

Essay

The Garden and the Necropolis: Ethics as Pilgrimage from the Buddha to the Posthuman

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Abstract

Humans inherit an ethical condition shaped by suffering: biological, historical, and relational. Buddhism begins by diagnosing this suffering as inherent to embodied life, while Western theology situates suffering and morality as consequences of the Fall. Levinas reframes suffering not as a problem to be extinguished but as the very site of ethical awakening: the Other's vulnerability commands an infinite responsibility. Maria Dimitrova's comparative work on Levinas and Buddhist thought reveals how compassion and responsibility illuminate one another and how both exceed purely ontological frameworks. This paper weaves these traditions into a single genealogy of ethics—from Edenic innocence to the historical moral burden of exile, from biological interdependence to the modern "Necropolis," and finally toward a speculative future in which technology may allow a reconfiguration of suffering itself. The result is a proposal that ethics is neither eternal nor arbitrary but a pilgrimage arising from suffering and oriented toward a horizon of grace made possible not by divine restoration but by human and post-human agency.

Keywords: Buddhist ethics; infinite responsibility; phenomenology of suffering; moral genealogy; Edenic myth and exile; Maria Dimitrova; Levinas; Heidegger; dependent origination

1. Methodological Note

This paper, which discusses a number of accounts of ethical responsibility, employs a comparative phenomenological method. I engage Genesis not as historical account or theological doctrine requiring defense but as what Paul Ricoeur calls "symbolic myth"—narrative that captures phenomenological truths about the human condition through story rather than proposition (Ricoeur 1967). Whether one accepts the narrative's theological framework (divine creation, Fall as historical event, suffering as punishment) is separate from recognizing its philosophical insight: that moral consciousness emerges alongside recognition of vulnerability, agency, and the capacity to harm others.

Similarly, I engage Buddhist philosophy through authoritative interpretive scholarship (Rahula, Harvey, Gombrich, Collins, Garfield) rather than conducting primary textual analysis in Pali or Sanskrit. This comparative approach—standard in philosophy of religion—allows diverse traditions to illuminate one another's insights without requiring resolution of their metaphysical disagreements. The aim is philosophical synthesis rather than exegetical precision: to trace how Buddhism, Genesis, Levinas, and contemporary phenomenology converge on recognizing suffering as the birthplace of ethics.

This methodological bracketing allows the paper to speak across traditions to readers from varied backgrounds—Buddhist practitioners, secular philosophers, religious believers, and those who, like myself, find themselves between traditional categories.



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2. Introduction

To ask what ethics is today requires asking what it has been. The answer, across cultures and centuries, is inseparable from suffering. Buddhist thought begins from an existential premise: to exist is to suffer (dukkha) (Rahula 1974). Western moral theology begins with a narrative of innocence lost, suffering introduced, and exile endured. Nietzsche ([1887] 1967) asserts that morality has no eternal essence but arises from historical wounds and power relations. Levinas, writing after the devastations of the twentieth century, insists that suffering—specifically the suffering of the Other—forms the basis of ethical subjectivity (Levinas [1961] 1969). And Dimitrova (2011, 2016), bridging Levinas with social phenomenology and Buddhist compassion, argues that responsibility emerges relationally rather than metaphysically.

This paper understands ethics across Buddhist, biblical, and phenomenological traditions as a genealogical pilgrimage: not a static comparison of doctrines but an iterative journey from the recognition of suffering through the emergence of moral consciousness toward the possibility of reflective solidarity. The movement is neither linear nor teleological, but recursive—each tradition circles back to suffering as the generative site of ethical awareness while pushing toward its transformation. This article begins with the Buddhist insight that embodied life requires harm: survival demands consuming other beings, and therefore consciousness is always the consciousness of a sufferer who must cause suffering. It then examines Heidegger’s ontological framework—where Dasein confronts death, anxiety, and thrownness—to establish why Levinas found it necessary to rupture ontology itself in favor of an ethics that precedes Being. Levinas transforms the fact of suffering into an ethical eruption—an infinite responsibility that precedes freedom and destabilizes any self-enclosed conception of the subject. Dimitrova provides a crucial hinge, showing that Levinas misreads Buddhism as quietist and that Buddhist compassion and Levinasian responsibility are structurally intertwined.

From there, the paper shifts to the West’s Ur-myth: Eden → Fall → exile. In Genesis, there is no morality before the Fall because harmony renders evaluation unnecessary. After transgression, consciousness becomes doubled: humans know good and evil because they now inhabit a world where actions cause harm. Exile is “the birth of birth”—the beginning of time, pain, labor, and ethical decision-making. This myth mirrors both the Buddhist cosmological diagnosis and Levinas’s phenomenology: ethics emerges from rupture.

Throughout, I use the term “Necropolis” sparingly to describe the moral landscape in which all human societies subsist. It does not function as a rhetorical flourish but as a precise philosophical motif: the recognition that every polis is built on the remains of other lives. Buddhism acknowledges this biologically; Levinas acknowledges it ethically; Nietzsche acknowledges it historically; Dimitrova acknowledges it socially. Ethics becomes the attempt to respond meaningfully within a world where harm is woven into the conditions of existence.

Finally, the paper considers whether ethics must remain defined by suffering. The Edenic narrative implies a lost harmony; Buddhism imagines liberation from craving; Levinas imagines no end to responsibility. But technological evolution, including artificial intelligence, quantum computation, and the possibility of post-biological life, raises a speculative question: can suffering cease to be the basic architecture of ethical life? Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* offers a literary analog: Prospero renounces domination and chooses reconciliation. A future “Eden” might not be a return to innocence but a technologically mediated maturity—an ethics that emerges from history yet strives to transcend it.

While Dimitrova’s work provides the crucial hinge connecting Buddhist compassion and Levinasian responsibility through social phenomenology, this paper extends her project in three directions. First, it develops what I call the Necropolis framework—a recogni-

tion that ethical life unfolds within structures of unavoidable harm. Buddhist thought acknowledges this biologically (life consumes life); Genesis acknowledges it historically (exile produces moral consciousness); Levinas acknowledges it phenomenologically (justice requires tragic choices); Nietzsche, Arendt, and Girard acknowledge it genealogically (moral systems are built on accumulated violence). By bringing these genealogies into conversation, I show how diverse traditions converge on a common recognition: ethics arises not from innocence but from complicity, not from purity but from the attempt to respond meaningfully within conditions of structural suffering.

Second, it extends Dimitrova's comparative phenomenology into technological and posthuman ethics. Dimitrova focuses on social institutions and embedded responsibility; I ask whether emerging technologies (AI, biotechnology, brain–computer interfaces) might transform the material conditions that have historically made suffering constitutive of ethical life. Drawing on Philip Goff's defense of cosmic purpose (Goff 2023), I propose "post-theistic grace"—a vision of ethical maturity achieved through technological participation in the universe's teleological drive toward reduced suffering, rather than through divine restoration or Buddhist cessation of craving.

Third, it employs the pilgrimage metaphor to reframe comparative ethics. Rather than seeking systematic reconciliation or adjudicating between traditions, I trace ethics as an ongoing journey from the conditions that made it necessary (suffering, vulnerability, interdependence) toward horizons that might make it less tragic (technological amelioration, cosmic purposiveness, reflective solidarity). This narrative-philosophical approach complements Dimitrova's analytical phenomenology by attending to the temporal and developmental dimensions of ethical consciousness.

3. Buddhism, Suffering, and the Ontological Burden of Life

3.1. *The First Noble Truth: Dukkha as Existential Condition*

Buddhism begins not with metaphysics but with diagnosis. The Buddha's First Noble Truth declares that to exist in embodied form is to experience dukkha—a term inadequately translated as "suffering" but encompassing dissatisfaction, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and existential unease (Rahula 1974). This suffering is not merely psychological distress but reflects a structural reality: conditioned existence (saṃsāra) is marked by impermanence (anicca), and all phenomena arise through dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda).

As Gombrich (2009) emphasizes, the Buddha's insight was empirical and phenomenological. He observed that conscious experience is characterized by flux, that attachment to impermanent phenomena generates suffering, and that liberation (nirvāṇa) consists of the cessation of craving (taṇhā).

More fundamentally, Buddhism confronts the ecological truth that life consumes life. All sentient beings persist by cannibalizing other life. As Harvey (2013) notes, "all beings subsist through the taking of others" (p. 42). This is not ethical failure, but ecological truth embedded in biological existence.

Thus, consciousness confronts a profound duality: I am both the one who suffers and the one who causes suffering. Ahiṃsā (non-harm) is not an absolute prohibition but an orientation toward minimizing the suffering inherent in existence (Keown 2005). The moral life begins not in purity but in recognition of complicity.

3.2. *Dependent Origination and the Interdependent Self*

Buddhist ethics cannot be understood apart from dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda): all phenomena arise in dependence upon conditions. Nothing pos-

sesses independent existence (svabhāva). As the Buddha taught: “When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises” (Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.61).

Collins (1982) argues that dependent origination undermines substantialist conceptions of personal identity. What we call “self” is a convenient designation for continuously changing psychophysical processes. For readers unfamiliar with Buddhist metaphysics, this means that no phenomenon—including the experiencing subject—possesses an unchanging essence that persists independently of conditions. Just as a flame appears continuous but is actually a series of momentary combustion events, the self is a processual continuity rather than a substantial entity. Garfield (2015) extends this: Madhyamaka philosophy reveals that all phenomena lack intrinsic nature precisely because they exist interdependently. Interdependence is not merely causal but ontological.

If the self is empty of intrinsic nature and exists only through relations, then the boundary between self and other becomes phenomenologically porous. As Garfield notes, “The emptiness of the self entails that there is no absolute boundary between oneself and others, and hence that one’s own welfare and that of others are not ultimately distinct concerns” (Garfield 2015, p. 167).

Compassion (karuṇā) in Buddhist thought emerges from recognizing that all beings share the predicament of dukkha. As Rahula (1974) emphasizes, compassion is inseparable from insight: one suffers with others because one sees that all sentient lives are intertwined.

The Mahāyāna Bodhisattva ideal—vowing to postpone final liberation until all sentient beings can be saved—parallels Levinas’s notion of infinite responsibility (Dimitrova 2011). As Harvey (2013) explains, the Bodhisattva path transforms the arhat ideal (individual liberation) into a fundamentally relational ethics: one cannot achieve genuine freedom while others remain trapped in suffering. This is not altruism as self-sacrifice but recognition of a deeper truth—since all beings are interdependent, my liberation and yours are not separable achievements. Garfield (2015) emphasizes that this follows directly from emptiness: if the self has no intrinsic boundaries, then the welfare of others is not external to one’s own flourishing but constitutive of it. Buddhist compassion involves a transformation of perception: learning to see beings as fellow sufferers rather than threats or resources.

3.3. *The Necropolis Motif in Buddhist Context*

Here, the Necropolis motif becomes philosophically clarified when used sparingly. Buddhist cosmology implies that every living system is built on the remains of previous living systems; existence unfolds atop invisible graveyards of consumed life. This is not a pessimistic doctrine but a sober recognition that informs Buddhist compassion. Because all beings subsist through taking life, compassion must orient action toward minimizing harm, not toward impossible ideals of moral purity.

This ethical humility contrasts sharply with Western theological frameworks that posit an Edenic state of prelapsarian innocence. Buddhism offers no such myth. There was no “before” suffering; sentient existence has always been marked by impermanence, interdependence, and the inevitability of harm. Ethics therefore looks not backward toward a lost paradise but forward toward liberation—nirvāṇa conceived not as restoration but as cessation, the extinguishing of craving that perpetuates the cycles of becoming. This contrast with Western myth-making becomes the entry point for examining how Genesis stages the same ethical awakening through narrative rather than cosmology.

4. Ethics After the Fall: The Historical Emergence of Morality

4.1. *The Eden Narrative as Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness*

The biblical account of Eden and exile represents Western thought’s earliest attempt to explain the origin of ethics through narrative rather than systematic philosophy. Genesis

2–3 describes a state in which humans exist in harmony with creation, each other, and God. Significantly, there is no “knowledge of good and evil” before the transgression because nothing requires moral evaluation. Adam and Eve’s pre-reflective existence resembles what Levinas describes as a kind of unbroken sameness, a life untroubled by the Other’s vulnerability (Levinas [1961] 1969, p. 36). Ethics, in Eden, is unnecessary because nothing has yet been wounded.

The serpent’s temptation introduces rupture. By eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve acquire evaluative consciousness: the capacity to discriminate, judge, and distinguish between good and evil. This act inaugurates a new ontological condition in which moral discernment becomes unavoidable. As the text makes explicit, their eyes are opened (Gen. 3:7)—not to literal blindness but to the evaluative dimension of existence. They recognize their nakedness, which is to say, they recognize vulnerability, shame, and exposure.

The Fall marks the beginning of exile but, more importantly, the beginning of moral life¹. As Augustine observes, the recognition of good and evil becomes possible only when harmony is broken; ethics arises from the awareness of dissonance (Augustine 1998, Book XIV). Before the Fall, there is no need for virtue because there is no possibility of vice; after the Fall, every action becomes morally charged because every action occurs within a world structured by conflict, scarcity, and competing goods.

4.2. Augustine: *Two Cities and the Burden of History*

Augustine’s theological anthropology provides the most sophisticated early Christian meditation on the Fall’s ethical implications. In *Confessions*, he frames sin not as isolated acts of disobedience but as a fundamental misdirection of love (amor sui versus amor Dei)—the self curved in upon itself rather than oriented toward God (Augustine 1961). This “incurvature” produces a world in which human beings seek their own glory at the expense of others, establishing hierarchies of domination that Augustine sees as consequences of original sin.

In *City of God*, Augustine develops this into a philosophy of history. Two cities—the City of God and the City of Man—exist intermingled within earthly kingdoms. The City of Man is founded on self-love and the lust for domination (libido dominandi); its prototype is Cain, who murdered his brother and founded the first city (Gen. 4:17). The City of God, by contrast, is founded on the love of God and neighbor; its citizens are pilgrims passing through a fallen world, oriented toward an eschatological reconciliation (Augustine 1998, Books XI–XIV).

Crucially, Augustine insists that the knowledge acquired through the Fall is not purely cognitive but experiential. Adam and Eve come to know good and evil not merely as concepts but as lived realities—they experience shame, fear, conflict, and exclusion. Their descendants inherit this experiential knowledge: every human being is born into a world where suffering is pervasive and where survival often requires causing harm to others. As Augustine writes, “We are born between feces and urine” (*Inter faeces et urinam nascimur*)—a blunt acknowledgment that embodied existence is marked by decay, dependence, and mortality (Augustine 1998, Sermon 126).

4.3. Feminist Theological Rereadings: *Eve’s Burden*

Feminist theologians have challenged traditional interpretations of the Fall narrative, which historically blamed Eve for introducing sin and justified patriarchal subordination. Trible (1978) argues in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* that Genesis 2–3 does not originally encode gender hierarchy. The Hebrew text describes woman (ishah) and man (ish) as mutual companions created from shared substance. The subordination of women—

“he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16)—is presented as a consequence of the Fall, not a divine ordinance.

Ruether (1983) extends the analysis in *Sexism and God-Talk*. The association of women with embodiment, sin, and death reflects later patriarchal interpretations rather than the original narrative. The punishment of pain in childbirth symbolizes the entry of suffering into existence but also highlights how women bear the biological burden of reproduction within fallen creation. As Ruether notes, “Women’s bodies become the site where the Fall is most viscerally experienced—through menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation” (Ruether 1983, p. 93).

The feminist rereading reveals an important phenomenological dimension: the Fall narrative describes how moral consciousness emerges alongside bodily vulnerability. Eve’s curse—pain in childbirth—links ethics directly to embodiment and to the biological fact that new life enters the world through suffering. In both Buddhist and biblical traditions, ethics emerges where life perpetuates itself through pain. Birth (jāti) is itself a form of dukkha in Buddhist thought, one of the fundamental sufferings (Rahula 1974, p. 18).

Johnson (1992) argues in *She Who Is* that Christian feminist theology must reimagine the Fall not as women’s fault but as humanity’s shared condition of alienation from God, from each other, and from creation. The knowledge of good and evil represents the birth of moral agency—the capacity to choose, to harm, and to take responsibility. From this perspective, exile is not purely punitive but developmental: humanity grows into ethical maturity by confronting the consequences of freedom.

Wendy Farley’s *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion* (Farley 1990) provides the most sustained feminist critique of suffering-as-punishment theology. Farley argues that interpreting childbirth pain as divine retribution for Eve’s transgression is not merely exegetically questionable but morally repugnant. It transforms a biological reality—the pain inherent in mammalian birth—into a moral indictment of women’s bodies and agency. As Farley writes, “To suggest that God inflicts suffering as punishment is to make God complicit in evil” (Farley 1990, p. 56).

Farley distinguishes between radical suffering (genuine evil that destroys flourishing) and suffering that serves pedagogical or redemptive purposes. The Fall narrative, traditionally interpreted, attempts to rationalize radical suffering by giving it a cause (sin) and a moral function (punishment and instruction). But this rationalization, Farley insists, is a form of theodicy that protects divine sovereignty at the cost of trivializing actual suffering. Pain in childbirth is not a lesson to be learned but a tragedy to be compassionately addressed and, where possible, ameliorated (Farley 1990).

From this perspective, the punishment of Eve becomes paradigmatic of how patriarchal theology weaponizes suffering. Women’s bodies—sites of both creativity (giving birth) and vulnerability (experiencing pain)—are constructed as punishment-bearing. The curse of Genesis 3:16 has been used for millennia to justify denying women pain relief in labor, restricting their autonomy, and subordinating them to male authority (Farley 1990).

Farley proposes an alternative reading: suffering reveals not divine judgment but divine compassion. God does not impose suffering but participates in it, accompanying sufferers in their pain. This shifts theological attention from explaining suffering (theodicy) to resisting it (solidarity). The ethical imperative is not to accept suffering as deserved or instructive but to reduce it through compassionate action (Farley 1990).

This feminist theological critique converges with the Buddhist recognition that suffering (dukkha) is structural rather than punitive, and with Levinas’s insistence that suffering is the site where ethical responsibility emerges. Across traditions, suffering is not to be rationalized but responded to with compassion, responsibility, and the work of amelioration.

Despite their different metaphysical frameworks, Buddhist and biblical narratives converge on a crucial insight: birth itself is an entry into suffering. For Buddhism, *jāti* (birth) is one of the twelve links in dependent origination, binding beings to *saṃsāra*. Every birth entails future death, and between birth and death lies the entire spectrum of *dukkha* (Gombrich 2009, p. 133).

The biblical tradition encodes this truth symbolically. Eve's curse, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children" (Gen. 3:16), establishes pain as the medium through which new life enters the world. Childbirth becomes the paradigmatic site where suffering and creation intersect. After the Fall, every generation inherits a world in which thriving requires struggle, and every new life perpetuates cycles of need, desire, conflict, and death.

Ethics emerges wherever conscious beings recognize that existence entails vulnerability and that survival implicates them in causing harm to others. Whether framed cosmologically or historically, both traditions understand moral life as arising from rupture of harmony, real or imagined. Ethics is the response to a world where innocence—if it ever existed—has been irretrievably lost. Yet these genealogies leave a crucial question unresolved: does ethics require a grounding in ontology, or does it precede and disrupt ontological inquiry? Heidegger's existential analytic provides the necessary staging ground for Levinas's radical answer.

5. Heidegger's Ontology and the Limits of Being

Before examining Levinas's ethical rupture of ontology, we must understand what Heidegger's existential analytic offers—and what Levinas found insufficient. In *Being and Time* (Heidegger [1927] 1962), Heidegger analyzes *Dasein* (literally "being-there"), the mode of being characteristic of human existence. *Dasein* is characterized by its relation to Being itself: it is the being for whom Being is at issue.

Heidegger describes *Dasein* as thrown into existence—we find ourselves already situated in contexts we never chose. We are born into circumstances that shape our possibilities without our consent (Heidegger [1927] 1962, p. 174). *Dasein*'s most defining feature is its relation to death: "Death is *Dasein*'s ownmost possibility" (Heidegger [1927] 1962, p. 294)—the one certainty that individualizes us absolutely. Anxiety reveals *Dasein*'s condition of being thrown into a world without ultimate ground (Heidegger [1927] 1962, §40).

Critically, Heidegger describes the structures of existence—thrownness, anxiety, death—without prescribing how *Dasein* ought to respond. This neutrality, which Levinas will call "ontological neutrality," is a deliberate methodological stance. As Critchley (2002) observes, Heidegger's analytic "precedes the distinction between good and evil" (p. 12). This neutrality becomes the central target of Levinas's critique.

Moreover, Heidegger's focus on Being-toward-death emphasizes *Dasein*'s radical individuation rather than its exposure to others. Even when Heidegger discusses Being-with (*Mitsein*), he subordinates intersubjectivity to *Dasein*'s fundamental self-relation (Heidegger [1927] 1962, §26). *Mitsein*—*Dasein*'s mode of being-with others—does not mean that the Other appears as radically exterior to my world. Rather, others are disclosed within the horizons of my own existential project: I encounter them as collaborators, obstacles, resources, or irrelevances relative to the possibilities I am pursuing. As Levinas will argue, this makes the Other's alterity structurally impossible within Heidegger's framework; the Other is always already comprehended, always reduced to a moment within my understanding of Being.

Levinas's entire philosophical project can be read as a repudiation of Heidegger's ontological priority. In *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas [1961] 1969), Levinas argues that Heidegger's neutral ontology effaces the ethical significance of the Other. By making Being

the fundamental question, Heidegger reduces the Other to another instance of Dasein rather than recognizing the Other's transcendent alterity.

For Levinas, the face (*le visage*) of the Other disrupts ontology. The face is not a phenomenon within Being but an epiphany that commands responsibility before I can constitute it as an object of knowledge. As Levinas writes, "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face" (Levinas [1961] 1969, p. 50). The face signifies vulnerability, but precisely through this vulnerability issues an injunction: "Thou shalt not kill."

Levinas inverts Heidegger's priority: ethics is first philosophy. Responsibility precedes Being; the relation to the Other precedes self-relation. As Peperzak (1993) explains, "Levinas's ethics is not a regional ontology or a branch of philosophy added to Heidegger's fundamental ontology. It is, instead, a philosophy that claims to be more fundamental than ontology" (p. 18).

Levinas's critique cannot be separated from Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism. Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and never publicly repudiated his actions. Levinas saw in Heidegger's ontology a dangerous abstraction that elevated Being over beings and subordinated ethical concern to metaphysical questioning. For Levinas, writing as a Jewish philosopher who lost family members in the Holocaust, Heidegger's silence about the Other's suffering revealed the moral bankruptcy of any philosophy that does not begin with ethics (Bergo 1999, p. 43).

The Holocaust exposed what happens when ethical responsibility is subordinated to ontological or political projects. The reduction in human beings to categories (Jew, Aryan, subhuman) exemplifies the violence inherent in totality—the attempt to comprehend, classify, and master beings within a closed system. Against this, Levinas insists on infinity: the Other always exceeds the categories I use to comprehend them, and this excess is not a cognitive failure but the very basis of ethical life.

Heidegger's existential analytic reveals human existence as fundamentally characterized by thrownness, finitude, and anxiety—yet it remains neutral before the ethical claim of the Other. Levinas argues that this neutrality is not simply incomplete but fundamentally mistaken: the face-to-face encounter with another's vulnerability is not one existential structure among others but the origin of subjectivity itself. The next section examines how Levinas develops this reversal into a comprehensive ethics.

6. Levinas and the Infinite Demand: Ethics Beyond Ontology

Levinas's phenomenology of the face (*le visage*) constitutes one of the twentieth century's most radical ethical proposals. The face is not a biological object but an ethical event—the manifestation of the Other's transcendence that exceeds all attempts at comprehension. As Levinas insists, "The face is present in its refusal to be contained" (Levinas [1961] 1969, p. 194). The Other's alterity cannot be totalized within my conceptual schemes.

The face "speaks" through its vulnerability. It signifies poverty, nakedness, exposure—and precisely in this exposure makes an absolute demand: do not kill me, respond to my suffering, acknowledge my humanity. This demand is not grounded in divine law or social contract but in the immediate recognition of another's fragility (Levinas [1961] 1969, p. 251).

Critically, this demand is asymmetrical. I am infinitely responsible for the Other, but the Other is not equally responsible for me. To clarify: the Other, as a self, does bear infinite responsibility toward me—but that obligation belongs to the Other's ethical relation, not mine. From my first-person perspective, I cannot demand reciprocity or measure my responsibility against theirs. The asymmetry is phenomenological rather than metaphysical: ethics is experienced as non-reciprocal command, even though every

self faces this same structure. Levinas insists that ethics begins in this asymmetry: I am uniquely responsible, constituted as a subject through an obligation I did not choose (Levinas [1961] 1969, pp. 244–47).

Totality and Infinity (Levinas [1961] 1969) argues that Western philosophy has been dominated by the logic of totality—the attempt to comprehend all beings within a unified system. Against totality, Levinas proposes infinity. The Other’s face opens a dimension that cannot be contained: an irreducible transcendence that disturbs my self-sufficiency. As Critchley summarizes, “To respect the other is to refuse the reduction in the other to the same” (Critchley 2002, p. 29).

In *Otherwise Than Being* (Levinas [1974] 1981), Levinas radicalizes this insight through the concept of substitution: the self is not merely responsible for the Other but becomes hostage to the Other’s suffering. Subjectivity itself is constituted through this substitution. As Levinas writes: “The subjectivity of the subject is substitution” (Levinas [1974] 1981, p. 117). I am “chosen” before I am free; I am accused before I am guilty; I am responsible beyond any capacity to fulfill that responsibility.

6.1. *The Third Party and the Problem of Justice*

The appearance of the third party necessitates comparison, judgment, and institutional structures. Justice requires weighing competing claims, establishing laws, and sometimes privileging one person’s needs over another’s. As Levinas acknowledges, “Justice is necessary because there is more than one other” (Levinas [1974] 1981, p. 159). Yet this necessity does not exhaust the ethical demand: Levinas insists that justice must continually improve itself, that we are commanded to seek a “better justice” responsive to the vulnerability of each singular Other (Levinas [1982] 1984, p. 196).

Here, Levinas’s thought intersects with the Necropolis motif. Justice creates a moral landscape in which ethical purity becomes impossible. Every political decision harms some while benefiting others; every allocation of resources involves prioritizing certain lives over others. As Dimitrova (2016) emphasizes, this does not invalidate justice; it situates justice within the tragic conditions of finite existence where responsibility exceeds capacity.

6.2. *Levinas and Buddhist Compassion: Dimitrova’s Bridge*

Levinas believed Buddhism risked quietism through extinguishing desire. Yet Dimitrova (2011) demonstrates that Levinas misunderstood Buddhist ethics. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is not the negation of desire but its ethical reorientation. The Bodhisattva vow—to postpone personal liberation until all beings are saved—parallels Levinas’s infinite responsibility (Dimitrova 2011, p. 142).

Moreover, the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) undermines the distinction between self and other. If all beings are interdependent, then the boundary between my suffering and yours becomes phenomenologically porous. This recognition intensifies rather than eliminates ethical responsibility (Garfield 2015).

This phenomenological porousness clarifies how Levinas’s concept of substitution functions. Substitution—the self becoming hostage to the Other’s suffering—might seem diametrically opposed to Buddhist emptiness, as if Levinas posits a substantial self that then sacrifices itself. But the relation is complementary rather than contradictory: substitution is the ethical structure that porousness makes experientially possible. Because the self has no fixed boundary, the Other’s vulnerability can penetrate and constitute me. Buddhist emptiness provides the metaphysical framework in which Levinasian substitution becomes intelligible as lived experience rather than a theological paradox.

Dimitrova identifies a structural parallel Levinas missed: both traditions ground ethics in recognition of vulnerability as primary. For Buddhism, this vulnerability arises from

universal dukkha; for Levinas, from the face's exposure. In both cases, ethics begins not with abstract principles but with phenomenological attunement to suffering.

7. Dimitrova's Phenomenological Bridge: Ethics, Sociality, and Justice

Maria Dimitrova's contributions to Levinasian scholarship involve situating his ethics within social phenomenology and comparative philosophy. In *Levinas' Trace* (Dimitrova 2011), she argues that Levinas's account of the face-to-face encounter abstracts ethical responsibility from its social, historical, and institutional contexts. Responsibility is always mediated by communities, cultures, and shared practices.

Dimitrova draws on Schütz and Merleau-Ponty to show that the ethical encounter with the Other is always situated within "webs of intersubjectivity" (Dimitrova 2011, p. 97). The face appears within social contexts that shape how vulnerability is perceived, acknowledged, or denied.

Dimitrova shows that infinite responsibility must be understood as embedded responsibility—shaped by roles, relationships, and collective structures. A parent's responsibility for a child, a physician's responsibility for a patient—each involves specific forms of responsiveness informed by social meanings. Ethics is not only interpersonal but infrastructural.

In *Sociality and Justice* (Dimitrova 2016), Dimitrova brings Buddhist ethics into dialog with Levinas and social theory. She argues that Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly Engaged Buddhism, addresses systemic injustice, economic exploitation, and political violence. Engaged Buddhism insists that genuine compassion requires addressing root causes of suffering—confronting poverty, militarism, environmental destruction, and structural racism.

Dimitrova shows that Engaged Buddhism parallels Levinas's transition from ethics to justice. Just as the third party necessitates institutions and laws, Buddhist compassion recognizes that individual acts are insufficient when suffering is produced systemically. Both traditions acknowledge that justice requires collective action and institutional reform (Dimitrova 2016).

Dimitrova's most original contribution lies in her phenomenology of justice as necessarily tragic. Unlike ethics, which involves infinite responsibility for a singular Other, justice involves finite relations among multiple Others. This transition from infinity to totality is a necessity imposed by plurality (Dimitrova 2016, pp. 167–89).

Drawing on Arendt, Dimitrova emphasizes that justice requires public institutions embodying historical compromises, power relations, and cultural values. As Arendt argues, politics involves action in a shared world where outcomes are unpredictable, and every deed generates unintended consequences (Arendt 1958).

This insight leads Dimitrova to reinterpret what I have called the Necropolis motif in social terms. Every political community is built on foundations that include violence, exclusion, and sacrifice. The nation-state depends on borders that exclude non-citizens; property rights depend on legal systems that enforce claims through coercion; economic prosperity often depends on labor exploitation and environmental degradation. These are not merely historical injustices that could be rectified through reform; they are structural features of how human communities organize themselves under conditions of scarcity and finitude.

Yet Dimitrova refuses both cynicism and utopianism. Against cynics who see justice as merely disguised power, she insists that institutions can be reformed, that laws can be made more responsive to vulnerability, and that collective action can reduce suffering. Against utopians who imagine a world without conflict, she emphasizes that justice will always

involve tragic choices because resources are finite, human needs are infinite, and every decision forecloses certain possibilities while enabling others (Dimitrova 2016, p. 217).

Compassion Without Quietism, Responsibility Without Theism

Perhaps Dimitrova's most important intervention is showing that both Buddhist compassion and Levinasian responsibility can operate within secular, pluralistic frameworks without collapsing into relativism or quietism. Neither tradition requires metaphysical foundations—Buddhist emptiness explicitly denies ultimate foundations, and Levinas locates the origin of ethics in the phenomenological encounter rather than divine command. To be precise: Levinas himself understands the face's ethical command as possessing a divine character—the infinite authority arriving through the Other's vulnerability is, for Levinas, the trace of divinity itself. What the paper here sets aside is divine command in the ontotheological sense of a transcendent legislator external to the ethical encounter. Levinas's divinity is immanent to the face-to-face, not imposed from outside it.

This secular reframing allows Dimitrova to propose an intercultural ethics that draws on multiple traditions without privileging any single metaphysics. Buddhist insights into interdependence, Levinasian insights into asymmetrical responsibility, and phenomenological insights into social embeddedness can mutually inform one another. The result is what she calls "ethics as ongoing responsiveness"—a mode of ethical life that remains open to the Other's alterity while engaging practically with institutional realities (Dimitrova 2016, p. 241).

This approach avoids both universalism (which imposes a single ethical framework on all cultures) and relativism (which denies any common ground). Instead, Dimitrova proposes comparative ethics: traditions can illuminate one another, critique one another, and together generate richer accounts of moral life than any single tradition could produce alone. As she writes, "Ethics emerges not from a single source but from the ongoing conversation between traditions, each of which bears witness to dimensions of human vulnerability and aspiration that others may overlook" (Dimitrova 2016, p. 256).

8. Moral Genealogy and the Necropolis: Nietzsche

8.1. Nietzsche: *The Historical Sedimentation of Morality*

To understand how ethics emerges from suffering requires genealogical analysis—not in the biological sense but in Nietzsche's sense of tracing the historical transformations of values. *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche [1887] 1967) reveals that moral concepts we take as natural or eternal—guilt, conscience, punishment, virtue—arose through specific historical processes involving violence, domination, and psychological adaptation.

Nietzsche's First Essay distinguishes "master morality" from "slave morality." Master morality originates among the powerful: it affirms life, strength, nobility, and pride. The "good" is whatever enhances vitality; the "bad" is whatever is weak or base. Slave morality, by contrast, originates among the oppressed: it inverts these values, redefining weakness as humility, suffering as redemption, and resentment as justice. Christianity represents the triumph of slave morality—it transforms impotence into virtue and elevates suffering as spiritually superior to strength (Nietzsche [1887] 1967, pp. 33–56).

The Second Essay traces how conscience arises through the internalization of aggression. In prehistoric communities, punishment was primarily compensatory—an outlet for the injured party's desire for vengeance. Over millennia, as societies became more regulated, humans could no longer discharge aggression outwardly. This instinct turned inward, creating what Nietzsche calls "bad conscience"—the self tormenting itself, judging itself, feeling guilty for existing. As he writes, "Hostility, cruelty, joy in persecuting, in

attacking, in change, in destruction—all this turned against the possessors of such instincts: that is the origin of the ‘bad conscience’” (Nietzsche [1887] 1967, p. 85).

Importantly, Nietzsche does not celebrate master morality or condemn slave morality simpliciter. He recognizes that the internalization of aggression, while psychologically painful, produced self-consciousness, depth, and the capacity for self-overcoming. The “bad conscience” is “that illness which man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced—that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace” (Nietzsche [1887] 1967, p. 84). Morality emerges from this enclosure, this wounding that turns humans into reflective, responsible beings.

8.2. *The Necropolis as Genealogical Motif*

Here, the Necropolis motif clarifies Nietzsche’s insight: every moral system is built atop accumulated violence, compromises, and power struggles. Laws are sedimented punishments; virtues are sublimated aggressions; rights are negotiated protections against harm. The polis—any political community—depends on excluding some, coercing others, and establishing boundaries that are ultimately enforced through violence.

This is not cynicism but realism. Nietzsche simply exposes what moralists prefer to obscure: that “civilization” requires the domestication of humans through discipline, punishment, and the creation of predictable, reliable subjects. As he writes, “To breed an animal with the right to make promises—is not this the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man?” (Nietzsche [1887] 1967, p. 57). Promising—the capacity to commit oneself across time—requires memory, and memory is forged through pain. “If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to hurt stays in the memory” (p. 61).

The genealogical method reveals that ethics is historical, contingent, and rooted in practices of domination and resistance. Yet Nietzsche’s analysis inadvertently supports the phenomenological insight shared by Buddhism, Levinas, and Dimitrova: ethics arises from suffering. Where Buddhism locates this suffering ontologically (in conditioned existence), and where Levinas locates it phenomenologically (in the face-to-face encounter), Nietzsche locates it historically (in the violent processes that create moral subjects). Arendt extends this analysis by showing how bureaucratic institutions diffuse moral responsibility, rendering systemic violence banal and impersonal (Arendt [1963] 2006). Girard, in turn, reveals how scapegoating mechanisms channel mimetic violence toward designated victims, sustaining communal order through ritualized exclusion—a cycle the Judeo-Christian unveiling of victims’ innocence makes possible to refuse (Girard 1972, 1986).

These genealogical analyses converge: human moral communities are built on foundations that include violence, exclusion, and suffering. Buddhism names this condition dukkha and responds with compassion; Levinas names it the face’s vulnerability and responds with infinite responsibility; Nietzsche names it resentment; Arendt names it the banality of evil; Girard names it sacred violence. Each recognizes that ethics arises within the tragic conditions of existence.

Can ethics transform these conditions, or does it merely negotiate within them? The question leads toward a speculative horizon where technology, cosmology, and human agency converge.

9. Ethics as Pilgrimage: From Exile to Post-Theistic Grace

9.1. *The Fall as Ethical Awakening Revisited*

Returning to the Eden narrative with the insights of the preceding sections, we can now see the Fall not as a regression but as a necessary stage in moral development. Before

eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve existed in a state of pre-reflective harmony—what we might call ethical innocence. They are neither moral nor immoral because they lack the capacity to distinguish good from evil. Their obedience to God is not virtuous in the sense of overcoming temptation; it is simply the absence of conflict.

The serpent introduces doubt, desire, and the possibility of transgression. Upon eating the fruit, Adam and Eve's eyes are opened—they become conscious of themselves as moral agents capable of choice, harm, and responsibility. The punishment—exile from Eden, pain in childbirth, struggle for subsistence—represents the consequences of this new consciousness. But it also represents the birth of ethical life: humans can now act morally because they can act immorally; they can take responsibility because they can harm others.

Augustine understands this dialectic theologically: the Fall introduces sin, but God's grace offers redemption. Nietzsche understands it psychologically: the internalization of aggression creates conscience. Levinas understands it phenomenologically: the encounter with the Other's vulnerability awakens responsibility. Dimitrova understands it socially: embedded relationships generate obligations. Each interpretation shares a common structure: ethics emerges through rupture, suffering, and the recognition of one's capacity to wound.

The Eden narrative thus functions not as historical reportage but as phenomenological myth—a story that captures the lived experience of becoming morally conscious. As Ricoeur (1967) argues in *The Symbolism of Evil*, myths articulate dimensions of human experience that cannot be adequately expressed through abstract concepts alone. The Fall myth expresses the insight that moral awareness arises from the painful recognition that the world is no longer ordered for our benefit, that our actions have consequences, and that we must navigate existence with care, discernment, and responsibility.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* provides a literary analog: Prospero, possessing godlike magical powers over the island, ultimately renounces them—choosing reconciliation and vulnerability over domination. *The Tempest* thus dramatizes the possibility of moving beyond the moral Necropolis—not by denying history or pretending past violence never occurred, but by refusing to perpetuate it. Prospero's magic represents technological power: the ability to manipulate, control, and dominate. His renunciation represents ethical wisdom: the recognition that power must be subordinated to compassion, that knowledge must be reconciled with humility, and that true freedom requires releasing others from our will.

9.2. Technology and the Transformation of Suffering

For the first time in history, humans possess tools capable of dramatically reducing certain forms of suffering that Buddhism, Genesis, Levinas, and Dimitrova all recognize as constitutive of embodied life. Medical technology alleviates physical pain; agricultural innovations address hunger; artificial intelligence promises to automate dangerous labor. The question arises: If suffering has been the birthplace of ethics, what happens when suffering becomes optional?

Buddhist thought offers one response: liberation (nirvāṇa) involves transcending conditions that generate suffering through inner transformation—cessation of craving—not through technological manipulation. Yet Engaged Buddhism acknowledges that reducing external suffering remains a moral imperative (Hanh 1987, p. 91).

Levinas offers a different perspective. For him, suffering awakens ethical responsibility. Even if technology could eliminate suffering entirely, the Other's vulnerability would persist as long as mortality and finitude remain. Dimitrova's social phenomenology suggests that technology alters the infrastructure of ethical life without abolishing responsi-

bility. New technologies create new forms of vulnerability even as they reduce older forms (Dimitrova 2016, pp. 278–302).

9.3. AI, Quantum Computing, and Post-Biological Ethics

Emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and quantum computing, raise more radical possibilities. If consciousness can be replicated in silicon, if minds can be enhanced beyond biological brains, then the boundary between “natural” and “artificial” collapses.

Bostrom (2014) argues that advanced AI systems could dramatically accelerate progress, potentially enabling the elimination of involuntary suffering within decades. Yet Bostrom warns such systems could pose existential risks if their values diverge from human values. Coeckelbergh (2020) emphasizes that AI ethics must also consider how AI systems mediate human relationships. Algorithms determine what information we encounter and how resources are allocated.

Fricker’s (2007) concept of “epistemic injustice” becomes especially relevant in AI contexts. If algorithms trained on biased data systematically misrecognize or marginalize certain groups, they perpetuate forms of injustice, undermining ethical relationships. Addressing these harms requires not merely technical fixes but structural changes to who designs technology and how accountability is distributed.

Miranda Fricker’s concept of epistemic injustice takes on new urgency when AI systems mediate ethical encounters. If facial recognition algorithms fail to recognize darker-skinned faces, if hiring algorithms systematically discount women’s applications, if content moderation systems silence marginalized voices, these technological failures reproduce precisely the kind of violence against the Other that Levinas warns against. The face commands “Thou shalt not kill,” but algorithms can “kill” in subtler ways: by rendering certain lives invisible, certain testimonies incredible, certain sufferings inarticulable (Fricker 2007).

From a Buddhist perspective, AI systems that optimize for certain outcomes while ignoring or discounting others exemplify delusion (*moha*). Just as craving (*taṇhā*) arises from misperceiving phenomena as permanent and self-sufficient, algorithmic bias arises from treating categories as fixed and training data as comprehensive. The Buddhist antidote—cultivating right view through recognizing interdependence and impermanence—suggests that ethical AI development requires epistemic humility: acknowledging that all models are incomplete, all categories provisional, all optimizations partial (Harvey 2013).

Coeckelbergh (2020) emphasizes that AI ethics cannot focus solely on outcomes (beneficial vs. harmful effects) but must attend to mediation—how AI systems reshape the phenomenological structure of ethical encounter. When facial recognition mediates police interactions, when recommendation algorithms shape what news we encounter, when hiring algorithms determine whose applications receive human review, the Levinasian face-to-face encounter is fundamentally altered. The Other’s vulnerability may be filtered, quantified, or rendered invisible before it can issue its ethical command.

9.4. Goff’s Cosmic Purpose: Toward Post-Theistic Grace

Philip Goff’s recent defense of cosmic purpose in *Why? The Purpose of the Universe* (Goff 2023) offers a philosophical framework for what I have called post-theistic grace. Goff argues that fine-tuning evidence—the extraordinary improbability that the universe’s fundamental constants would permit complex life—points toward a universe with inherent teleological structure. This is not a personal interventionist deity of classical theism, but what he calls “cosmic purpose”: a natural tendency of reality itself to evolve toward higher states of being.

Goff's position resembles what the early twentieth-century philosopher Samuel Alexander called "Nisus"—an inherent drive within the universe to move toward greater complexity, consciousness, and value (Goff 2023). This cosmopsychist view provides a middle path between classical theism (which founders on the problem of suffering) and nihilistic naturalism (which struggles to ground meaning and purpose). If the universe has an intrinsic teleological orientation toward reducing suffering and expanding consciousness, then technological development becomes participation in cosmic evolution rather than mere human artifice.

This framework transforms the question posed earlier: Can suffering cease to be the basic architecture of ethical life? On Goff's view, cosmic purpose does not eliminate suffering—which would make ethics unnecessary—but orients reality toward its reduction. Buddhist liberation, Levinasian responsibility, and technological amelioration all participate in the same cosmic trajectory: the universe's evolution toward states of greater flourishing and reduced harm (Goff 2023).

The post-theistic grace I propose thus differs from both Edenic restoration and Buddhist *nirvāṇa*. It is not a return to pre-reflective innocence but the achievement of reflective wisdom through cosmic evolution. Knowledge and compassion are reconciled not by divine fiat but by human and technological participation in the universe's inherent purposiveness. As Goff argues, if the universe is "trying" (in some non-anthropomorphic sense) to produce conscious beings capable of reducing suffering, then our ethical and technological efforts align with reality's deepest structure (Goff 2023).

This vision preserves the ethical urgency of Levinas—responsibility remains infinite because the Other's vulnerability persists—and the compassionate realism of Buddhism—suffering is real and must be addressed through both inner transformation and outer action. But it opens toward a future where the material conditions of suffering themselves may be transformed. The Necropolis need not be humanity's permanent dwelling. To be clear: this does not promise suffering's elimination—which would abolish ethics itself—but its progressive attenuation. The necropolis remains the condition from which ethics operates; what changes is the direction of travel. On Goff's account, cosmic purpose does not guarantee a final "escape" but orients reality toward states where harm becomes less structurally necessary, where vulnerability can be protected rather than merely endured, where ethical response can shift from being primarily reactive (compelled by suffering) to being increasingly generative (motivated by cultivated compassion and solidarity). It describes where we have been, not where cosmic purpose might lead us.

9.5. *Post-Theistic Grace: A Secular Eden?*

If the Fall represents the emergence of ethics through suffering and exile, might a "return" to Eden be possible—not through divine intervention but through human and post-human agency? This would be post-theistic grace: not restoration of innocence but cultivation of wisdom, not return to harmony but creation of a world where knowledge and compassion are finally reconciled.

From a deist perspective, any "Eden" humanity creates will be through our own efforts—through technology, social reform, ethical evolution, and collective action. There is no divine rescue; there is only the slow work of reducing suffering within the constraints of natural law.

A new "Eden," if it emerges, would not resemble the biblical garden. It would not be pre-reflective innocence but reflective wisdom. It would not eliminate vulnerability—which Levinas rightly identifies as the ground of ethical relationship—but would transform how vulnerability is experienced and addressed.

Buddhist compassion, Levinasian responsibility, and Dimitrova's social justice together provide conceptual scaffolding for this vision: compassion without quietism (actively addressing suffering), responsibility without theism (grounded in phenomenological encounter), and justice without domination (structured by responsiveness to vulnerability).

10. Conclusions: Toward a New Cosmological Ethics

This paper has traced ethics as a genealogical pilgrimage across Buddhist, biblical, and phenomenological traditions. Whether framed ontologically (dukkha), historically (the Fall), genealogically (Nietzsche, Arendt, Girard), or phenomenologically (Levinas), moral consciousness arises when beings recognize their entanglement in suffering and capacity to harm.

Heidegger's existential analytic reveals human existence as fundamentally characterized by thrownness, finitude, and anxiety—yet remains neutral before the ethical claim of the Other. Levinas ruptures this neutrality. Ethics is first philosophy: responsibility precedes freedom, and the face of the Other issues a command that cannot be refused (Levinas [1961] 1969, [1974] 1981). The subject is constituted through being hostage to another's vulnerability.

Dimitrova bridges Levinas and Buddhism, showing both traditions ground ethics in responsiveness to suffering (Dimitrova 2011, 2016). She situates ethics within social contexts: responsibility is mediated by institutions, communities, and collective practices. Justice emerges when infinite responsibility encounters multiple Others—a transition from ethics to politics that is necessary and tragic because it requires prioritizing some lives over others.

Whether framed as dukkha, fallenness, thrownness, or infinite responsibility, moral consciousness arises when beings confront their capacity to harm and be harmed. Ethics is not a return to innocence but an ongoing pilgrimage toward reducing suffering and expanding compassion.

The question remains whether ethics must be defined by suffering. Emerging technologies alter the material conditions that have historically necessitated ethical frameworks. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* provides one answer: Prospero's renunciation of power suggests moving beyond domination toward reconciliation.

Buddhist compassion actively reduces suffering while cultivating inner transformation. Levinasian responsibility remains infinitely responsive to the Other's vulnerability. Dimitrova's social phenomenology transforms institutions to become more accountable. These traditions suggest ethics can evolve beyond the tragic conditions that gave rise to it without abolishing responsibility.

The Necropolis—life unfolding atop accumulated deaths, communities built on compromises and violences—describes where we have been, not where we must remain. From dukkha through the Fall to infinite responsibility to intercultural phenomenology, ethics is a pilgrimage from the conditions that made it necessary toward horizons that might make it less tragic.

The pilgrimage requires both humility and ambition. Humility, because suffering cannot be eliminated through willpower or technology alone. Buddhist insight into craving, Levinasian insight into finitude, and Dimitrova's insight into social complexity all caution against utopian fantasies. Ambition, because accepting suffering as permanent and ethics as merely palliative abandons the very aspiration that drives moral life.

Like Prospero, we must learn when to renounce power, when to forgive rather than dominate, and when to prioritize relationship over control. The tools we now possess—AI, biotechnology, communication technologies—can either intensify domination or enable new forms of compassion.

Ethics remains a pilgrimage because the journey has no final destination. Liberation is the cessation of craving, not a place; redemption is ongoing responsiveness, not a state; justice is continually renegotiated as new vulnerabilities emerge. What we can hope for is not an end to ethics but its transformation—from tragic necessity born of suffering to joyful practice born of care.

Whether this hope is justified depends on the choices humanity makes collectively. Will we use godlike powers to dominate or renounce domination in favor of solidarity? Will we reduce suffering while preserving the vulnerability that makes ethical relationships possible? Will we transform institutions to become more responsive? These questions require not merely analysis but action, not merely understanding but commitment.

From the Buddha to Augustine to Nietzsche to Heidegger to Levinas to Dimitrova, ethics arises from suffering but points beyond it. The path from Eden (innocence) to exile (moral consciousness) to Necropolis (recognition of complicity) need not end in despair. It can lead toward post-theistic grace: a world created through wisdom rather than restored through divine fiat, where compassion and technology, responsibility and freedom, justice and care are finally reconciled.

This genealogical pilgrimage reveals that ethics need not remain permanently defined by the tragic conditions from which it emerged. Dimitrova shows how responsibility is socially embedded, and justice requires institutional transformation. I have attempted to show that this transformation might extend to the material substrate of suffering itself. If Philip Goff is right that the universe has inherent purposiveness—a natural drive toward higher states of consciousness and reduced suffering—then Buddhist compassion, Levinasian responsibility, and technological innovation all participate in the same cosmic trajectory (Goff 2023).

The Necropolis framework developed here—the recognition that moral life unfolds within structures of unavoidable harm—describes where we have been. Buddhism acknowledges this biologically, Genesis historically, Levinas phenomenologically, Nietzsche genealogically. But the pilgrimage describes where we might go. Whether we arrive at the post-theistic grace I have envisioned—a world where knowledge and compassion, responsibility and technology, are finally reconciled—depends on choices made collectively across coming generations. What seems certain is that ethics will continue to be a pilgrimage rather than a destination, an ongoing responsiveness to suffering rather than its final abolition.

The pilgrimage aims not toward return to pre-reflective harmony but achievement of reflective solidarity. Not a world without knowledge but a world where knowledge serves compassion. Not the elimination of vulnerability but its transformation into the ground of mutual care rather than mutual threat. Whether such a world is possible remains uncertain. That it is worth striving toward seems certain—and that striving, finally, is what ethics is.

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Note

- ¹ Though not addressed here, one notes that the provision of reproductive organs in the First Couple, followed by the temptation, and the exile, suggests divine intention and the inevitability of exile, as the couple might have lain about for holy ages in an anatomically incorrect stasis in the land of grace. In this case, the pain promised Eve was already known to God beforehand by virtue of His omniscience and Plan. Further, human resolution of ethical issues begins in earnest when the Couple punish the first born for murdering the second human born, leading to the first known human moral judgment—the exile of Cain to land of Nod. Again, this is not fully explored here, but worth noting.

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