

## Toward a Secular Ethic of Compassion

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**To be or not to be.** “In the moment of love, the nature of emptiness dawns nakedly” (Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche). Concerning our human conduct and its relation to happiness, Plato told, “No small matter is at stake. The question concerns the very way in which human life is to be lived” (Republic, Book I). “We enter the future backwards” (Paul Valery). As we proceed into our future on the thermodynamic “arrow of time,” the precise result of our thought and action cannot be foreseen. Nevertheless, we’ve seen that from the interdependent arising of all spacetime phenomenal reality, with all the impermanent conscious beings who perceive it and act in it, emerges the inexorable karmic *law of cause and effect*. Interdependent Relationship. What we give, positive and negative, consciously and unconsciously, is what we receive. Our present life situation—our view, our suffering and our happiness—is *caused* by our previous thought, intention and action. What we do now, our thought and conduct creates and determines our future destiny. What we are now is *exactly* the result of our past actions. Here, there can be no egoic “plea for excuses,” no fudge factor. Nothing is lost. *Simply put, this “law of karma,” of reaping what we sow, is the basis of human freedom* We are free to choose the unbiased and impartial love-wisdom unity path to enlightenment—our step-by-step supreme happiness and liberation from suffering—in direct relation to the process of our gradual recognition, then realization and actualization in conduct of the imponderable, inexorable timeless truth of interdependent relationship (*hetu/tendrel*), the Law of Karma. “*What you are is what you have been; what you will be is what you do now*” (Shakyamuni, the Buddha). This path, whether or not one is aware of it, is the lifestage developmental path or evolutionary path toward our liberation from alienation and suffering. Thus spake the masters of our nondual primordial Great Wisdom Tradition.

Because we are utterly interdependent and interconnected, and because we all desire happiness and desire to avoid suffering, an altruistic secular Ethic of Compassion naturally re-emerges from this Great Wisdom Tradition teaching. All of our major religious-cultural traditions and most secular ethics within these streams have founded their ethic upon human kindness and compassion (*karuna, maitri, nyingje, bodhicitta, ahimsa, hesed/charis, altruism*). “Ultimately the purpose of religion is to facilitate love and compassion (H.H. The Dalai Lama, 1999). Compassionate thought, intention and action (conduct) is the very basis of moral virtue. Non-virtue results “from causing harm to another’s experience or expectation of happiness . . . . A positive result cannot come from a negative cause” (H.H. The Dalai Lama). A thought, intention or act is ethical or morally right, based on “The Good” of happiness—the motivation—and wrong if it causes suffering—the consequences. Therefore, intention, motivation (deontology) *and* consequence (teleology) of an act determine the karmic result. The effect or consequence of an act is inextricably linked to its prior intention-motivation. Both determine its ethical content. What then shall we do with this precious life we’ve been given, this time to attend to opening to the great source that links us all together?

**The primary moral imperative is the wisdom of kindness.** This emerging secular ethic of interdependence requires the practice of wise, unbiased, gentle and generous activity in the service of all beings (including ourselves and our Mother Earth). This is “the courage to be” that is the wisdom of uncertainty, beyond fear and hope, continuous ego- self-surrender in the

fearsome face of emotional-spiritual transformation. With self-surrender (*wu wei, aporia*) arises the nondual state of equanimity that is the compassionate Witness Presence—our original mind that is our indwelling, always present presence, our christ/buddha nature that is who we actually are now. Here our ethical precepts are lived spontaneously, without effort. “If you keep your original mind the precepts will keep themselves” (Suzuki Roshi). “Make of yourself a light,” (the Buddha’s last words to his disciples). “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jesus of Nazareth). This is our Great Wisdom Tradition’s secret of liberation that is Happiness Itself, the happiness that cannot be lost. The practical significance of this Moral Imperative for the 21st Century? We learn to transcend ego-ethnocentric hatred—thanatos, the deadly denial of our primordial Wisdom Mother (Gnosis, Shakti, Prajnaparamita, Yeshe)—and help one another, or perish from the earth. This is our choiceless choice (cf. “A New Secular Ethic of Compassion,” [www.davidpaulboaz.org](http://www.davidpaulboaz.org)).

All the happiness there is in this world comes from compassionate  
service to others, and all the suffering comes from serving oneself.

-Shantideva

Clearly, these primordial truths of our shared Great Wisdom Tradition have great constitutive power in the unfolding of an incipient integral noetic resolution to the pressing problems of knowledge (wisdom), morals (conduct), and governance (political economy).