

# **Moonpaths: Ethics and Emptiness**

The Cowherds



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The Mahayana tradition in Buddhist philosophy is defined by its ethical orientation--the adoption of *bodhicitta*, the aspiration to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. And indeed, this tradition is known for its literature on ethics, which reflect the Madhyamaka tradition of philosophy, and emphasizes both the imperative to cultivate an attitude of universal care (*karuna*) grounded in the realization of emptiness, impermanence, independence, and the absence of any self in persons or other phenomena. This position is morally very attractive, but raises an important problem: if all phenomena, including persons and actions, are only conventionally real, can moral injunctions or principles be binding, or does the conventional status of the reality we inhabit condemn us to an ethical relativism or nihilism?

In *Moonpaths*, the Cowherds address an analogous problem in the domain of epistemology and argues that the Madhyamaka tradition has the resources to develop a robust account of truth and knowledge within the context of conventional reality. The essays explore a variety of ways in which to understand important Buddhist texts on ethics and Mahayana moral theory so as to make sense of the genuine force of morality.



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