Article

Conceptualizing Personhood for Sustainability: A Buddhist Virtue Ethics Perspective

Christian U. Becker ^{1,*} and Jack Hamblin ²

¹ College of Business, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA

² Department of Religious Studies, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80210, USA; jack.hamblin@du.edu

* Correspondence: chris.becker@colostate.edu

Abstract: This conceptual paper addresses the role the individual plays in sustainability against the backdrop of the ethical dimensions of sustainability. We discuss the relevance of moral personhood as a basis for sustainability and develop a model of personhood for sustainability. The paper outlines the ethical dimensions of sustainability and discusses the role of individual morality for sustainability from a virtue ethics perspective. We employ a Buddhist virtue ethical approach for conceptualizing a model of the sustainable person that is characterized by sustainability virtues, interdependent personhood, and an inherent concern for the wellbeing of others, nature, and future beings. In contrast to many Western-based conceptions of the individual actor, our model of sustainable personhood conceptualizes and explains a coherent and inherent individual motivation for sustainability. The paper contributes to the methodological question of how to best consider the individual in sustainability research and sustainability approaches and suggests a conceptual basis for integrating individual, institutional, and systemic aspects of sustainability.

Keywords: Buddhism; individual actor; methodology; moral personhood; sustainability ethics; sustainability research; virtue ethics

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1. Introduction

Sustainability has become a prominent concept since the 1980s and marks a major challenge of the 21st century [1–3]. A large body of research has shown that current human activities significantly impact and overuse the earth and jeopardize the living conditions of future generations, people around the world, and non-human beings [4–7]. The concept of sustainability refers to this issue and potential solutions. Sustainability means the ability to sustain systems, processes, and entities that are crucial for the wellbeing of contemporaries, future generations, and nature [1–3,8]. The sustainability perspective is a broad, long-term perspective on human activities on earth and prompts questions of how to transform human activities, as well as technological, societal, and economic systems in order to achieve a sustainable future.

The sustainability discourse refers to a variety of conditions and drivers for achieving a sustainable future. Conceptions for sustainable development address different interrelated levels of implementation and change: the sustainable design of societal and technological systems, sustainable institutions and organizations, the role of political and societal power structures, and the role of individual awareness and action. Moving toward a more sustainable future is a complex challenge that requires fundamental changes on all these levels [8,9].

Whereas there is a substantial body of literature focusing on systemic, institutional, and political aspects of sustainability, the individual's role within sustainability has been studied less [10]. The individual level is crucial for sustainability, though, as it defines the basis for all activities, including political actions and the design and management of societal and environmental systems. In particular, the role of modern, Western-based

conceptions of personhood, such as the one formalized in the model of the human actor in economic theory [11–14], should be critically examined with regard to their implications for sustainability. Conceptions of personhood that center around self-interest may not be a sufficient basis for sustainability but rather a root cause for today's unsustainable systems and processes [8,15].

This paper contributes to the discussion of the individual's role within sustainability and to the literature that has directly addressed the crucial role that personhood plays in sustainability [8,10,15–17]. Our contribution distinguishes itself from the existing literature on the topic by focusing on the normative dimension of sustainability and integrating (i) a model of sustainable personhood based on ethical theory, (ii) a non-Western perspective, and (iii) conceptual and practical elements of developing sustainable personhood. The theoretical backgrounds of the paper's approach are sustainability ethics [8,18] and Buddhist virtue ethics [19–22].

The paper develops a conception of personhood for sustainability—that is, a personhood that cultivates awareness for sustainability and an inherent motivation for sustainable actions. We refer to insights from sustainability ethics regarding the normative character of sustainability and discuss the question of how to systematically develop a normative motivation toward sustainability at the level of the individual person from a virtue ethics perspective. We consider sustainability as a normative concept, which implies that sustainability is something both good and desirable as a goal [3,8], and we conceptualize a type of personhood that systematically supports the inherent normative claims of sustainability.

Our conception of personhood for sustainability is based on Buddhist virtue ethics—that is, on a philosophical interpretation of Buddhism from a virtue ethics perspective. We argue that Buddhism offers crucial insights for conceptualizing and realizing sustainable personhood. Based on Buddhist virtue ethics, we develop a conception of sustainable personhood characterized by interdependency and an inherent care for humans, nature, and future beings. Against the backdrop of our conception of sustainable personhood, we reconsider the role of the individual in the context of global economic and technological systems, as well as how the individual person can reclaim attentiveness and care for others within the sustainability framework.

Current technological and economic systems are characterized by a high degree of indirect and abstract interrelations. People around the world are interconnected in complex, abstract, and implicit ways. Economic and technological systems result in many harmful side effects to the environment, people around the world, and future generations and are largely perceived as unsustainable [4–7]. Much sustainability research focuses directly on a more sustainable design and management of economic and technological systems [8,10]. However, we argue that a lack of awareness regarding interdependence with others is central to the problem. Our model of sustainable personhood based on Buddhist virtue ethics has the potential to support and drive more sustainable systems and sustainable policies.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines the perspective of sustainability ethics regarding the normative dimension of sustainability and introduces a virtue ethics-based conception of the sustainable person as a general framework for sustainable personhood. Section 3 outlines the approach of Buddhist virtue ethics and develops its potential for further defining and conceptualizing the sustainable person. Section 4 discusses the implications of our model of the sustainable person based on Buddhist virtue ethics with respect to interdependent personhood, care for other humans and nature, and sustainable action in the context of complex economic and technological systems. Section 5 provides a conclusion.

2. The Ethical Dimension of Sustainability

2.1. Ethical Aspects of Sustainability and the Role of Individual Morality

Sustainability is not merely a technical question of properly designing and managing economic, technological, and ecological systems. Sustainability also has a crucial normative

dimension. Most sustainability approaches operate on the (implicit) normative assumption that we ought to be sustainable and ought to sustain crucial economic, technological, and ecological systems into the future. To some extent, sustaining such systems is in the self-interest of current actors. However, sustainability perspectives usually refer to timescales beyond the mere self-interests of current actors, and consider global and long-term developments over many decades, for instance, with regard to climate change, biodiversity loss, oceans, food, and energy supply. Concerns beyond mere self-interests are based on some kind of concern for the wellbeing of future people, people around the world, or nature itself. These concerns are grounded in certain ethical claims, e.g., that future people have the right to live well, or that the current generation has certain moral responsibilities and obligations toward future people or nature [23,24]. Such ethical underpinnings of sustainability can be called sustainability ethics [8,18].

Ethical perspectives can refer to actions, persons, lives, societies, organizations, institutions, or systems. One can aim to define and realize right actions, good lives, just societies, good organizations, or good systems. Although it is possible to focus on ethical aspects at one level, these various levels are usually interrelated. For instance, conceptions of individual morality are often linked to some conception of a good societal system and vice versa (see, e.g., [25]). In the sustainability context, individuals are considered alongside their interrelations with contemporaries, future generations, and nature, and these three fundamental sustainability relationships are mediated by economic, technological, and ecological systems [8]. Defining good sustainability relationships and good system design with regard to sustainability requires some consideration of moral personhood for sustainability because the individual person is the basic entity in these relationships and systems.

How can one conceptualize individual personhood that optimally supports sustainability and sustainable systems, and what systems, in turn, optimally support sustainable personhood? How can we explain and envision a systematic, inherent individual motivation for sustainability? Within the context of Western thought, these questions are challenging. Some prominent models of individual actors and personhood fall short with regard to sustainability [8,15]. For instance, the economic actor of neo-liberal economics, who is defined as a self-interested, rational utility-maximizer [26] (pp. 5–7), can hardly have a systematic interest in the wellbeing of future generations, nature, or people around the world [8] (pp. 84–96). Traditional Western moral philosophy also cannot easily be expanded into coherent approaches that establish a moral responsibility for sustainability and a systematic moral consideration of future people and nature. Traditional Western ethics has largely been an ethics of the here and now [27]. It is possible to extend traditional ethical approaches, but there are difficulties and limits. For instance, Kantian ethics determines the fundamental normative request to respect each human being as ends in themselves, but it does not extend this request for respect to non-human beings [28]. Utilitarianism, which defines the ethically right action as the action that maximizes the overall happiness of all affected, can be expanded to include non-human beings, but only insofar as these beings are capable of suffering pleasure and pain [29,30]. More encompassing views of the wellbeing of nature and broader ethical considerations of nature are difficult to establish based on those theories.

2.2. *Introducing a Virtue Ethics Perspective*

Virtue ethics, another prominent ethical theory in the Western tradition, has some potential to define the moral relationship between humans and nature based on moral personhood [31,32]. Virtue ethics focuses on the development of personal excellence as the original motivation for ethical actions [25,33]. Virtues are excellent character traits that enable a person to interact with others in an exemplary way and are developed over time through practice and experience [34] (p. 192), [8] (p. 9). In the prominent Aristotelian approach of virtue ethics, individual excellence, or the virtues, are the crucial element of human flourishing and a good life. Virtues, such as honesty, friendship, and justice, are

crucial for developing good relationships with others and a good society. As social and relational beings, humans can only thrive and live well when developing and living in good societal relations [25].

One can expand the Aristotelian perspective by determining general relational virtues—that is, excellent character traits that are crucial for developing excellent relationships with other human or non-human beings. One can argue that positive relationships are based on ethical elements, such as respect, trust, and care, and that these ethical elements require some foundation in basic relational virtues such as attentiveness and receptiveness [8] (pp. 78–81). Relational virtues enable someone to recognize others as unique individual beings and recognize, respect, and care about their needs, feelings, and potentials to thrive. With this, relational virtues promote excellent relationships and the flourishing of all partners in the relationship (ibid). Relational virtues can expand to non-human beings, as humans can develop attentiveness and receptiveness to other species and develop respect and care for all forms of life. One can expand the community of relational virtues beyond human societies to include the environment. Humans are not only societal beings; humans are also animals and therefore part of nature and members of a much larger community of species. One can argue that human excellence and flourishing are only possible within the context of positive societal relations and positive relations with nature and non-human life.

Virtue ethics and relational virtues provide a theoretical basis for conceptualizing moral personhood for sustainability. Relational virtues can be considered as foundational for respect and care for other beings, including contemporaries, non-human beings, people around the world, and future beings. Relational virtues that expand this way can be called sustainability virtues, and relational personhood based on sustainability virtues can be called the sustainable person [8] (p. 79). The sustainable person is defined by moral personhood for sustainability, which is based on sustainability virtues and an inherent moral motivation to care about the wellbeing of others in the sustainability context: other contemporaries, non-human life, and future beings. As virtues contribute to individual flourishing, the sustainable person thrives in virtue of their sustainable identity and actions, while promoting sustainable systems, a sustainable community, and the mutual thriving of all its members, including nature and future people [8].

Developing a conception of moral personhood for sustainability based on the Western tradition of virtue ethics has some limitations, though. In the Aristotelian tradition, virtues are defined within concrete societal contexts and in direct interaction with others. This means that relational virtues, such as attentiveness and care, need to be developed by interacting with others. This is certainly possible with regard to non-human beings: someone can, for instance, develop attentiveness and care for animals, and an excellent gardener may develop a specific attentiveness for plants. However, the realm of such relational virtues and excellent relationships is limited to the horizon of personal experience and interaction. An expansion of relational virtues beyond direct personal interaction is difficult. General attentiveness and care for the wellbeing of nature, contemporaries, and future beings, as envisioned for moral personhood for sustainability, for the sustainable person, faces conceptual and practical difficulties within the framework of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

To better support a virtue-based conception of personhood for sustainability, we refer in the following section to Buddhist virtue ethics. This enables us to develop a conceptual framework for expanding the circle of attentiveness and care beyond immediate interactions and to conceptualize moral personhood for sustainability in a new way. After introducing core aspects of Buddhism and Buddhist virtue ethics, we go on to develop further the conception of the sustainable person through a broader foundation of interdependent personhood, a more detailed specification of sustainability virtues, and more systematic approaches to the practical development of sustainable personhood through meditation.

3. Buddhist Virtue Ethics

3.1. *The Interdependent Individual and Its Implications for Wellbeing*

Buddhism began with the teachings of the historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, roughly 2500 years ago in Northern India (what is today, Southern Nepal) and set about spreading around the globe. As one of the world's great living religious traditions, it means different things to different people. It is thus better to think not of a single Buddhism but of multiple Buddhisms. Our interpretation develops the more explicit philosophical aspects, and specifically the moral dimensions, of the tradition, following in the footsteps of someone like the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's project of secularizing Buddhist ethics [35,36]. Despite its diversity as a tradition, Buddhists and Buddhism's philosophical interpreters are univocal about certain commitments. Foremost among them is solving the problem of suffering. The problem and its solution are animated by the Buddha's four noble truths:

1. There is suffering.
2. Suffering has causes.
3. Eliminating the causes ends suffering.
4. There is a path to end suffering.

The first noble truth is the claim that suffering is pervasive in human experience. There is the gross suffering that we face as sensitive bodies in the world. These include all forms of physical pains and discomfort. Then, there is the suffering of impermanence which swallows everything. Life is transitory. Our best moments pass. Those for whom we care deeply die. We know we are vulnerable to old age, sickness, and, however dimly, death. Our recognition of these things and inability to alter their direction is a perpetual source of perfect existential distress. The second noble truth, that suffering has causes, along with the third noble truth, eliminating the causes ends suffering, together point out that the suffering we undergo has a causal ancestry and that further suffering can be prevented by putting an end to those causes. Picking out the right causes and implementing methods that help bring an end to suffering for oneself and others are critical for solving the problem of suffering. The fourth noble truth (which we unpack in greater detail in Section 3.2) outlines the eightfold path, which puts forward the methods to end suffering.

Historically, Buddhism has not taken up a normative ethical project of theorizing and systematizing what makes actions good or bad or right or wrong. Instead, Buddhism has tended to focus on a handful of moral guidelines and the development of certain wholesome qualities of mind and the behaviors they shape. These latter elements fall out of the four noble truths and are common enough across the diversity of Buddhist thought that Western philosophy has latched onto them in hopes of developing a Buddhist normative ethical theory [19,37]. Since environmental issues are crucially important for how humans live, it should come as no surprise that hand-in-hand with theorizing Buddhist ethics, there have been various Buddhist applications of environmental ethics [38–43]. Further, prominent Buddhists have weighed in on environmentalism, from Thich Nhat Hanh [44] to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama [45,46].

This paper has affinities with those sources of Buddhist environmentalism, specifically with virtue ethical interpretations of Buddhist environmental ethics [20,47]. Nevertheless, in contrast to these approaches, we do not follow an Aristotelian, eudaimonistic interpretation. Rather, our model of the sustainable person is directly based on Buddhist virtues. Four Buddhist virtues, known as the four immeasurables (*appamaññā*), act as the core of our model. These virtues are loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). The virtues encompass both psychological and behavioral dimensions, and their cultivation brings about greater sensitivities and responses to the suffering of others. Loving-kindness wants one's own and others' wellbeing and happiness. Compassion is genuine concern and appropriate care for others' suffering. Sympathetic joy takes joy in the happiness of others. Equanimity is psychological stability and tranquility.

The four immeasurables are considered to be trainable, and there are multiple practices for developing them. Whatever form the training takes, their cultivation entails

continuously expanding one's purview of concern for others because ideal expressions of the virtues are unconditional and universal in scope [22] (p. 8). The expanding circle is normatively justifiable through the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The doctrine recognizes that all phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena. Each thing is what it is; in other words, in virtue of causes and conditions, and what something is depends on the causes and conditions that compose it.

Dependent origination is ubiquitous in Buddhist thinking, and every phenomenon is subject to its analysis—humans included. A human is a collection of elements: a brain, a heart, lungs and kidneys, a circulatory system and blood. None of these elements exists separately but rather in dependence on one another. When one of these elements ceases to function well, so do the others. Furthermore, humans do not just depend on those elements that lie beneath the skin. We are causally coupled to, and so dependent on, our social and natural environments, and just as the proper functioning of our lungs affects brain function, the character and quality of our environments have implications for overall wellbeing. All of the relations humans maintain produce highly interrelated and ultimately dependent, individuals.

The four immeasurables enhance the multifarious relationships (or dependencies) humans have by reducing suffering for oneself and others. Many of the methods Buddhists employ to cultivate the virtues start by focusing one's attention on the fact that, because every phenomenon is dependent on countless other phenomena, the causes and conditions for one's suffering are bound up with the suffering of many others. Attending to the interdependencies of suffering like this can weaken the sense that our own suffering is more important than the suffering of others and instead focus our attention on our shared plight with them. Śāntideva (8th century) expresses this attitude as follows: "I should dispel the suffering of others because it is suffering like my own suffering. I should help others too because of their nature as beings, which is like my own being . . . When fear and suffering are disliked by me and others equally, what is so special about me that I protect myself and not the other?" [48] (p. 96).

The four immeasurables find their footing first in the recognition that we are enmeshed in a web of dependent origination with others, that our own suffering and happiness is not only dependent on, but equal to, theirs, and that every positive or negative action ramifies endlessly around the web. While other persons are the direct target of the virtues—that is, loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy involve treating others differently, while equanimity ensures the expressions of the virtues are unconditional and universal in scope—the virtues are also expressible toward non-human animals and the environments that sustain them. Here, the four immeasurables reveal themselves as sustainability virtues. Seeing them as such involves shifting from the direct targets of the virtues (or other humans) to indirect targets (or non-human animals and the systems that support them). We unpack the theoretical and practical aspects of the process in the next section.

3.2. Expanding the Circle of Care

The eightfold path to end suffering, presented in the fourth noble truth, is critical to defining the overall moral framework that helps one to locate oneself and others within the web of dependent origination. The path is carved up into three basic, mutually supportive categories: wisdom, moral discipline, and meditative concentration. The wisdom category includes right view and right intention. Right view is having knowledge of the Buddha's four noble truths. Good will is the mark of right intention. The moral discipline category contains right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood. Right speech refrains from false, divisive, malicious, and purposeless speech. Abstaining from harming sentient beings is right conduct. Right livelihood avoids occupations that cause suffering. The meditative concentration category involves right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Right effort commits to engaging the world in ways that do not cause, but instead, eliminate suffering. Right mindfulness and right concentration designate meditative practices that are essential for moral development.

The eightfold path comprises diverse areas of concern that must be heeded in order to properly bring about an end to suffering, and on our analysis, the four immeasurables are central to this project [21]. Foremost, they are regulated and directed by wisdom, put into action through moral discipline, and motivated and reinforced by meditative concentration. What is more, cultivating the immeasurables through meditation plays a vital role in moving one to act for the welfare of all sentient beings. This motivation embodies one recognizing her role in an interdependent community and also calls to mind Śāntideva's insight that suffering is undesirable, regardless of whose it is.

For Buddhists, an intimate understanding of the Buddha's four noble truths is foundational when one starts on the eightfold path. Assimilation of this nature is not, however, essential for the layperson who is only looking to cultivate the four immeasurables. Minimally, one must simply acknowledge that no one wishes to suffer or wants suffering for those who are dear to them. This attitude is the source of loving-kindness. Taken as a starting point, one can expand one's circle of care and come to feel responsible for suffering all around oneself. One route to this expansion is through loving-kindness meditation (*maitrī-bhāvanā*). Buddhaghosa (5th century) explains that one should begin the practice by ginning up loving-kindness toward oneself, repeating internally, "May I be happy and free from suffering" [49] (p. 289). Once one is able to generate loving-kindness toward oneself, one expands the scope of the attitude first by flooding oneself with loving-kindness, then by extending it to a friend, a neutral person, an antagonist, and lastly to all sentient beings [49] (p. 290).

Compassion meditation is another route to expanding the circle of one's concern. Śāntideva's 'exchange of self and other' (*parātmāparivartana*) is one form. This meditation builds on his insight that suffering is equally undesirable. Śāntideva encourages the meditators to shift their perspective by exchanging their viewpoint with another person's. One imagines someone envious of one's station, someone holding the same one, someone competing for it, and someone looking down on it [48] (pp. 100–102). By disregarding oneself and taking seriously the viewpoints of others, the exchanges ultimately weaken the meditator's self-centered tendencies and helps the mediator to become sensitive to the suffering of all sentient beings.

The clear concern Buddhists have for other humans expands to non-human beings and the environment and can be set in motion through meditative techniques such as those just mentioned. Non-human beings suffer. Since the ultimate goal of Buddhism is the elimination of suffering, non-human beings deserve our concern. The French-born, Tibetan Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard points out, "[r]eal altruism and compassion knows no bounds . . . Compassion relates to all suffering and is directed toward all who suffer." [50] (p. 265). The suffering of non-human beings does not therefore lie beyond one's purview; it is an appropriate target of our care. Leaving aside that justification for the moment, however, right conduct, according to the eightfold path, prohibits harming or killing sentient beings. Hence, it is at best logically inconsistent for a Buddhist to ignore the suffering of non-human animals, and, at worst, morally incompatible.

The doctrine of dependent origination also induces an inherent concern for the environment and the wellbeing of non-human beings. According to the doctrine, we are causally dependent on our environments. Harming them transfers harm to us. Environmental degradation caused by human activities broadly impacts human wellbeing. This includes, for instance, the degradation of environmental services, fertile land, and fresh water supply, and the impacts of climate change, deforestation and biodiversity loss. The mutual, often destructive, dynamics between human and natural systems has become rather complex and has been analyzed by a large body of scientific literature [4–7]. However, theoretical scientific knowledge does not automatically translate into individual responsibility and action. The doctrine of dependent origination promotes an inherent personal insight in the fundamental interdependence of human wellbeing and nature. The doctrine promotes the idea of interdependent personhood and correspondingly establishes an inherent personal

motivation for caring about the environment and the various environmental impacts of one's own actions.

Future beings are also included in the model we are putting forward. This implication can be seen clearly if we consider compassion. The compassionate wish that all beings be free from suffering and its causes is strongest in Mahāyāna Buddhism, where it is central to the bodhisattva path. Bodhisattvas are ethical exemplars in Buddhism and defined by their commitments to eliminate the suffering of others before their own. Śāntideva describes the scope of the bodhisattva's compassionate aspiration like this: "As long as space abides and as long as the world abides, so long may I abide, destroying the sufferings of the world" [48] (p. 143). Śāntideva recognizes that a bodhisattva's compassion is not delimited by one's present plight but extends to future suffering as well. Śāntideva imagines living countless lifetimes until all suffering is eliminated. Following Śāntideva, we can work to eliminate the suffering we encounter presently in order to reduce the suffering future beings would otherwise face, or we can imagine the possible suffering of future beings in order to motivate us to eliminate present suffering for the sake of those future beings.

If we integrate all elements discussed above, we arrive at the conception of the sustainable person based on Buddhist virtue ethics that is characterized by sustainability virtues, interrelated and interdependent personhood, and an inherent concern for the wellbeing of other people, non-human beings, nature, and future beings (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conception of the sustainable person based on Buddhist virtue ethics.

4. Discussion: Implications for Sustainability

The conception of the sustainable person based on Buddhist virtue ethics entails an inherent motivation and ability to systematically care about sustainability. The sustainable person is characterized by a systematic motivation for sustainability and an interdependent disposition that inherently cares for the wellbeing of others, nature, and future people. In this section, we discuss theoretical, practical, and systemic implications of our model.

First, the model of the sustainable person is of theoretical relevance for sustainability research. Sustainability research encompasses broad interdisciplinary efforts for analyzing ecological and economic systems and identifying paths for a sustainable future. This in-

cludes the study of individual behavior within such systems. There have been influential approaches within social sciences to explain, model, and predict individual decision-making and behavior based on self-interest. This is especially true for impactful economic models of individual decision making (e.g., [51,52]), but there have also been influential proponents of self-interest centered approaches in other fields, e.g., Ayn Rand [53] and Richard Dawkins [54]. Models of self-interested behavior may make methodological sense for analyzing and explaining certain areas of human (inter)actions, such as economic areas [55]. However, they constitute simplifications of personhood and human behavior which are rather limited in scope [13,15]. Models of self-interested personhood specifically run into difficulties when modeling sustainability and recommending policy measures. These models cannot explain a systematic, inherent individual motivation for sustainability and suggest some conflict between individual interests and sustainability requirements. As a result, policy measures based on models of self-interested personhood often refer to incentives and rules for making the self-interested individual act in sustainable ways [56–58].

In contrast to self-interest-based models of individual behavior, the model of the sustainable person demonstrates that there are reasonable alternatives for understanding individual actors and their motivations beyond mere self-interest, which are more fruitful for systematically conceptualizing, explaining, and developing individual actions for sustainability. Such a broader understanding of personhood has traditional roots in Western thought (see, e.g., [59,60]) and many other cultures. Our model of the sustainable person exemplifies a broader conceptualization of personhood with an inherent motivation for sustainability. It demonstrates the potential of developing integrative sustainability approaches that encompass broader conceptions of sustainable personhood, sustainable policies, and sustainable systems. Deviating from reductionist models of personhood based on self-interest allows for sustainability approaches that are not exclusively focused on incentives and regulation—approaches in which sustainability does not appear as a negative limitation of individual development and freedom, but rather as positive enrichment of personal development [8]. Such approaches can conceptualize broader policy measures that consider the development of sustainable personhood as a crucial part of sustainability strategies.

Second, our model of the sustainable person is also of practical relevance, as it refers to elements of the Buddhist tradition, which is particularly concerned with practical aspects of personal development and life. The model relates to applicable paths for developing a type of personhood that cares about sustainability. Buddhism offers various meditation techniques for developing sustainability virtues and personhood for sustainability (see Section 3.2). With this, the model constitutes a genuine and comprehensive foundation for sustainable personhood. This goes beyond isolated individual concerns and actions for sustainability, such as riding one's bike more or buying an electric car in order to reduce the carbon footprint. The sustainable person bases all their actions on a foundational interdependent awareness: professional actions in business contexts, consumption, lifestyle, everyday interactions in private contexts, and so on. The sustainable person cares about the effects their business decisions, investment decisions, and consumption have on people in global supply chains, future people, and nature [61]. The sustainable person develops attentiveness for the perspectives and concerns of other people and considers them in public and political discourses. Against the backdrop of the Buddhist tradition of meditation practices, there are a range of applications for the development of sustainable personhood, from educational settings to training programs in businesses and organizations. Meditation practices that focus on sustainable personhood can become part of environmental and sustainability education and contribute to other efforts of effectively using meditation for the promotion of sustainability [62].

Third, the model of the sustainable person has systemic implications: it enables a critical reflection on the individual's role within modern global systems with regard to sustainability and suggests potential paths to overcome the increasing discrepancy between structural interconnectedness on the one hand and focus on individual self-interest on the

other. The processes of globalization have increased interdependencies and impacts among people around the world, while also increasing systemic impacts on future generations and nature. The global economy interconnects billions of people around the world [63] and substantially impacts people around the world, nature, and future generations in complex ways [8,64]. Most economically and technologically driven interconnections, however, are tacit ones of which individuals are largely unaware. Even though systemic complexity and tacit interconnections among individuals have increased, individuals' perspectives seem to increasingly remain focused on self-interest and conceptions of self-centered personhood [65,66], which have been promoted within prominent traditions of Western thought [67,68]. Based on individualistic conceptions of personhood, the main motivation is to do well personally within global economic and technological mechanisms, at the expense of empathy and care for others. The growing discrepancy between systemic interconnection on the one hand, and the motivation and capacity of individuals to recognize, care about, and deal with the complex impacts they have on other people around the world, future generations, and nature on the other, is a major obstacle for sustainable development. Overcoming the discrepancy is crucial for achieving a more sustainable world.

The increasing discrepancy between a type of personhood defined by self-centeredness and global, intertemporal, and environmental interconnection is a surprising effect of globalization. New economic and technological mechanisms, such as business activities, internet, and (social) media, have increased global interconnections, but intercultural understanding and awareness have not evidently increased accordingly [69,70]. Increasing interdependence has not led to significantly better knowledge or awareness of other cultural values, identities, experiences, arts, or literature. Despite being highly interconnected economically and technologically, people do not know or care much about the perspectives or feelings of people from other cultures. However, basic awareness, openness, and care for others' perspectives and concerns are crucial for thriving societies and for promoting freedom, justice, and sustainability [70,71]. Our model of the sustainable person provides a theoretical and practical basis for overcoming the increasing disconnect between growing systemic interconnection and the intensifying type of personhood defined by self-centeredness. The model enables persons to reestablish an overall awareness for their interdependence with, and impacts on, others, future generations, and nature. The sustainable person develops a systematic awareness and care for the concerns and suffering of others, future people, and nature. This in turn promotes a systematic, inherent motivation to care about the effects of one's life and actions on others and the biosphere, as well as a genuine care for the wellbeing of others, nature, and future people.

5. Conclusions

Based on sustainability ethics and Buddhist virtue ethics, we have developed a conception of personhood that entails a systematic ethical concern for sustainability and an inherent motivation for sustainable actions. Buddhist virtue ethics enables a detailed conceptualization of moral personhood for sustainability. It provides a definition of interdependent personhood and sustainability virtues that are foundational to an inherent, systemic care for the wellbeing of others, nature, and future beings. The conception notably involves practical methods for developing sustainable personhood and sustainability virtues by expanding the circle of care through meditative concentration. This goes beyond Aristotelian virtue ethics and has further implications for the practical realization of sustainable personhood, for instance, in educational contexts.

Our conception of sustainable personhood provides a potential foundation for sustainable systems, such as a sustainable economy, that are difficult to coherently develop and implement based on established models of the human actor, which are focused on self-interest. The conceptualization and realization of sustainable systems can benefit from integrating sustainable personhood with systemic sustainability. For instance, a sustainable economy needs to be based on a type of sustainable personhood that systematically entails a motivation for sustainable economic actions beyond mere self-interests.

Finally, the virtue ethics perspective has the potential for an interculturally compatible global approach to sustainability ethics. Conceptions of virtue can be found in the history of Western philosophy, Buddhism, and Chinese philosophy, among others. Our approach based on Buddhist virtue ethics demonstrates the potential of virtue ethics for addressing the normative dimension of sustainability and providing some common ethical ground for people around the world to address the global challenge of a sustainable future.

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