

# Reflecting on Meditation’s Ethics: Ignatian “Spiritual Exercises” and Buddhist “Mettā-Bhāvanā”

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## Introduction

In her recent study of moral sympathies in the thought of Buddhaghosa and Adam Smith, Maria Heim points out that as early as 1900, the comparative value of Buddhist thought has been recognized in the Western academy.<sup>1</sup> It was then that Caroline Rhys Davids asked, “Is it too much to hope that, when such a work is put forth, the greater labour of a wider and juster initiative will have been undertaken, and the development of early psychological thought in the East have been assigned its due place in this branch of historical research?”<sup>2</sup> This question and others like it have opened a door to over a century of often overly-tentative forays into the field of comparative religious ethics. Even earlier, in 1844, Eugène Burnouf similarly wondered about the comparative place of various aspects of Buddhist thought. Writing of the Perfection of Wisdom literature, he noted:

This is the truly ancient philosophical part of Buddhism, which could be called psychology and ontology, in the same way that the theory of the four sublime truths represents morality more particularly; and the Reverend W. H. Mill has been quite fortunately assisted by the recollection of his classical erudition when, examining the famous philosophical formula by which the knowledge of all causes is attributed to the Buddha, he recalls the famous verse *Qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, and names Śākya the Epicurus of this great Oriental system.<sup>3</sup>

This glancing comparison of the Buddha with Greek philosophy could have been the start of a great tradition of comparisons and dialogue. However, in 2014, 170 years after Burnouf and over a century after Rhys Davids, the study of non-Western thought as ‘philosophy’ is still a woefully small field in the academy. Our work toward understanding specifically emotional characteristics in Buddhist ethics, and through these more deeply understanding non-Buddhist forms of thought, is thus in its infancy. It is in this light that somewhat experimental, though strongly analytical, comparisons of non-Western religious thought and potential Western analogues can be found most valuable.

In this paper, we embark upon an analysis and comparison of the ethical and soteriological nature of two highly distinctive forms of meditation: the ‘Spiritual Exercises’ of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556) and the ‘cultivation of loving-kindness’ (*mettā-bhāvanā*) in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. This work is done from the standpoint of a scholar of Buddhism, looking both into the world of Ignatian spirituality and through this looking afresh into Buddhist practice. The comparison seeks to foster greater mutual understanding between Christians and Buddhists through examining the imaginative and emotive language employed in these practices and exploring the complex role that meditation plays in the ethics of both traditions. Through each practice, we are taken through the imagination into the world of ethical aspiration and transformation and, ultimately, directed toward the final goal of each tradition. This final goal, explained further below, can be characterized as both cognitive and emotional in the Buddhist tradition: cognitive in the sense of seeing reality as it truly is, as opposed to through the obscurations of ignorance; and emotional in the sense of having overcome the twin vices of greed and aversion. In the Ignatian tradition the final goal is similarly based on a fully developed cognitive capacity, described as discernment leading ultimately toward seeing God in all things, and a correspondingly overcoming impulses and desires that deviate from the will of God.

Examination of processes of ethical development through the cultivation of emotions represents a relatively small area in the study of comparative ethics, and smaller yet in the field of Buddhist ethics.<sup>i</sup> We follow the recent scholarship of Maria Heim, who has suggested a particularist approach to comparative ethics, one which looks at specific aspects of seemingly distant traditions to shed greater light on each.<sup>ii</sup> Heim's work, largely following that of Charles Hallisey,<sup>iii</sup> strives toward a more fruitful comparative ethics by seeking “not to compare Buddhist ethics as a unified whole, but rather more circumscribed thinkers, discourses, or texts from within particular traditions.”<sup>4</sup> We also follow the work of Rupert Gethin, who has argued in “Cosmology and Meditation” (1997) and more recently on “Mythology as Meditation” (2006) that scholars should take seriously the often grandiose cosmologies and mythologies of Buddhism not as literal and thus incorrect visions of the world, but rather as powerful meditative tools. As Gethin writes of the Mahāśudassana Sutta (D II 199):

Even if we hesitate to regard the MSud as a formal visualization in, say, the manner of the tantric *maṇḍala*, yet its meditative and contemplative dimensions remain manifest. The slow, unhurried description of the city with its groves of jewelled trees with tinkling bells and its lotus ponds, of the palace with its jewelled rooms and couches, evokes an image and sense of wellbeing and calm. The story of the king's conversation and of his death, especially in the Pāli version, is of considerable emotional intensity: it is a story of letting go, of the passing of the things to which we are deeply attached — the passing even of the Buddha himself.<sup>5</sup>

Gethin here brings us beyond the surface story in the text and into the emotionally rich thought-world of the practitioner. In this thought-world, an imaginative process transforms the practitioner's view of self and surroundings out of mundane reality and into the salvific, or in this case liberatory, path of the religion. We find a similar character in the process of the Spiritual Exercises, which begins with a focus on the enormity of divine goodness in contrast to human sinfulness. This chasm is filled with the hope and faith at the heart of the Christian tradition: “Central to the grace of the First Week is an awed sense of how creaturely perversity fails to frustrate divine love.”<sup>6</sup>

## Methodology

Understanding the relationship between ethics and meditative practice or experience is no simple task. As Georges Dreyfus observes in his study of the ethical-meditative continuum in the Tibetan *Dge lugs* (Geluk) tradition, “[modern scholars] cannot proceed to a straightforward comparison between Buddhist and Western ethicists, but must first construct the studied object.”<sup>7</sup> The same holds true when we attempt to compare meditative practices. The texts of each tradition provide a starting point, orientation, and conceptual mapping for the journey of the practitioner. But the compelling force itself must come from the practitioner, the human being engaged in the idiosyncrasies of human existence. “Meditation is not a disembodied phenomenon that is identical regardless of how, when, where, and by whom it is practiced.”<sup>8</sup> This fact must be taken into account as one reads the texts, and indeed the *situatedness* of persons within communities of practice is acknowledged in both the core texts and commentaries for these practices. The

<sup>i</sup> Aronson's *Love and Sympathy in Theravāda Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996) is a notable exception.

<sup>ii</sup> Both holistic and particularist approaches are useful and, it is hoped, complementary. For further debate over methodology, favoring the particularist approach, see Hallisey (1996) and Heim (2007). Many attempts at holistic classification have been made, including: Whitehill (1994), Keown (2001), Velez de Cea (2004), and Goodman (2010). As Heim points out, “Successful work in comparative Buddhist ethics must tread carefully through these debates even as it begins to reach beyond them.” (2007, p.110).

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Hallisey, C., 1996, “Ethical Particularism in Theravāda Buddhism,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 3: 32-43 and Hallisey, C & Hansen, A, 1996, “Narrative, Sub-ethics, and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravāda Buddhism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 305–27.

Buddhist Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta (Sn 1.8) begins with a list of ethical injunctions, concluding by directing the practitioner’s attention to the world:

And without the slightest conduct, [doing] anything at all, which other wise ones  
would find fault.<sup>iv</sup>

This reminder of the “wise ones”, grounds the meditator in his or her particular ethical community. In the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, a directee (or ‘exercitant’) begins by taking up a daily *examen* or reflection on her activities and, more importantly, on her emotional responses to the activities of the day. She is instructed to contemplate the overall sin of the world and then her own sin: to see herself as part of a community. There is the utmost emphasis on developing one’s spirituality through activity in the world, rather than through the seclusion and extensive prayer that was arguably too common of the Catholic Orders of the time.<sup>9</sup> Over time, the Spiritual Exercises have become the heart of Jesuit spirituality, and the *mettā-bhāvanā* has become a focal point of Theravādin Buddhist practice.<sup>v</sup>

### **The *Mettā-Bhāvanā* of Theravāda Buddhism**

We begin with the *mettā-bhāvanā*, the Buddhist cultivation of loving-kindness. It has become commonplace to assert that a key feature of the early Mahāyāna was a reassertion of the Buddha’s compassionate spirit as opposed to the institutionalized and overly intellectual early mainstream schools. And yet many scholars, including Richard Gombrich and Harvey Aronson, have demonstrated the importance of emotions (most importantly loving-kindness, *mettā*) in the Buddha’s teaching and carried on through the Theravādin tradition. Gombrich argues, contrary to prevailing thought on the Buddha’s teaching, “that far from preaching that the only solution to life’s problems lay in eliminating emotion, he was the person who found a way to salvation *through* emotion, albeit emotion purified of selfishness...” (1998, emphasis mine). As will be discussed, the selfless character of *mettā* connects it to the central Buddhist metaphysical doctrine of *anattā* (not-self). To realize *anattā*, a crucial aspect of seeing things ‘as they truly are’ (*yathā-bhūtaṃ* or *yathā-dhammaṃ*), is the epistemological goal of Buddhism. We thus turn to an early Buddhist teaching in which ethical concerns drive epistemological and metaphysical understanding.

Following Gombrich (1996, 1998, 2010), we find the *locus classicus* of the *mettā-bhāvanā* in the Tevijja Sutta, a dialogue between the Buddha and two young *brahmins*, Vāsetṭha and Bhāradvāja. The beginning of this *sutta* is akin to the more well-known Kālāma Sutta, in which a dispute or uncertainty has arisen in the face of many paths being taught at the time, each claiming superiority over the others. These two young *brahmins* ask the Buddha specifically which path will lead to ‘union with Brahmā.’ The Buddha responds first with a dismissive account of the teachers whom the young *brahmins* had previously seen, suggesting that none of them, despite being well-versed in the three Vedas, knows the way to union with Brahmā. He states that the teachers’ words turn “out to be laughable, mere words, empty and vain”<sup>10</sup>, thus seeking to turn the students away from these past teachers.

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<sup>iv</sup> *Na ca khuddam samācare kiñci, yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ.* All Pāli Canon translations are my own unless otherwise noted, in consultation with translations available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org>. Original Pāli Canon used was that of the Chāṭṭha Saṅgāyana CD published by the Vipassana Research Institute, available online at <http://www.tipitaka.org/romn/>. Visuddhimagga material is from the Pali Text Society print edition. Pāli *sutta* and proper names are not italicized, while technical terms and extensive passages are.

<sup>v</sup> Fleming describes Ignatian Spirituality as “The most influential spiritual movement of the modern age” (back matter of *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* by Fleming) and see Gombrich quote below, p.10.

The Buddha continues by raising the topic to the *behavior* of those teachers, asking whether they were pure, unencumbered by wealth and wives, and suggesting outright that they were bound by the five bonds and five hindrances.<sup>vi</sup> The Buddha contrasts this with the pure and unencumbered state of Brahmā and then with the similarly pure state of the Buddha himself and any who follow his teachings. Thus, the subject of discussion is shifted from knowing the way to union with Brahmā to behavior or ethics. This is a familiar move in the *suttas*, a move away from isolated ritual knowledge or action toward the mind of the individual. The Buddha has not rejected the goal of *gnosis* given in the Upaniṣads but instead redirected the emphasis to the more basic activity of ethical behavior. In other words, he does not reject the goal of union with Brahmā, but instead the Buddha emphasizes ethical perfection (*sīlasampanno*) as a foundation for this union.<sup>vii</sup> Maintaining the gnostic elements of Upaniṣadic thought, elsewhere the Buddha describes *nibbāna* exactly as seeing things ‘as they truly are’ (*yathā-bhūtaṃ* or *yathā-dhammaṃ*),

The Buddha then claims that he himself knows Brahmā and his world as well as the way there. This of course excites the *brahmin* Vāseṭṭha, who beseeches the Buddha to teach him the way. The Buddha responds by repeating a section of the Sāmaññaphala Sutta<sup>11</sup> discussing the perfection of ethics for a monk. And this *sutta* itself is found to repeat a long list of moralities or abstentions practiced by the Tathāgata (Buddha) from the previous *sutta*, the Brahmajāla Sutta.

Finally, based on this foundation of moral teachings, the Buddha introduces the four *brahma-vihāras* (though the term is not used in this *sutta*), beginning with loving-kindness (*mettā*) and moving through compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Though these four are classified in the meditation (*samādhi*) portion of the threefold version of the Buddhist path, by drawing beneficial emotions such as loving-kindness and compassion into meditation and extolling the ethical behavior that results, the Buddha creates an overlap of emotions, meditation, and ethical conduct.<sup>viii</sup> He states that one may gain liberation (*vimutti*) of the heart/mind (*ceto*)<sup>ix</sup> through dwelling in each of these states.

Thus, cultivating liberation of the mind through loving-kindness, by this he leaves nothing standing beyond his measure, nothing is unaffected by him. This indeed, Vāseṭṭha, is the path to union with Brahmā.<sup>x</sup>

The Buddha concludes by equating the result of these practices with the unencumbered state of Brahmā, thus winning over the two *brahmins* as lay followers.

The problem, Gombrich argues, is that the Theravādin tradition did not understand the Buddha as literally stating that the *ceto-vimutti* achieved via the *brahma-vihāras* was equivalent

<sup>vi</sup> *Andūtipi* and *bandhanantipi* are bonds and fetters; these are the objects of the five senses (mind is excluded), and the familiar *nīvaraṇā* for hindrances: *Kāmacchandānīvaraṇaṃ* (sensuality-hindrances), *byāpāda* (ill-will), *thinamiddha* (sloth and torpor), *uddhaccakukkucca* (restlessness and worry), and *vicikicchā* (doubt).

<sup>vii</sup> Buddhaghosa defines *sīla* as a basis or foundation for profitable/virtuous states, *kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ* (Vism. I,19).

<sup>viii</sup> Alexander Moseley writes, “The philosophical treatment of love transcends a variety of sub-disciplines including epistemology, metaphysics, religion, human nature, politics and ethics” (2010).

<sup>ix</sup> This is sometimes distinguished from *paññā-vimutti*, ‘release by wisdom’ where *ceto-vimutti* is defined as ‘release of the mind’ (Gombrich 1996, 112). Gombrich argues, contra tradition, that the two are equivalent, as they are given in lists of cognates in the Nikāyas.

<sup>x</sup> “*Evam bhāvitāya mettāya cetovimuttiyā yaṃ pamāṇakataṃ kammaṃ na taṃ tatrāvasissati, na taṃ tatrāvatiṭṭhati. Ayampi kho, vāseṭṭha, brahmānaṃ saḥabyatāya maggo.*” “Sahabyatāya” could also mean ‘companionship.’ Norman makes a strong case for the non-union interpretation in his *A Philological Approach to Buddhism* (1994, 24), while Walsh (1995, 187-195) prefers union.

to *nibbāna*.<sup>xi</sup> Instead, they took literally the idea that the practitioner would thus dwell with Brahmā, and this, as is evident in other *suttas*, is a state inferior to *nibbāna*.<sup>xii</sup> Gombrich suggests that the early compilers of the canon were confused by this disparity in teaching – were they to take literally the notion of union with Brahmā, which is below awakening in the Buddhist cosmology, or take literally the compound *mettā-ceto-vimutti*, which denotes release of the mind by loving-kindness and see this practice itself as capable of leading to *nibbāna*? In the end, they demoted the *brahma-vihāras* to achieving a state just short of awakening. Aronson, in *Love and Sympathy in Theravāda Buddhism*, finds this in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, where the Buddha instructs Anāthapiṇḍaka on “a hierarchy of religious practices in terms of results produced”<sup>12</sup> in which the cultivation of a ‘loving mind’ (*mettacitta*) is found just short of the liberating insight of the realization of impermanence.<sup>13</sup><sup>xiii</sup> Buddhaghosa, following tradition, explains the four *brahma-vihāras* as each achieving and leading to subsequent immaterial *jhāna* states.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the Aṅguttara Nikāya, it is stated that “Here, however, by saying ‘liberation of the mind,’ he meant just the placement [of love, as it were, into its object] by way of the first three ... absorptions.”<sup>15</sup> And in both the *suttas*<sup>16</sup> and Visuddhimagga,<sup>17</sup> we find the list of “eleven advantages to cultivating *mettā*” ending in the promise that, if one penetrates no higher, one will be reborn in the Brahmā worlds. Thus, this emotion-based meditative practice falls short of the ultimate goal.

But, as Gombrich points out, Buddhaghosa ends his Visuddhimagga chapter on the *brahma-vihāras* by suggesting that they alone might complete the Ten Perfections, cultivate the Ten Powers, the Four kinds of fearlessness, the Six Kinds of Knowledge Not Shared by Disciples, and the Eighteen States of the Enlightened one—thus, essentially, *nibbāna*.<sup>18</sup> Gombrich, in good humor, writes, “This suggests to me that the spirit of a religion may survive even when literalist literati have lost the point.”<sup>xiv</sup>

While it seems quite possible that Gombrich is correct, and the tradition has lost an important element of the Buddha’s teaching on *mettā*, whether or not his argument wins the day, we can see that the *mettā* practice was from the beginning at or very near the pinnacle of Buddhist soteriology.<sup>xv</sup> *Mettā-bhāvanā* was not only a potentially liberating practice, but also a teaching found in a variety of contexts in the Pāli canon and commentaries for more worldly concerns. It was taught to monks and laity alike for its wide range of positive effects. Aronson documents the many cases in which the cultivation of love (*mettā*) is found in the Pāli sources. *Mettā* is taught as

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<sup>xi</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy, who equates *nibbana* and *vimutti*, stating explicitly that “those who have attained this salvation [*vimutti*] are called *Arahats*” (2003, 117-118). Gombrich (1996) in his chapter “Retracing and Ancient Debate” gives the dialogue as MN I. 437 as a text that “strongly suggests that there are two *vimutti*, two qualitatively different experiences of release,” 113. Looking also at AN. I 61, he argues that the words appear together as synonyms or nearly so, but that tradition sought to find a difference. He concludes that the two *vimuttis* cannot but refer to the same thing, 116-117.

<sup>xii</sup> A very poignant and canonically nearby example is the Kevaddha Sutta (DN I 11), in which a monk, Kevaddha, goes, stage by stage, up the cosmological hierarchy all the way to Mahābrahmā, ‘Great Brahmā,’ seeking to know where the four elements cease without remainder. Great Brahmā, in a gesture of somewhat comical magnitude, takes the monk aside and says that he doesn’t know and that the monk should ask the Buddha.

<sup>xiii</sup> The *sutta* is the Velāma Sutta and the Pāli phrase is, “*yo ca antamaso gandhohanamattampi mettacittam bhāveyya , yo ca accharāsaṅghātamattampi aniccasaññaṃ bhāveyya, idaṃ tato mahapphalatara*”<sup>nti. Dasamaṃ.</sup>

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid. Gombrich (1998, 7) also claims that the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta (Aṅguttara Nikāya I, 168ff) suggests the salvific nature of loving-kindness. While this is indeed plausible and adds weight to Gombrich’s claims here, detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this essay.

<sup>xv</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi challenges Gombrich in his review of *How Buddhism Began*, citing the numerous instances in the *suttas* in which “the Buddha declares the divine abodes to be inadequate for attaining Nibbāna (e.g. DN 17, MN 83, MN 97, etc.)...” (1997, 294).

a remedy for unruly deities, as in the commentary of the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta (Kuddaka-Pāṭha 252), a protection from murderous husbands, as in the case of Queen Samavāṭī,<sup>19</sup> a protection from being burned by hot ghee (Vimanavatthu, No. 15), and as a protection from snakes, as in the case of a certain monk fatally bitten by a snake.<sup>xvi</sup>

In contemporary use, the *mettā-bhāvanā* and the chanting of the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta serve as both a ‘calming’ (*samatha*) meditation practice and a ‘protection’ (*paritta*) chant. The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta, according to Gombrich, “may well be the most widely used Pali text in Theravādin practice... The positive values of kindness and unselfishness characterize Buddhism better than do the moral precepts for the laity, which are expressed negatively.”<sup>20</sup> Buddhists strongly believe that the *mettā* they generate has real efficacy, not only psychologically for the individual undergoing the meditation,<sup>xvii</sup> but also in relation to those they call to mind during the meditation. In one case, mentioned above, Buddhaghosa describes the case of Queen Samavāṭī, whose enraged husband could not fire his poisoned arrow pointed at her due to her pervading him with loving-kindness.<sup>21</sup> A further relational effect of love arises in Buddhaghosa’s discussion of *mettā*, where one should refrain from bringing a deceased person into the meditation.<sup>22</sup> Because the deceased person no longer exists, the cultivation of loving-kindness is ineffective: “But if he cultivates [*mettā*] towards a dead person, he reaches neither a fixed mind nor access [concentration]”<sup>23, xviii</sup> In one case, the act of loving-kindness directly affects another person’s actions, and in the other, the death or absence of the other person (as meditative object) prevents the meditator from progressing.

The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta is also a very widely known *sutta* amongst the lay people who chant it devotionally or aspirationally. Winston King, who did field research in Burma in the late 1950s, compares the Mettā Sutta (along with 2 others, the Maṅgala Sutta and the Sigālovada Sutta) with the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and Paul’s description of love in First Corinthians (ch 13) in Christianity. He goes on to say, “This is loving ‘one’s neighbor as oneself’ with a universal vengeance!”<sup>24</sup> He further quotes Caroline Rhys Davids as saying that “thoughts which did not carry over into action were like flowers that bore no fruit,” thus suggesting the importance of meditative aspirations becoming practitioners’ worldly actions.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, we find *mettā* occupying a central role in canonical Buddhist texts and commentaries as well as the practices of modern Theravādin Buddhists. The practice of cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā-bhāvanā*) is based on teachings of ethical perfection (*sīlasampanno*) and yet carries ethics into the meditative realm. This is done, as we have seen, through the meditation’s ability to affect both the meditator (leading to complete harmlessness) and those included in the meditation.

## The ‘Spiritual Exercises’ of St. Ignatius de Loyola

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<sup>xvi</sup> “Gotama states that if the monk had related to the four families of snakes with a loving mind [*mettena-cittena*], he would not have been bitten” (Aronson 1996, 50, 52, original at A.ii.72-73).

<sup>xvii</sup> As the cultivation arguably leads toward awakening and, as it has been pointed out, “Early Buddhism seems logically committed to the view that one who is fully aware (i.e., an awakened being) can do no harm. This view is consistent with that of Rupert Gethin who has recently argued that intentional killing, even on ostensibly compassionate grounds, is impossible for a being who is fully aware of the nature of their act (2004:181)” (Adam, 82).

<sup>xviii</sup> *Kālankate pana bhāvento neva appanaṃ, na upacāraṃ pāpuṇāti*. The young monk who inspired this injunction had been cultivating *mettā* toward his teacher. Upon making no headway in his meditation, he was told to ‘seek the sign’: to physically find that teacher. When the monk does so, he discovers that the teacher is dead. Upon changing people (to one who is alive), the monk is successful in attaining absorption.

The Spiritual Exercises arose from St. Ignatius's unique life and meditative experiences in solitude in a cave near Manresa, Spain.<sup>26</sup> The central purpose of the exercises is, "the conquest of the self and the regulation of one's life."<sup>27</sup> This is undertaken through the discernment of those impulses which arise in the life of the practitioner, determining whether they arise from the self or from without, the latter impulses or emotions being attributable to either goodness, or God's influence, or an evil spirit (one who leads the practitioner away from God).<sup>28</sup> Direction into the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius often begins with a discussion of the man himself. As one Jesuit historian effuses:

The originality of the *Exercises* lies in the fact that, though completely traditional in its ascetical teaching and based to some extent on the world of other spiritual writers, the book is not so much a book as the condensed, the suffered experience of a most noble heart that had wrestled with God and won emancipation at tremendous cost.<sup>29</sup>

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born *Íñigo López* in the Kingdom of Navarre, which is today the Basque country of northern Spain in 1491.<sup>xix</sup> He lived in a time of great religious and political upheaval as Europe was plunged into Reformation (Martin Luther was excommunicated in 1521) alongside growing nationalism, colonial expansion, and international warfare. His youth was filled with romantic fantasy, and he eventually took up military service. Injured in battle in the same year as Luther's excommunication, he was sent home to recover. There, he read books on the lives of the Saints and on Jesus and, again in 1521, he had his conversion to the service of Jesus Christ. "After that religious conversion, intellectual, moral, affective, and social transformations followed," writes J. Carlos Compeau.<sup>30</sup>

Drawing from his own conversion experience yet stripped bare of autobiographical information, Ignatius infused the subject matter of the Spiritual Exercises with a deeply meditative and emotional tone.<sup>31</sup> It is meant to engage the reader, or rather the *directee* (as he or she practices under the guidance of a spiritual director), in personal reflection and to move toward a love of God which manifests itself in activity in the world. The directee should not have the full text, but rather should be guided in "the way and order of meditating and contemplating."<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the practices are deeply personalized, and "[t]he candidate's personal history should somehow come into contact with the story of Christ, but always in a way that respects his personal capacities."<sup>33</sup> The exercises are therefore more than mere devotion, acting to transform the directee's past and present experiences in light of Christian teachings.

The exercises are traditionally practiced intensely over a period of four weeks but have been modified to last eight weeks or eight months for those amongst the general laity who cannot devote the continuous thirty days required to complete the practices.<sup>xx</sup> At the onset, one learns the *examen*, a process of reflecting on one's daily experience with others. It is the cornerstone of Ignatian prayer, "a daily habit to be developed by all Jesuits and never omitted."<sup>34</sup> This having been established, the directee moves through four weeks of specific objects of contemplation. The first week is devoted to sin—both that of the world and one's own—and God's unconditional love. During the second week, one reflects on the person and life of Christ. The third week focuses specifically on the Passion and death of Christ. And finally, the fourth moves to the Resurrection and a sense of joy as a foundation for sharing in Christ's service.<sup>35</sup> The full process is aimed at training one to see 'God in all things' and to discover a vocation through which one could participate fully in the love of God in daily life.

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<sup>xix</sup> Sedgwick (1923), in *Ignatius Loyola* (London: Macmillan) argues for a 1495 date, but this has never been accepted. Cited in Brodrick (1947, 43).

<sup>xx</sup> "Though four weeks, to correspond to this division, are spent in the Exercises, it is not to be understood that each Week has, of necessity, seven or eight days." *Spiritual Exercises Fourth Annotation* (Mullan 2007).

Philip Endean illustrates the process, drawing from Exercises 101-117, with the directee recalling, through narrative, the scene of the birth of Christ, coupled with a “composition of place” or “a setting oneself within the scene”:

...to see with the sight of imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem; considering the length and the breadth, and whether such road is level or through valleys or over hills; likewise looking at the place or cave of the Nativity, how large, how small, how low, how high, and how it was prepared.<sup>36</sup>

The concluding step is the prayer, “for what I want: it will be to ask for knowledge of the Lord from inside, Who for me has become human that I may more love and follow Him.”<sup>37</sup> The process both humbles the practitioner, placing her at the birth of the Lord and Savior, and allows for an emotional rapprochement, entering into the will of the Lord. The instruction is to be minimal, with the effort coming from the directee to create a fully personalized—and thus more emotional—experience in his imagination.

And yet the process is not meant to be a simple one. “Ignatius wants the process to be driven by the exercitant’s responses to the text, and he rather expects that these will be conflicting (to the point of suggesting in *Exx.* 6 that where conflict is absent the director should be worried).”<sup>38</sup> It is this conflict which should lead both to deeper humility and to changes in the life of the directee toward the service of God. This service of God is enacted through the service of humanity:

The goal of Ignatian spirituality is a self-transcending love of God and of the other... Authentic receptivity to God involves receiving love that enables one in turn to love others. For many the attraction to the practice of spirituality will originate in a desire for self-development. But over time they will discover a truth that Jesus taught: one must lose one’s life in order to find it... Ignatian spirituality leads a person to deeper appreciation of God’s love, and by extension to the expression of love in acts of solidarity, justice, and mercy... [I]t is an invitation to change society by becoming a changed person within society.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola form not only the heart of the practices of the Society of Jesus, but also the “very springhead of Jesuit philosophy.”<sup>40</sup> As we have seen, the practice of *mettā* is claimed to have far-reaching and profound effects on practitioners; could this practice of exceptionless love likewise be seen as the springhead of Buddhist philosophy?<sup>xxi</sup> The vivid remembrance of Christ’s selfless sacrifice serves an evocative purpose, conjuring a sense of both humility and gratitude, and the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta draws one evocatively from the image of one’s mother and into a practice which brings an end to desire and rebirth:

As a mother protects with her life  
Her child, her only child  
Likewise with a boundless heart  
Should one cherish all living beings  
...

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<sup>xxi</sup> It is broadly agreed that *nibbāna* constitutes the substantive end or goal of Buddhist practice. Currently, following tradition, most examinations of Buddhist philosophy start at ignorance (*avijjā*) and trace only the intellectual route to awakening, *paññā-vimutti* (cf. Gombrich 1996, p.116-117, op. cit.). However, if *mettā* alone (or any of the other emotionally charged practices of the *brahma-vihāras*) constitutes a complete path to *nibbāna*, one could reread the Pāli *suttas* with an eye toward the *emotional* character of the teachings. Granted that Aronson’s *Love and Sympathy in Theravāda Buddhism* was an excellent examination of some of this material, it is now over 30 years old.



Holding no more to wrong views  
With virtue and vision of perfection,  
And having removed all greed and sensual desire,  
Never again is one born in a womb.<sup>xxii</sup>

Through his presentation of the salvific or damning qualities of emotions, Ignatius draws the practitioner into a dialectical flow of daily life and emotions and meditative practice like that which we find in the Buddhist *mettā-bhāvanā*. By this it is meant that a practitioner of each begins by utilizing solitude or quiet reflection to develop an open heart by either actively becoming aware of God's presence or calling to mind a benefactor. The practitioner then actively calls to mind individuals or events from her daily life, focusing on the emotional aspects therein. In the practice, she then seeks to transform negative emotions into those resembling either Christ's love or the love of a mother toward her child. But, as it is a dialectical process, it does not end there; each meditator lives out the positive feelings created in meditation in her daily life.

This call to action in daily life is explicit in the Spiritual Exercises, as noted above. The call to action is similarly explicit in the opening lines of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, and the desirability of *mettā* is further emphasized by the repeated mention of its benefits. It is also made explicit by modern teachers and scholars with exhortations such as Caroline Rhys Davids, mentioned earlier, or similar words by the contemporary Sri Lankan teacher Henepola Gunaratana who says, "We not only recite [the] words, we active[ly] cultivate [love/*mettā*]. Having recited these words even a million times, if we do not put them into practice, [then just] parroting words doesn't mean anything" (2008).<sup>xxiii</sup> As the practice progresses, a Christ-like feeling or boundless love becomes ever-more a feature of the practitioner's daily life.

In the Spiritual Exercises, humanity is fallen and sinful but capable of full turn (or re-turn) to God. In Buddhism there is likewise a sense of fallenness, expressed as ignorance (*avijjā*) or delusion (*moha*), as each unawakened being still clings to the false view *asmi-māna* (the conceit, 'I am'). The *mettā* practices directly combat the conceit of self, explicitly seeking to "break down barriers" (*Vism.* IX, 40-43) between oneself and others, thus moving the metaphysical concept of *anattā* into an emotional framework on a path to awakening. Likewise, the Spiritual Exercises turn one away from the sinful approach to daily life (one that craves individual success, comfort, etc. and is upset by failure, discomfort, and the likes) and toward a view of life in which God is constantly active, a fully *graced* life.

Is such a *graced* life for the practitioner of the Spiritual Exercises really similar to that of the Buddhist meditator who has developed a heart that embraces all beings? The problem of incommensurability has not even begun to be addressed. It has instead been hoped that the return to the very basic metaphor and perceived emotional quality of both meditations could point to similarities behind the vast geographical, temporal, and theological chasm between the traditions. However, these traditions today are interpenetrating one another on the levels of theory and practice like no time in human history. As John Cobb Jr. points out, "When we think of living Christians and Buddhists not as embodiments of static linguistic systems but as dynamic thinkers seeking answers to questions that are often not adequately expressed within their inherited

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<sup>xxii</sup> *Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttamāyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe; Evampi sabbabhūtesu, mānasam bhāvaye aparimāṇam ... Diṭṭhiṅca anupagamma silavā dassanena sampanno; Kāmesu vineyya gedham, nahi jātu gabbhaseyyam punar eti ti.*

<sup>xxiii</sup> He concludes: "the fire, poison, and weapon are within ourselves [sic]." "Fire, poison, and weapon" refers to the 11 blessings of *mettā* practice discussed by Buddhaghosa at *Vism.* IX 37, from the *Aṅguttara Mettā Sutta* (AN 11.16) on the eleven advantages to cultivating *mettā*. To stress the metaphorical nature of fire, poison, and weapons, Gunaratana points to the *Āditta Sutta* (SN 35.28) in which the Buddha states, "Everything, Oh Monks, is aflame. What, Oh Monks, is all aflame? The eye is aflame, the body is aflame..." (*sabbaṃ, bhikkhave, ādittaṃ. Kiṅca, bhikkhave, sabbaṃ ādittaṃ? Cakkhu bhikkhave, ādittaṃ, rūpā ādittā...*), and so on, including the six senses, the six sense-consciousnesses, and six sense objects.

linguistic systems, we can understand that, in fact, their thinking is not simply incommensurate” (40).

One of the initial sparks for this work was an encounter between myself, a Buddhist scholar and meditation practitioner with Catholic roots, and a student in an Introduction to Buddhism course I taught at The University of Montana. This student was a retired gentleman who had lived through his own transformation from Protestant Christian pastor to devoted Catholic lay minister. While at first we each found the “linguistic systems” of the other to be problematic in this way or that, with time, and especially in our approach to one another connecting as friends on an emotional level, those systems opened up. I taught him my favorite Buddhist practice, the *mettā bhāvanā*, and he in turn led me through an abbreviated version of the Spiritual Exercises. This in turn granted both of us access to the other’s tradition in a way that would have a lasting impact on our lives. Entering into the practices of the other’s tradition, we lived as the “dynamic thinkers” Cobb wrote about. Based on that experience, in this work I have sought to move away from “static linguistic systems” which have tended to be the focus of more ‘holistic’ analyses of religious ethics. Shedding light on this specifically emotive aspect of these practices and their ties to metaphysics and epistemology might serve to deepen our discussion of Buddhist and Ignatian ethics. Further expanding this circle to encompass the emotional roots of practices in other traditions might serve to open new avenues in the study of comparative religious ethics more broadly. And for those working in the realm of interreligious dialogue, approaching fellow religions from an emotional angle may help develop and deepen connections beyond the barriers of divergent doctrines and practices.

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