The Ethics of Tension:
a Buddhist-Deconstructive Paradigm

Jin Y. Park
American University
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In this paper, I propose the ethics of tension as a potential ethical paradigm for Buddhist-deconstructive ethics. I will first outline my idea of the ethics of tension and discuss the ethical paradigm of Huayan Buddhism and Derridean deconstruction as examples of such an approach to ethics.

1. Ethics and Tension

In his book, *Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction*, David Wood characterizes postmodern forms of ethics as a "step back." Wood writes, "The step back marks a certain shape of philosophical practice, one that does not just resign itself to, but affirms the necessity of, ambiguity, incompleteness, repetition, negotiation, and contingency."[1] What Wood identifies as the characteristics of deconstructive ethics stands at the opposite of the general description of normative ethics. Normative ethics becomes possible by providing norms for judgment based on a mutually exclusive system of binary opposites, whereas Wood's statement is characterized by a refusal to provide such a definitive mode in our ethical imagination.

Instead of a ready-made recipe for answers to ethical questions, Wood suggests the ethical as a state of suspension. He explains this suspension by using John Keats' famous expression "negative capability," which Keats defines as a state "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."[2]

What kind of ethics can we envision in this context? Wood explains deconstructive ethics in reference to Levinas and describes it by using a spatial concept. Wood notes that Levinas's idea of ethics as a first philosophy is removed from the normative concept of ethics and states, "for Levinas, the ethical is the space of infinite responsibility for the other man. . . . For Derrida, this responsibility takes on a

more general openness to the sites at which otherness—and not just other man—is occluded in our thinking and writing."[3] In this manner, Wood counterbalances deconstructive ethics arising in the space with the rule-bounded ethics of metaphysics. What could it mean to say that the ethical arises in this space?

The question demands that we radically re-conceptualize the definition of ethics itself. I would like to place this space for Buddhist deconstructive ethics in the tension between the centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetality is the force moving toward a center whereas centrifugality is the force moving away from it. By its nature, the former centralizes and unifies, whereas the latter decentralizes and diffuses. Two points need to be made in advance for the discussion of centripetality and centrifugality. The first is that despite our habitualized value system, which is ready to evaluate unity and harmony as positive, and diffusion and disunity as negative, unity and disunity are value-neutral as such. Second, they never function separately, but are always already interfused. The tension as a state of the relationship between the two forces denotes a recognition of the heterogeneous nature of centripetality and centrifugality and at the same time of their indissociableness. The tension in this case is not a provision for any type of final resolution; instead, the continued state of tension without ultimate resolution is to be understood as the nature of an entity.

These two types of forces have appeared in the history of philosophy in several different modes: the transcendental and the empirical, the noumenal and the phenomenal, the universal and the particular, the mind and the world, the subject and the object, the one and the many, the ontological and the ontic, and Truth and its dissemination. Buddhist tradition is not alien to this hermeneutic device, even though it has rarely been discussed in this way. The Buddha and sentient beings in Mahāyāna tradition, especially in Zen Buddhism, is one instance; the relationship between subitism and gradualism in Zen tradition is another; the normative linguistic and social convention and Zen *gong'an* language is yet another; the relationship between wisdom and compassion also can very well be interpreted as the tension between the centralizing and decentralizing forces. That these two forms exist in a state of tension, mutually reinforcing, has not always been recognized; and when it is recognized, the tension is there only to be resolved, which becomes the *raison d'être* of the tension. Tension, as a form of an ethical paradigm, does

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not denote a conflict that is subject to a final resolution. The ethics of tension represents an inevitable heterogeneity existing in the identity of an entity, be it individual, cultural, social, or philosophical. The ethics of tension reflects what Derrida calls indecidability, which arises out of the inexhaustibility of context. The tension is reminiscent of the Buddha's concept of the middle path. Like Derrida's indecidability, the Buddha's concept of the middle path expresses the non-identity of an entity, the impossibility of making a once-and-for-all demarcation. The openness by nature readjusts one's relationship with others as well as one's own identity. Hence, the openness of an entity cannot but be related to the political and the ethical.

2. Phenomena, Noumenon, and the Ethical Dimension of the Huayan Fourfold Worldview

In the Huayan Buddhism, the space for this tension appears in the relationship between the noumenon (*li,* the principle) and phenomena (*shi,* the particular). The tension between the two becomes the source of Huayan paradigm of the ethical. The well-known paradigm of Huayan fourfold worldview aptly summarizes their relationship in Huayan Buddhism. The fourfold worldview includes: the reality realm of phenomena (C. *shifajie*), the realtiy realm of noumenon (C. *lifajie*), the reality realm of the non-interference between noumenon and phenomena (C. *lishi wuai fajie*), and the reality realm of the non-interference among phenomena (C. *shishi wuai fajie*).

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

other Buddhist schools, as the tradition identifies itself as the "complete teaching" or "perfect teaching" (C. *yuanjiao*).

The four layers of the fourfold worldview of Huayan Buddhism has too often been cited without critical evaluations of what is involved in this vision. Seemingly simple on its surface level, a close look at the paradigm evokes questions that do not seem clearly articulated by the major thinkers of Huayan Buddhism during its inceptive period. One of the most problematic in the context of our discussion is the position of conflict in the Huayan fourfold worldview. The vision defines the realm of phenomena as "mutually non-interfering," whereas in reality, the phenomenal world is full of conflicts. Contrary to this claim of phenomenal harmony, Chengguan, the Fourth Patriarch of the school, explicitly acknowledges the existence of conflicts in the phenomenal world as he states, "phenomena basically obstruct each other, being different in size and so forth; noumenon basically includes everything, like space, without obstruction; merging phenomena by noumenon, the totality of phenomena is like noumenon—even a mote of dust or a hair has the capacity of including the totality."[4] If the conflicts in the phenomenal world are to be admitted, as Chengguan does in this passage, how should we interpret the hallmark statement of Huayan Buddhism which postulates a world in which particularties in the phenomenal realm co-exist without conflict?

One way of interpreting this is to consider it as a logical flaw in Huayan Buddhism. Some scholars of Huayan Buddhism claim that, despite the Huayan promotion of the fourth level of "mutually non-interfering phenomena" as its ultimate teaching, Huayan patriarchs are actually more interested in the third level of mutual inter-penetration between the noumenon and phenomena, and thus contradict the basic promise of the school's doctrine. This contradiction has been understood as a "hermeneutic problem" within Huayan Buddhist philosophy.[5]

The claim that Huayan vision is an endorsement of the noumenal world of harmony at the expense of phenomenal diversity represents the dominant interpretation of the *Huayan jing*, especially of the chapter on the "Entering into the Realm of Reality." Allegedly one of the most important chapters in this *Sūtra*, in this chapter, the truth-searcher Sudhana makes a journey through the fifty-three dharma

teachers. At the end of his journey, Maitreya puts him in samadhi at the tower of Vairocana, the Buddha of Light, in which Sudhana experiences that all the diversities in the phenomenal world exist in harmony in the ultimate realm of reality. This interpretation concurs with the idea that Huayan Budhdism promotes the ultimate harmony represented by the noumenal world. The diversity of the phenomena is acknowledge only to be negated for the benefit of the all encompassing noumenon.

I propose a different reading of the Huayan fourfold paradigm and the "Entering into the Realm of Reality" chapter of the *Huayan jing*, based on the following four aspects: first, a consideration of the evolution of theory of the fourfold worldview from Dushun to Chengguan; second, Fazang's vindication of the significance of phenomena in the Huayan paradigm; third, the implication of the journey of Sudhana in the "Entering into the Relam of Reality" chapter of the *Huayan jing*; and forth, the function of wisdom and compassion in respect to noumenal and phenomenal realities. Examining these four aspects will help us to construct Huayan Buddhist ethical paradigm by clarifying the position of conflict in the mutually non-conflicting world of phenomena in Huayan Buddhism.

For this presentation I will briefly discuss the first, the third, and forth items.

The foundation of the Huayan fourfold worldview is already well developed in Dushun's *Fajie guan* (Contemplation of the Realm of Reality), whose existence is known about only through its appearance in the commentaries by Huayan scholars after him. In this essay, Dushun identifies three types of contemplation in relation to practicing the realm of reality in Huayan Buddhism. They are: (1) contemplation of true emptiness (C. *zhenkong guan*); (2) contemplation of non-obstruction between noumenon and phenomena (C. *lishi wuai guan*); and (3) contemplation of universality and inclusion (C. *zhoubian hanrong guan*). Even though the fourfold worldview is a reiteration of Dushun's Threefold Contemplation, there exist delicate differences between Dushun's original proposal and Chengguan's interpretation. These differences have rarely been addressed; however, they merit our attention for us to get a better understanding of the ethical implication of the fourfold worldview. As Dushun emphasizes, in presenting the relationship between noumenon and phenomena, Huayan Buddhism underscores the importance of "contemplation." Dushun contends that contemplation is the mode through which one encounters the objective reality without being disturbed by

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subjectivity. That should be the case in all three tiers of his Threefold Contemplation of noumenon (emptiness), of the relationship between noumenon and phenomena, and of the phenomena. When Chengguan reformulates this "contemplation" about the realms of reality into a paradigm of the fourfold realm of realities, the paradigm asserts itself as a fact; it is postulated without consideration of the subject's relation to the factual world. The dismissal of the subjective position in the understanding of reality is a path to universalize the given paradigm. The implication resulting from the transformation of *contemplation* of the phenomenal world into the *reality* of the phenomenal world is significant. From the perspective of Dushun's paradigm of "contemplation" of the threefold realm of reality, the non-interference either between noumenon and phenomena or among phenomena is an awareness obtained through the subject's mental cultivation so as to be able to realize the underlying structure of reality, whereas, from Chengguan's paradigm of the fourfold worldview, the non-interference becomes factual reality itself. This transformation has become the cuase of the quesiton regarding Huayan Buddhism's ethical position. If all the pheonemea in the world are mutually harmonizing, how does one explain the existing conflicts in the world?

One way of answering the question is to consider the symbolic meaning of Sudhana's search for truth as described in "Entering into the Realm of Reality" chapter of the *Huayan jing* (Flower Garland Scripture).

"Entering into the Realm of Reality" (*Rufajie pin*) is one of the most well-known chapters in the *Huayan jing*. In the chapter, a young truth-searcher named Sudhana asks Mañjuśrī about how to practice bodhisattva paths. Mañjuśrī sends Sudhana to a monk named Maghśri, who turns out to be only the first out of the fifty-three dharma-teachers who this truth-searcher is to meet during his pilgrimage. What distinguishes Sudhana's search for truth in this chapter is the diversity in terms of the characters of the dharma-teachers who he meets during his journey. Other Buddhist *sūtras* usually take Buddha's disciples as their main characters. Sudhana's dharma-teachers in the *Huayan jing,* however, are neither Mahākāśyapa nor Subhuti nor Sāripūtra. Among the teachers who Sudhana is led to meet are monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. They also include sages, kings, a heretic, an incense seller, and a seaman. The diversity in their occupations and social positions symbolically demonstrates the *Sūtra*'s agenda. Each of these dharma-teachers has mastered a certain degree of Buddhist teaching, along with the mastery of

her/his occupation. Each of them, however, denies having obtained the perfection of the bodhisattva path, and refers this pilgrim to yet another dharma-teacher. All of the fifty dharma teachers, in their own ways, speak of issues related to their vocations as spiritual teachers to Sudhana.

As important to note as the endorsement of diversity of phenomena in the "Entering into the Realm of Phenomena" chapter is the message that no one phenomenon can completely represent the entirety of truth. Like Lacan's sliding subject, the articulation of the ultimate truth, or the ultimate truth of bodhisattva path in the Huayan paradigm, is constantly deferred to the next dharma teacher, as Sudhana moves on to meet fifty teachers to accumulate the truth on top of each.

The problem of the "one Truth" that repeatedly appears in the *gong'an* literature echoes here. (Rather, it is the *gong'an* literature which echoes the problem of the one truth articulated here, given the historical time-line.) If there existed one Truth or one Law that is the foundation of the world, the mastery of that one Truth or observance of that one Law will guarantee an individual the master of the truth of the world. In the Huayan world, in which a truth-searcher goes through different *dharma* teachers who continue to defer him to the next teacher, there is no one Truth or one Law to reveal the truth of the world. If there existed only one ultimate truth that a bodhisattva needed to master in order to understand the truth of the world, through which the bodhisattva could offer help to sentient beings, a bodhisattva-apprentice such as Sudhana would not need to go through fifty different *dharma* teachers only to learn that there would be no ending of learning. That Sudhana meets fifty teachers does not indicate that there are only fifty teachers; instead, the search for truth for Sudhana, and in that sense, for any individual, will continue inexhaustibly, because that is the nature of the world and entities from the Huayan Buddhist perspective. Each *dharma* teacher has perfected in her/his own way the truth in her/his context, but it always falls short of being the one universally perfect truth. And that is the nature of truth: truth is always already conditioned and limited by its own context, and context is inexhaustible in Huayan Buddhism because beings, by nature, exist through interaction. The phenomenal will always fall short of being a complete presentation of noumenon; however this does not indicate the noumenon should be the only reality; instead it is the tension between the two when ethics emerges.

The ethical implication of the tension between noumenon and phenomena is further clarified when we consider Chengguan's statement on the relationship of wisdom and compassion. In his *Huayan fajie xuanjing* (Mirror of the Mysteries of the Realm of Reality in Huayan Buddhism), Chengguan writes, "contemplating phenomena involves compassion [in addition to wisdom] whereas contemplation of noumenon is [related to] wisdom."[6] Chengguan does not elaborate on the meaning of this insightful passage; after this passage he goes back to discussing the importance of noumenon in understanding phenomena. However, this short passage offers a clue for us to reconsider the Huayan position as to the relationship between noumenon and phenomena. Even though Huayan patriarchs take pains to expound the nature of noumenon and its importance in understanding the phenomenal diversity, in the ultimate sense, phenomena cannot fully understood if approached with the quality that is required to understand noumenon. Phenomena require an additional quality which Chengguan finds in the Buddhist concept of compassion.

Compassion comes to pass when an individual realizes the ultimate absurdity of existence itself. Absurdity, in this case, does not need to be understood in a negative tone. To use the Huayan Buddhist terminology, compassion arises when one realizes the inexhaustibility of the context of each incidence as one considers the dependently arising nature of being. The existence of each entity is always in the net of excess which defies the existing referential system of the subject. This excess is described by Fazang the inexhaustibility (C. *chongchong wujin*) of the realm of reality. This inexhaustibility of context is the reality of each entity in the phenomenal world, like each jewel in Indra's net. To understand noumenon requires only wisdom, for it involves the hermeneutical realm of the inexhaustibility as a condition of being; but to understand phenomena requires both wisdom and compassion, for it involves the existential reality of the subject. From the Huayan perspective, it does have an ethical implication. Ethics, in this case, is not just related to moral laws or moral obligation.

3. Hospitality, Aporia, and the Ethical

The tension between the universal (or unconditionality) and the particular (or conditionality) becomes a theme of Derrida's discussion of ethics in his later works. In this context, Derrida especially focuses on the

concept of "hospitality." Derrida even declares, "*ethics* is *hospitality*"[7] (emphasis original). He reiterates, "ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality."[8] The limits and perversion of our practice of hospitality is, from Derrida's perspective, the very limits of ethics that we practice.

What is at stake in Derrida's discussion of hospitality is the aporia that the concept of hospitality carries with it. Hospitality means one's opening of one's space to guests, foreigners, and visitors wholeheartedly and without condition; hence conceptually, hospitality is pure and unconditional. Hospitality when it takes a concrete form, however, cannot but be limited by reality. No one can just open their home unconditionally even when they are welcoming their guests with their whole heart. This is not because one receives guests with an unwelcoming mind, but because how much one opens one's door to be truthful to hospitality, appropriation is inevitable in the actualization of hospitality.

In his essay "On Cosmopolitanism," which deals with the issue of refugees, asylum seekers, and foreigners in France, Derrida discusses the issue of hospitality and ethics in detail in his reading of Kant's concept of hospitality as articulated in his 1795 essay "To Perpetual Peace." In this essay, Kant outlines five preliminary articles to maintain permanent peace among states, which is followed by his proposal of three definitive articles for eternal peace. In the Third Definitive Article, Kant brings our attention to the concept of universal hospitality. In this essay Kant treats hospitality not as an issue of philanthropy, but "of right" of an individual: "Hospitality means the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another's country."[9] Kant's idea of the right to universal hospitality is based on his deliberation that no region of the earth originally belongs to anyone, and thus everybody has a right to be on any part of the earth. In other words, the earth is owned by no one and is thus open to everybody. Kant thus states: "the right to visit, to associate, belongs to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth's surface; for since the earth is a globe, they cannot scatter themselves infinitely, but must, finally, tolerate living in close proximity, because originally no one had a greater right to any region of the earth than anyone else."[10]

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, in which the modernist concept of separate nation-states became a standard of regional divisions, no statement might sound more naïve than this

claim of the universal right for individuals to be on any part of the earth. However, no period in recent history makes us more aware of the truth and reality of this statement--that we all live on earth, and, if humanity wishes to survive, we need to live together. By saying so, in our understanding of territorial ownership of the earth, we are already in the realm of what Derrida calls the double bind, or in the zone of indecidability.

With the world community getting closer everyday, and technology in cyberspace and transportation bringing us even closer every moment, opening of one's society to outsiders seems inevitable. And we begin to ask: to whom should we open "our" territory, and how should we open it? What limitations should we impose on the foreigners who will be on "our" territory? Is "unconditional" opening our option at all? If our acceptance of foreigners has conditions, what are the grounds of this conditionality? Is it based on national identity? Since when does this land belong to "us," and exclusively to "us"?

In what is ownership of territory grounded? If territorial ownership came to exist at a certain point in history, and was not given by a certain transcendental power, does it nullify the current ownership? What about a nation-state's responsibility to protect its citizens? But can a nation survive, either in Kant's time or in the twenty-first century, without cooperation with other nations economically, politically, environmentally, or humanistically?

The indecidability and double bind that we find in our attempt to answer these questions define the double bind that binds the concept of universal hospitality as well. Kant himself must have been aware of this problem when he declared the universal ownership of the earth by all human kind. Hence, after the declaration, Kant sets conditions for universal hospitality. In the Third Definitive Article for Perpetual Peace, Kant states: "The law of universal citizen shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality." Kant limits the right of universal hospitality to the right for foreigners to visit and not to reside in the foreign soil. And the residential right will be speculated by the sovereign power of the region. Hence, we need conditions to execute unconditional hospitality. This statement falls into aporia. If universal hospitality has conditions, can it still be universal?

In Kant's hospitality, the distinction between the unconditionality of hospitality and the conditions of such hospitality can be explained by marking a distinction between the natural surface of the earth and the institutions established on that natural surface. In other words, one may be on any part of the earth, because all of us share the ownership of the earth's "surface." But to be a resident of a nation means to be a part of an institution. A society, or a nation-state as an institution, is not merely a "surface" of the earth, but its institutionalized space. However, where does the natural state of earth's surface end and the institutionalized space of a nation begin?

This is exactly what Derrida finds as the double bind in Kantian concept of hospitality. Derrida thus states: "in defining hospitality in all its rigor as a law […] Kant assigns to it conditions which make it dependent on state sovereignty, especially when it is a question of the right of residence."[11] Derrida further states:

there would be an antinomy, an insoluble antinomy, a non-dialectizable antinomy between, on the one hand, *The* law of unlimited hospitality (to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give him or her one's own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfillment of even the smallest condition), and on the other hand, the law*s* (in the plural), those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional."[12]

Before he comes to this conclusion, Derrida has declared: "*ethics* is *hospitality*"[13] (emphasis original), which I cited earlier. Why is ethics hospitality? Because ethics, like hospitality, begins with one's relationship with others; ethics, like hospitality, begins with one's desire to have a favorable, good, and right relationship with others; and like hospitality, ethics, in one's attempt to be fair, be right, and be good, always gets caught in the double-bind of the impossibility of making decisions without appropriation. A Derridean approach to ethics suggests to us that the function of ethics cannot be limited

to offering precise rules for our decision-making. Rather, a deconstructive view of ethics demands we be aware of the instable status of the existing moral codes. Ethics, from a deconstructive perspective, reminds us of the question of appropriation and domestication involved in our thinking, decision-making, and action-taking.

As Derrida notes, "this concept of pure hospitality can have no legal or political status. No state can write it into its laws."[14] The point, however, is not that unconditional hospitality cannot be performed in reality; but that one cannot simply dismiss it because of its impracticality and its ineffability and choose conditional hospitality. Derrida writes, "No state can write it into its law. But without at least the thought of this pure and unconditional hospitality, of hospitality itself, we would have no concept of hospitality in general and would not even be able to determine any rules for conditional hospitality."[15]

A similar question can be asked about the Huayan view on the noumenal and the phenomenal. If we understand the noumenal in the Huayan fourfold worldview as the unconditional, which cannot be inscribed in reality as it is, because of the very fact that it is unconditional, but at the same time, which cannot be completely dissociated from the phenomenal reality, we begin to understand Dushun's emphasis on the importance of contemplation and at the same time the meaning of the forever deferred truth represented by Sudhana's pilgrimage as well as Chengguan's statement that to understand noumenon requires wisdom and for phenomena compassion is required in addition to wisdom.

The tension between the noumenal and the phenomenal, or the unconditional and the conditional demonstrated in the discussion of hospitality also appears in Derrida's discuss on justice and forgiveness. The reality of appropriated hospitality is anchored on the unconditional hospitality; likewise, laws are activities to realize justice, which to Derrida is openness of the totality of contexts. Laws are legislated in an attempt to practice just, but become possible only through appropriation of justice and thus violence as much as a way to practice justice.

Some might argue that Derrida's critique of hospitality as not being universal is naïve or even perverted, because no nation in reality can accept all and any foreigners without imposing some limitations in order to protect its own citizens. What is at stake in our deliberation on the possibility of

deconstructive ethics is not whether a nation should accept foreigners or immigrants without imposing conditions. The very fact that that is not possible in reality, and, thus, the application of hospitality is always to be done un-universally, implies the limit of our hospitality even when we decide to open our doors to others. Practicing hospitality, and thus, practicing ethics, is possible in this case not because we simply open our doors, but because we constantly remind ourselves of that which has been suppressed and thus forgotten in our decision-making.

In this sense, Derrida considers that exercising deconstructive ethics is closely connected to our way to democracy. Deconstructive operations do not deny the fact that decisions should be made in our daily lives and especially in the public and political realms. Conversely, the fact that decisions are there to be made, each and every moment of our personal and public life, does not mean that the excluded parties in decision-making should also be forgotten. Excluded parties and suppressed ideas are always there, as invisible traces, in the marking of the decision made. Only when suppression and exclusion are constantly on the horizon, to be applied in the future decision-making, will voices of the unheard be heard and democracy, function as democracy. Hence, for Derrida, democracy is always the "democracy to come." The democracy to come does not postulate the future in which democracy comes to perfection, if by *perfection* we mean a hypostatization, completion, and thus a closure. Democracy for Derrida is always the democracy to come, in the sense that perfection itself can never be perfect. Derrida once defined deconstruction as an "institutional practice for which the concept of the institution remains a problem."[16] By the same token, democratic institution, or the institution called democracy, become democratic only when it problematizes its own institutionality.

Deconstructive ethics is possible in our awareness of something to come or happen. Derrida once called this excess of context the "secret."[17] And he writes: "it is necessary also in politics to respect the secret, that which exceeds the political or that which is no longer in the juridical domain. This is what I would call the 'democracy to come'."[18] This event of the future anterior in turn reveals our awareness of the non-saturability of contexts in which we live. The impossibility of exhausting the contexts of our reality makes ethics a humble endeavor to remind us of the limitations of human beings. If the

metaphysical concept of ethics grounds itself in the belief of human beings' capacity as rational beings who are capable of distinguishing between right and wrong or good and bad, deconstructive ethics begins with the acceptance that such distinctions are possible only after appropriation and thus the suppression of the unfavored side in the process of decision-making.

By the same token, Huayan Buddhist ethics begins with our awareness of the non-closure of an entity. The non-identity of identity emphasized as the reality of being through the noumenal level of the Huayan fourfold worldview opens up the space for the ethical in the phenomenal world as entities constantly get involved with conflicts amongst themselves. The fact that the whole scope of the conflict cannot be known because of the openness of reality results in one of the existential conditions of one's being, and that is the first step toward compassion.

Deconstructive ethics provides us with the possibility of considering the ethical without resorting to the metaphysical grounding which traditionally functioned as a foundation for ethical value judgments. It also demonstrates that ethics is not just about making distinctions, and that ethics is possible by realizing the impossibility of making the final decision. The idea of indecidability which Derrida sees at the core of a being and a being's relationship with the world rejects any decision-making to be a final closure. It provides a non-substantialist mode of ethical thinking.

One might contend that the way ethics is outlined in Derridean deconstruction and Huayan Buddhism is not ethics. If we look into the grounds of such a claim, we may find that the insecurity caused by deconstruction' and Buddhism's refusal to offer any final solution as a ground for such a contention. However, if we step back and think about it, we realize that life itself is a continuation without a final resolution. Wood puts it in such a simple way: "the interminable need to 'step back' is not the Sisyphean 'bad infinity' but rather the ongoing persistence of life, and our contemplation of it. It is no more a sign of failure that this movement must be repeatedly undertaken than that we cannot eat the breakfast to end all breakfasts, or say 'I love you' in a way that would never need repeating."[19] Just as our body needs nutrition through the continuous activities of intake and excretion and the constant movement of our muscles and respiratory organs, so too does our mind require incessant thinking. By the same token,

an ethical decision needs constant recontextualization with our awareness of tension between parties involved in an event.

Glossary of Chinese Characters

chongchong wujin 重重無盡

Huayan fajie xuanjing 華嚴法界玄鏡

li 理

lifajie 理法界

lishi wuai fajie 理事無碍法界,

lishi wuai guan 理事無碍觀

shi 事

shifajie 事法界

shishi wuai fajie 事事無碍法界

yuanjiao 圓敎

zhenkong guan 眞空觀

zhoubian hanrong guan 周遍含容觀

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[1] David Wood, The Step Back: Ethics and Politics after Deconstruction (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), p.4.

[2] Wood, *The Step Back*, p. 1.

[3] Wood, *The Step Back*, p. 5.

[4] Chengguan, *Huayan fajie xuanjing, T*. 45. 1883, 672c; English translation by Thomas Cleary, "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Hua-yen" in *Entry into the Inconceivable*, Cleary, p. 74.

[5] See Peter N. Gregory, "What Happened to the 'Perfect Teaching'? Another Look at Hua-yen Buddhist Hermeneutics," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 207-230. See also a revised version in his book, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of*

Buddhism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 154-170. Also see Liu Ming-Wood, "The Teaching of Fa-tsang: An Examination of Buddhist Metaphysics," Ph. D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1979.

[6] Chengguan, *Huayan fajie xuanjing, T*. 45. 1883, 676 b. Cleary, "Mirror of the Mysteries of the Universe of the Hua-yen," p. 91.

[7] Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Éditions Galelée, 1997), p. 42; English translation by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughs, "On Cosmopolitanism," in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Hichael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 17.

[8] Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort*! p. 42; "On Cosmopolitanism," p. 17.

[9] Immanuel Kant, "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," trans. by Ted Humphrey, in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 107-143, p. 118.

[10] Kant, "To Perpetual Peace," p. 118.

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1997), p. 56; English translation by Mark Dooley and Michael Hughs, "On Cosmopolitanism," in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. by Mark Dooley and Hichael Hughes (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 22.

[12] Jacques Derrida, "Step of Hospitality," in *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 77.

[13] Derrida, Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort! p. 42; "On Cosmopolitanism," p. 17.

[14] Giovanna Borradori, Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 129.

[15] Borradori, Philosophy in a Time of Terror, p. 129.

[16] Jacques Derrida, "Privilege," in *Who's Afraid of Philosophy?: Right to Philosophy I,* trans. by Jan Plug (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 53.

[17] See Jacques Derrida, "'I Have a Taste for the Secret'," in Jacques Derrida & Maurizio Ferris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. by Giacomo Donis, ed. by Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

[18] Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness," in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, p. 55

[19] Wood, *The Step Back*, p. 2.