the past" and a "prepossession of a future" because it plunges forward into novel ideas, new insights in geometrical research, from the springboard of those who have come before (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 7). Novel ideas become, in turn, the structure for how geometry is thought and practiced in the future. The present-day geometrician does not just use the insights of her forbears. Rather, she thinks *through* those insights; they are the structure through which problems come to her and that shapes her approach to solving them. As she adds her own insights to the structure of geometrical principles that suggest further problems and their resolution, the ideas that ground her thought transport ideations from the past into her present thought, while her present thought projects itself into the future by setting the conditions under which the next insight can emerge. She does not use geometric principles; she inhabits them.

Husserl's example of geometry as an iteration of the historicity of ideation is, perhaps, a bit dry. We can point, however, to similar dynamics in other disciplines such as the practice of clinical psychology. For example, in his critique of the pathologizing paradigms of Freudian psychoanalysis, Abraham Maslow famously remarks, "I suppose it is tempting, if all you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail" (2004,

[10] "Even if we knew nothing about those who founded geometry, we would at least know that there had been such individuals; geometry is never a natural phenomenon like stones and mountains. It exists only in a 'space of humanity'" (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 6).

15). For Maslow, the methods of psychoanalysis *require* the presence of neurosis in order to be put into play; he likens the foundational commitments of the Freudian psychoanalyst to a car wash that is very efficient in cleaning cars but will treat anything other than a car that is put into it exactly as it would a car, however messy and ineffective the results. His point is that because psychoanalysis privileges psychological unhealthiness so highly as the primary question to be addressed that it is not equipped to ask – much less answer – questions related to psychological healthiness. The "wake of historicity" that shapes the Freudian psychoanalyst's practice offer her a set of highly specialized ideas, refined within her discipline and her study thereof over time, that inform how she receives and treats her patients. This both enriches and limits her therapeutic rapport with her patient insofar as it motivates her apprehension of a set of diagnosable phenomena in her patient's biography. The historicized ideations of that diagnosis project themselves into the future in the continued development of the therapist's understanding of psychoanalytic principles as they come to bear in her patients' experiences and in her intervention as a therapist.

Maslow's critique is well taken, but for our purposes this example is useful for seeing the historicity (and futurity) of the psychoanalyst's clinical approach. Just as the geometer uses the ideational patrimony of the history of geometry in devising and solving problems, the psychoanalyst's thought about her patient is cast in the shape of her discipline (problematically, in Maslow's view, because of its excessive concern with neurosis). This is not to say that no other intellectual or affective factors inform her practice as an analyst, but it is fair to say that the diagnosis and treatment of her patient will be structured to a great extent by the foundational principles of her discipline which

function less as rules to be followed than a style of apprehending her patient's narrative. When Maslow described the psychoanalytic approach as one of seeing a world full of nails because one's only tool is a hammer, he was not just critiquing its emphasis on pathology; he was also highlighting the way our thought is cast in a certain shape and how our use of historical ideas influences how we relate with and work to resolve the problems in our midst now. Our thought has a history, and our relation with the present moment reaches both backward and forward, into the past and into the future.

Tracing the link between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on the question of the life-world can inform our understanding of what it means to have a world by highlighting its historical structure. By Merleau-Ponty's lights, the foundation of our thought (which Husserl had understood to be the life-world) is not an utterly immutable structure. Reading *The Origin of Geometry* as an example of Husserl's historically-oriented thinking, Merleau-Ponty takes Husserl as a genuine interlocutor – not just a rhetorical foil – as late as 1960,[11] and it is specifically Husserl's articulation of the way our thinking is based upon historically-inflected meanings that Merleau-Ponty latches onto in his explanation of how the shape of our lived experience is founded – that is, founded in history, rather than founded on the universal foundation of a "pure" life-world. Merleau-

[11] We need not wait for *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* to hear Merleau-Ponty articulate such a view, however. He comments directly upon this point of debate in *Phenomenology of Perception*, citing *Experience and Judgment* in a footnote: "that which is truly transcendental… is not the collection of constitutive operations through which a transparent world, without shadows and without opacity, is spread out in front of an impartial spectator, but rather the ambiguous life where the *Ursprung* [springing-forth] of transcendences takes place, which, through a fundamental contradiction, puts me into communication with them and on this basis makes knowledge possible" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 382). Although it's a valid exercise to trace the ruptures and rearticulations within Merleau-Ponty's thinking from *Phenomenology of Perception* through his final lecture courses, on the question of the life-world he remained remarkably steady.

Ponty follows Husserl into the cultural life-world but stops there, abandoning the project of isolating the "pure" life-world that Husserl posited beneath it.[12] Instead of being a mere ladder to get to the "pure" life world, as interpretations of Husserl such as David Carr's suggest it might be, for Merleau-Ponty the historical life-world eclipses the "pure" life-world as the central device that explains how the specificity of our lived experience takes shape.

Just as it remains a topic of debate whether the historicity of the life-world is or is not a shift for Husserl, the continuity or lack thereof between Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology remains a site of contestation. Dan Zahavi argues that Merleau-Ponty's interest in the historical life-world is continuous with the late Husserl; Zahavi makes much of the fact that Merleau-Ponty was the first outsider to visit the Husserl archives at Leuven in 1939, where he had access to a few as-yet unpublished texts, including *Experience and Judgment*, *Ideas II*, and unpublished portions of the *Crisis*. A closer reading of Husserl's manuscripts, Zahavi maintains, reveals a clearer link between the late Husserl and Merleau-Ponty than conventional readings of their published works suggest: "[commentators], in contrast to Merleau-Ponty himself, failed to take Husserl's research manuscripts into account. I think Merleau-Ponty did in fact capture some important submerged tendencies in Husserl's thinking… which overwhelmingly become clear if one – as is nowadays a must – draws upon the volumes subsequently published in *Husserliana*" (Zahavi 2002, 7). Jacques Garelli concurs on this point with his assertion of the two poles of Husserl's thinking and his argument that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty are

[12] Merleau-Ponty writes, "Ideality *is* historicity because it rests upon acts and because 'the only way to grasp an idea is to produce it'" (2001, 7 emphasis mine).

more similar to one another than they are different, as long as you read the developments of the late Husserl as a distinct turning point rather than an aberration borne of imprecision. That is to say: Husserl's understanding of the life-world evolved from a transcendentalist position to a more historicized one, and Merleau-Ponty picked up where Husserl abruptly left off.[13] As Bettina Bergo puts it, Merleau-Ponty's work is an "extension of the philosophy of the *Lebenswelt*" (2001, 171), and Merleau-Ponty himself writes in the working notes to the *Visible and the Invisible*, "We are making a philosophy of the *Lebenswelt*, our construction makes us rediscover this world of silence" (VI 170). In this piece he gives a continued reaffirmation of Husserl's initial insights into the irreducible ground of thought that took up the more historically-oriented trajectory of his late works.

The arguments for the continuity between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty hinge on the presence of a tension within Husserl, the seeming shift from positing a "pure," universal life-world to a consideration of the possibility of a cultural, historical life-world. Above we saw Carr deny the presence of any real discontinuity in Husserl. Such a denial necessarily drives a wedge between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology: if Husserl was, indeed, true to his transcendentalist project to the end, Merleau-Ponty's parsing the historical constituents of the structure for lived experience is simply a different exercise altogether. As a consequence, some authors, like Claude Lefort, maintain that Merleau-Ponty and Husserl were up to fundamentally different projects: the account of the reflexive intertwining of self and world that Merleau-Ponty developed is

[13] Cf. Garelli, "Il y a le Monde" (1982) and "L'Héritage husserlien et l'expérience merleau-pontienne du commencement" (1998).

dramatically at odds with Husserlian transcendentalism.[14] As long as Husserl is read as an uncompromising transcendentalist, the Merleau-Pontians of intertwinement cannot draw a straight line of inheritance between these two phenomenologies.

Clearly there is a lot of interpretive contention here, and reasonable arguments can be made for and against the continuity of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The key issue in all of this, in fact, is whether Husserl really did change direction in his later years, at the expense of the "pure" life-world. I agree with those phenomenologists who argue that Merleau-Ponty's work was, as Bergo puts it, an "extension" of Husserl's insights into the life-world rather than a wholesale revision of it, not only for the reasons adduced above, but also because Merleau-Ponty himself said that that was what he understood himself to be doing. Merleau-Ponty refers at various turns to "the *Lebenswelt*" in *The Visible and the Invisible*, but he proves to be quite precise about what that term means to him. He is clear that he is not talking about an immutable, universal life-world: the kind of life-world to which he is referring is "physico-historical" and "subjective" (1968, 175; 185). He also says that, while anything that philosophy says must necessarily spring from the life-world, that philosophical articulation itself is, in turn, "sedimented, 'taken back' by the life-world" (1968, 170), becoming a part of the ground within which future philosophical thematization takes place.

Husserl's development of the life-world is, of course, part of a broader argument that our predicative thinking is not intrinsically 'rational,' but rather our thought relies for its coherence upon the foundational self-evidence of the life-world. The life-world, we might recall, is the "domain of ultimate originality to which exact cognition returns for its

[14] Cf. Lefort (1978).

sense" (Husserl 1973, 41). Merleau-Ponty retains this original function of the life-world; both he and Husserl affirm that our thinking relies upon a ground of basic intelligibility, a foundation of (seemingly) intrinsic meaning that serves as the context of meaning within which thought takes shape. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the historical construction of the life-world should not eclipse what is ultimately the most important aspect of the life-world (ahistorical or not): that it provides a context of intelligibility upon which all of our rational discourse draws. We rely upon this sedimented ground of meaning in order to dwell within a world that fundamentally makes sense to us. The fact that, by Merleau-Ponty's lights, this ground of intelligibility is an historical product does not change its basic function, which is to cohere our thinking within a domain of overarching intelligibility. Though the life-world may be historical, it functions for us as if it were primordial. The seamless way the world shows itself to us in our conventional, quotidian discourses belies its subjective, historical structure.

Now I bring us back to the primary goal of this section: to outline what the status of Husserl's life-world is by the time we find it in Merleau-Ponty's hands, in order to understand the impact of this aspect of our lived experience – how Husserl understood its role in our thought and how Merleau-Ponty understood its distinctly historical character. The version of Husserl's life-world that Merleau-Ponty picks up and rearticulates is a historical world that is subjectively sedimented, a world imbued with meanings that orient the subject according to a foundation of prepredicative sense that is generated within her.[15]

[15] Henceforth, I will drop the nomenclature of 'life-world' in my analysis of Merleau-Ponty and refer instead to a 'world.' Although I do think the Husserlian inheritance of the

For Merleau-Ponty, a person does not simply 'tap into' a field of intelligibility that is pregiven in the world itself or even in the subject herself; the self-evident intelligibility that she finds in the world springs from a subjective structure that forms through her constant rapprochement with the world. In *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty explains the ongoing process wherein every ideation becomes part of the future horizon within which the next ideation will take shape as "a mutation in knowledge" (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 6).[16] The experienced, historical world integrates each ideation into the coherence of the world.[17] The reflexive loop between experience and world is such that the meaning of our experience springs from the

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life-world persists conceptually in Merleau-Ponty and is particularly evident in his discussion of the perceptual impact of habit, it would be anachronistic to maintain my use of a technical term from Husserl in my analysis of *Phenomenology of Perception*, where it is only mentioned by name twice. With reference to texts in which Merleau-Ponty does comment directly upon the Husserlian concept, such as *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, I will, of course, mirror his use of it. To be clear, this is not to drive a wedge between Husserl's life-world and the meaning of world for Merleau-Ponty but rather to use the technical terms that are proper to each thinker. Again, as I have argued, I maintain that there is a philosophical continuity between Husserl's concept of the life-world and Merleau-Ponty's 'world,' if not a semantic one. (Incidentally, the two cameos for the life-world in *PP* occur in a footnote referencing *Experience and Judgment*, cited above, and in the opening paragraph of the Preface, in which Merleau-Ponty notoriously claims that "all of *Sein und Zeit* emerges from Husserl's suggestion, and in the end is nothing more than a making explicit of the '*natürlichen Weltbegriff*" [natural concept of the world] or the '*Lebenswelt*' [life-world] that Husserl, toward the end of his life, presented as the fundamental theme of phenomenology" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxx).)

[16] Here Merleau-Ponty is commenting upon Husserl's analysis of how geometry emerged as a seemingly ahistorical system of thought that has been passed down for generations, with each subsequent generation taking it up, refining it and giving a "reinterpretation of the whole [system]" through it without actually acknowledging the historically contingent nature of the system itself (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 6).

[17] "The main effect of every ideation, which is dated and signed, is to make its literal repetition superfluous, to launch culture toward a future, to achieve forgetfulness, to be overcome, to outline a futural, geometrical horizon, and to circumscribe a coherent domain" (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 6).

structure of our world, and the structure of our world is shaped by experience. This is why every idea comes to us "with a wake of historicity" (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 6). For example, a person might find, months after moving to a new city, that her neighborhood streets no longer seem impenetrably circuitous, that she has a general sense of orientation in this no-longer-new place, that certain of its landmarks – a café, the corner store at which she is a regular, the apartment of a neighbor with whom she has struck up a friendship – have become lodestones of the life that has taken root in this place. As she settles into her new city, she finds that the features of it that she could once hardly appreciate have taken on a texture; she has a feel for her neighborhood that is largely defined by the points at which her daily orbit intersects with it. Her growing familiarity with her neighborhood is a refining of a world; she makes the city hers by investing it with an affective topography that solicits her specific way of navigating it, which becomes richer over time.

The feel that a person gets for her neighborhood is distinctive precisely because it is not intrinsic to the neighborhood but is something that ripens and transforms. The origin of meaning is in history; our thinking and the arc of our experience are mutually dependent. This means that our cultural milieu as well as our personal, individual engagements with the world become the formal basis for what we know and how we know it. Again, let us recall Husserl's initial insights into the role of the life-world in predicative thought: the life-world is not simply comprised of the specificities of the objects to which we turn our attention. It *is* the domain within which anything is available to us at all.

All of this has been an effort to bring us a fuller understanding of what it means to have a world for Merleau-Ponty, and the roots of his thought in the late Husserl. Although it is unwise to conflate the terms 'life-world' and 'world' entirely, I do think that when we find Merleau-Ponty claiming in *Phenomenology of Perception* that a world is "an open and indefinite multiplicity where relations are reciprocally implicated" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 73) and when, in the Preface of the same text, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the goal of phenomenology is to "rediscover…naïve contact with the world" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxx), it is helpful to recall the historical life-world and its Husserlian lineage in order to appreciate that the world, for Merleau-Ponty, is not an objective space or even a place at all; it is a milieu of meaning that is knowable and apprehensible for us because we have sedimented its meaning over time through our engagement with it. Our world is not separable from us, in fact; we navigate it through structures that we shape within ourselves and within history.

III. Perceptual Habit and the Formation of Our World

In light of the foregoing discussion of what it means to 'have a world' for Merleau-Ponty, we are now in a good position to examine how the world that we have actually takes shape. In this section, I will outline how habit contributes to that process. Motor habits such as playing an instrument illustrate how our embodied discourse with the world is not a matter of intellectualist calculation or rote mechanism; rather, we gear into a world that we have made ours by incorporating instruments that allow us to pursue our projects within it. Perceptual habits similarly demonstrate our ability to make our world ours by stylizing it to correspond to our projects. What is at stake in my analysis is

this: habit shows us that the meanings that define our world and our style of dwelling within it take shape. Looking at habit is like seeing the sedimentation of our world in real time; Merleau-Ponty's eminently practical exegesis of motor and perceptual habits underscores the lived realities of the sedimented meanings and values within which we dwell. These meanings are indeed prepredicative and prereflective, but they come together in history, in the ongoing task of dwelling within a world that is polarized by our projects.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes the advent of perceptual habit as "an acquisition of a world" (2012, 154). He enters into his discussion of habit in this text by way of his explanation of the spatiality of the body, and much of his discussion there is understandably dominated by examples of the acquisition of motor skills such as typing.[18] Bodily movement most clearly demonstrates the way in which the world is not originally available to us as objective, because movement is not passive – it takes up space and time actively as "a power of various regions of the world that already rises up toward the objects to grasp and perceive them" (2012, 108). To have a world is to work from the standpoint of an "original intentionality," within which motricity orients us "toward the inter-sensory unity of a 'world'" (2012, 139). The horizon for the content

[18] This discussion figures into Merleau-Ponty's refutation of intellectualist interpretations of the body schema – the function of consciousness that allow a person to track the position and posture of their body in space. The key aspect of Merleau-Ponty's articulation of body schemas here, which will relate to his subsequent development of the concept of habit, is his use of value as the element that anchors our embodied spatiality. The body schema is only possible because, behind our thought, we have "the atmosphere of sense by which it is enveloped…behind dispersed facts and symptoms" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 122).

of our conscious experience gives the objects of that experience an intelligibility that informs – if not dictates – the course of our navigation of them.[19]

Given the relevance of motor habit to a discussion of embodied spatiality, commentators such as Hubert Dreyfus have taken Merleau-Ponty's articulation of habit to be simply a discussion of skill formation.[20] Understanding habits as a kind of skill underscores the curious feature of habit that inspired Merleau-Ponty's engagement of it in the first place: that it seems to be effective action without mental representation. Dreyfus takes this to mean that the skills rendered by habit function such that "the body takes over and does the rest [i.e. what is required to accomplish a goal beyond routine practice] outside the range of consciousness" (1996). What mainly captivates Dreyfus' attention is the way in which habituated action seems to accomplish so much while requiring so little active attention. This is indeed a possible outcome of some kinds of habit, but overall this gives a rather linear, perfunctory reading of a concept that gets quite a rich and nuanced treatment in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

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[19] "The Kantian subject posits a world, but, in order to be able to affirm a truth, the actual subject must first have a world or be in the world, that is, he must hold a system of significations around himself whose correspondences, relations, and participations do not need to be made explicit in order to be utilized" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 131).

[20] "Merleau-Ponty uses 'habit' as synonymous with 'skill,' so when he wants to refer to skill acquisition he speaks of 'the acquisition of a habit'" (1996). Dreyfus' thesis in this article is that habit acquisition *qua* skill formation is the process by which the subject's intentional arc is founded. He rehearses the stages of skill acquisition from "novice" to "expertise," by way of examples such as learning to drive a car and play chess (which, respectively, illustrate "bodily" and "intellectual" skills). As the learner progresses in her acquisition of a skill, Dreyfus argues, rule-following and reasoned decision making are replaced with intuitive behavior and acute discrimination. Altogether, (habituated) skills help us cope and inform our action by giving us a refined sense of our situation, or what Dreyfus calls "maximum grip" (1996).

Habit is not strictly a matter of sharpening competencies, motor or otherwise. It also "expresses the power we have of dilating our being in the world" (2012, 115) – of adding to and refining the field of significances that orient our world and make it meaningful. Merleau-Ponty cites a number of examples of motor habit: a person learning a dance; a woman tracking the location of a feather in her hat as she moves about; a blind man using a cane to sense the environment around him; a typist knowing where the letters are on a keyboard without having to calculate its objective dimensions; and an organist familiarizing himself with a new instrument. All of these examples show the various ways in which we can "consecrate" regions of the body in regimes of expression and action that look less like the automaticity of a skill learned by rote than a remarkable ability to gear into a world that is relevant to our projects (2012, 147).

Dreyfus' reading of habit adequately accounts for how human subjects can gain such proficiency in a task that they can execute it with complete precision, but it misses the more diffuse function of habits outside of explicitly practiced and goal-oriented activities. Furthermore, habit does not just allow a person to act upon the world; it *gives* her a world. What is most interesting about habit, to my mind, is not that it allows us to master practical skills but that it brings us a world that acts upon us – by offering us a field of values, feasibilities, and limitations – as much as we act upon it.

The power of "dilating our being in the world" becomes even more evident in the case of perceptual habit. Whereas motor habit amounts to a kind of "extension of existence," Merleau-Ponty claims that perceptual habit is an "acquisition of a world" (2012, 154). Perceptual habit helps to mediate a world, making it correspond with the style of our perception and making our world obedient to our perception, stylistically

speaking. Among the examples of perceptual habit that Merleau-Ponty provides, his elaboration of a blind person's cane is the most detailed. Upon the acquisition of the cane as an instrument of perception, "the world of tactile objects expands, it no longer begins at the skin of the hand, but at the tip of the cane" (2012, 154). The cane is not simply one object among others for this person; she has integrated it into the bodily synthesis that is the zero point of her rapport with the world. It is not the only habit by which her world takes shape for her, but what is particularly instructive about this example is that there is nothing universal or inevitable about the kind of world that the user of the cane has through her use of this instrument of perception. Her world is one that has come to include the vectors of meaning that are rendered by the incorporation of a cane, meanings that are specific to her use of it. The extension of bodily synthesis in the cane demonstrates the subjective plasticity of the shape of our world and the way in which subject and world are in an organic relation.[21] Through the instruments of perception that are incorporated into the body through habit, consciousness "throws itself" into a world (2012, 154). Perceptual habit is an acquisition of a world, then, because through it the world takes a shape that can meet our perception and the instruments of perception that we have incorporated. Perceptual habit gives us a world that conforms to habits through which we apprehend it or, put another way, our perceptual habits make the world what it is for us.

[21] "Correlatively, the external object is not the geometrical plan or the invariant of a series of perspectives; it is a thing toward which the cane leads us and whose perspectives, according to perceptual evidentness, are not signs, but rather appearances" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 154).

We can find another example of both motor and perceptual habit in a hockey player who inhabits a space that might otherwise be highly inhospitable to an un-habituated person – a slick, frozen surface – in a display of elegant dexterity, nimbly riding two metal blades across a field of ice and wielding a long curved stick to guide a puck about. Such ability is not intellectual per se; it has to do with incorporating certain instruments – the skates, the stick, possibly even the puck – such that they are integrated into the field of significances that are defined by the hockey player's project (winning a game) and the practiced motor fluency that she deploys to attain that goal. We can think of the ice rink as a microcosm of the world, and the skilled hockey player navigates it according to its value in the project of winning a game. The two goals at either of ends of the rink are not identical in value; indeed, when the goals of each team switch in the second period of the game, the value of the objective space on the rink inverts for all of the players.[22] And of course to this Californian, who hardly skates and has a merely theoretical interest in the game, the rink and the accoutrements of the game are not evocative of the powers and significances that they hold for the habituated player. I lack the motor habits that would enable me to truly inhabit the space of the rink and the perceptual habit of seeing the features of the ice rink through the investment that the project of a game would afford; the absence of my habit amounts to a neutrality of that space for me, a differently shaped world than that of a hockey player.

In terms that ring remarkably Husserlian, Merleau-Ponty explains that a person's sense of a reliable placement in the world, which is rendered by way of habit, is possible

[22] "The subject's intentions are immediately reflected in the perceptual field: they polarize it" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 133).

"because he possesses a pre-predicative evidentness of a unique world" which allows things to "be lived prior to being conceived" (2012, 131). This is possible thanks to sedimentation, which he characterizes as a "world of thoughts" in which our mental operations have become distilled and which "allows us to count on our acquired concepts and judgments, just as we count upon the things that are there and that are given as a whole, without our having to repeat their synthesis at each moment" (2012, 131). We are connected to this world of thoughts, this sedimented world, through "a multitude of intentional threads" (2012, 132), but our acquisition of this world is not absolute; it is always under revision over time, as each experience adds a new layer of sedimentation that, in turn, becomes the foundation for the next.[23] The content of our conscious experience is the product of "an activity of projection, which deposits objects around itself like traces of its own acts, but which relies upon them in order to move on to new acts of spontaneity" (2012, 138). Again we see here the dual forces of sedimented projection and spontaneity: the inevitability of our own influence upon the appearance of the world alongside the exposure of spontaneity.[24] The structure of our world is in constant play with the reemergence of new strata of sedimentation, changing us and

[23] "My acquired thoughts are not an absolute acquisition; they feed off my present thought at each moment; they offer me a sense, but this is a sense that I reflect back to them. In fact, the acquisition that is available to us expresses, at each moment, the energy of our present consciousness… The acquired, then, is only truly acquired if it is taken up in a new movement of thought, and a thought is only situated if it itself assumes its situation. The essence of consciousness is to provide itself with one or many worlds, to make its own thoughts exist *in front of* itself like things, and sketching out these landscapes and abandoning them indivisibly demonstrates its vitality. The structure 'world,' with its double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity, is at the center of consciousness…" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 132)

[24] "To think an object… consciousness must rely upon a previously constructed 'world of thought'" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 138–139).

changing the world that we can have. The world that we experience is only possible as such insofar as our consciousness "[allows] its wake to trail behind itself" (2012, 138).

It bears mentioning that, while I have focused upon the Husserlian heritage of Merleau-Pontian habit, Ed Casey aptly notes the Bergsonian inflection of this aspect of habit, observing that habit "is at once the most pervasive and subtle way in which we are in touch with the past that we bear and that bears us (1984, 290)." By tracking the influence of Bergsonian habit-memory in Merleau-Pontian habit, Casey underscores the way in which habit – as the concretion, both mental and somatic, of our past actions and behaviors – reanimates the past in the present, making the past "presently efficacious" (1984, 292) for us. While I concur with Casey's argument that Merleau-Ponty's analysis of habit was informed by Bergson's articulation of memory, the understandable preponderance of the past in a discussion of memory detracts from an important aspect of habit, which is the spontaneity mentioned above. By Bergson's lights, habit is mindless automaticity that denotes a lack of engagement in one's life and milieu.[25] Yes, habit does reanimate the past in the present, but more importantly this means that the content of the present moment is always hurtling forward into the future, becoming the basis for the experience that lies before us. Furthermore, rather than undermining a genuine rapport with the world, habit is our basis for that very rapport.

All this is to say: perceptual habit is an acquisition of a world because the sedimented significances that are the currency of one's habits *are* one's world. Perceptual

[25] In her survey *On Habit*, Clare Carlisle summarizes Bergson's (largely unfavorable) treatment of habit, in which he "suggests that all habitual actions degenerate into rigid automatism" (2014, 91). Bergson himself says that habit is "is automatism established in life and imitating it" (Bergson 32).

habit structures the world by forming the foundation of prepredicative self-evidence within which we act and pursue our projects. The perceived world is one in which a person can see her own significations embodied concretely in her experienced world, while the world itself "suggests" significations to her (2012, 133). Merleau-Ponty refers to the relationship between subject and object as a "dialogue" that "arranges a world around the subject that speaks to him on the topic of himself and places his own thoughts in the world;" the physical object a person perceives is itself a "gathering together" of the subject's intentions (2012, 134).

Here let us recall our earlier reflections upon the inheritance of Husserl's life-world in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which specifically have to do with the subjective foundation of the sense that the world makes for us. Linking Merleau-Ponty's reception of the life-world to his concept of habit specifies the means by which the field of significances within which we dwell becomes sedimented – how it is that the world we have is acquired. The world speaks to us on the topic of ourselves insofar as it is a world of sedimented meaning, a historical life-world in which what we experience is experienced *through* the structure of value and significance that we have founded in habit. What is significant about the elaboration of habit within the life-world is that it illuminates the mundane process of sedimentation by which our world is imbued with such meaning. Whereas Husserl's most worldly comments on this point were his anthropological references to the diversity of cultural worlds in the *Crisis*, which mainly tell us *that* such cultural worlds exist but not how they came to be, in *Phenomenology of Perception* we find a raft of detailed accounts of how individual styles of dwelling take

shape according to the habits that individuals incorporate and the unique ways that those instruments allow those individuals to gear into a world that is theirs.

IV. Habit and the Ethics of the Gaze

This insight suggests an avenue from the life-world and habit into a line of ethical questioning, as it indicates that the value that we find in the world that determines our discourse within it stems from our own actions, not from a transcendental ego and not exclusively from a cultural heritage. Habit shows us how, through our own behaviors and patterns of gearing into the world, we invest our world with meaning that, in turn, shapes further action. Should we not, then, inquire into how we might establish habits that will give rise a world structured by the most ethically felicitous meanings and values, particularly when we discover ethically infelicitous habits that influence our decision making and undermine our own or others' flourishing?[26]

Many of Merleau-Ponty's examples of habit are so prosaic that it seems a bit of a leap to view habit as ethical, particularly if one understands habit as a kind of practiced, practical skill *à la* Dreyfus. If habits are just practical competencies in activities such as chess, why view them as morally significant? One crucial example of perceptual habit that is particularly relevant to this question is the gaze (*le regard*). Of course, the gaze is

[26] Bettina Bergo riffs on Garelli on this point and prefigures these ethical considerations: "As Jacques Garelli puts it: '[These] metamorphosing exchanges between the 'me' ['*moi*'] and the things…lead to a total restructuration of the situations of man in the world; for, henceforth, it is from one of the folds of the world that man arises, takes action, and thinks, alongside the peripheral emergence of things…revealing an invested space like a "thinking visibility."' This 'thinking visibility' of multiple folds is the Merleau-Pontian inflection of Husserl's *Lebenswelt*. And this is, no doubt, the thematic site from which Merleau-Ponty might have begun his own reflection on ethics" (Bergo 2001, 166).

a concept that appears throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception*, but its inclusion in the discussion of perceptual habit lends itself especially well to ethical questioning because it broadens the scope of perceptual habit into a generalized style of apprehension. Merleau-Ponty says that the gaze is a "natural instrument comparable to the blind man's cane" and that, like all instruments of perceptual habit, it "obtains more or less from things according to the manner in which it interrogates them" (2012, 153). Throughout *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty pairs an incredible range of verbs with the gaze: it caresses, glances, posits, scours, defines, skims, wanders out, subtends, explores, inhabits, plunges, lends itself to the spectacle, vibrates, embraces, immerses itself in an object, penetrates, animates, gears into objects, and knows. These verbs name 'manners' in which the gaze 'obtains' what it does from its objects. The polyvalence of the gaze expresses how the gaze is *in* everything we perceive; these are not different functions of the gaze so much as diverse ways it shows itself in the range of lived phenomenal experiences that are available to us at any given moment. The ubiquity of the gaze throughout this text speaks to its centrality to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project of describing what perception is "like." When we find the gaze in our experience, we are finding the element of *us* with which the objects of our experience are imbued. The stylization of the gaze places the objects of our experience before us, in *our* world, arranged within a scheme of valuation proceeding from our projects rather than their 'objective meaning.' The gaze is more than a one-off example of habit; it is a major descriptive device of how we come to dwell within a world rife with significations, values and stylizations that we bring to it. As such, it underscores how much more habit is than a rote skill.

As an iteration of habit, however, the gaze clarifies the profoundly ethical consequences of the 'acquisition of a world' that is perceptual habit. More than just an act of 'seeing,' the gaze is a kind of fine-grained, affectively-tinged apprehension that highlights the ways in which we each stylize our worlds, drawing forth those of its features that are most relevant for us. In other words, the gaze with which we meet the world determines the qualities of the world that we experience. The gaze impresses itself upon the world in such a way that the world reflects the gaze that receives it, and the habit of our gaze makes the world and those within it what they are to us. It brings us a stylized world: Merleau-Ponty writes that habituated perception gives rise to a "life of significations that renders the *concrete essence* of the object immediately readable and…only allows its 'sensory properties' to appear *through* it" (2012, 133, emphasis added). Through the gaze, the world is concept incarnate, and concepts are likewise our world; the sensory givens that we perceive are brought to light *through* these meanings that are alive before us. The habituated gaze is part of what Merleau-Ponty calls the "intentional arc" of a person's being that "projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation or, rather, [it] ensures that we are situated within all these relationships" (2012, 137).

In short, the gaze is a kind of habit through which consciousness finds itself projected into a world that reflects its own meanings and values.[27] How we respond to the

[27] In truth, it may be more accurate to say that the gaze is something more like a meta-habit, which draws together multiple threads of habitual perception into a holistic style of apprehending the world. Nonetheless, in spite of the multiplicity of its sources in a variety of habituated meanings and values, because it functions as a holistic habit, I refer to the gaze as a single habit rather than a 'set' of habits or by a neologism such as 'meta-habit.'

world as such – as laden with value that we ourselves project – is, of course, an ethical domain. The context within which we make ethical choices is one polarized by our own structures for apprehending it. This means that, beyond just using good will and our best judgment when it comes to morality, we also must consider the possibility that our very understanding of the ethical angles of our world proceed from the structures through which we apprehend it.

A timely example of this ethical thrust of the gaze is aversive racism.[28] Dovidio and Gaertner cite aversive racism as the source of the so-called "American dilemma" – the fact that despite egalitarian ideals and an ever-increasing trend among whites to support racial equality nominally, clear markers of racial disparity and discrimination remain entrenched in the United States.[29] They write: "A critical aspect of the aversive racism framework is the conflict between whites' denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings toward and beliefs about blacks" (2004, 4).

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[28] 'Aversive racism' is a term coined by psychoanalyst and social activist Joel Kovel, who distinguishes it from "dominative racism" characterized by overt bigotry. By Kovel's definition, aversive racism can be harbored even by well-meaning, liberal white people who, though they profess ideals of racial equality, still unconsciously harbor negative beliefs and feelings about people of color (Kovel 1971). Aversive racism therefore names a psychological phenomenon and should not be confused with the broader problem of institutionalized racism in the United States in which social and political structures funnel power and privilege to white people at the expense of people of color. Kovel's definition is meant specifically to problematize the not-so-benign disparities between liberal white people's political and ethical allegiances and how they actually *feel* about race. Incidentally, research on implicit bias such as that of Kelly and Roederr has noted that negative bias toward people of color occurs even among people of color (Kelly and Roederr 2008), though this phenomenon is not the concern of Dovidio and Gaertner's study nor Kovel's anti-racist work.

[29] Dovidio and Gaertner cite the following as examples of such differentials between whites and blacks: median family income, residential segregation, unequal degrees of career advancement, and unequal outcomes in health care. I would add to this list the mass incarceration of black men and the chronic underperformance of inner-city schools that primarily serve students of color.

Though there are still plenty of holdouts on the side of overt racism and white supremacy, the particularly intractable problem of aversive racism is that, in the absence of overtly prejudicial ideologies, the negative feelings toward black people and other minority groups that aversive racism prompts are rationalized and explained away on the basis of some other justification (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986). That is to say, white people who hold aversively racist perceptions do not think they are discriminating against people of color on the basis of their race; instead, they are responding to subtle affective responses that inform their decisions and behavior and even seem to "make sense" to them without being explicitly racist. For example, in their seminal study of bias in hiring decisions, Dovidio and Gaertner found that although self-reporting of racial prejudice among white people declined between 1989 and 1999, white individuals given the task of rating job applicants on either end of this interval demonstrated a bias in favor of white candidate and against black candidates in cases when the standard for judging qualifications was ambiguous (2000). That is to say, job candidates with sterling credentials were generally highly recommended regardless of their race, and blatantly unqualified candidates were likewise judged equally across both racial groups, but in situations that required more of a 'judgment call' by the study's subjects, black applicants fared demonstrably worse than white applicants.[30] The study's authors conclude that "the subtle, rationalizable type of bias [that is] associated with aversive racism can thus help to demonstrate that discrimination is not a 'thing of the past'" (2000, 318).

[30] "Moderate qualifications are responded to as if they were strong qualifications when the candidate is white, but as if they were weak qualifications when the candidate is black" (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000, 318).

The "subtle, rationalizable bias" of aversive racism is an iteration of the perceptual habit of the gaze because it cashes in on the sedimented "world of thought" in which "the concrete essence" of a thing (that is, its subjective meaning) is "immediately readable." Despite holding egalitarian ideals, these subjects still see potential job applicants through a gaze that inflects black applicants with disfavor and projects preference for white applicants. This meting out of favor and disfavor cannot be accounted for by way of explicit racial ideologies, but it does speak to the fact that these mock "managers" apprehend black applicants according to a schema of value that is racially specific. Just as perceptual habit projects out into the world affective vectors that a person gears into in her navigation of the world, the aversively racist habit that these test subjects geared into was one that flags hypothetical job applicants as subtly problematic (or at least subtly less desirable) if they are black. The perceptual field that is founded in habit is a polarized one; we can see this in the value that the hockey player ascribes to the regions and elements of the hockey rink, and we can see this – in a much more pernicious form – in the subtle bias a white hiring manager might show against an applicant of color.

If, as Merleau-Ponty writes, every habit "delimits our field of vision and field of action" (2012, 147) and if, as I have ventured, the perceptual habit of the gaze influences our ethical choices, then it is high time that we consider how we can more readily take up the ethical valence of habit. The example of aversive racism highlights how the stylization of the gaze can lead us toward behaviors or judgments that we might otherwise disavow. Indeed, the sedimentation of an aversively racist gaze is a pernicious social problem. But though the world we have is one in which we see our own meanings

projected in the world, this projection need not imprison us, and, frankly, we cannot allow it to do so; cynical admission of the entrenchment of aversive racism without a proactive effort to revise the habits that give rise to it will not do in an era beset as ours is with racial profiling and police brutality.

To that end, we must also remember the spontaneity that Merleau-Ponty pairs with projection, such that the sedimentation that structures our world is not just a reanimation of the past but also an arrow pointing into the future, indicating that the content of our present engagements will also become part of the structure of tomorrow's world. While we cannot abandon our history in one fell swoop, we can find freedom in this spontaneity. "Our nature…is not an ancient custom," Merleau-Ponty writes (2012, 147), because it is always undergoing reflexive revision in the play between person and world. Even from within the structure of ethically toxic habits, we can exploit the open-endedness of our world-acquisition. The world that habit gives us is not absolute, and its pliability is something that we can exploit in the interest of our own ethical formation.

The ethical valence of habit is one worth considering, therefore, and the next chapter addresses just this. Merleau-Ponty is surely not the first theorist of habit, and the ethical questions of habit that his phenomenology provokes lead us naturally toward Aristotle – the ethicist of habit *par excellence.* Habit figures prominently in Aristotle's virtue ethics; his treatment of it gives us a number of concepts and philosophical issues through which to consider the ethical impact of habituation. Aristotle makes explicit the connection between habit, character virtue, and the generalized project of flourishing as a human being; we cannot live well if we lack good character, and for good character, we must be well habituated. The responsibility that we can personally claim for being well

habituated and, beyond that, how we can correct imperfect habituation remain important questions in Aristotle scholarship, and to that we turn next.

Chapter Two

"All the Difference" that Habit Makes:

A Problem in Aristotelian Moral Psychology

I. Introduction

Numerous ethicists in the Western canon have examined habit as a feature of the moral life, both favorably and unfavorably. Probably *the* key Western ethicist of habit is Aristotle, who argues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that character is the product of habituation. In this chapter, I will review Aristotle's account of habit as an ethical project, with particular concern for the question of the promise (or difficulty) of working on our habits in a proactive effort to become more virtuous. My aim is to illuminate 1) why habit has such profound consequences for our ethical lives and 2) whether and how we can take hold of that fact in the interest of our own ethical development.

More concretely, this chapter focuses on a curious tension in Aristotle's account of habituation: while he claims that the habituation that we receive from our upbringing makes "all the difference" in the development of our character (1103b24-26),[31] at the same time he holds us responsible for being "part-causes" of our character inasmuch as we choose to reinscribe our habituation through our voluntary action (1114b23). This tension brings to the fore a considerable problem for moral psychology that was also present in our precedent discussion of Merleau-Ponty: the conflict between the need for us to be the authors of our own character and the seeming impenetrability of the existing historical structures of our ethical life. I read this tension in Aristotle not as an instance of self-contradiction but as a productive and provocative problem with which we must

[31] All citations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* come from the Ross translation (1984).

contend if we genuinely hope to do anything more than a descriptive ethics of habit. My goal here is to demonstrate that this tension shows us where and how we might be obstructed in our efforts to revise our own character as it gestures toward the very tools we might exploit in overcoming those obstacles.

II. What Is the "Difference" that Habit Makes?

Aristotle assigns to habituation the key role in establishing a person's ethical character in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*NE)*.[32] He says that "moral excellence comes about as a result of habit" (1103a16-17) because "states [of character; *hexeis*] arise out of like activities" (1103b21).[33] Further, he emphatically links upbringing with this

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[32] By this point in *NE,* Aristotle has introduced his project as a search for the "chief good" – the final, overarching goal that all human action pursues, which he defines as happiness (*eudaimonia*, also translated elsewhere by "flourishing"). He argues that what unifies the vast variety of human ends is that through them, fundamentally, everyone is trying to achieve happiness. From this commonsense starting point, he launches his investigation into the constituents of true happiness. He says that happiness becomes attainable when a person possesses "complete excellence," meaning she fulfills the highest possibilities of what it means to be human. Accomplishing complete excellence entails attaining excellence of the two parts of the soul: the rational part and the non-rational part. Excellence of the rational part consists of five further excellences, namely (*epistêmê*, *technê*, *phronēsis*, *nous,* and *sophia,* respectively). Excellence of the non-rational part of the soul is what Aristotle calls character excellence or, more frequently, simply "excellence." Put very simply, Aristotle's ethics says that human happiness is the result of having become excellent at being human, and we become excellent in an intellectual sense over time through teaching, while we acquire excellence of character from habituation.

[33] It bears clarifying the etymology of some of these terms. Aristotle's term *hexis*, translated here by 'state' (and elsewhere by 'disposition') is often mistranslated and misunderstood as 'habit' itself. 'Habit' or 'habituation' is actually rendered from *ethos* or *ethismos*, which in an etymological aside of his own, Aristotle links with "character" (*ēthikē*) and "character-trait" (*ēthos*). A state of character or disposition is clearly not habit, then, but it is in fact the *product* of habituation. (See Thornton Lockwood, "Habituation, Habit, and Character in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*", in *A History of*

process, claiming that "it makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference" (1103b24-26). Aristotle says that excellence "is a disposition to act in the best ways *in relation to pleasures and pains*" (1104b27-28, emphasis added). What we are drawn to do in life comes down to a large degree to how it makes us feel, so Aristotle argues that "to feel delight and pain rightly or wrongly has no small effect on our actions" (1105a6-7).[34] This is why Aristotle says, much later in the *NE*, that "in educating the young we steer them by the rudders of pleasure and pain" because "to enjoy the things we ought and to hate the things we ought has the greatest bearing on excellence of character" (*NE* 1172a21-23). Habituation is therefore the cultivation of what we have called in our previous chapter an affective life-world; the 'feelings' that result from it are not emotions per se but styles of affective attunement that invest the world with certain values that attract us, repel us or even fail to garner any meaningful attention altogether.

Moral excellence, then, is not a matter of adhering to a moral maxim or even of rational calculation per se; it is instead a matter of having the right affective orientation to the world, which is invested in us through habituation. If we want to be good, we must do good things, over and over again, becoming habituated to those kinds of behaviors.[35]

Habit: From Aristotle to Bordieu, ed. by Tom Sparrow and Adam Hutchinson, Lexington, 2013, p. 20).

[34] Feeling delight and pain "rightly or wrongly" is another way of describing the ethically felicitous affective orientation of good character. Aristotle specifies what this means in his formulation of the Doctrine of the Mean, when he says that excellence shows itself in feeling pleasure and pain "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way" (1106b21-23).

[35] "By doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites

Aryeh Kosman articulates this process of habituation as "habitual acting out and embodying of those actualizations which the dispositions are dispositions toward" (Kosman 1980, 111). A proper upbringing helps train us to respond to and navigate the world well, so that we will be angered, saddened, overjoyed, fearful or simply 'put off' at the right things.

Take, for example, the social custom in some Asian countries of refraining from pointing the bottoms of one's feet in the direction of an elder or other honorable person or even a sacred space such as a shrine.[36] Pointing one's feet at a teacher or other authority figure comes across as disrespectful and careless. This social custom is not just a matter of rote observance of the 'rules' of polite society, however; it reveals the values with which certain people, things and types of comportment are invested and how people become disposed toward those things in particular ways according to those values – in this case, the value of the bottoms of the feet as symbolically unclean and the value of an honorable person, and the ways that those values take 'out of play' certain kinds of bodily comportments. The outward behavior is a simple manifestation of gentility and respect, but it is underwritten by the meanings that the objects involved in that behavior denote. By Aristotle's lights, this kind of response has to do with how we have been habituated. On the basis of the values that the milieu of our upbringing teaches us about various

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and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances" (1103b14-20).

[36] The feet are considered symbolically unclean in some Asian countries, making it disrespectful to use one's feet to point to or touch certain things or people and to expose the bottoms of one's feet to others. In an interview in the 2011 film *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*, for example, Daisuke Nakazawa, an accomplished sushi chef said, when discussing his former employer and mentor, "Let's just say I don't sleep with my feet in his direction" (Gelb 2011), expressing his continued reverence for his erstwhile teacher.

people, things and concepts, we are disposed toward or away from certain kinds of actions in response to all of those things. All of this comes to us through the practice of good actions, which over time sediment as habits.

In his seminal article "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good," Myles Burnyeat emphasizes that Aristotle's take on habituation does not amount to "some bland reminder that virtue takes practice" (73). He argues that the repetitive practice of doing virtuous actions under the guidance and influence of our caretakers and society actually establishes for us the orienting definitions of the 'good' that are required for ethical agency. This cognitive founding is inextricable from the pleasures and pains that accompany apprehension of the 'good' and its alternatives. Aristotle writes, "To lovers of the fine what is pleasant is what is pleasant by nature; and actions in accordance with excellence are like this, so that they are pleasant both to these people and in themselves" (1099a13-15). For example, when it comes to the exercise of the virtue of generosity, the properly habituated, virtuous person will be neither miserly nor profligate; she will enjoy giving under appropriate circumstances and to an appropriate degree. To a generous person, giving a birthday gift, for instance, is festive and enjoyable, but we would consider it socially awkward if a new acquaintance enthusiastically gave one a valuable, treasured family heirloom as a gift. All things being equal, the gift may be lovely, but in this context, the virtue of generosity could have been adequately fulfilled by happily and informally bringing a middling bottle of wine to a party. That more appropriate manifestation of generosity indicates a proper attunement to one's situation – the depth of the relationship in question and the meaning of the occasion and the gift itself. Burnyeat further argues that our affective responses are what develop first, before our full

understanding of the good, and is indeed the key ingredient in internalizing knowledge of the good. The key passage from Aristotle that establishes this reads as follows:

> We must take as a sign of states [of character] the pleasure or pain that supervenes on acts… For moral excellence is concerned with pleasures and pains; it is on account of pleasure that we do bad things, and on account of pain that we abstain from noble ones. Hence we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things that we ought; for this is the right education (1104b4-12).

The issue is not just whether a person can make it a matter of routine of doing the virtuous thing; she does it with *pleasure* or at the very least in accord with an affective draw that stems from the intrinsic appeal of the action itself and how she recognizes it as a 'good.' Aristotle offers examples of moderation and bravery to illustrate this point: if someone abstains from an enjoyment begrudgingly, she can hardly be considered temperate – just, at best, obedient. Likewise, a person who is distressed when he "withstands frightening things" is not brave simply for having withstood them; the virtue of bravery will show itself in a lack of distress if not cheerfulness in the face of adversity. Habituation clearly is not simply a matter of repetitively actualizing an action to the point of automaticity – not merely 'following orders' out of fear of retribution or reflexively leaping into harm's way out of the Pavlovian training of intensive military conditioning. It is the development of affinities, of affective vectors that pull us toward the right things

and repel us from the wrong things. Rather than impoverishing us by reducing our moral action to mindless machinery, it lends an affective richness to our world.

So when Aristotle says that a good upbringing makes "all the difference," it is because that upbringing is what enables us to experience the world in a way that draws us toward ethical actions and away from unethical ones. It helps delimit our field of action, as Merleau-Ponty might say, by distilling the ethical saliences upon which we might act. This kind of habituation is more than a passively acquired routine such as, e.g. tipping 20% in the United States is a matter of custom and social expectation. Instead, it is how we hold ourselves in our ethical lives and how we are planted in a world that pushes and pulls us – not according to 'the way the world is' but rather the way that *we* are. Aristotle says that virtue is about acting "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way" (1106b21-23), all on the basis of the pleasures and pains that arise in relation to the situation at hand. The action that proceeds from virtuous character is embedded in the life-world of the agent; it is always formulated relative to the specificities of the situation that are rendered morally significant according to the agent's affective orientation. That affective orientation – the quality of character that proceeds from habituation – is what determines how we aim our actions, the ends we choose based upon our relational, embedded, affectively-tinted apprehension of our situatedness.

Our habits set the conditions for how we apprehend the world *as* ethically charged in the first place. They make us feel and respond to given situations in a certain way, and they are what affectively attune us to a target at which our action aims. In this short summary of a few points on habit in Aristotle's ethics, we can see that the acquisition of

habit founds a world in much the same way that Merleau-Ponty's articulation of habit demonstrates. Aristotle's agents do not experience a world objectively but are rather always embedded, in a relation to a world that bears affective markers – evoking pleasures and pains – according to the ways in which that relation is structured by habituation. We see this in the case of the person who does not necessarily have to explicitly *try* not to point their feet at another person but who prereflectively feels repelled from doing so because it simply seems rude to her. What differentiates the virtuous person from a person otherwise habituated is that the virtuous person has developed a set of habits that will lead her to respond to and act in the world with a uniquely virtuous perspicacity – that is, with the action that is appropriate to the situation, hitting the target of the most skillful response to the given circumstances.

III. How Character Directs Our Actions

But how, precisely, does habituation dictate a certain style of action in the world? Aristotle's moral psychology has a fairly robust account of how habituation influences our actions that links together three key concepts: state of character (*hexis*), which we have seen at play above in the context of how habits shape our affective dispositions; practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), the intellectual excellence concerned with choice (understood as commitment to an action); and imagination (*phantasia*), which provides the perceptual undercarriage for ethical choice as the faculty by which the very terms of and parameters for our action appear to us. In the following sections, I discuss *phronēsis* and *phantasia* to unpack their connection to character and ethical action. At stake in this discussion is my broader goal of investigation how habituation directs our action and how, in turn, we can shape our own habituation. Aristotle's complex account of moral

subjectivity interweaves questions of the affective proclivities of our character, what we perceive, and how we act. To understand if and how we can become authors of our own moral subjectivity according to Aristotle, we must first take stock of how imagination and our use of practical wisdom come to bear in the manifestation and formation of moral subjectivity.

a. Practical wisdom (phronēsis*)*

Practical wisdom is the lone intellectual excellence that directly links with character excellence. Aristotle defines practical wisdom as excellence in deliberation (1104a25-27), which is essential to the actualization of the kind of action through which we realize the affective proclivities of our character. When we choose a particular action, there are two elements at play: our desire for a particular end or goal, which is dictated by the habituated affect distinctive of our character, and the practically-oriented, intellectual reasoning of the deliberation of practical wisdom, which tells us how to go about achieving the end that is given to us according to our character. As Aristotle puts it, "[character] excellence makes the aim right, and practical wisdom the things leading to it" (1144a8-9).[37] But these two elements are intimately intertwined: in order for our character to manifest as pursuit of the goals that we perceive as desirable, we must also have the intellectual excellence of practical wisdom to provide the mechanism by which we move toward our goals. In other words, one cannot be fully morally excellent without

[37] Aristotle echoes this formulation elsewhere: "Excellence makes the choice right, but the question of the things which should naturally be done to carry out our choice belongs not to excellence but to another faculty" (1144a20-22) and "the choice will not be right without practical wisdom any more than without excellence; for the one determines the end and the other makes us do the things that lead to the end" (1145a4-7).

the practical wisdom to act well, and one cannot be practically wise without the orientation toward virtuous goals that a well-habituated character disposition provides.

It bears mentioning that this interpretation of the relationship between character and practical wisdom is a matter of some scholarly contention. Some commentators worry that it unduly privileges desire over intellect in the moral life, enacting a proto-Humean, hedonistic view in which the person is a slave to her desires rather than a rational agent. If that is the case, the rational part of the soul in ethics is rendered a something more like a handmaiden to the non-rational part – or so such commentators worry. Sarah Broadie and John McDowell advance two such interpretations. In her introduction to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Broadie maintains that it is "very problematic" to ascribe to character the task of ethical goal-setting, because doing so does not adequately differentiate between the wise person and the general population. All people, she argues, are characterized by the formal goal to "*do what is good (or best) in this situation, all things considered*" (Broadie 49, italics original),[38] so the intellectual part of the soul must play a stronger 'editorial' role in aiding the desiderative, non-rational part of the soul to determine whether something is "a worthwhile goal" (Broadie 2002, 49).[39] By Broadie's lights, practical wisdom helps separate the ethical wheat from the chaff, analyzing the broader set of possible goals that appeal to the desiderative, non-rational part of the soul and determining which of those goals are actually good ones. Only those

[38] "We all wish for pleasure, honour, material resources, health, friends; and wisdom is exercised in pursuing these common goals in appropriate ways" (Broadie 2002, 49).
[39] This is a more intellectualist view than the one found in her *Ethics with Aristotle*. Terence Irwin advances a similar thesis that excellence is only able to grasp a virtuous goal of action inasmuch as practical wisdom has already identified one for it through the use of reason (Irwin 1978).

goals that "[survive] the analysis" waged by practical reason are put into action (Broadie 2002, 50). Broadie's intellectualist reading is clever: it allows her to preserve to the letter Aristotle's pronouncement that "excellence makes the goal correct" (inasmuch as the *only* goals under consideration are ones provided by character from the start) while allowing the intellect to do most of the legwork in actually directing the course of the agent's action.

McDowell offers also an intellectualistic reading, although at the same time he emphasizes the inextricable connection between affective and intellectual factors in deliberation. While he still agrees that the "recoil" from a reading that privileges the role of habituation in setting the goal for action is "surely right," he considers it equally inaccurate to locate full responsibility for goal-setting in the intellect with practical wisdom. Doing so requires either "strain" or "embarrassment" in contorting Aristotle's clear statements of the role of character in establishing the values that guide our action (McDowell 2001, 31). He admits that the virtuous person's conception of the proper end of action is molded through habituation of the desiderative part of the soul in her upbringing, but nonetheless because practical wisdom amounts to "knowing what needs to be done occasion by occasion," and a clear view of the good is inseparable from this ability, the intellectual excellence of practical wisdom eclipses the role of character excellence in determining the goals of action. For McDowell, while the motivations that stem from character play a role in offering to the agent a range of possible goals, it is the intellectual work of practical reason that ultimately does the most legwork (McDowell

2001, 32).[40] The much more important element in virtuous action is therefore the deliberative function of practical wisdom, which for him is more than just instrumental reasoning but includes also reasoning about the goal itself.

Moreover, deliberation operates not at the level of general principles, but rather it deals with the particular details of each practical situation; it is the repeated answering of the question, as McDowell puts it, "'What does doing well *here and now* amount to?'" (McDowell 2001, 32). As in Broadie's account, the difference here is between having a so-called 'general conception of the good' – that is, an abstract goal of flourishing in general – and being able to apply that conception to practical circumstances, knowing how the feasibilities of one's milieu come to bear on that generalized desire for whatever one considers 'good.' It is practical wisdom that affords the latter, according to McDowell, which means that the most decisive factor in our action is the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, rather than character. For McDowell character virtue is certainly an element in deliberation, but not necessarily the primary one.

By placing most of the onus for defining "what the good looks like" in everyday situations on practical wisdom rather than character, Broadie and McDowell's readings assign less responsibility for the direction of our moral life to the non-rational activity of the passions than to the intellectual activity of phronēsis. In so doing, both readings unduly undermine what is, to my mind, a clear enough articulation of the primary role of character in setting the course of action upon which practical wisdom then embarks. Such

[40] "Having the right motivational orientation *can* be something other than a product of argument (or intellectual intuition), without any implication that it is extra-intellectual, something that directs the practical application of the intellect from outside" (McDowell 2001, 32).

intellectualist readings of the role of character would indeed be necessary if character excellence were to be understood as a generalized desire for an abstract good that does not supply directives specific and forceful enough to guide our action. If the orienting function of character mainly tells us to "*do what is good (or best) in this situation*" (Broadie 2002, 49), then we surely do require another faculty that can specify the exact components of that 'doing what is good' in a more practical register. But character does, in fact, do much more than bestow a general desire for the good. After all, if the virtuous person's formal goal to "*do what is good (or best) in this situation*" is "common to all purposeful agents," as Broadie says (2002, 49), then there is hardly any real value to the habituation that supposedly leads to the virtuous person's singular characteristic, a disposition to feel pleasures and pains "at the right things." What differentiates that person's character from that of other purposeful agents otherwise habituated, who presumably have differing ranges of character excellence? Broadie and McDowell emphasize an intellectual faculty in the specification of what is good and thereby diminish the primacy of character's orienting function for moral action.

I side with commentators such as Jessica Moss who take intellectualist interpreters such as Broadie and McDowell to task for refusing to read Aristotle's exposition of practical wisdom at face value. There is no need to impute an intellectual element into Aristotle's statement that "excellence makes the goal correct" as long as you take seriously how character formation *does* in fact guide the identification of the goals of ethical action. Moss convincingly argues that it is unproblematic to ascribe to character the role of identifying the goals of our action, with practical wisdom in the second-order role of identifying the methods for attaining those goals. Moss puts it bluntly: at the level

of our individual moral-psychological development, "we each reach our view about what happiness consists in…not by any intellectual process, but instead through the non-rational habituation of the non-rational part of the soul" (Moss 2011, 205).[41] I support this reading of the mechanics of practical wisdom because it squares most closely with the most crucial and pointed articulations from Aristotle himself about both practical wisdom as an excellence and habituation as the shaping our affective responses to the world. According to those articulations, we see that under ideal circumstances, in which an ethical agent has both a well-habituated character and the skill of deliberating well that is practical wisdom, we can count on character excellence to place our goals before us, and then we rely on the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom to help us get there.

b. Imagination

Taking that to be the case, let us investigate more thoroughly how character establishes the goal that practical wisdom pursues. Aristotle says explicitly that our decisions – that is, the outcome of the deliberative processes for which practical wisdom is responsible – are indications of our character. This seems sensible enough: we can discern whether a person is virtuous or vicious by the actions that they choose. Once we begin to look more closely at the mechanics of practical wisdom, however, we see a much richer moral psychology behind this claim that brings together habituated character,

[41] By 'non-rational habituation,' she means habituation of affect (the 'passions'), confirming that habituation works "mainly by means of pleasure and pain" (Moss 2011, 217). It also bears mentioning that although her discussion here focuses on the acquisition of virtue by an individual, that development is certainly not atomistic or divorced from the profound influences of a social milieu. Quite the opposite, in fact; Aristotle is clear that a community's culture and traditions are key contributors to the habituation of the members of that community, which is why he so frequently refers to the relationship between ethics, virtue and politics.

practical wisdom, and the imagination and informs our inquiry into what shapes our character and what it would mean to work on our own character.

We always act in pursuit of an end – something for which we "wish," and that end is "the *apparent* good" (1113a16), because what appears to a person as good will depend on how they have been habituated.[42] Aristotle is abundantly clear on this point:

> For each disposition has its own corresponding range of fine things and pleasant things, and presumably what most distinguishes the good person is his ability *to see what is true in every set of circumstances*…But most people are deceived, and *the deception seems to come about because of pleasure*; for it appears a good thing when it is not. So they choose what is pleasant as something good, and they avoid pain as something bad (1113a32-1113b2, emphasis added).

The 'apparent good' is exactly what it sounds like: the thing (or concept or course of action) that we apprehend as desirable according to the proclivities of our character. Moss argues persuasively that such appearances come to us by way of a specific cognitive capacity, the imagination.[43] That is, our action is motivated by how things appear to us as

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[42] "For the person of excellence the object of wish is the one that is truly so, whereas for the bad person it is as chance will have it…for the good person discriminates correctly in every set of circumstances, and in every set of circumstances what is true is apparent to him" (1113a25-32).

[43] Heda Segvic argues a similar interpretation, against those who read Aristotle's use of "apparent" more loosely, as little more than an allowance for the possibility of error in choosing an end of action (cf., for example, Richardson 1992). Such arguments hold that all agents choose either the good or the *apparent* good, the latter being a euphemism for a

either desirable or undesirable, and those appearances themselves are mediated by the imagination.

Phantasia (imagination) is a notoriously complicated concept in Aristotle scholarship,[44] in large part because Aristotle's treatment of it (or at least the extant portion of his treatment) is hardly systematic. We find his most detailed exposition of the imagination in Book III of *De Anima*,[45] where his primary concern is to explain how perceptual error comes about.[46] Unlike sensation and conceptual thought, which by Aristotle's definitions must correspond to reality, the imagination allows for conscious experience to diverge from reality. The way Aristotle formulates the imagination in *De Anima* III.3 brings out the subjective element that accounts for the difference between the

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problematic end that a person would only mistakenly choose. Segvic persuasively counters with a more technical, cognitive reading of the concept of an "apparent good," which Moss and I follow here (Segvic 2002).

[44] Although 'imagination' is the standard translation of *phantasia*, it is hardly an unproblematic one. *Phantasma,* means "appearance," and the verb *phantasia* can more literally be translated as "appearance-awareness," the awkwardness of which makes it an unattractive alternative to the standard if faulty translation of 'imagination.' Nonetheless, reading 'imagination,' we should remember that Aristotle has in mind much more than strictly visual phenomena. Imagination is a faculty of generalized apprehension, of taking stock of the meaning of a concept or object that is required for all thought, though it need not be tied always to sensory perception.

[45] All citations from the *De Anima* come from Mark Shiffman's translation (2010).

[46] Aristotle runs into a problem in this area because his account of sensation holds that the object of sensation is "one and the same" as the object that the experienced sensation presents (*De Anima* 425b26-27). That means that there is a perfect correspondence between the cause of the sensation – a man I see on the horizon – and the content of the sensation, which is the experience of actually seeing the man on the horizon. A problem arises with this model, however, if I see a man on the horizon and later discover that the figure was, in fact, a signpost. The content of my sensation was, in this case, not present in its cause. There must therefore be some other cognitive component to sensation that can explain the possibility of error. The imagination is that faculty.

reality of the object of our perception and our perceived experience of that object.[47] The imagination does more than just lead us astray, however; it demonstrates that our perceptions are mediated through a faculty that introduces subjective elements into our perception.[48]

The imagination is *interpretive*; Martha Nussbaum distinguishes it from the passive reception of sensory stimuli, characterizing the imagination as that through which "we actively focus on some object in our environment, separating it out from its context and *seeing it as a certain thing*" (Nussbaum 257, emphasis added). The imagination is centrally important to Aristotle's theory of motion and action generally, inasmuch as it explains how a perceiving being can recognize elements of its milieu that are relevant to its projects, even in the most basic, animalistic sense.[49]

This is all simple enough: we strive for whatever appears good to us. Of course, not everything good will appear as good to everyone. To a vegan animal rights activist, the sight of the meat and other animal products that many others happily eat without much thought is repulsive. This difference of appearances that is wrought by the imagination becomes especially relevant to our line of questioning when we consider the ethical perception of the *phronimos*, the person of practical wisdom. The ethical skillfulness that is her most distinguishing feature hinges upon her knowledge of the

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[47] Beyond mistaken perception, Aristotle also cites dreams and hallucinations as instances of the imagination at work. Jessica Moss refers to these phenomena broadly as "non-standard perceptual experiences" (Moss 2012, 53).

[48] Victor Caston defines the imagination as "a form of intentionality which is more basic than the conceptual, and firmly rooted in the general character of perceptual experience" (Caston 1996, 52).

[49] The secondary literature on the role of imagination in animal behavior abounds. Martha Nussbaum, Malcolm Schofield, and Victor Caston have all contributed to an ongoing debate about this elusive topic in Aristotle.

"ultimate particular" (*NE* 1142a22) – that is, her ability to perceive the actual contents of her environment according to how they conduce to her project of virtuous action in the world. She apprehends things, people and ideas by way of a *phantasia*-laden assessment of their value. When it comes to grasping the ethical value of a state of affairs in our deliberation, the imagination does more than just direct animal motion toward the things that conduce to its most basic survival; concretely, the imagination also directs our moral lives by giving us the very ethical appearances upon which we deliberate and to which we commit ourselves through our choice.

Thus we should, following Moss, give a central role to the imagination in our explanation of the impact that habituation has on our moral lives. Habituation does not simply inscribe routines or vague values that nominally mark us as virtuous or un-virtuous; habituation directs our action by shaping how the world appears to us. By linking character and the imagination, Moss shows how ethical action starts with ethical perception.

Although Aristotle does not invoke the imagination directly in his discussion of practical wisdom in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, when he says again and again that practical wisdom is knowledge of the "ultimate particular" (1142a22), he is drawing our attention to our primary means of *knowing* particulars in the specificity of their value for our projects: perception, which per *De Anima* relies entirely upon the imagination to take place. The good that we apprehend as worthy of pursuit or, conversely, the things that we apprehend as morally abhorrent both reflect the ethical perceptual styles of our character. If this is so, the affective education of our habituation is a kind of perceptual education as well.

c. Upbringing, Affect and Perception of the World: Are we Prisoners of Our Character?

Upbringing makes "all the difference," then, because it bestows not only regimes of affect that direct our action but even regimes of perception that tell us what the 'goods' of our world even *are*. We have to "train the young by the rudders of pleasure and pain" because enjoying and hating the things we ought is actually an issue of perception more than personal tastes. Such training attunes us to those goods and virtuous goals in the world that, when pursued, actually stand to make us truly happy. Upbringing makes such a big difference, in fact, that Aristotle even restricts his audience in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to those who "have been brought up in good habits," because only they will really have the right goals in mind when considering virtue and non-virtue.[50] It is not quite that Aristotle does not want to waste his time arguing with such people about what a virtuous goal is; he does not think that such argumentation is what really teaches virtue in the first place. If his interlocutor does not already respond to the world in a virtuous way, that is an indication that the non-rational part of their soul has not been properly habituated, and philosophical argumentation is not the remedy for that disorder.

But if Aristotle has this view of moral upbringing and its effects in how we see the world, we might have good reason to take Aristotle to be a moral determinist claiming that once the tenor of one's ethical habituation has been established in childhood, the

[50] The full citation reads as follows: "Hence any one who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just and, generally, about the subjects of political science must have been brought up in good habits. For the facts are the starting-point, and if they are sufficiently plain to him, he will not need to reason as well; and the man who has been well brought up has or can easily get the starting-points. And as for him who neither has nor can get them, let him hear the words of Hesiod: …he who neither knows, nor lays to heart / Another's wisdom, is a useless weight" (*NE* 1095b3-13).

effects of this ethical habituation cannot be undone. Such a reading would boil down to the following: 1) Our upbringing determines our character; and 2) Our character determines our actions, based upon the pleasures and pains that supervene on possible choices, which stem from how we have been habituated. On the face of it, in an everyday sense, all of this seems plausible enough: we count on our caretakers and our social milieu to teach us the value of things – what should be pursued, what should be avoided, how we should behave – and this early training stays with us in a very profound way. In the next section we will explore what avenues Aristotle offers out of this deterministic picture of character habituation.

IV. Can We Be Authors of Our Own Character?

The Aristotelian account of ethical character in *Nicomachean Ethics* II discussed in previous sections does give one the impression that getting out from under a bad upbringing seems nearly impossible, because our character is first established through actions which are directed by our upbringing, but our actions are determined by our character. These two assumptions together seem to make it impossible for us to act 'out of character' in such a way that would allow us to refine or revise our character. To do so would be to adopt a way of engaging with the world that departs from the established parameters of our ethical apprehension. Given our account in the previous section of how habituation shapes the way we perceive the world, the entire notion of acting 'out of character' by choosing to pursue a good that diverges from those identified with one's habituation is difficult to conceive; the depth of the influence of habituation on how we perceive and respond to our world makes it seem that the trajectory of our ethical choices

are set by the upbringing of our habituation, for which we cannot actually take responsibility. This would seem to rule out the possibility of ethical formation or growth beyond the ethical ways acquired in our childhood. The ethical world into which we are inducted by upbringing seems, by these lights, to be immutable.

This is not, however, what Aristotle means. In *NE* III.5, he directly counters the objection that his account of character and habituation clashes with the agents' responsibility for their actions.[51] If our actions are determined by our character, asks Aristotle, and we owe our character to our upbringing, then how could we possibly be counted as agents solely responsible for their actions? This occasions a detailed discussion in the chapter of the nature of voluntary action, in which one of Aristotle's primary goals is to preserve our ability to exact moral censure by showing that people actually *are* responsible for their actions and, by extension, for the moral character that led to those actions. So here we find Aristotle making such claims as: "Because it was in our power…to act in this way or not in this way, therefore the states [of character] are voluntary" (1115a2-3), and therefore that "we are ourselves somehow part-causes of our states of character" (1114b23). We thus find Aristotle arguing that people are morally answerable for their actions, because *they* (and not just their upbringing) are responsible for the state of their character. Clearly he wants to preserve the possibility that we can censure someone for morally repugnant behavior; in other words, it will not do for all of

[51] An implicit interlocutor here is Plato; his main target is Plato's provocative thesis that no one actually "chooses" to do wrong, because if anyone truly knew what the good was, she would never choose against it. By Plato's lights, then, non-virtue is not a choice. This is a problem for anyone who wants to try to ascribe moral praise or blame, because for something to be morally praiseworthy or blameworthy, it must be voluntarily chosen.

us to ascribe our behavior to forces out of our control, leaving no room for the social expectation that we will be answerable for our actions.

This apparent tension between the accounts of responsibility for our character in Books II and III has provoked considerable commentary in recent years. Some commentators (such as Jean Roberts and Susan Sauvé Meyer) claim that this section on voluntariness doesn't meaningfully undermine what is fundamentally a deterministic depiction of the moral landscape in Aristotle;[52] while others (such as Thomas Brickhouse and – most recently – Gianluca DiMuzio) hold that these arguments on voluntariness provide important evidence that Aristotle was not in fact a determinist. In what follows, I

[52] Joan Roberts' article, "Aristotle on Responsibility for Action and Character," is mainly concerned with distinguishing the continuities and discontinuities between Plato and Aristotle's conception of moral responsibility, and she argues that Aristotle does not depart significantly from Plato on this question. Along the way, she entertains and then refutes a non-deterministic reading of Aristotelian moral development, which she says proceeds according to a "causal chain from education to character" (Roberts 1989, 28). She writes, "The view in question is also difficult to reconcile with Aristotle' s belief in the efficacy of moral education. It is difficult to see why, once the question about what determines, or has determined, any individual's character is raised, the answer should not make primary reference to that person's educators. That is, if the question here is 'what ultimately caused X to be of this character?' Aristotle ought to say, if he is to be consistent, that other people had at least a great deal to do with it" (Roberts 1989, 28). Similarly, Susan Sauvé Meyer denies any circularity in Aristotle's argument that we are responsible for our characters by reminding us of Aristotle's intended audience: "young people who have been blessed with a correct upbringing, good laws, and competent teachers" (Meyer 2006, 156). Aristotle presumes that his addressees already do, in fact, know what the good is and need only instruction on how best to pursue it. "The fortunate young people in that audience are, in Aristotle's view, no more responsible for having a correct general outlook on right and wrong at this stage of their moral development than the person raised in a den of thieves is responsible for having a mistaken one" (Meyer 2006, 155). In other words, according to Meyer, the arguments in Book III about responsibility for character are not really about *all agents'* responsibility for their character but rather how *these agents* – Aristotle's fortunate and well-brought-up students – can take responsibility for further cultivating their virtue.

will argue that the latter commentators – those who find in Aristotle's conception of moral subjectivity room for ethical self-cultivation of character.

Those in the latter group read Aristotle's claim that our childhood habituation "makes all the difference" as not quite literal. For example, DiMuzio likens 'the difference' made by upbringing to the help a tennis star might get from a coach.[53] Without the coach's expertise, she could never have become a champion, but she still had to do all the work of training, practicing and actually winning matches on her own. Analogously the habituation of our early upbringing gives us a certain advantage (or disadvantage), but ultimately it is up to us to act in such a way that we will create for ourselves a virtuous character. Furthermore, Aristotle does mention that it is basically a matter of common-sense *doxa* that "only a thoroughly senseless person" denies that "it is from the exercise of activities on particular objects that states of character are produced" (1114a9-10). It is not sufficient to simply claim, "This is how I was raised; I can't do any better." Aristotle maintains that we simply do know that the things we choose to do have an effect on our character, and whether we had a good upbringing or a flawed one, we still have to take up the responsibility of being 'part-causes' of our character through our own ethical self-cultivation.

I agree with Brickhouse and DiMuzio that, in spite of Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of upbringing, we should not take him to be a determinist. His ethics is

[53] Brickhouse directly counters Roberts' claims: "Against Roberts I shall argue that Aristotle's theory of character-development requires that there be a point when an adult has the capacity to perform or not to perform the actions by which a state of character is produced or maintained and that whether or not an agent performs the requisite character-producing actions is to be explained in terms of the agent' s choices – choices which cannot, in turn, be explained by the agent's childhood habituation or anything else beyond his control" (Brickhouse and Polansky 1991, 138).

directed to 'learners of virtue' – people who are somewhere between total virtue and total vice,[54] and for this category of 'learners of virtue' even to be a coherent concept, it must be possible to continue to grow and develop as ethical agents beyond childhood. I read Aristotle as doing something more than simply a descriptive project of placing different kinds of characters on a continuum to define what virtue is or is not; the depth of his moral psychology is meant to show us how we come to be who we are, ethically speaking, so that we can better navigate those features of our inner life and our life with others.

When Aristotle suggests that we are 'part-causes of our character,' he is calling upon us to consider how we are contributing to the habituation that not only defines our ethical disposition but also casts the appearance of our world in a certain shape. Aristotle even says that "if each [person] is somehow responsible for the state [of character] he is in, he will also be himself somehow responsible for how things appear" (1114b2-3). He resolves this conditional by affirming that states of character are indeed voluntarily chosen, but not in the same way that actions are said to be voluntary: "we are masters of our actions from the beginning right to the end, if we know the particular facts, but though we control the beginning of our states [of character] the gradual progress is not obvious, any more than it is in illnesses" (1114b30-1115a2). In other words, we are *in principle* responsible for our character inasmuch as we all should know that the actions in which we engage will shape us and contribute to the ongoing sedimentation of our ethical

[54] Indeed, it is only those who are fully virtuous or non-virtuous who have truly unchanging characters. Anyone who is in the middling category of 'learner of virtue' will display a mix of excellence and ethical fallibility, but such people are, in fact, learners and therefore apt to change and develop.

habituation. Although this indicates that we have control over the formation of our character through our actions, the mere admission of this fact hardly illuminates for us a method by which we can master that process.

Aristotle's point is that, although it is clear that there is a connection between our choices and the resulting character, it is not always clear at the beginning of the process what the outcome of our choices will be when it comes to character-formation. Aristotle's example is one of decline: he claims that it should be clear to anyone that our bad actions result in vicious character, although this point becomes gradually less apparent to those who are immersed in the situation. A modern example, is Walter White, a character in the AMC show, *Breaking Bad;* he is a high school chemistry teacher who begins to cook methamphetamines when he is diagnosed with apparently aggressive and terminal cancer. A doting family man, he makes this illicit 'career change' in order to provide financially for his family in the face of his imminent death. Over the course of the show's five seasons, we see Walter transform from a self-sacrificing, doting husband and father into an egomaniacal anti-hero. Even after his cancer proves defeasible in the first season, he finds himself unable to return to his former life; the power and excitement of the life of a meth kingpin are too strong a draw. He deceives his loved ones and engages in all the most unsavory acts that accompany engagement in the meth trade. Clearly, his choice to become a drug dealer has formed his character, and not in the positive manner that his initial motivations – of ensuring his family's well-being – would have indicated. Although the conceit of the plot is initiated by good intentions and his understandable desire to protect those he loves, the more middling specificities of how he commits himself to that goal end up changing him in profound ways. Manipulative and reckless

behaviors that were once unthinkable become his modus operandi. This exemplifies Aristotle's point that "the gradual progress is not obvious." Walter's moral decline is slow and insidious and takes everyone – including him – by surprise. One set of virtuous motivations eventually is overtaken by the new affectively loaded priorities of a drug dealer, primarily those of getting and retaining power. Although plenty of viewers could critique his initial solution to the problem of his family's financial solvency, the more salient fact for this discussion is the way in which that initial decision was the first of many that would eventually re-habituate him in a most ethically problematic fashion. He certainly did not enter into the drug trade in order to become a murderer and a liar, and the progress toward those outcomes were "not obvious," as Aristotle would say, as they were occurring. Each individual decision he made was reasonable enough to him at the time he made it, but over time they each contributed to a re-sedimentation of the habitual structures of his character until he was practically unrecognizable as the gentle Walter White who had once contented himself with the life of a middle-class husband and father. This kind of moral decline is something that takes place when an agent does not adequately anticipate the mechanisms of sedimentation of ethical subjectivity that results from action. Individual choices to him seem isolated and freely chosen, and yet they work to narrow his field of vision and the scope of his action. From a Merleau-Pontian standpoint, they alter the 'lay of the land' of the agent's ethical life. Here is an instance of a person who fails to anticipate the toll that a series of individual choices will take on his overall character.

A different kind of case is those people who have as a starting point problematic characters. Although Aristotle's model is focused on the moral upbringing of those who

start from a neutral position and are being habituated for the first time, it should enable us to think about how to transform through habit someone who has been wrongly habituated and has a bad character. Take, for example, the case of the person who appears incapable of controlling his anger. Here the difficulty is not knowing where to start in transforming it. Though the irascible person might admit that he and he alone is responsible for his outbursts, simply admitting as much does not help to stem his irascibility. There are two relevant aspects to this iteration of vice: 1) his inability to control the expression of his anger and 2) the inordinate response he has to what should be relatively benign phenomena. For example, adherents of anger management courses who learn to redirect their anger, or celebrities outed on social media for out-of-control, hateful behavior (à la Mel Gibson or the comedian Michael Richards) who seek therapy may at least be acknowledging the problem of unchecked aggression. Underlying that aggression, however, is a response to a challenging situation that is overblown and unskillful at the very least. The mere admission that one "should not have behaved this way" has not yet drilled down to the initial cause of that misbehavior, which is a poorly calibrated set of pleasures and pains that have arisen in response to their milieu. In these cases, Aristotle's point, once again, is well taken: the process by which those pleasures and pains take shape and can therefore be changed is "not obvious." Anger management seeks to teach its students to be "masters of their actions" only at the level of whether and how they express the affective polarities that are already in play for them; to transform the landscape of those polarities themselves would be quite another story.

This discussion about the role of habituation in ethical choice and perception and the extent of our responsibility for our character brings to light an underappreciated

aspect of the tension between these two factors in Aristotle: the complexity of the problem of attempting to work on our own character. It is a task that is required of us if we are to become virtuous, and yet there are powerful psychological structures that complicate our access to our own self-cultivation. Aristotle's substantial account of how habituation actually works – how it creates the conditions for how we meet and apprehend the world and the kinds of ethical actions that proceed from that encounter – show us what a vitally important task it is to ensure the quality of our habits. At the same time, there is a real moral-psychological difficulty of undoing habits that we know are ethically deleterious, specifically due to the profundity of the effects of habituation in providing the terms through which we would have any world at all. How do we work on the structures through which we experience and respond ethically to the world from within the very structures we hope to refashion? Aristotle does not directly answer this question as to how, practically, we can engage in a process of ethical re-habituation, but offers some tools for us to work towards a response. If the ways we habitually relate with the world influence our ethical character to the extent that Aristotle suggests, then it matters very much that we examine how our habitual ways of thinking and doing might be leading us toward or away from our ethical ideals – that is, toward or away from fulfilling our highest ethical potential.

V. Conclusion

The case of aversive racism developed in the last chapter speaks to the problem that this chapter has raised: it is not 'enough' for a white person to espouse a belief in egalitarian values for them not to behave in racist ways that harm people of color. In spite

of holding liberal values about race, the test subjects in Dovidio and Gaertner's study still harbored subtly negative feelings about black people upon which they acted in their hypothetical 'hiring practices.' This seems like a situation in which we might attribute at least part of these negative feelings to a white person's upbringing or cultural milieu that cannot be outstripped by an avowed belief in a social or political ideal; habituation, in this case, does indeed seem determinative even in spite of the subjects' wishes for racial equality. Something more needs to happen between the adoption of an ideal like racial equality and the actual ability to manifest that belief in one's feelings toward and treatment of people of color, because, for Aristotle and certainly in the United States today, it is not sufficient for white people to simply acknowledge that they have been habituated according to racist values (if they do so at all). This is a clear example of the need for a method for not just identifying problematic habits but actually undoing them. While it may be true that only a "thoroughly senseless person" would deny that the actions in which we engage influence our character, and our character influences our experience of the world, who among us really knows what a process of ethical re-habituation would require of us? How can we act 'out of character' in order to found for ourselves a new character? What about us would such a regimen target in order to be effective? Aristotle's ambivalence on the question of responsibility for our own character is well-founded, because it brings to light an important problem for moral psychology that cannot easily be dismissed.

In the last chapter, we found in Merleau-Ponty's conception of habit a view of world-acquisition that was both inspiring and forbidding for the person who wishes to cultivate herself at the dispositional level. The sedimentation of our world through habit

brings our past into our present at every moment, making it difficult to imagine how we could unseat an infelicitous habit such as a racist gaze. On the other hand, the spontaneity of habit indicates the open future that lies before us in trying to cultivate ourselves through habit; in this futurity of habit we can find its ethical valence. In this chapter, Aristotle has met that interest in the ethics of habit with a richly complex if ambivalent picture of what it means to work on our own character given the profound perceptual and psychological stakes of our early habituation. Together, Merleau-Ponty and Aristotle show us that re-habituating ourselves is a matter of re-fashioning some of the most fundamental structures that tell us not just 'how to behave' relative to other and the objects of our world but rather *what* those others and those objects even are. Ethical re-habituation would have to work on the parts of us that give us our world and make it affectively evocative and meaningful for us. In the following chapter, we will turn to a tradition that offers a number of detailed practices for doing just that, the Tibetan Buddhist Lojong tradition. We will read Lojong as an example of a moral-psychological pedagogy that has ethical aims in mind and aims to accomplish them by reworking the most basic structures through which its practitioners have a world.

Chapter Three

Ethical Re-Habituation in the Lojong Tradition

I. Introduction

The last chapter left us with the question of what it would mean to act 'out of character' and the challenges inherent to changing the habituation that defines our ethical subjectivity. Doing so would require changing important ways in which we perceive and experience the world that give us the field of possibilities for our ethical action. This is no simple task, and yet one that is required if we hope to take up habit as a site for ethical self-transformation. Buddhist thought is keenly attuned to this problem. Indeed, the Buddhist project as a whole might be expressed as one of transforming our rapport with the world so that we can fulfill the highest possibilities of what it means to be human and better meet the ethical demands of our lives.

In this chapter, I outline the general schematics of Buddhist ethics and particularly the ethics of Mahāyāna ('Great Vehicle') Buddhism, arguing that the Buddhist approach to the problem of ethical self-transformation centrally involves processes of re-habituation. I specifically address the Tibetan Buddhist Lojong tradition as an iteration of the ethical mandate of the Mahāyāna to transform our world by working with phenomenological habit. My reading of Lojong therefore focuses on the phenomenological mechanics of its pedagogical strategies. I argue that Lojong offers a combination of discursive and non-discursive techniques for (a) overcoming the habituation that defines the unenlightened mind ensconced in suffering and (b) cultivating the ethical ideal of bodhicitta, the 'mind of enlightenment' characterized as a commitment to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Lojong not only

teaches its practitioners to 'be good Buddhists' by training their habitual responses toward moral action; more crucially, it also transforms the phenomenological basis from which they *have* a world at all.

II. What Do We Do When We Do Buddhist Ethics?

In order to contextualize Lojong as a method for actualizing the Mahāyāna Buddhist ethical mandate of cultivating bodhicitta, first I will outline what is at stake in Buddhist ethics more generally. Following Jay Garfield (2010; 2015), I read Buddhist ethics as moral phenomenology and therefore different in kind from mainstream Western ethical paradigms. As moral phenomenology, Buddhist ethics problematizes our conventional phenomenological orientation that is the cause of our suffering and calls us to transform that orientation in the interest of ethical self-transformation.

In recent decades Western scholars such as Damien Keown and Charles Goodman have advanced influential readings of Buddhist ethics vis-à-vis Western paradigms such as virtue ethics and consequentialism.[55] Keown finds in Buddhist moral theory a structure parallel to Aristotelian virtue ethics, while Goodman reads Buddhist thought as a form of universalist consequentialism. While each of these analyses has illuminated modes of moral reasoning that are embedded in different moments of Buddhist thought, I do not think that Buddhist moral theory can satisfactorily be characterized in virtue ethical or consequentialist terms.

[55] Cf. Keown (2000) and Goodman (2009).

a. Two Western Approaches to Buddhist Ethics

Keown locates the main points of the structural similarity between Buddhist moral theory and Aristotelian virtue ethics in their teleological orientations and the role of training toward virtue as the path toward the ethical *telos*. Both Buddhism and virtue ethics are oriented toward conceptions of flourishing. Flourishing is defined in systematically specific terms but in both cases it amounts to a fulfillment of the highest potentiality of the human event (i.e. either enlightenment or *eudaimonia*). Each theoretical system further proposes a specific program of personal development that leads to that fulfillment. In both traditions, Keown argues, the undercarriage of that pursuit of flourishing is the ongoing practice of cultivating and enacting specific virtues.[56]

For his part, Goodman's reading of Buddhist thought as a form of universalist consequentialism relies considerably upon the agent-neutrality of Buddhist moral reasoning. In his analysis of Mahāyāna ethics specifically, Goodman notes that the path of the Mahāyāna practitioner is to eradicate suffering wherever she finds it, in herself and in any other sentient being. Her work to alleviate suffering ought not privilege her own spiritual or material well-being in any way.[57] This resonates with the universalist consequentialist aim of acting with an eye toward the consequences faced by all sentient beings in the universe for all future time, whether or not those consequences specifically

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[56] "The passage from [one's psychological starting point] to [the goal of liberation] is…achieved through the cultivation of specific virtues which promote a structured *participation in the end* through its progressive incarnation in the present" (Keown 2001, 22–23).

[57] "Mahāyāna Buddhism both allows actions to be moral that don't promote the well-being of the agent and places the virtue of all beings above the virtue of the individual agent. According to [seminal ethical texts such as] the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and the *Precepts Sūtra*… the goal of each agent should be to promote virtue in general, not just the virtue of that agent" (Goodman 2008, 24).

benefit the moral agent in question. According to Goodman, the engine of both of these ethical systems is a shared conception of the incoherence of pursuing the goods of an atomic individual. From the Buddhist standpoint, Goodman argues, this ethical stance stems from the doctrine of non-self, while Western consequentialism sees no meaningful difference between the happiness of any one agent over another's but rather is concerned with the sum total of the happiness of all individuals. Goodman cites Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* on this point. Parfit argues that, just as it would be irrational for an individual to pursue her short-term happiness at the expense of her long-term interests, it is equally irrational for an agent to hold her own interests or the interests of her in-group as any more significant than those of all sentient beings generally (Goodman 2008, 20–21).

Keown maintains that part of the benefit of his comparative analysis is the possibility it affords for transferring the analytical scaffolding erected for the exegesis of Aristotelian virtue ethics to the study of Buddhist ethics. He sees this method as one of "proceeding from a known to an unknown" (Keown 2001, 21). Goodman is likewise explicit in naming his comparative ethics as a necessary step in forging a conversation between Western and Buddhist ethicists. He says that cross-cultural ethical dialogue "will be very difficult unless we Westerners can find some way of understanding, *in our own terms,* what kind of ethical theory Buddhism might involve" (Goodman 2008, 17, emphasis added).

Though these attempts to systematize Buddhist thought in terms that are legible to Western ethicists can be valuable exercises, I concur with Jay Garfield that such readings require undue contortions and omissions to get traditions that are distinct from one

another – historically, culturally, and formally – to 'say the same thing.'[58] Buddhist ethics is different in kind from Western moral theory. Moreover, I think that although we might be able to find moments within Buddhist ethical texts that seem to betray a consequentialist or virtue ethical bent, such instances are not definitive of the main work of Buddhist ethics, which is concerned not with rationally justifying and explicating the moral primacy of universal happiness or virtue but rather with articulating the need for a more fundamental ethical commitment: transforming our phenomenological orientation toward and experience of the world. That is, Buddhist ethics is founded upon the most basic of all Buddhist insights: we are suffering because we have wrongly apprehended the world and our own selfhood, and it is the most pressing ethical task of our lives to rectify this error. This is a phenomenological problem from the start.

One might object at this point that 'transforming our phenomenological orientation' sounds like more of an epistemic project than an ethical one. Buddhist ethics does not amount to an adoption of a value system or a maxim for choosing moral actions, but rather is more like a wholesale reworking of our phenomenological rapport with our world, undoing the habitual structures that define and direct our confusion and suffering. If one defines ethics as an exclusive exercise of justifying maxims and defining virtues, then perhaps the Buddhist approach does not even qualify as an ethics. If, however, we see ethics as fundamentally concerned with living well and the constitutive factors of a successful human life (however that is defined within a given tradition), then Buddhist

[58] Garfield writes, "Each of these readings [of Buddhist ethics as virtue ethical or consequentialist], I fear, is a symptom of the dangerous hermeneutic temptation to force Buddhist ethics into a Western mold…[and] each misses the heart of the matter" (Garfield 2015, 299).

ethics as outlined here does fit the bill. To that end, what differentiates this Buddhist ethical approach from predominant Western ones is the depth to which its reflections upon the question of phenomenological self-transformation delve; Buddhism asks not that we behave a certain way within the world that we have but rather that we work to give ourselves a different world. In other words, in Buddhism we find an acknowledgement of the fact that phenomenology is an ethical issue. As the answer to the question of ultimate human flourishing, the cultivation of a different world is not just a matter of epistemic accuracy; it means creating the conditions necessary for our escape from the confusion that causes our own suffering as well as our mistreatment of others. The Buddhist project is epistemological *because* it is ethical; it starts with the problem of suffering and finds a path out of that suffering by way of transformation of our way of having a world.

b. Buddhist Ethics as Moral Phenomenology

Garfield presents an interpretation of Buddhist ethics along these lines in his influential article, "What Is It Like to Be a Bodhisattva?" (2010) and further refines it in his most recent book, *Engaging Buddhism* (2015). He reads Buddhist ethics as fundamentally different in kind from Western ethical theories, developing the argument that, rather than focusing on character, consequences of action, or moral maxims per se, Buddhist moral theory amounts to a "moral phenomenology" (2015, 10).[59] The aim of

[59] Garfield also vociferously undercuts the approaches of Keown and Goodman and offers pointed refutations of each of these readings (Garfield 2015, 299). I concur with his view that Buddhist ethics is distinct from Western canonical moral theories, particularly in the case of Goodman's consequentialist reading, and I share his concerns about reading Buddhist ethics through the lens of Western concepts rather than attempting to take Buddhist thought on its own terms. However, I also think there is less

Buddhist moral phenomenology is to provide a solution to *dukkha*, or the pervasive suffering of the human condition (Garfield 2015, 10).[60] Our suffering stems from our misapprehension of the interdependent play of reality by way of what is called "two-fold self-grasping" (Garfield 2015, 10), in which we erroneously impute a substantial reality to the self as an intrinsically real, independently existing entity and then, based upon that misapprehension, we perceive and experience the world through a structure of subject-object duality. This 'way of taking up the world' is the origin of suffering. When we place our own subjectivity as the 'mobile center of the universe,' we automatically privilege the 'I.' Further, everything *else* in the world is perceived and understood relative to this 'I' – as Garfield puts it, everything becomes cast in terms like "*my* friends, and those who are *not* my friends; *my* possessions and those that are *not* mine; *my* field of interest, and those that are *not* mine," *et cetera* (2015, 11). Together, this 'I' and 'mine' structure comprises two-fold self-grasping, which establishes the frames of reference within which we map our experience of the world.[61] This is the source of suffering

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daylight between Aristotelian virtue ethics and Buddhist ethics than Garfield seems to think, but not because Buddhist moral thought is virtue ethical per se. On the contrary, the 'moral phenomenology' that Garfield finds in Buddhist ethics has a more robust presence in Aristotelian virtue ethics than Garfield acknowledges. Nonetheless, in the end, the highest good propagated by each of these theories – *eudaimonia* and enlightenment, respectively – are different enough to drive a structural wedge between the two systems. In any case, my argument in this chapter does not hinge on a resolution of this dispute, and a full argument in defense of this view is also not the work of the present chapter.

[60] *Dukkha* is a Pāli word routinely translated by 'suffering' but also rendered as dissatisfaction, unease, stress, anxiety, or pain.

[61] On this point, the 20th century Tibetan scholar Geshe Lhundub Sopa writes, "One's thoughts concerning 'I' and 'me' are dominated by the view of a real personal identity, which holds the self as permanent and existing absolutely… Every aspect of misery and suffering in this world actually arises from the view of a real personal identity, or the egoistic view" (2001, 45).

because there is a "mismatch between the illusion we project and the reality in which we live" (Garfield 2015, 11). The vicissitudes of life – misfortune, discomfort, irritations and the like – are a matter of course, but when take them personally as attacks upon 'Me, the Mobile Center of My Universe,' we *suffer* rather than simply undergo them as the inevitable occupational hazards of being alive.[62] Effectively, when we project a substantial self where there is not one, we immediately begin to cling to it and protect its interests. In Merleau-Pontian terms, we could say this is a form of a perceptual habit that polarizes our world according to our projects, and the main project is at hand here is self-cherishing. Two-fold grasping therefore skews our experience of the world and sets us on a track to simply 'get it all wrong,' all the way down. The habit of our imputation of intrinsic reality of a self and a world produces an ethical orientation that is an expression of confusion. All this is to say: Buddhism, as a tradition that is fundamentally a response to the human condition of suffering, is always already an ethics.

Further, Garfield's articulation of Buddhist ethics as moral phenomenology hinges upon the thesis that moral life – every encounter, every ethical choice – is grounded first and foremost upon perception as the form of our meeting with the world.[63] We perceive the content of our world through a lens of concepts that tells us not only

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[62] Garfield puts it this way: "The fact that I have no absolute control over my life might be reality, but it is [suffering] only if I thought that such control even made sense. Pain, impermanence and interdependence are facts; to take them as existential failures is to experience [suffering]" (2015, 11).

[63] "Every morally charged interaction begins with a perceptual encounter… Changing the affective dimensions of our perceptual experience is both possible, and can lead us to be better (or worse) people, can lead us to experience and to create more or less suffering...This aspect of our perceptual engagement with the world, while automatic in the moment, is malleable, and while deeply cognitive is also deeply moral" (Garfield 2015, 287).

what a thing is but also discloses its affective significance as a thing worthy of attraction, revulsion, or indifference. We perceive the world, but perhaps more importantly, we *feel* the world; our reception of and response to it is not as a mass of data that we intellectually synthesize. What we have when we have a world is a rich array of phenomena that push and pull us according to the phenomenological structures that we provide through which they manifest. Furthermore, the shape of this encounter is subject to transformation in the long term; although its individual instantiations feel automatic and inevitable, the structure of that encounter is in fact something that takes shape and can be reshaped over time. Our perceptual engagement with the world is therefore "far from passive, far from fixed" (Garfield 2015, 288), and the Buddhist ethical project takes this insight as its cue.

A major aspect of the world that we fail to apprehend when we hypostasize ourselves and the objects of our experience is expressed by the doctrine of interdependent origination (Sanskrit: *pratītyasamutpāda*; Tibetan: *rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*).[64] Interdependent origination is integral to one of the very first teachings of the Buddha upon his enlightenment under the bodhi tree,[65] and has remained a major topic of

[64] Alternative translations of this term include: dependent origination, interdependent arising, dependent co-arising, and mutual causality. This is an immensely important and sophisticated concept that merits (and indeed has been the subject of) much more in-depth analyses than what is possible here. See, e.g., Ewing (2001), Garfield (1994), or Macy (1979).

[65] In the *Cūḷa-Māluṅkya-Sutta*, the Buddha reports, "I truly knew what suffering is, I truly knew what the arising of suffering is, I truly knew what the cessation of suffering is, I truly knew what the practice leading to the cessation of suffering is" (Gethin, *Sayings of the Buddha* 186). This, of course, paraphrases the Four Noble Truths, at the heart of which is a causal process that brings about suffering as well as its eradication. The Four Noble Truths, possibly the most basic, universal teachings in all of Buddhist doctrine, are fundamentally about causation: once one can see that there is suffering and how suffering

Buddhist philosophical reflection up to the present day. Put simply, interdependent origination is an account of causation that postulates that all psychological and material manifestations arise in dependence upon the causes and conditions that bring them about. What is most metaphysically important about this thesis is that such dependence marks all psychological and material manifestations as lacking intrinsic existence (Sanskrit: *svabhāva*, Tibetan: *rang bzhin*). In Indian Buddhist thought, essential substantial reality is equated with the possession of intrinsic, unconditioned existence. An ultimately existing thing would therefore necessarily be independent from the flux of cause and effect. Anything that is interdependent – that arises thanks to causes and conditions – therefore cannot be said to possess ultimate, intrinsic existence.[66] Another way of saying this is: the presence of causation necessarily indicates an absence of intrinsic existence.

There is considerable nuance and differentiation in how this point gets elaborated throughout the history of Buddhist thought. One of the relevant points for Buddhist ethics regarding the concept of independent origination is that ordinary beings like us have a tendency to 'miss' this fact about the 'way things are' – that everything arises in dependence upon causes and conditions, especially *us*, our psycho-physical states, and

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comes to be (the First and Second Noble Truths); then she can see that the cessation of suffering is possible (the Third Noble Truth), as well as the specific steps that lead to that cessation (the Fourth Noble Truth). The Buddha goes on in this *sutta* to say, "Then it occurred to me that the Truth I had found was profound, hard to see, hard to understand; …It is hard for this generation to see the possibility of things having specific causes and arising [originating] in dependence on things" (Gethin 2008, 186). This iconic story from the Pāli canon – recounted again and again as a spiritual teaching as much as a part of Buddhist cultural lore – demonstrates the centrality of understanding causation – and specifically, interdependent origination – to Buddhist soteriology.

[66] This also means that all things are 'empty' of intrinsic, ultimate existence. Interdependent origination therefore serves as an explication and justification of the doctrine of emptiness that is at the heart of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy.

the meanings of the things we perceive in our milieu. Instead, we hypostasize the content of our experience and our own atomic, individualized selfhood, projecting upon them a permanence and a substantial reality that they in fact lack. This misapprehension is the foundation of the confusion that causes our suffering.[67]

Abiding in confusion about the nature of reality *qua* interdependent origination has moral ramifications, therefore; by misapprehending the nature of reality, we impute and grasp at an illusory self and structure our world according to an ego-centered, dualistic schema. Because of two-fold self-grasping, we orient ourselves to the world according to a zero-sum game of 'me against the world,' selfishly looking out for the interests of a self-contained, independent self at the expense of all others. When we rout this misapprehension, we are effectively undoing the two-fold self-grasping that is the basis for our suffering and the self-cherishing attitude that leads us to defend the exclusive interests of our fictitious self. At the same time, we are challenging some of the most fundamental 'facts' that we have taken to be true about ourselves and the world. This is therefore a moral transformation inasmuch as it eradicates the self-cherishing from whence comes our moral wrongdoing, but it also is a profound phenomenological reorientation as it calls for a re-polarizing of the values that structure our experience of the world. This is the work of Buddhist ethics as moral phenomenology.

c. Bodhicitta and Moral Phenomenology

[67] Garfield glosses this misapprehension as a set of "cognitive habits that issue in deception" and even likens the totality of this phenomenological structure as a *Lebenswelt*, or life-world (Garfield 2015, 309).

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, developed about five hundred years after the time of the Buddha, roughly two millennia ago,[68] the central strategy for accomplishing the project of transforming our orientation to the world boils down to one activity: cultivating bodhicitta (Tibetan: *byang chub kyi sems*).[69] Bodhicitta names the intention to become enlightened not to relieve one's own suffering exclusively but for the sake of all sentient beings. The bodhisattva is the moral exemplar of the Mahāyāna, the person who has cultivated bodhicitta and therefore has this highest of motivations for her practice. Garfield calls bodhicitta "a complex psychological phenomenon" and "a standing motivational state with conative and affective dimensions" (2015, 299).[70]

The most widely celebrated elaboration of Mahāyāna ethics is Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (*How to Lead an Awakened Life*),[71] a multi-chapter manual on how to cultivate bodhicitta. In it Śāntideva explains to his readers how to manifest the "perfections" (Sanskrit: *pāramitā*; Tibetan: *pha rol tu phyin pa)* that characterize the

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[68] Dating the origins of the Mahāyāna is a topic of some contention. In particular, there is a difference between the scholarly account of the emergence of the Mahāyāna, which I follow in my gloss here, and the traditional account, which holds that the Mahāyāna does not constitute a doctrinal innovation per se and the Mahāyāna sutras were in fact the 'word of the Buddha' himself. See Williams (2009) for a more thorough explication of the history of the Mahāyāna.

[69] Bodhicitta is a Sanskrit term that I will leave untranslated. Its usual renderings in English are "mind of enlightenment" and "awakening mind," but neither of these terms is all that helpful in capturing the actual meaning of this important term. Other important features of Mahāyāna ethics include its emphasis on *karuṇā* (compassion, or care) and the centrality of the bodhisattva as moral exemplar.

[70] As one of the central components of Mahāyāna Buddhism, bodhicitta is the subject of considerable study (not to mention actual practice). One of the most well-known, traditional elaborations upon bodhicitta is Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (2008), discussed below. Other worthy discussions elsewhere abound. See Williams (2009) for a helpful gloss of this rich concept or Brassard (2000) for a more in-depth discussion.

[71] Incidentally, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is often cited in Lojong texts and commentaries, clearly serving as foundational, doctrinal justification for the Lojong tradition, which we will discuss in greater detail below.

bodhisattva. These are the so-called Six Perfections.[72] Some of these perfections pertain to domains of behavior that from a Western standpoint seem straightforwardly 'moral' in nature, such as Generosity and Forbearance. In addition, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* also includes long chapters on themes like Meditative Absorption that seem less obviously moralistic from a Western perspective. As Garfield notes, however, meditation is integral to Mahāyāna ethics because "it is through meditation that one embeds discursive knowledge into one's character" (2015, 307).

The content of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* speaks to Garfield's thesis about what kind of an ethics Buddhist ethics is: its instructions are all presented as forms of mental cultivation that are not normative rules to live by but rather transformative practices that lead to a more skillful and compassionate style of taking up the world. It is not a set of maxims telling us what we must do but rather a manual for telling how we should become what we must in order to flourish. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* exemplifies how the fruition of the Buddhist path, understood as our extirpation from suffering, is not quite the result of philosophical knowledge or even rote practice of virtuous behavior;[73] rather, it is about transforming the very structures through which we have a world through the cultivation of bodhicitta.

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[72] Per Crosby and Stilton's translation, the Six Perfections are: Generosity, Discipline, Patience, Vigor, Meditative Absorption, and Understanding (2008). Elsewhere in the Mahāyāna we find schemata of the Ten Perfections, though this presentation does not find a place in Śāntideva's account here.

[73] Having the right metaphysical view is not a product of philosophical reflection per se; it has to be "an innate cognitive instinct;" this is why "meditative practice is necessary, in order that reflective thought can become a spontaneous cognitive set, a way of *being in the world*, rather than a way of *thinking about the world*" (Garfield 2015, 309).

In sum, Buddhist ethics emphasizes the fact that the way in which agents are located within and oriented to their world is both the source of and solution to the main problematic of the human condition. This is an ethics driven by the problem of suffering, and the solution that it offers to this problem is a rigorous method for eradicating the orientation that has proceeded from it and a method for setting the practitioner aright with a more metaphysically and ethically felicitous orientation. This is why Garfield locates the critical feature of Buddhist ethics in phenomenology, even arguing that "the task of leading an awakened life – a morally desirable life – is the task of transforming our phenomenology" (2015, 310). The phenomenological reorientation that Buddhist ethics proposes involves re-habituation away from the habituation of two-fold self-grasping and toward bodhicitta.

III. Lojong: Bringing Bodhicitta within Reach

With this overview of Mahāyāna ethics in mind, let us turn now to the Lojong tradition to see how it makes this profound moral-phenomenological transformation possible through its highly practical, concrete instructions on cultivating bodhicitta. As an exercise of moral phenomenology, the cultivation of bodhicitta is a radical project of transforming the structures of one's ethical subjectivity. From its inception, the Lojong tradition has been presented as a practical, accessible, progressive approach to this formidable task of ethical self-transformation;[74] for all their various styles and

[74] The renowned contemporary Tibetan scholar and translator of the *Mind Training* collection, Thupten Jinpa, writes, "The heart of Tibetan [Lojong] is the cultivation and enhancement of Mahāyāna Buddhism's highest spiritual ideal, the generation of the awakening mind (*bodhicitta*)… More specifically, 'mind training' or *lojong* refers to a

instructions, what ties the texts of this genre together is their common pedagogical orientation of instructing ordinary people – not necessarily 'master' practitioners – on how to inculcate bodhicitta.

The term "Lojong" is a compound word. "Lo" (*blo*) has a cognitive valence, and can be translated with mind, intellect, intelligence, cognition, understanding, intellect, or conceptual mind. The word "jong" (*sbyong*) often serves as a verb meaning "to purify" or "to cleanse," though in its nominal use it can be translated with purification and cleansing as well as training, cultivation, study, and practice.[75] Sweet and Zwilling hold that Lojong can be felicitously understood as something along the order of "mental-purification training" or, even less pithily, as "mental purification through repeated practice" (1996, 17). With this clunky if thorough rendering of the meaning of Lojong, Sweet and Zwilling underscore the purpose of Lojong as a method specifically attuned to the project of cultivating bodhicitta.

Lojong is what Michael Sweet calls a "genuinely Tibetan innovation" (1996, 245) because, although its progenitors hailed from India, none of the extant literature seems to have originated outside Tibet.[76] The Indian sage Atiśa Dīpaṃkara is said to have

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specific approach to cultivating [bodhicitta]. That approach entails a disciplined process for radically transforming our thoughts and prejudices from natural self-centeredness to other-centered altruism" (Jinpa 2006b, 1).

[75] Traditionally, Buddhist training is often characterized as a form of purification, so the metaphorical leap between the verb "to purify" and its nominalization as "training" is nothing all that remarkable.

[76] Nonetheless, Indian canonical Mahāyāna sources for the Lojong approach include Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī*, Atiśa's *Bodhipāthapradīpa,* Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, and especially Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. As mentioned above, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is cited frequently in Lojong texts and commentaries to provide clarification and justification of a text in light of this celebrated and widely accepted expression of the Mahāyāna view. The pedagogical approaches to Lojong are also clearly

transmitted the Lojong teachings from India to Tibet in the 11th century CE. He came to Tibet at the invitation of the king known as Yeshe Ö during a time of religious turmoil; although Buddhism had been in Tibet for more than 200 years, the formalities of religious practice and its doctrinal foundations had broken down. In response to this, Atiśa and other Indian scholar-teachers were called to Tibet to help re-establish the Buddhist tradition there. The idea behind the introduction of teachings such as Lojong, then, was to "reestablish the faith on a firmer foundation… [through] the presentation of the fundamentals of Buddhism in a manner easily accessible to the clergy and educated laity" (Sweet 1996, 244).[77]

This history has philosophical significance: when the Buddhist tradition seemed to be fraying in Tibet, Atiśa's teachings were meant to get 'back to the point;' at a time when the central purpose and practice of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Tibet needed to be distilled, clarified, and refined, Lojong was introduced as the most direct and simple way of doing so. We might imagine that the main question of Atiśa's time was: What should we *really* be doing as practitioners of the Mahāyāna? Lojong comes as the answer to that question: "You need to cultivate bodhicitta, and *this* is how you can do it." Lojong is therefore meant to bring within reach the Mahāyāna mandate of cultivating bodhicitta. As such, Lojong is not an innovation exactly but more like an exceptionally practical

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inspired by the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. For example, the eighth chapter of Śāntideva's text finds an explication of the practice of "meditating on the equality of oneself and other" (VIII.90), which forms the basis for the Lojong practice of exchanging self and others, outlined below.

[77] For about a century, the Lojong teachings were "secret" teachings – that is, transmitted only orally and privately at the discretion of a teacher rather than presented in written form or any other public venue. After a century of such oral transmission, Lojong began to be taught in more public settings and even collected in writing.

application of the Mahāyāna ethical view, a guide meant to transform the moral-phenomenological landscape of the practitioner through a process of re-habituation.

IV. Lojong Pedagogy in Two Seminal Texts: The Seven-Point Mind Training and the Wheel-Weapon

By far the most well-known Lojong text is the *Seven-Point Mind Training* (*bLo sbyong don bdun ma*), which presents root verses attributed to Atiśa that were then codified and organized by the 12th century Tibetan scholar, Geshe Chekawa Yeshé Dorjé (*'Chad kha ba Ye shes rdo rje*). These verses had been passed down as private oral instructions from teacher to student for about a hundred years after Atiśa's death.[78] While all Lojong texts have in common their orientation of cultivating bodhicitta, they differ in their emphasis of exoteric (Sūtrayāna) methods or esoteric, tantric (Mantrayāna) practices. The *Seven-Point Mind Training* is distinctive in its class for its strictly non-tantric presentation; the other Lojong text that we examine in this section, the *Wheel-Weapon,* is more replete with tantric rhetoric and stylistic elements.

a. The Seven-Point Mind Training

The *Seven-Point Mind Training* presents 59 of Atiśa's aphorisms, dividing them into seven sections.[79] The majority of these aphorisms on their face are straightforward

[78] According to lore, Geshe Chekawa elected to present these hitherto secret teachings to a general audience inspired by the belief that they could benefit even a character as coarse and untrained as his derelict brother.

[79] In his commentary on the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, Geshe Chekawa's student, Sé Chilbu, applies the following descriptions to these seven sections: 1) Presentation of the preliminaries, the basis; 2) Training in [ultimate and relative bodhicitta], the main practice; 3) Taking adverse conditions onto the path of enlightenment; 4) Presentation of a lifetime's practice in summary; 5) Presentation of the measure of having trained the

instructions for decent behavior in everyday life, some quite prosaic (e.g. "Do not torment with malicious banter"). Others are stunningly oracular and provocative (e.g. "In the intervals, be a conjurer of illusions"), albeit still fundamentally meant to be practiced and enacted in our everyday life (Chekawa Yeshé Dorjé 2006, 83–84). Alongside these instructions toward everyday behavior and attitudes are two aphorisms that offer instructions on a meditation practice called tonglen (*gtong len*, meaning 'giving and taking'), discussed in detail below. We can find in the array of instructions that Lojong offers a pedagogy that relates with practitioners discursively *and* non-discursively.[80] What is ultimately at stake in Lojong practice as a whole is a holistic transformation of the practitioner's ethical selfhood, which includes both her discursive, conceptual understanding of herself and others as well as the lived, practiced, and embodied values that supervene upon her experience of her world. These discursive and non-discursive tactics of Lojong are meant to re-habituate practitioners and thus transform them at the deepest levels of their moral subjectivity.

i. The Phenomenological Significance of Contemplation of Aphorisms

A major component of the Lojong practice of the *Seven Point Mind Training* is intensive contemplation of Atiśa's pithy instructions. Contemplation practice is more than just learning the Mahāyāna view as a 'philosophical fact' or of a set of normative

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mind; 6) Presentation of the commitments of mind training; 7) Presentation of the precepts of mind training (Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen 2006, 89).

[80] These categories of instruction are not necessarily mutually exclusive; as we shall see, oftentimes an instruction that appears plainly discursive on its face becomes inculcated and embodied in a non-discursive fashion. My point in delineating these categories is not necessarily to assign one or the other to each of Atiśa's aphorisms but rather to underscore the 'access' points that Lojong takes in its practitioners – at the level of their explicit thoughts and intentions as well as the proclivities of their affective orientations and embodied experience.

maxims to be obeyed. Contemplation involves meditative *repetition* of each aphorism until it has 'mixed with the mind' of the practitioner, giving it a haunting quality that becomes a part of the practitioner's way of thinking without the need to explicitly call forth its instructions. Indeed, the aphoristic form lends itself to this purpose, insofar as many times an aphorism's true meaning does not emerge as the result of a line of argumentation per se but rather requires active participation on the part of the reader-practitioner. The meaning of an aphorism is often found in an experience, a turning of the mind through which the meaning of the aphorism *appears* and thereby becomes personally available to the practitioner. Further, that availability goes beyond conceptual signification, a statement of fact or a philosophical claim. The meaning becomes available to the practitioner as a way of seeing or apprehending a view, if only temporarily.[81]

Recall, for example, the aphorism cited above: "In the intervals, be a conjurer of illusions." Here "the intervals" refers to the periods between meditation sessions, often called "post-meditation" in Tibetan Buddhist practice literature. The 12th century Tibetan scholar Sé Chilbu explains in his commentary that one must go about one's business during post-meditation "without losing the flavor of [one's] meditative equipoise" (Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen 2006, 92). That is, during meditation the practitioner attempts to connect to and realize emptiness; whatever we experience and perceive as intrinsically existing is only the product of our illusion-like conceptual construction. In post-meditation experience, then, the practitioner is instructed to "relinquish clinging to

[81] I am grateful for conversations with John Lysaker for helping me develop this reading of the pedagogical functions of the aphoristic form.

substantial reality" by attempting to see her experience of herself and her world as what they are: impermanent, contingent, and interdependently originated (Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen 2006, 93). Being a "conjurer of illusions" means actively cultivating a different mode of relating with one's perceptions, lifting oneself out of the assumptions of the intrinsic reality of one's world as if in a lucid dream.

The discursive significance of this aphorism, then, aligns well enough with the overall project of enacting a reorientation away from one's conventional way of experiencing the world. The real work of this aphorism goes beyond simply agreeing to this idea, however. In fact, this instruction requires actual participation and experimentation on the part of the practitioner; it cannot simply be assented to in a perfunctory sense ("Yes, yes, I should see the world as illusion-like"). In order for the practitioner to really know what it would mean to be a "conjurer of illusions," she must give it a try, experimentally entertaining the act of seeing and even feeling her world as an illusion, even if only hypothetically or ephemerally. She must absorb and relate with the meaning of the aphorism in a personal way, taking up the view that it presents and experiencing it non-discursively rather than just intellectualizing its meaning. Contemplation practice is an important tool for allowing the practitioner to do this.

Traditional Buddhist literature and practice instructions celebrate the value and importance of contemplation. For example, in the classic Tibetan presentation of the Buddhist view and path, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, the 20th century teacher Sogyal Rinpoche outlines contemplation as follows:[82]

[82] This is part of his exegesis of the Three Wisdoms, which together are hearing, contemplating and meditating. As for the other two of the Three Wisdoms: hearing

> The deepening of understanding, then, comes through *contemplation* and reflection… As we contemplate [a teaching], it gradually begins to permeate our mindstream and saturate our inner experience of our lives. Everyday events start to mirror and more and more subtly and directly to confirm the truths of the teachings, as contemplation slowly unfolds and enriches what we have begun to understand intellectually and carries that understanding down from our head into our heart (2012, 126).

What most stands out in this characterization of contemplation is the way in which it brings discursive teachings "down from our head into our heart." This is a practice of heartfelt reflection, not strictly intellectual analysis. It makes the teaching under consideration something lived within the body and in daily life rather than a set of concepts that has nothing to do with how we actually live or feel. Contemplation practice is 'enriching' because it brings a teaching – which may have initially seemed inaccessible or foreign for its contrast to our ordinary orientations to the world – *into* the practitioner's inner life. In other words, by repeatedly returning to a deep, reflective consideration of a teaching, the practitioner stands to develop an intimate relationship with a novel way of experiencing or understanding the world. In this way, contemplation helps make an

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involves "*listening* repeatedly to spiritual teachings" (Sogyal Rinpoche 2012, 125), which can also include repeatedly reading a dharmic text and even memorizing it. Sogyal Rinpoche characterizes meditating as "[putting] into action the insights we have gained and [applying] them directly, through the process of meditation, to the needs of everyday life" (2012, 126). Although in truth all of the Three Wisdoms come into play in the practitioner's engagement with Atiśa's aphorisms (as well as other texts or teachings, Lojong and otherwise), my analysis here is focused on the way in which contemplation toggles between discursive and non-discursive practice, so I will limit myself on this occasion to a discussion of contemplation alone.

unfamiliar view familiar. It begins at a discursive level – of returning again and again to a particular teaching or idea and reflecting upon its meaning – and becomes non-discursive when it accesses the practitioner at the level of their lived experience and orientation to the world. Contemplation makes the meaning of a teaching available in a non-discursive, embodied, affective way.

This play of discursive and non-discursive pedagogy in contemplation is particularly notable in the case of Atiśa's aphorisms, because, as mentioned above, their literary form as aphorisms lends them to the kind of interactive, experiential, transformative play of the mind that makes contemplation so productive. Aphorisms are eminently memorizable, and their brevity makes them especially suited to repetition. Their brevity often belies a meaning that goes beyond what is explicitly contained in the words of the aphorism itself. For example, to return to the aforementioned aphorism (i.e. "In the interval, be a conjurer of illusions"): this aphorism suggests that we can – and should – tinker with our phenomenological habits through an imaginative process of 'conjuring.' The practitioner's contemplation of this aphorism must go beyond rote repetition of its words; what it truly would mean to be a 'conjurer of illusions' is not readily apprehensible at a discursive level. The practitioner can only understand what the experience of being a 'conjurer of illusions' is *like* by actually trying it, if only provisionally. What would it feel like to *know* that this experience I am having in this moment is projected and illusion-like? What would that change about how I am engaging with the objects of my experience? Doing this kind of contemplation creates a bit of play in the terms of the practitioner's experience of her world and cultivates an ability to loosen the structures through which she has that world. This is how contemplation

practice moves from the discursive level of a thought or idea to a non-discursive level of experience.

If we understand our ongoing assumption of a substantial, permanent self in relation to a substantial, permanent world as a habituated orientation, then questioning and disrupting the seamlessness of that construction is an act of habit revision. "Clinging to substantial reality," as Sé Chilbu puts it, is a phenomenological orientation to which there is an alternative – an alternative that conduces to the cessation of suffering and the ethical attunement that attends that cessation. It may not result in an immediate and wholesale transformation of one's dualistic, deluded thinking, but it at least seems to introduce an ability to experience from a slightly oblique angle the 'factuality' of one's world.

Next, take the aphorism that reads, "Banish all blames into a single source" (Chekawa Yeshé Dorjé 2006, 83). On the face of it, the instruction here is to take responsibility for the misfortune that befalls one, rather than blaming others or external circumstances. This instruction sounds straightforwardly moralistic enough (if a bit self-sacrificial), but a closer examination reveals much more profound stakes to this instruction than simply refraining from the unflattering behavior of deflecting blame. Sé Chilbu claims that this aphorism actually serves as a reminder of the disastrous results of self-grasping, remarking that "this line presents the *perceiving of your own self as the enemy*. Whatever calamities befall you, without blaming others, you should think, 'This is due to my own self-grasping'" (2006, 98, emphasis added). Truly taking on the blame for the misfortunes that one encounters has to do with seeing that the source for all misfortune is actually self-grasping. Sé Chilbu goes on to instruct the practitioner to

contemplate the following: "'So long as I fail to view this [the self] as the enemy, so long will I continue to seek the well-being of this self…This self has been my own executioner and my enemy from beginningless time…" (Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen 2006, 99). All this is to say: 'driving all blames into one' means assigning blame to the true source of suffering, self-grasping. Self-grasping is the real 'enemy' against which some righteous anger is justified.[83] "Banishing all blames into a single source" is not about being the 'nice guy;' it is about seeing correctly that whenever we have the occasion to defend against or deploy blame, we are enacting a perniciously habitual, dualistic and deluded phenomenological orientation to the world.[84]

Ultimately, then, blaming the "single source" of self-grasping amounts to accurately "[recognizing] the enemy as the enemy," effectively reversing our ordinary attitude of 'looking out for Number One,' so to speak, and regarding anything that threatens the self as the enemy (Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen 2006, 100). By these lights, inasmuch as any misfortune that we experience is actually a misfortune undergone by the ego-clinging self, such misfortune is actually an attack on the enemy and therefore can be greeted as a positive phenomenon by the same logic that holds that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend.' Whatever pain we experience is the pain of the illusory self; if we

[83] Śāntideva confirms as much in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* VIII:154: "We must make [the self] fall from happiness and involve [it] in continual pain. Because of [it] we have all suffered the afflictions of cyclic existence hundreds of times."
[84] The 19th century scholar and teacher Jamgön Kongtrül concurs on this point in his commentary on this aphorism: "Whatever annoyance, major or minor, comes up in your life or affairs, do not lay blame on anything else, thinking that such-and-such caused this problem. Rather, you should consider: 'This mind grasps at a self where there is no self…All the sufferings I now experience are the results of those actions. No one else is to blame; this ego-cherishing attitude is to blame. I shall do whatever I can to subdue it'" (Kon-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas 2000, 17).

distinguish properly between enemy and friends – that is, if we see the self as the enemy and whatever attacks the self as friends – then we can see that when misfortune torpedoes the intentions and preferences of the ego, ultimately we need not lament such events.

The complement to this change of view toward self and other comes in Atiśa's next aphorism in Geshe Chekawa's collection: "Toward all beings contemplate their great kindness" (2006, 83). Whereas "Banish all blames into a single source" asks the practitioner to properly recognize the self as 'the enemy,' this aphorism asks the practitioner to perceive and experience *all* others as friends, even – or especially – those one conventionally considers an enemy. Sé Chilbu explains: "Here one deliberately focuses on the perpetrators of harm and cultivates loving-kindness and compassion and then trains in giving and taking [tonglen]" (2006, 103). Again, this is not just a matter of 'loving one's enemy' because that is 'the moral thing to do'; we are meant to love our enemies because every time they hurt us, they are actually only hurting our illusory, perennially confused self – the very self whose primacy we hope to eradicate by dint of our practice. Harm from an enemy, when viewed correctly, only furthers our cultivation of bodhicitta.

Together the last two aphorisms exemplify the powerfully radical reversal of the habitual tendencies of our 'untrained' attitudes toward self and others that Lojong seeks to inculcate. However, as we have already seen above, the work a practitioner does to enact that reversal must go beyond the discursive level of 'convincing' herself that misfortune is actually good for her. Through her contemplative practice, she is meant to absorb the significance of 'self as enemy' and 'other as friend' in a more-than-philosophical sense. Contemplation of these two aphorisms challenges the most

foundational habitual orientations that she has. What does it *really* mean that the source of all misfortune is self-grasping? What would it really feel like to 'change allegiances' from self-cherishing to other-cherishing? What is the actual experience of regarding our enemies as *helpful*? Again, the realization of the meaning of these aphorisms goes beyond discursive, philosophical assent; it is something that the practitioner *feels.* Contemplating thus gives the practitioner an opportunity to practice ways of responding to self and other that were once utterly foreign and to make these news ways of responding more and more familiar. This creates the basis for more ethically felicitous habituation.

ii. The Phenomenological Significance of Tonglen Practice

Another key element of Lojong is the meditation practice called tonglen, which is presented as a direct method for practicing 'exchanging self and other,' a key antidote to the self-cherishing attitude. 'Tonglen' is a compound Tibetan word meaning "giving [or sending] and taking." The instructions for tonglen practice are phrased as follows: "Train in the two – giving and taking – alternately. / Place the two astride your breath" (Chekawa Yeshé Dorjé 2006, 83). 'Giving' refers to a commitment to offering "your body, wealth, and all your virtues" to others, so that they may serve as "the conditions for engaging in spiritual practice" for others (Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen 2006, 94–95). More specifically, Sé Chilbu instructs the practitioner first to generate bodhicitta by imagining practicing with diligence and generosity in offering one's own goods for the interests of one's own mother (a figure who in these classical Buddhist texts is cast as unquestionably positive and loveable, not to mention the person to whom one owes their precious human

life). The practitioner then extends that love, loyalty and compassion toward all other sentient beings, offering to them "wealth and roots of virtue… [pledging] to accomplish their welfare, taking this responsibility upon myself… Give these away wholeheartedly and with no conceptual elaborations" (Sé Chilbu Chökyi Gyaltsen 2006, 95). As for the instruction to "take," Jamgön Kongtrül instructs practitioners to "take on myself all the different kinds of suffering…and the source of suffering, all disturbing emotions and actions [and] meditate that all of this negativity comes to you and foster *a strong feeling of joy* at the same time" (Kon-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas 2000, 14, emphasis added).[85] This meditation practice is done to the rhythm of the breath. Within the context of sitting meditation, as the practitioner inhales, she imagines that she is willingly taking in suffering and negativity, and on her exhalation she offers and gives away feelings of well-being, joy, and all her comforts and advantages.

A particularly notable aspect of this practice is the instruction to feel *joy* in taking on the suffering of others and in giving away all to which she is attached. Affect plays an important role in tonglen; this is a practice that invokes and then disrupts our most visceral positive and negative reactions. A 20th century Tibetan lama, Shamar Rinpoche, explains tonglen practice as "an incredible shortcut" in cultivating bodhicitta (Shamar

[85] Similarly, Geshe Sopa's practice instructions for tonglen read as follows: "When we meditate on the exchange of self and others, we give everything good to others and take everything bad upon ourselves. First, you do this mentally along with an awareness of breathing out and in. When breathing out, you imagine you are sending forth everything that is desirable, positive, and meritorious, whatever sources of happiness or peace that you possess – you wish that others might have them. Breathing in, you absorb all of the problems, miseries, and sufferings that afflict others and sincerely wish all of it to ripen in yourself, to experience them all yourself. At first, you may practice this only occasionally, but when you reach an advanced level, every moment can easily be a source of merit and virtue" (Sopa 2001, 49).

Rinpoche 2009, 58); it cuts right to the root of our self-cherishing and our ego-centeredness, reversing the directionality of our selfish grasping. This method is a 'shortcut' insofar as it works at the deep, affective levels of self-grasping. Its effectiveness and purpose lie in undermining the basic territoriality of self-cherishing that is the hallmark of the unenlightened mind ensconced in suffering; it cultivates a willingness on the part of the practitioner to abandon her resistance to discomfort and the things from which she ordinarily recoils and to willingly relinquish the things to which she is selfishly attached. In this way, tonglen homes in on the prepredicative, non-discursive polarities of our desires and aversions. It asks us to *feel* differently – or at least to practice doing so. The skillful means of the practice lies in prompting the practitioner to have an affective experience that goes against her existing habituation and become accustomed to a novel kind of feeling-response to suffering and pleasure.

Some Tibetan teachers, including the 19th century scholar Jamgön Köngtrul, also include a visualization in this meditation practice such that on the inhalation, the practitioner imagines that the negativity that she inhales comes in the form of black, smelly muck, and that the comfort and joy that she exhales leaves her in the form of white light. By vividly imagining pulling into her very body something that she finds disgusting and offering out from her body peaceful, white light, she is establishing a new style of relating with these phenomena; the conventional values through which she knows such things begin to lose their primacy as the *only* way to apprehend them. This use of imaginative faculties in visualization practice is yet another way to access the practitioner's non-discursive valuations of certain phenomena to undermine the habitual ways in which she is repelled from or drawn to them.

A key feature of what makes this kind of rehabituation possible in tonglen is that it takes place within the 'hypothetical environment' of meditation practice. Although actual practices of generosity (e.g. caring for the indigent) are relevant to the path of training in bodhicitta, tonglen practice is not a matter of literally giving away one's "body, wealth, and all one's virtues." What is happening in the case of tonglen practice is rather an exercise of working with one's moral-phenomenological orientation. The practitioner is practicing doing things she is not accustomed to doing – the very things that her self-cherishing habituation leads her not to do, in fact. What ordinary person feels drawn to inhale all the suffering of the world and give away everything that they cherish? Tonglen allows the practitioner to practice doing so – imaginatively, repetitively, and using her body and her somatic experience as the basis for the practice. This allows her to go against the problematic habituation of her self-cherishing and begin to invest in a new habituation of other-centeredness. As in the discursive practices of contemplation of aphorisms, tonglen works with the prevailing polarities of the affect of self-grasping, gently and gradually working to loosen the habituation toward self-cherishing and establish habits of other-centeredness.

Ultimately, the point of all of the practices we have discussed in this section is to change the practitioner's habituation enough that the orientation of other-cherishing will become spontaneous and effortless. Of the dedicated practitioner of Lojong, Geshe Sopa writes: "When this attitude of exchanging self with others spontaneously arises each day, without effort, it becomes the antidote for self-cherishing" (2001, 54). This likewise recalls the aphorism from Atiśa that reads, "If this can be done even when distracted, you

are trained" (Chekawa Yeshé Dorjé 2006, 84).[86] This exemplifies the kind of transformation that is characteristic of Buddhist ethics: not a principle to which one adheres oneself but rather a reworking of one's inner life that produces ethical behavior *because* it has reoriented the practitioner's moral-phenomenological landscape.

b. The Wheel-Weapon

A similar set of practices is presented in another well-known Lojong text, the *Wheel-Weapon*,[87] attributed to Atiśa's teacher, Dharmarakṣita.[88] The term 'wheel-weapon' refers to an actual disc-like weapon with sharp teeth along its circular edge. Symbolically the wheel-weapon named in the text refers to the 'cutting' quality of

[86] Although the aphorism does not explicitly supply the referent for the word 'this,' I take it to refer to the general work of re-orienting one's moral-phenomenological life by exchanging self and other that is the thematic focus of Lojong.

[87] Sweet and Zwilling translate the full title as *The Wheel-Weapon Mind that Strikes at the Enemy's Vital Spot* (dGra bo gnad la dbab pa'i mtshon cha 'khor lo). In my exegesis I will quote from Thupten Jinpa's translation in the *Mind Training: The Great Collection* volume (Jinpa 2006c). Jinpa renders the title of the text as *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*, the name by which it is most commonly known in the West, though in a rare instance of disagreement with Jinpa's translation I will refer to the text as the *Wheel-Weapon*, following Sweet and Zwilling.

[88] Dharmarakṣita was an Indian sage who, incidentally, never traveled to Tibet himself. There are some reasons to doubt his authorship of the *Wheel-Weapon*, principally among them the fact that several features of the text indicate a Tibetan origin. For example, the *Wheel-Weapon* includes admonitions not to partake in certain shamanistic rituals indigenous to Tibet, such as *mo* divinations, which surely would not have been a concern of a teacher permanently ensconced in India. Sweet and Zwilling argue that this indicates that the text is likely apocryphal as the handiwork of Dharmarakṣita himself (1996, 10–12), though it certainly can be taken to be a fair representation of what Atiśa learned from one of his principal gurus and drew upon in his own formulation of proto-Lojong.

Mahāyāna teachings, which strike at the 'vital point' of the enemy, i.e. the self-cherishing mind, from which all our troubles proceed. There is an additional layer of symbolism in that, as Sweet and Zwilling note, the trajectory of such wheel-weapons turn back on their source when thrown, in "boomerang fashion" (1996, 13). That is, symbolically the 'wheel weapon' thrown by the self returns back to it, cutting self-cherishing right at the source from whence it came. This illustrates the Lojong trope of welcoming the 'cutting' experience of suffering,[89] as well as the practice of using one's existing habituation – one's self-cherishing proclivities – as helpful, pointed indicators of the very things about us that are targeted by our practice.

i. The Ethical Productivity of Suffering

Targeting self-cherishing as the source of our suffering is the primary trope of the *Wheel-Weapon*. The text repeatedly celebrates the way in which egoistic misdeeds circle back upon the agent, karmically striking at the 'vital point' of her ego from whence they originated.[90] For example, verse 10 of the text reads: "When my mind falls prey to

[89] Incidentally, there is an even more explicit and elaborate use of 'cutting' imagery in Lojong literature of *gCod*. This is the tantric 'cutting' practice in which one visualizes oneself offering parts of one's own corpse to nourish other beings, including one's enemies or even demons. This practice is featured in the *Eight Session Mind Training*, which Thupten Jinpa conjecturally attributes to Atiśa's disciple, Dromtönpa. There we find one example of a practice of 'exchanging self and other' that involves a visualization "that your body is…cut into pieces and that [the whole world] becomes filled with meat and blood… Imagine that this all transforms into ambrosia… Then as you offer the ambrosia [to all beings], imagine that, as a result, all of them attain the nonconceptual wisdom of the dharmakaya. Now your body is no more, for it has been taken away by sentient beings; as for your mind, place it naturally in the absence of intrinsic existence" (Jinpa 2006a, 230).

[90] In fact, the *Wheel-Weapon* is written as a supplication to the wrathful deity Yamāntaka to "strike the enemy" of ego-clinging and violently destroy it (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 140, verse 49). Yamāntaka is the destroyer of Yama – the lord of death who is seen as the holder of the process of cyclical suffering in the process of birth and death. The

suffering, / It is the weapon of evil karma [*las ngan*] turning upon me[91] / For definitely causing turbulence in the hearts of others; / From now on I will take all suffering upon myself" (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 134). The idea is that one should understand one's sufferings as a productive insult to one's self-cherishing; every time we experience pain, it is our ego's pain – the pain of an illusory and destructively ignorant self. Again, we have here the logic of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend;' we should regard our sufferings positively as an ally in the Lojong project of transforming our moral-phenomenological orientation.

The refrain of the text, which repeats dozens of times from verses 55 to 90, further dramatizes this point: "Dance and trample on the head of this betrayer, false conception! / Mortally strike at the heart of this butcher and enemy, Ego!" The *Wheel-Weapon* makes a veritable party out of suffering. This is not just a celebration of suffering for the 'practical' reason that suffering attacks the self, and anything that undermines the self is a categorically good thing. The ongoing celebration of suffering also has a more contemplative aspect. Like the aphorisms of the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, lines like these from the *Wheel-Weapon* are not meant to be taken as philosophical arguments that should immediately convince us intellectually to change our view of suffering. Rather, ongoing, even rhythmic contemplation of these repetitive lines is part of a process of transmuting our suffering and confusion into a path toward

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invocation of Yamāntaka, therefore, frames the *Wheel-Weapon* as an attack on the source of all our wrongdoing and suffering: the ego-clinging and ignorance that keeps us ensconced in the cycle of birth and death.

[91] The noun that Jinpa translates with "evil karma" – *las ngan* in Tibetan – can also be translated with "evil action." The Tibetan word "*las*" means either karma *or* action in conventional usage; indeed, Sweet and Zwilling give it as "evil deeds" (2001, 63).

enlightenment. The opening lines of the text speak to this project of transmutation, invoking the symbol of the peacocks that "thrive on the essence of virulent poison" in the same way that the bodhisattvas "willingly embrace suffering [and therefore] / Always remain happy due to their heroism" (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 133, verses 1-3).

By intensively contemplating suffering and attempting to regard it in a positive light, the student of the *Wheel-Weapon* is effectively practicing a different style of affective response to these phenomena. As in the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, she is using the hypothetical environment of a contemplative practice to 'try on' a different orientation to suffering. The repetition of this process of 'trying on' is an attempt to lay the groundwork for a different habitual structure that is *not* ego-centered or self-cherishing. This exemplifies a key element of Lojong pedagogy: the use of a poorly-habituated, self-grasping, ordinary person's responses to their world as fodder for practice. The practitioner cultivates bodhicitta by engaging with her own daily experience in all its vicissitudes. She specifically targets the desires with which she is beset from the standpoint of self-grasping.[92] The Lojong practitioner does not produce bodhicitta 'from scratch' (whatever that would mean); she has to begin from the standpoint of her existing moral-phenomenological orientation and gradually transform it by examining its finer workings and seeing where in it there may be some 'play' – some ability to shift or revise it, even if only minutely or in a hypothetical register.

ii. Conceptual Construction as the Source of Suffering

[92] "Now here, desire is like the jungle of virulent poison; / The peacock-like heroes [alone] can digest this" (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 134, verse 4).

This relates to another prominent feature of the pedagogy of the *Wheel-Weapon*: its focus on the problem of conceptual construction as the source of suffering. For example, in the refrain, "false conception" is cast as a "betrayer," a "butcher," and an "enemy," the heart of which is Ego itself, which must be struck down in order for true happiness to be made available.[93] Conceptual thinking is a manifestation of two-fold self-grasping; it is predicated upon the dualism of a perceiving, observing, categorizing, self-enclosed subject up against a world that is ontologically separate from her. The problem with concepts – the way in which they are a manifestation of self-grasping – is that universals imply intrinsic existence and permanent identity of a thing as such in itself. Conceptual thinking therefore imputes a false reality in the objects of our experience, including and especially ourselves, which leads to ego-clinging and self-cherishing.

The *Wheel-Weapon* takes conceptualization up with passion and precision, singling out various instances in which this view appears in our engagement with the world and enthusiastically requesting that their source be violently cut down. All of this conceptual construction is, after all, *constructed* and effectively imaginary, and this constructedness of experience is just what Lojong exploits. Undoing the proclivities of conceptuality is not necessarily easy, but the fact that they are not ultimately real means that their undoing is not only possible but necessary if we are to break out of the habituation through which we are the architects of our own suffering.

Furthermore, when the practitioner acknowledges the unreality of her constructions, she not only diagnoses the problem, the source of her suffering; she also

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[93] This is the refrain mentioned above: "Dance and trample on the head of this betrayer, false conception! / Mortally strike at the heart of this butcher and enemy, Ego!"

finds within that concession a pathway out of confusion. That is, in seeing through conceptualization and acknowledging conceptual reality as a projection and a fiction, she learns that it is in principle possible to actively construct her experience. This is why confusion can be made fodder for enlightenment.

The *Wheel-Weapon* encourages the practitioner to take up her pain and confusion and make them useful; in them she can find the right medicine for her troubles, if she can engage with them skillfully and take them as indicators, teachings that point out exactly where in her approach to life she is going wrong and therefore what specifically she can address to become better.[94] The learner thus engages in a process of self-cultivation and re-habituation.

iii. Habituation as Familiarization

The *Wheel-Weapon* even cites habituation as the source of the desire from which we must be rehabilitated in order to become bodhisattvas: "Propelled by karma and *habituated* to the afflictions [negative emotions] / The sufferings of all beings who share this nature / I will heap them upon this self that yearns for happiness" (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 134, verse 7, emphasis added).[95] Here the term that Jinpa gives as "habituated" is the Tibetan *goms pa*, which can also be translated with familiarization, cultivation, conditioning and even meditation. The semantic range of this term is significant: the process by which one acquires an infelicitous moral-phenomenological orientation to the

[94] The *Wheel Weapon* glosses this affective reorientation as follows: "From now on I will distance myself from this demon's emissary – / Self-grasping – which [makes me] wander helplessly / And seeks [only] selfish happiness and prosperity; / I will joyfully embrace hardship for the sake of others" (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 134, verse 6).
[95] A similar usage of *goms pa* recurs at verse 84: "Habituated to attachment and aversion, I revile everyone opposed to me. Habituated to envy, I slander and depreciate others" (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 146).

world can share a name with the conditioning process of inculcating positive mental qualities through meditation and other practices of self-cultivation. That is, the process that *goms pa* names – familiarization, habituation, cultivation, conditioning – can cut both ways, either sedimenting self-grasping or bringing us out of it.

Lojong takes up this process of conditioning that is already at work in self-grasping and redirects it toward content that is more likely to produce genuine happiness. In his commentary on the *Wheel-Weapon*, Geshe Lhundup Sopa likewise writes that, "Mind training is accustoming the mind to [bodhicitta]" (1996, 53). Just as we have habituated or familiarized ourselves with self-grasping, we can habituate or familiarize ourselves with bodhicitta, settling into it the way we settle into all of the habitual orientations that are definitive of our ways of being in the world.

V. Conclusion

Lojong addresses the main problematic of Mahāyāna ethics – that 'nasty habit,' one might say, acquired and re-inscribed over many lifetimes, of self-grasping. It does so by way of practices of re-habituation that access the practitioner's moral subjectivity discursively *and* non-discursively. Lojong provides an intensive method for making re-habituation possible, transforming the habits through which one has a world and *thereby* realizing a transformation of one's moral-pheneomenological landscape.

Lojong thus serves as a productive interlocutor for both Merleau-Ponty and Aristotle. Our reading of Merleau-Pontian habit left us with the question of how to make an ethical project out of our habituation. Aristotle showed us how important – and complicated – such a project is, but not how we might finally be able to get out from

under infelicitous habituation. With Lojong, we hear echoes of many of these insights about the ethical impact of our ways of perceiving and being in the world, along with down-to-earth, practical instructions for how to work with our own phenomenological orientation. In the next chapter, we will draw these three traditions into deeper conversation on the prospects we have for using habit to transform ourselves at the dispositional level.

Chapter Four

The Coming-About of Moral Subjectivity:

Prospects for Re-Habituation

My actual freedom is…out in front of me, among the things.
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 479

I. Introduction

I have come to this project with a specific concern: can we change ourselves at the dispositional level, and if so, how? Habit gives me entry into that question because it helps illuminate the historicity of our dispositional orientation in the world as well as its futurity and aptitude for transformation. Admittedly, my inquiry does not always align perfectly with the central aims of the texts and traditions at hand. At times, I found myself approaching phenomenology, virtue ethics, and Lojong from oblique angles in order to articulate the insights that speak to this investigation.[96] These texts differ from one another in important ways on the questions of moral subjectivity and re-habituation; reading these traditions through the lens of the concerns of this project *is* what generates a point of convergence between them. I do not claim that they speak in one voice, and I do not need them to do so in order for their encounter to be fruitful. Whatever intersections I have found do not serve as proof of these traditions' systematic agreement. In their differences – in the ways they challenge or contradict one another and in the specificity of their views – they mutually enrich one another.

[96] Merleau-Ponty, for example, does not explicitly problematize habit in an ethical register; Aristotle does not address what, practically, would be required by a regimen of re-habituation, and Lojong, while quite affirmative of practices of re-habituation, does not formulate them in the phenomenological terms that I have here.

Keeping in mind that methodological orientation, I now would like to explore what these three traditions tell us about the possibilities and limitations that face projects of ethical re-habituation. Having examined this question from the standpoint of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, virtue ethics and the Tibet Buddhist Lojong tradition, what can we say about our power to shape our own moral subjectivity through habit? What trajectories do these textual streams offer?

This chapter has two main parts. I will review the major outcomes of each of my studies of habit and its role in shaping moral subjectivity, looking specifically at the reasons they give us to be either cautious or bold when it comes to ethical re-habituation. In the second half of the chapter, I will reflect more synthetically about where this leaves us: how optimistic should we be about our prospects for re-habituation? What particular instructions or guidelines do our readings of Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle, and Lojong offer us to that end?

II. The Available Trajectories

a. On Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty's account of habit gives us an impression of the deep roots of habit in our experience of the world as well as the openness of our world's future. His formulation of what it means to have a world is both inspiring and forbidding to the person who wishes to transform herself at the dispositional level. With echoes of Husserl's formulation of the life-world, Merleau-Ponty asserts that in 'having a world,' we draw upon prepredicative self-evidences, a domain of original meaning that serves as the background within which the features of the world gain their significance. All

perception is pregnant with the meanings that define our stylization of the world. This process is in dynamic relation with the world and with the content of our experience; whatever is given to us in experience is folded into the future sedimentation of our subjectivity and the ongoing refinement of our stylizations. This means that the world we have is one that appears through our own subjective structures, but that does not mean that we are condemned to static solipsism.[97] Our perceptual structures are not fixed, and our contact with our world – including all the irruptive moments that come with novel ideas, productively disruptive people, and the events of our eco-social situation – all stand to shift the terms within which our future experience arises.

In his exegesis of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty calls the ongoing sedimentation of meanings in the development of geometry a "mutation in knowledge" (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 6). The mutations that are always underway in the development, refinement and transmission of the geometer's system of thought exemplify the way in which truths which we experience as ahistorical are in fact contingent, historical, often transmitted in and by communities, and furthermore we – the learning human beings – are ultimately

[97] Merleau-Ponty's answer to anticipated allegations of skepticism in his "*Cogito*" chapter in *PP* is relevant to this point, albeit obliquely. He refers to thought as "a value-fact" as opposed to fact, full stop, and acknowledges the very real possibility of error there (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 419). There is, in fact, a 'real world,' and it the possibility for error in apprehending that world comes with the territory of the contingency of our perception. However, he also confidently and optimistically proclaims that "the teleology of consciousness invites us to seek out [errors'] resolution… The world is the real, of which the necessary and the possible are merely provinces" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 419). I take this optimism about the "teleology of consciousness" to indicate that not only is our perception never utterly self-sufficient or self-enclosed; it bends toward apprehension of truth. That means that our perceptual apparatus is not utterly seamless and can be interrogated and interrupted, and those interruptions need not be limited to neutral reorganizations of our valuations but are – under ideal circumstances – steps toward actual knowledge of the world.

their authors. Geometry might be a somewhat spiritless example of this, but for our purposes it is illuminating to note the following: 1) the prepredicative facts of the world are not *what* we experience but that *by which we have* an experience, 2) they are not intrinsically stable, and 3) the knowledge that is founded upon those facts is likewise fluid. The 'what' of experience mutates when the 'that by which' mutates; both of these are always in motion.

This need not give us the impression of a self-sufficient ego whose world is simply a mediation of pure ideas. In the Introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty is at pains to distinguish his approach from rationalism, which he thinks leaves no room for contingency in the person's opportunities for thought.[98] Intellectualism does not leave enough room for "any phenomenon to be able to *solicit* [consciousness]" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 30). The world is certainly not ready-made within us, as the intellectualist egologist would assert. The embodied subject is not a transcendental ego that possesses all phenomena in the privacy of her own consciousness; the perceptual synthesis of her experience demonstrates "the profound movement of transcendence that is [her] very being, the simultaneous contact with [her] being and with the being of the world" (2012, 396).[99] For Merleau-Ponty, whose motive throughout the *PP* is to describe what actual perception is *like*, intellectualism does not contain within it

[98] In the same section he also contrasts his approach with empiricism, which does not adequately account for how a subject would come to encounter an object at all in the first place because it lacks an "internal connection between the object and the act it triggers" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 30).

[99] Furthermore, in contrasting embodied subjectivity from the constituting consciousness, Merleau-Ponty asserts: "Bodily movement can only play a role in the perception of the world if it is itself an original intentionality, a manner of being related to the object that is *distinct from knowledge*" (2012, 407, emphasis added).

enough room for the dynamic play between subject and world to actually describe what gives rise to the quality, texture and specificity of the meanings that each subject has in her interactions with the world.[100]

While the terms of our life-world lend to our experience a basic intelligibility that seems to precede all philosophical formulation and reflection, the historicity of that life-world shows us that our subjectivity is always already transforming. Every idea and every conception comes to us with "a wake of historicity" (Merleau-Ponty 2001, 6), and every thought and experience is foundational, contributing to the ongoing sedimentation of the life-world. The prepredicative self-evidence of the world is always arising, always subtly bending as we bring to it the fodder of continued experience. The prereflective, non-discursive, affective meanings from which my experience proceeds are not fixed, then; their structure includes play and movement as they integrates whatever is in their midst. If it can *have* an experience, they can and will be transformed by it, even if only minutely or only by way of deepening their existing phenomenological structures.

Merleau-Pontian habit, which helps explain the practical formation of the historical life-world, is tantalizing if ambiguous as a site for ethical self-cultivation. Recall that Merleau-Ponty understands the founding of a perceptual habit as "an acquisition of a world" (2012, 154). Habit – particularly perceptual habit, and most especially the gaze – is integral to establishing our being-in-the-world; it is how we gain purchase in a world that is rife with the tools and affective vectors that are relevant to our projects. Effectively, in habit we can find a site for mutations in knowledge, as my

[100] This line of thinking sees an even more pronounced elaboration in the *Visible and the Invisible* and Merleau-Ponty's concept of "the flesh [*chair*] of the world," or the interdependence and elemental inseparability of the perceived world and the perceiver.

acquisition of a habit invests my world with the meanings and values that speak to my projects.

We can feel assured, then, that Merleau-Ponty is no proponent of a constituting, transcendental consciousness. His phenomenology richly illuminates how our experience is not a matter of a self-enclosed ego standing over and against the world, projecting her own private meaning into it. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty does not make clear the machinations whereby a world actually changes or how exactly 'mutations in knowledge' work. This gap is where I would like to press Merleau-Ponty. Are 'mutations in knowledge' something with which we can reflectively and purposefully work, particularly with an ethical end in mind? What are the limits, if any, that habit offers to my project of ethical self-cultivation? Just what kind of world can we acquire when we acquire a new perceptual habit? A person who loses her sight can incorporate a cane with which to perceive the topography of her world, thus mutating her knowledge in some respect, but is it possible to approach ethical re-habituation in the same way – with a specific kind of phenomenological habit to cultivate in mind? Merleau-Ponty does not address this. It is not altogether clear, based on his development of habit as a phenomenological concept, how we can make it an ethical project: how we could actively cultivate 'more ethical' habits or how we might work to undermine infelicitous ones. Reading his explanation of how habit functions, it is difficult to imagine how the "suggestiveness" of the world that is given through habit could be undone – how I could contest the "self-evidence" of what the world or parts of the world mean to me. Even if I recognize that the intelligibilities with which I find my world invested are subjective (and many people would contest even that), it is hard to fathom how I could dictate for myself

a different set of worldly intelligibilities. Merleau-Ponty says that the world speaks to us on the topic of ourselves, but can we speak back to it? Is the habituated life-world anything more than a solipsistic echo chamber? Or can we make it a productive, transformative interrogation?

If there is a path toward self-interrogation in Merleau-Pontian habit, it seems to lie in examining our projects. My habits support my projects; the person with a visual disability cited above develops the motor and perceptual habits of using a cane once she has adopted the project of using a cane to traverse her city. In more ethical terms, we can take the example of a white person adopting a critical stance toward white privilege. In anti-racist circles, white privilege is defined as a product of white supremacy that allows white people to navigate their world and their lives within a society that facilitates their success, rendering advantages small and large, while the structural features of that privilege remain invisible to the person who benefits from them.[101] Epistemically, this presents a problem for a white person who aspires to be an anti-racist ally, when many of the unjust dynamics in her social milieu are invisible to her. White privilege is a part of the habituated apparatus through which she has a world; she has a world *by way* of her habits, but she cannot see her habits as such. How, then, can she interrupt her own

[101] For example, Teaching Tolerance, an initiative of the Southern Poverty Law Center, describes white privilege in the following terms: "White skin privilege is not something that white people necessarily do, create or enjoy on purpose. Unlike the more overt individual and institutional manifestations of racism…, white skin privilege is a transparent preference for whiteness that saturates our society. White skin privilege serves several functions. First, it provides white people with 'perks' that we do not earn and that people of color do not enjoy. Second, it creates real advantages for us. White people are immune to a lot of challenges. Finally, white privilege shapes the world in which we live — the way that we navigate and interact with one another and with the world" (Teaching Tolerance 2016).

privilege if she cannot first see it, immersed as she is in her habits? To do so, she has to adopt a different project. Prior to adopting the project of anti-racism, she likely had little reason to question whether and how her race factored into her mundane pursuits; there was no reason to disrupt her presumption of an 'unraced' experience of her world. Integrating the project of interrogating her privilege involves establishing a commitment – novel, for her – of finding and recognizing the ways in which race functions in and even buttresses her own life. Before she can really begin to see and appreciate the fact of white privilege, she has to accept – or at least entertain – the existence of white privilege as an article of anti-racist *doxa.* By definition it will not be something that stands out to her un-habituated perception; development of such perceptual habits can only come about once she has established the project that would motivate them. She adopts that project on faith – the faith that, though white privilege is not directly verifiable from with the current structures of her habituated standpoint, it is something that she can *come* to see with some practice and education. For this to be possible, she has to rely on the testimony of people of color and other teachers that the dynamics of privilege are in fact in play, even if she does not yet have the habituation to support *seeing* and apprehending such dynamics just yet. The adoption of the project of anti-racism is a first step in re-polarizing her grasp on the world and seeing the contingency of her experience. Just as the incipient musician first must take up making music as a project before she can develop the habits necessary for doing so, the white anti-racist first adopts the project of recognizing white privilege as an article of faith and then develops the phenomenological habits that support that project.[102]

[102] The outcomes of training toward anti-racism need not necessarily result in anti-racist

Merleau-Ponty speaks to the possibility of such an endeavor when, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, he writes that all philosophical articulation itself is "sedimented, 'taken back' by the life-world" (1968, 170), becoming a part of the ground within which future philosophical thematization takes place. This feature of the historical life-world that Merleau-Ponty has inherited from Husserl is what invites our optimism about projects of re-habituation. It speaks to the lack of fixity that is underneath the basic intelligibilities through which we have a world.[103] The meaning of our world is historical, yes, but that history is always hurtling forward, and every new formulation, every new articulation of the world changes us – or rather, it changes our world. Our habits form in order to support our projects; with every new project comes the possibility of new habitual structures that give shape to our life-world. If every thought and every experience gives us a "mutation in knowledge" through its contribution to the sedimentation of our life-world, then entertaining a new goal or way of thinking, even if only as a matter of imagination, will change us.

As far as the exercise of bringing Merleau-Ponty in a more ethically thick direction, what is instructive about the white privilege example is the fact that the anti-racist ally can entertain the notion of white privilege as an article of faith, without necessarily having the habitual structures in place for apprehending its machinations in

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perceptual habits per se; at least initially, the incipient white ally might simply develop an awareness of the limitations and fallibility of her perception of the world.

[103] From a phenomenological standpoint, this is less an ontological claim than an epistemological one. It comments upon the un-fixedness of the phenomenological instruments *through* which we have a world, not the noumenal realm itself. As far as the metaphysics of the subject that this thesis suggests, there is much more to say about this than could possibly be adequately developed here, but – briefly – I point to Merleau-Ponty's account of embodied subjectivity in the *PP* and how he contrasts it with the subjectivity of the Cartesian *Cogito*, mentioned above.

the world as such – at least not yet. 'Having a world' means having projects that polarize it and the habitual structures that direct us toward the things that serve those projects. When we adopt a new project, we prompt the development of new habits and therefore the structures for a revised intelligibility of the world. We thus 'mutate' our knowledge through re-habituation.

b. On Aristotle

Aristotle's trajectory for re-habituation looks a bit different. He is perhaps the most conservative of our interlocutors when it comes to the question of whether and how we can re-habituate ourselves, but even at that he does give us some reason to optimistically pursue such projects. Aristotle's moral psychology is forbidding to the person who wishes to re-habituate herself primarily because what exactly habituated character entails – including and especially ethical perception through which the goals of our action appear to us – seems to overdetermine the field of our possible ethical agency, including our efforts at self-cultivation. At the same time, he invites his audience to take seriously their role as "part-causes" of their characters. Even his seemingly pessimistic exclusion of those who did not receive an ideal upbringing gives us some insight into the possible source of ethical re-habituation inasmuch as it indicates that intellectual arguments are not the proper venue for training one's character. Aristotle's moral psychology, while ambivalent on the topic of re-habituation, helpfully points us to the parts of our subjectivity that would be "sticking points" in our projects of ethical self-cultivation and how those come to bear upon a person's ethical development.

Aristotle's analysis of the relationship between habituation, character and the imagination indicates that the state of our moral subjectivity shows itself not only in our

tastes, preferences, and behavior but more fundamentally in our perception and how the world appears to us. Our upbringing and cultural milieu make "all the difference" because they give us our first and possibly most basic sense of the goods that we should pursue.[104] When Aristotle instructs his listeners to ethically habituate the young by steering them "by the rudders of pleasure and pain," what is at stake is not just training them with punishments and rewards to do what we think they ought but rather to train them to perceive the world so that it provokes the kinds of affective responses that enable ethical comportment. A parent does this, for example, when he uses positive reinforcement in praising a child's act of generosity (e.g. "It is so kind of you to share your toys with your cousin!"). In this case, the aim of the positive reinforcement is to encourage the child to take up the practice of sharing as something enjoyable, pleasurable or just appealingly *good*.

The profound stakes of ethical education go all the way down, all the way to *feeling* the world well and knowing the world through that feeling. When it comes to questions of proactive self-cultivation through re-habituation, then, it is hard to conceive of how we can reorder these depths by our own efforts, which is why Aristotle emphasizes how crucial a good upbringing is in having a good character. In the absence of a flawless upbringing, we are left to wonder: what would be required to get ourselves to *feel* differently or to change the very appearances of things such that they would no longer have the same magnetic quality for my ethical perception?

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[104] For Aristotle there are also certain perceptual valuations that have more to do with biology than character, drawing us toward activities that are healthful in a simple animalistic sense (e.g. craving a hearty, warm soup in the dead of winter). My analysis is limited to the pleasures and pains that supervene on the specificities of one's character habituation, however, not biologically-motivated ones.

Our upbringing gives us the orienting definitions of the good that inspire the pleasures and pains that the ethical dimensions of our world provoke for us. These pleasures and pains are not abstract; they are baked into perception. Changing this order of things seems necessary for many us, if also impossibly unrealistic. The main sticking point here lies in the imagination. Our reading of the imagination in Chapter Two and the link we found from the imagination to character showed us that the affective education that is our habituation is broadly perceptual. The pleasures and pains we feel according to our habituation do not just give us comfortable routines or affinities of taste; they go along with our perception of what a thing *is* – its value and its role in our pursuit of our goals. Ethical action is inseparable from ethical perception, so changing our character is linked with change of perception – changing how we perceive the "ultimate particulars" of the things we should pursue or avoid. Real transformation of our moral subjectivity is concomitant with coming to perceive our world differently, but Aristotle's account of perception does not have the fluidity of what we found in Merleau-Ponty. While Aristotle concedes that we are "responsible for how things appear," he does not point us enthusiastically toward the kinds of "mutations in knowledge" that would transform the phenomena of our ethical lives. This is the sense in which it seems that our upbringing overdetermines our field of ethical agency. Furthermore, this is why Aristotle restricts his lectures in the *Nicomachean Ethics* only to those who have been "brought up well," because those lacking the proper habituation are not in a position to hear arguments about ethics. If you do not have the right character, arguments about virtue will fall on deaf ears. This exclusionary move on Aristotle's part seems to damn the poorly habituated to a life of vice, as if to say, "There's nothing to be done; they can't be saved."

On the other hand, more optimistically, we might also take Aristotle's exclusion to mean nothing more than this: what people who lack a good upbringing need are not lectures but *experiences*. Intellectual philosophical teachings are not the proper medicine for an infelicitous character.[105] We need not assume that poorly habituated people are beyond help but just that the venue of a philosophy lecture is not where they stand to improve their lot as ethical characters. Recall that Aristotle defends himself against charges of moral determinism by reminding his audience that "only a thoroughly senseless person" would deny that their behaviors influence the state of their character (1114a9). This is what justifies his argument that our states of character are voluntary – not prescribed by the circumstances of our upbringing – and that the power to change the state of our character therefore lies in our actions. What he does *not* say, of course, is that the state of our character proceeds from philosophical argumentation. "States [of character] arise from like activities" (1103b21), not from convincing arguments. If there is a path toward ethical re-habituation in Aristotle, it lies in the particular activities that are "like" the states we wish to cultivate. This is where the person who lacks proper habituation should exert herself: in morally educative experiences that deal in the main currency of character formation – affect – rather than intellectual explications thereof.

Aristotle gives us further reason to aspire toward re-habituation: he explicitly tells us that we *should* try to transform our characters, as forbiddingly difficult as that may

[105] This is, in part, because intellectual arguments appeal to a different part of the soul than that which is morally educated through habituation. Intellectual arguments certainly can play a role in helping elucidate the meaning of the good or the most direct practical actions for pursuing the good, for example, but what we get out of such philosophical articulations cannot be called character change. Aristotle's account of human nature places habituation of character outside the scope of intellectual teaching.

appear to be. Like it or not, our character will be judged by our actions; we cannot simply attribute all of our actions to our upbringing and our culture and claim no responsibility for them. Indeed, we are not just responsible for our character; Aristotle says even more radically that we are "responsible for how things appear" (1114b3). Although he concedes that "the gradual process" of authoring our character "is not obvious" and otherwise provides no clear set of instructions as to how we could dictate the shape that our character takes (1115a1), my point above as well as the primacy of affect in Aristotle's explanation of habituation give us good reason to turn to experiential education as the venue within which ethical re-habituation might take place.

For example, service learning programs attempt to enact this kind of pedagogy. In contradistinction to "charity work," service learning by its very name emphasizes the value of working for others' benefit in the educative experience undergone by the person rendering the service. Giving footbaths to people who are homeless (as volunteers do at the Boston nonprofit Healthcare for the Homeless) or traveling into blighted inner city neighborhoods to tutor teenagers become a form of ethical education that does not rely upon linear philosophical theses as the main currency of its teaching.[106] For the first-time volunteer, these activities likely involve going against the tide of some of his habituation, which might ordinarily prompt aversion to massaging the feet of a stranger (much less the kind of stranger that one might tend to avoid in public) or hanging out in neighborhoods

[106] Of course, this ethical education can harmonize with and be supported by philosophical articulations of an ethical view. The washing of a person's feet is obviously evocative of Christian ethics, for example. The point here is not that such practices do not or could not have philosophical justification, but that their practitioners seek to develop their character toward those ethical views, which from an Aristotelian standpoint happens at the affective level rather than through intellectual assimilation of a philosophical or religious doctrine.

reputed to be 'dangerous.' The pedagogy of service learning hinges on giving a person an opportunity to engage in this kind of service repeatedly over the course of a semester or longer, providing an opportunity to challenge the volunteer's habitual responses to the features of his social milieu that he had previously avoided, derided or feared and possibly even developing bonds of positive affect or solidarity instead. This is an example of a transformative experience that offers an ethical education distinct from a strictly intellectualistic, philosophical explanation toward social justice. It is meant to be an affectively loaded experience that works with students' affective responses to difficult social issues. Again, philosophical articulations of ethics, politics, or religious doctrines manifestly do have a place in ethical education, but it is clear from Aristotle that such intellectual work is not a sufficient method for producing character change or, based on that, changes in ethical perception, which are the main concerns of the present inquiry. From an Aristotelian standpoint, philosophical arguments will not change how someone *feels* in relation to others. For that, transformative experiences that appeal to the non-rational part of the soul are the requisite pedagogical method.

If we can work with pleasures and pains, then, and train ourselves to feel them at appropriate things, then we will be serving as authors of our own character. This, in turn, will make us perceive our world differently. An affective education is a perceptual education; this is what it means to be "responsible for how things appear." If nothing else, Aristotle's ethics tells us that if we want to transform our ethical subjectivity, we have to work to perceive our world so that our feeling responses to it reflect truly ethical values, and this is accomplished not by argument but through experience.

c. On Lojong

When it comes to our prospects for re-habituating ourselves, Lojong is bold. The main premise that supports this boldness is the thesis that the contingency of how we take up the world makes it radically open to revision. Garfield tells us that the style of our experience and of our life-world is "far from passive, far from fixed" (Garfield 2015, 288); in every moment, we actively create the world that we experience, and we can exploit that fact in order to transform it. From the Buddha's first insight into the interdependent origins of all phenomena onwards, Buddhist ethics has maintained that working with the quality of our experience is a moral question and a part of our ethical development. The kind of ethical development that Buddhism proposes calls for a realization that will transform us at the deepest levels of our subjectivity and thus provoke the ethical reorientations necessary for the profoundest forms of flourishing that are afforded by the human event. There is a special motivation behind a project like this: ending suffering – our own and others'. The fact of suffering is more than just a fact; it is a problem to be solved *because* it is avoidable and therefore susceptible to our efforts. Buddhist ethics gives us an account of the constituent features of our moral subjectivity that leaves a dramatically open invitation to their revision.

Lojong takes up this account of moral subjectivity and provides a concrete regimen by which we can re-habituate ourselves. Lojong is not detained by concerns like Aristotle's that the "progress is not clear" in our habituation. It is doubly bold for its ambitions for re-habituation in the sheer scale of the structures that the practitioner is attempting to change. Lojong is not addressing isolated habits that pertain to one aspect of our moral lives. We are not even talking about the habituation that proceeds from one's childhood rearing. Rather, Lojong addresses the 'ultimate habit,' extending through

beginningless lifetimes, of dwelling within illusion and confusion. The "untrained attitudes" of the self-cherishing person are much more than just that; they are the manifestation of a forbiddingly totalized, dualistic structure through which we have a world. Becoming a "conjurer of illusions" is a deeply demanding project, therefore. Detaching ourselves from the meanings that define our world is difficult if not utterly terrifying.

In the face of this, Lojong hardly blinks. Instead it provides a richly detailed array of practices that places the project of re-habituation in a container that allows it to take place without either intimidating or completely unmooring the aspiring bodhisattva. To that end, one of the principal skillful means through which Lojong sidesteps the destabilization if not outright impossibility of re-habituation is its use of the 'hypothetical environment' of meditation practice. In the context of tonglen, the practitioner is able to adopt what in Merleau-Pontian terms we could call the project of bodhicitta. The project of achieving enlightenment for the sake of *all* sentient beings (not just oneself) is, for most of us, a wildly novel one. Tonglen allows the practitioner to 'try on' that project hypothetically, gradually habituating herself to its non-dual ethical structure as an intra-personal matter before necessarily putting that project into motion in her mundane discourse. Tonglen stands to profoundly reorient the life-world of its practitioner by loosening the knots her self-grasping.

The literary trope in many Tibetan Buddhist practice manuals of opening the text with a reaffirmation of one's commitment to the central tenets of the Buddhist path or to cultivating bodhicitta speaks to this point. The *Wheel-Weapon,* for example, opens with:

"Homage to the Three Jewels!" (Dharmarakṣita 2006, 133).[107] This is not a matter of paying lipservice; it is a reminder to the practitioner to recall the unconventional 'turn' that she is taking in engaging in the practice that is to follow. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is not tantamount to a subscription to a norm or an ethical telos per se but rather a naming, a pointing out, of the possibility for taking up the world differently. The practice that follows is comprised of instructions toward gradual re-habituation, but those instructions take their cue from this centralizing project. As a process of re-habituation, Buddhist practices such as Lojong stand to re-polarize the moral lives of their practitioners, but that first requires having a clear view of the direction that this new polarization will take. In other words, the practitioner must have clearly in mind the project that orients her practice of re-habituation.

A further point helps justify Lojong's bold optimism, and that is that Lojong has many allies in its effort to undermine self-grasping: all of our misfortunes. Compared to Aristotle's caveats that the bad luck of a poor upbringing precludes studying ethics, Lojong sets up a big tent.[108] Likewise, with Lojong, we don't have to take up the kinds of worries that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology might give us of how to overcome or undermine existing infelicitous habituation. As far as Lojong is concerned, we can make *good use* of such habituation. The prevailing polarities of a person's affective life are

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[107] The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha, and together they summarize the primary commitments of entering into the Buddhist path.

[108] This difference has to do with differing accounts of moral subjectivity between these two traditions. Tibetan Buddhists' subscription to foundational Buddhist tenets such as selflessness, emptiness and interdependent origination leave a good deal of fecund, open space for transformation at the dispositional level. Aristotle's concern for the foundational impact of upbringing on character and the opacity of moral change in adulthood speaks to a view of moral subjectivity that is, while not utterly prohibitive of self-transformation, more measured in its proclamations on the topic.

integrated into the work of Lojong by providing the basis upon which the practitioner would begin to undermine her self-cherishing. Lojong is efficient in this way; rather than hoping for the 'right moment' or 'right circumstance' to start the process of re-habituation, it strikes upon the worst moments – when one feels under attack by bad luck and anguish – and uses those as teaching moments.

I have been arguing here that Lojong is boldly optimistic when it comes to re-habituation; it certainly seems so when held up against the likes of Merleau-Ponty and Aristotle. It is true, Lojong does strike confidently in the direction of re-habituation and seems relatively untroubled by some of the "sticking points" we find among our previous interlocutors. At the same time, it is worth noting that Lojong is not all that radical from a Buddhist standpoint. After all, an instruction such as "Be a conjurer of illusions" does not ask that we do anything other than recognize what is *already* at play in shaping experience. It is not such a far leap, in fact, to be conjurers of illusions or to see reality through the lens of illusion; this aphorism only asks us to acknowledge the role we play in constituting some of the features of our lived experience and of a world that is always already underway. We therefore do not need to be *told* to conjure illusions but rather to understand and remember that we are already engaged in doing so. Our lived reality already contains subjective elements; that is why there is an opening to change it. Being a "conjurer of illusions," then, is an exercise not of *creating* the capacity to imagine our world otherwise but of *recognizing* that we are already putting that capacity into practice anyway. The practices of Lojong only seem radical if we assume that our ordinary, conventional experience is what is purely, objectively 'real,' and cultivating bodhicitta requires tearing ourselves away from that. If the practitioner can come to appreciate that

her lived reality is already illusion-like, however, she can rightly feel emboldened to tinker with that projection in the interest of cultivating bodhicitta.

Then again, there is little reason for us to think that any ordinary person would adopt the view that her transactional experience is a projection without some outside influence. Although there are such cases of "lone-wolf Enlightenment" – the historical Buddha is one notable example – for the most part we should count it as unlikely that we would be able to gain such a critical distance from our experience that we would be able to see through the subjective structuring of our world and realize the paired truths of emptiness and interdependent origination. That is why we need teachers and texts, which can provide the kinds of interruptions to our ordinary experience that would make possible the adoption of a novel project like bodhicitta. Although Buddhist ethics is predicated upon the fungibility of the structures of our experience and the ethical reasons we have for transforming them, most of us still require some kind of pedagogical shock that can disrupt the seamlessness of our dualistic, deluded self-grasping and thereby motivate the whole re-habituation process. For this reason, the Lojong practitioner has to rely on the skillful means of a teacher, text, or practice that presents a view that is at odds with her everyday experience. This is another instance, similar to what we saw in our discussion of Merleau-Ponty above, of the role of faith in the adoption of a new project. Just as the white anti-racist ally might have to begin to apprehend white privilege by first entertaining its existence as an article of faith, the Lojong practitioner has to begin with entertaining the notions of interdependent origination and the perniciousness of self-grasping in order to develop the perceptual habits that would make those truths available to her in experience.

Altogether, Lojong uses the thesis of a fundamentally un-fixed moral subjectivity as an engine for ethical growth. Its practices are grounded upon fundamental Buddhist insights about what gives rise to the qualities of our experience, including and especially our suffering, insights that place within reach the transformation of that experience. More concretely, the person engaged in Lojong has the opportunity to re-habituate herself first within the 'hypothetical' context of contemplative practice and to regard her existing habituation toward self-grasping not as an obstacle to be overcome per se but rather as 'grist for the mill' of challenging the dualistic structures that impede her cultivation of bodhicitta. While this ultimately works toward a manifestation of moral subjectivity that looks quite different from what we might consider 'normal,' from a Buddhist standpoint this practice only aims to put to good use the phenomenological dynamics that are already operative in shaping our experience, showing us that we have always been radically untethered in the construction of our experience and we can use that fact to our advantage.

III. Re-Habituation and the Total Choice of Our World

Informed by these perspectives on the task of ethical re-habituation, I take the following stance: we *should* approach re-habituation with moxie and creative ambition. The serious difficulties that we face in changing ourselves at the dispositional level, pointed out to us in their way by Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle and Lojong, can themselves serve us in this effort, flagging the points at which our efforts at re-habituation are likely to run aground. We would do well to heed these warnings but need not abandon the project altogether.

I am reminded again here of Foucault's assertion that "people…are freer than they feel" (Foucault 2000, 10). This is not a claim about agency or free will; the "freedom" to which Foucault refers is a lack of fixity, a play, a free movement that is at the heart of our subjectivity. We are underway, our constitution always coming together and coming apart. Merleau-Ponty gestures in this direction in "Freedom," the final chapter of *Phenomenology of Perception*, where he counters the traditional identification of freedom as a question of deliberation or determinism. Our real freedom is actually prior to our attempts to express agency through deliberation; it lies in a "secret decision" that "makes motives appear" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 460). The example that Merleau-Ponty develops to illustrate this point is the person who wishes to scale a steep rock face and sees it as impossibly steep and unclimbable. It only appears as such to she who actually intends to climb it; the sense that it has appears as such because her "projects cut these determinations out of the uniform mass of the in-itself and make an oriented world" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 460). To anyone else who lacks these projects, the rock might be a dramatic topographical feature, a geological marvel or altogether unremarkable, but not *unclimbable* per se. Whether she chooses to attempt to climb it is not the most meaningful expression of her freedom. Her freedom rather consists in the fact that she has come to know and see the rock face in the terms that she does, as receptive to or deflective of the project that she brings to it.

Merleau-Ponty thus bats away the desire to locate our agency in volitional choices – the choices that define morality as a rationally-justified choice against our other

inclinations.[109] The struggles of moral compunction are not the most fruitful venue for considering our freedom. Rather, we should look to the world in which we find ourselves embedded. There we can find, in the exchange between self and world, our "concrete and actual freedom" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 463). The fact that the terms of our moral choices appear to us contingently is evidence of our freedom, our lack of fixity. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> The genuine choice is the choice of our whole character and of *our way of being in the world*. But either this total choice is never articulated, it is the silent springing forth of our being in the world, in which case it would not be clear in what sense it could be called ours – this freedom glides over itself and is equivalent to a destiny – or the choice that we make of ourselves is truly a choice, a conversion of our existence, but in this case it assumes a preexisting acquisition that it sets out to modify and it establishes a new tradition (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 463).

We have already discussed how the world speaks to us on the topic of ourselves inasmuch as our habituation indicates our projects and the style of our being-in-the-world. We can take this passage in that vein as well; the world speaks to us on the topics of ourselves because having a world that is "ours" is evidence of the freedom at the heart

[109] "This is why our freedom must not be sought in the insincere discussions where a style of life that we do not wish to question clashes with circumstances that suggest an alternative: the genuine choice is *the choice of our whole character* and of our way of being in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, *PP* 463, emphasis added). Merleau-Ponty's inclusion of such an ethically-loaded term as 'character' here is remarkable. He does not elaborate upon it further, but the stark articulation of "our whole character" as well as "our way of being in the world" as a "genuine choice" is indeed one of his most directly ethical moments in the *PP*.

of our subjectivity. Until we see our world as something that proceeds from the structures we provide for having it, our world will appear to be an immutable fact, and the freedom at the core of our being in the world thus "glides over itself," remaining a fold in our subjectivity that slips out of our grasp, making our world and our being elusive to us, not *ours* but only ours to abide. Alternatively, we can know and feel our way of being in the world as something that we have given and continue to give to ourselves. Even when it is received from our eco-social history, because it is *our* being in the world, it is nowhere but *in* us. Furthermore, for Merleau-Ponty, included within this recognition of the "total choice" of our being-in-the-world is the task of modifying it. I cannot just passively acknowledge that I have founded my character and my being in the world ("Yes, this is all my own doing"); this article of self-knowledge prompts pro-active engagement with my moral subjectivity. (1) The world I have is *not* inevitable, so I shouldn't treat it that way; (2) I should *exert the influence* I have to found my life-world with some care and attention. These are the implications of our freedom for Merleau-Ponty.[110]

I take Foucault's statement that we are "freer than we feel" as an invitation to this kind of self-cultivation, and I take each of my textual interlocutors in this work as advisers in fleshing out what that might mean. The weight of habituation and the totalization of the experience of our world that it affords belie the fact of its historical

[110] These reflections upon freedom and our power to transform our field of action and experience lead Merleau-Ponty to a discussion of class consciousness and revolution. Our relations to history as classed individuals demonstrate the weight of history in creating the valuations through which we have a present. At the same time, "the free project of the future" speaks to the fungibility of these valuations and the possibilities for upending the class structures that define who we are and where and how we are free to act. Such revolutions "[create their] own instruments and [their] own means of expression" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 471).

construction. Each of the traditions that I have engaged here confirms in its way that our moral subjectivity *comes about*. Merleau-Ponty's "mutation in knowledge," the Aristotelian thesis that an education of character is a perceptual education, and Lojong's practice of re-habituation in the interest of the project of bodhicitta all speak to the prospects we have for transforming our lived experience by working with habit. If we do not feel free, it is because we assume that our world is *the* world, the only possible thing to experience. We feel free when realize that our experience is something susceptible to tinkering that is always undergoing transformation and will inevitably change shape as we progress though our lives.

We have our world through our habits, and they therefore provide the ground for the manifestation of our ethical subjectivity. Our insight into the factors that institute new habits in this work can point us toward a novel optics – an optics engendered by the moral psychology of re-habituation. I am inspired by what portends the phenomenologist's attempt to re-polarize her world by adopting a new project; in taking up a novel project as a matter of faith, she stands to establish affective vectors in her world that will pull her toward newly significant features of her milieu. A new project can recast the structures through which she can have a world that is, if nothing else, less totalized in its values. At best that world would be less expressive of ethically problematic values such as white supremacy or other biases.

The experiential education toward which Aristotelian moral psychology points us provokes questions toward the kinds of experiences that stand to count as transformative. Art? Service learning? Psychotherapy? Travel? Trauma? If I want to change the meanings of the things that I encounter in my world, what should I *do*? If I can give

myself the kind of experience that truly makes me feel and respond to something in a new way, I will quite possibly be engaging in the kind of affective education that could (begin to) define a novel character for me. I want therefore to expose myself to the kinds of experiences and valuations that could challenge my own and that might even make me uncomfortable. After all, obeying the direction of the arrangement of my pleasures and pains will only lead me to further confirm the current state of my character. An experience of actively bucking those proclivities in the interest of virtue would be highly productive in reorganizing my moral subjectivity. In other words, Aristotle shows us that if moral change could happen at all, it will not feel *good*, at least at first. The coming-about of ethical transformation will feel awkward and possibly deeply uncomfortable.

I can be inspired by Lojong to have more of a sense of humor about my habituation. In some respects, Lojong challenges Merleau-Ponty and Aristotle to take habit more seriously – as seriously as possible, in fact.[111] The shape that habituation gives to our lived experience bears the enormous consequences of either keeping us ensconced in endless cyclical suffering or prompting us finally to apprehend the nature of reality and release ourselves (and others) from delusion. At the same time, a further insight that we can glean from Lojong is that, in a more proximate sense, we should not take so seriously the terms of the world that we have. Recall the glee with which the *Wheel-Weapon* regards mundane suffering. Yes, suffering is viewed positively in this text because it is the enemy of my ego, but there is also a tinge of twisted humor in pointing out again and

[111] This is not to trivialize the importance of habit to Merleau-Ponty or Aristotle. I simply mean to point out how – even when considered alongside the very careful treatments of habit by these two thinkers – the profound existential gravity of habit in Lojong appears more pronounced.

again all the ways in which we could turn our perception of our world on its ear and just *do something different*. Lojong gives us loads of opportunities to do that in a hypothetical register with its contemplations and the practice of tonglen, which altogether we can read as low-stakes experiments in a high-stakes enterprise. We have good reason to play with the apprehensions of our world that guide our discourse with it; we can take up the power of our imaginative faculties and tinker with our perceptions. We can take the attitude that the worst that can happen is that we will remain ensconced in the same suffering in which we have always found ourselves. At best we might uncover some movement, some play, some un-fixedness within our ethical subjectivity and begin to see that we have 'come about' and how we can continue to play with the ways in which we are always underway.

IV. Conclusion

Altogether, what this synthetic analysis of these three philosophies of habit have shown us is that the freedom and the lack of fixity at the heart of our moral subjectivity points a way forward for ethical self-cultivation. By looking at habit, we certainly stand to learn something about the historicity of our lived experience and how it has come about – in other words, that our world has a history. We also have good reason, however, to look toward the futurity of our habit in a spirit of ambitious creativity. Our world has a future too, and its shape is not inevitable or necessarily linear. Knowing that our moral subjectivity is something that comes about, we should not abdicate our role in that 'coming about.' Yes, our personal and eco-social histories play important roles in shaping our characters and our worlds, so it would be foolhardy to assume that we can make ourselves utterly transparent to ourselves and unilaterally reshape our inner lives with no

contribution or interruptions from others. On the other hand, we should not pretend that we have no power to bring new projects into our midst, cultivate a novel orientation through which to have a world, or simply make our world and ourselves a bit strange to ourselves by being willing to make sites of contestation out of accepted ideas and modes of being. We can do this as a matter of experimentation – playing with the play of a subjectivity underway. It is a serious project that we can undertake with a sense of humor. It begins with the intimation that, beneath the discourses of my world that seem so fixed, there is a freedom that invites my self-cultivation.

Conclusion

The Future of Re-Habituation

This work began with the orienting question of what trajectories are available to the person who wishes to ethically re-habituate herself. In addressing that question, we have rehearsed the moral-psychological implications of three philosophies of habit. Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle and Lojong have each elaborated in their way upon how habit shapes us and what would either beset or buttress our attempts to re-habituate ourselves in the interest of self-cultivation. By bringing these three textual interlocutors together, my aim has been to foster a mutually enriching cross-cultural philosophical investigation in which each textual tradition can speak in its own voice to the human problem of how to work on ourselves. The methodological strength of cross-cultural philosophy, then, lays in its ability to corral culturally and historically disparate philosophical streams in a line of shared inquiry while allowing them to remain different and even wildly incommensurate at times. The ways in which phenomenology, virtue ethics and Buddhist ethics variously comment upon our prospects for transforming ourselves through habit show the richness and polyvalence of habit as a device for reflecting upon our moral subjectivity. At the same time, the convergence of these traditions in themes such as imagination; affect; perception; phenomenological projects and experimental, experiential habit formation demonstrate the fecundity of a cross-cultural approach to this kind of philosophical inquiry. Reading these traditions alongside rather than against one another, this project has allowed us to see how even in the singularity of their voices and conceptual apparatuses, phenomenology, virtue ethics and Buddhist ethics can

collaboratively, productively inform and inspire us to critically examine how habituation shapes our ethical character and our experience of the world.

To that end, a few key accomplishments of these chapters on re-habituation and ethical subjectivity stand out: the utility of appreciating habit's role in shaping a subjectivity that is always underway; introducing the concepts by which the practical terms for a regimen of ethical re-habituation might be enacted; and elaborating a phenomenology of Lojong.

First, for all of their differences, each of these accounts of habit has affirmed in one way or another the way in which ethical subjectivity is always underway. Habit is always dynamically moving forward. Even if the past movements of habituation cannot be recuperated or undone, its relentlessly forward movement serves as a potent reminder of the unfinishedness of our ethical subjectivity. Reasonable theorists of habit can disagree on whether or not we are entirely free to extirpate ourselves from the bounds of past habituation, but at least one thing is clear: the structure of our inner life is always under construction. Whatever sense of boundedness or ossification we experience in the field of our experience has more play in it than might be apparent. My character is not just susceptible to change; it is always changing. All experience changes us, and we are always already underway. We need not feel damned to the current state of our character, therefore; at the same time, we cannot necessarily assume that just because we are always changing – sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically – that we are changing for the better or in any planned way at all.

Just entertaining an aspiration for ethical self-cultivation requires that we see ourselves as unfixed in the first place. The key virtue of such an aspirant will be not just

the desire for a different state of affairs in her ethical subjectivity but, first and foremost, the ability to recognize that such a difference is possible. Having this basic insight into the un-fixedness of the human event is important, because it answers a question lingering in the penumbra of this work. All along this project has been motivated by the desire to change ourselves at the dispositional level. But what inspires such a desire? That is, how does someone even get that to that first step of critical self-cultivation – of *wanting* to do this in the first place? Many believe that this kind of intrapersonal transformation is impossible to affect on one's own, and beyond that many more fall into the category of people who Foucault would say are "much freer than they feel," who believe subjectivity and lived experience to be static. In other words, the line of inquiry that this project has pursued begins with the premise of the person who *wants* to change. That is a fairly specific subset of people. Not everyone wants to change or even takes the wish that she could seriously enough to actually pursue the question of doing so. What can this project offer to those who fall outside that subset? Or does it have nothing do say to them? Do we just count it as some form of moral luck to be already interested in if not convinced of the possibilities for ethical self-cultivation?

Here our work on the phenomenological significance of habit can be useful, because even if we bracket the question of telic self-cultivation, habit shows us that our experience is something that comes about. Although the machinations of that process might not be obvious in our mundane experience, looking more closely at the phenomenological impact of adopting new projects, instruments, practices and behaviors at least can affirm the dynamism of our subjectivity. Just as Aristotle says that we would have to be thoroughly senseless to think that doing certain things will not make us a

certain way (e.g. that drinking every day would not make us into a drunk), once we have reflected upon habit, we would have to be thoroughly senseless to think that we cannot or do not change. Our inquiry into habit helps illuminate the fact that we *do* change, that we *are* underway, and that a static conception of our subjectivity is too simplistic. This can serve as an impetus to enter into the premise of this project, at least provisionally.

Another accomplishment of this project is that it has introduced some of the terms by which we can begin to think more practically about techniques for ethical re-habituation. Our survey of Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle and Lojong focused on the *prospects* of projects of ethical re-habituation that each of them portend. Even our discussion of Lojong, which was so concerned with the specificities of its pedagogical strategies, primarily addressed what about it made re-habituation possible – how its discursive and non-discursive strategies influenced the thinking and ethical responsiveness of its practitioners. By looking at the possibilities for ethical re-habituation in each of these traditions, we have been able to distill in abstract terms what ethical re-habituation would be like or would involve. For example, Merleau-Ponty has helped us appreciate the value of adopting a new project in order to re-polarize our phenomenal field, even if the adoption of the project might have to begin as a matter of faith. Aristotelian habit brought us to the hypothesis that re-habituation can take place by way of experiential education that exposes us to experiences and valuations that challenge ours. Lojong showed us how much we stand to gain from repetitively, imaginatively familiarizing ourselves with an unfamiliar view.

All of this is helpful to the person who wants to know if and how it would be possible to cultivate her character by way of habit, but there is more we can do with this

information. In future work, I would like to extend the findings from these chapters into an even more practical register. For example, how can we apply our analysis of Lojong's pedagogical strategies to the problem of aversive racism that we outlined in the first chapter? What would a Lojong-inspired practice of countering aversive racism look like or involve? Or for that matter what would an Aristotelian experiential education toward anti-racism look like? There is a lot of promise in further integrating the synthetic analysis that we began in the fourth chapter in this direction toward more a more specific elaboration of the pedagogical elements of re-habituation could entail; it stands to deepen and refine the answer that this project offers to the person who wishes to transform herself at the dispositional level.

Third, this project has begun to flesh out a phenomenology of Lojong that can add to the exciting conversation in contemplative humanities and neuroscience that surrounds this practice. A growth edge in Lojong scholarship is its widely lauded secularization in evidence-based curricula such as Stanford University's Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) and Emory University's Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT). These trainings have demonstrated that Lojong can be standardized and offered to diverse populations like foster children, college students, and medical professionals. The growing body of empirical evidence surrounding Lojong shows that this centuries-old set of practices renders certain neurological and hormonal changes in its practitioners, but the philosophical analysis of the stakes of these changes remains rather thin. The phenomenological analysis of Lojong developed in this work can help explicate what makes Lojong so practical in these secular settings. Conversely, the secularization of Lojong is itself a distillation of its pedagogy, and comparing the secular practice of

Lojong against the analysis of discursive and non-discursive strategies that I develop in the third chapter can be mutually illuminating, pointing out what a 'pared down' version of Lojong amounts to; what, if any, the curricular changes in a secularized Lojong stands to shift about the phenomenological or soteriological stakes of the practice itself; and what how the neuroscientific findings on Lojong square with the phenomenological reading of habit that this project has elaborated.

In sum, I came to this line of questioning with the hope to affirm the possibilities that we can direct the forward movement of our ethical development, at least in part. When it comes to the shape of our moral subjectivity, I have tried to push for something more actively engaged and optimistic than simply abiding the status quo. Together Merleau-Ponty, Aristotle and Lojong provide enough evidence that, challenging as a project of ethical self-cultivation may be, we have good reason to try to pursue it. The person who does so must be ethically and psychologically ambitious, but these qualities are not about idealistic longing; they denote moral moxie and intrapersonal resourcefulness and make possible the work we have to do if we hope to grow as ethical characters and experience the world in a more ethically felicitous way.

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