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The Śāntideva Passage

Bodhicaryāvatāra VIII.90–103

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The passages from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (BCA) on “exchanging self and other” have been a center of debate in the study of Buddhist ethics; they play a major role in this volume, and are read very differently by different Cowherds. In this chapter, we consider these passages, their role in the BCA, three ways in which they might reasonably be interpreted, and what hangs on their interpretation. We direct the reader, in particular, to Chapters 7 and 8 of this volume for alternative readings, and we encourage the reader to consult the translation of Prajñākāramati’s commentary on these verses, included as an Appendix to his volume. First, we offer some comments on the composition of the whole text and on its author or authors. Next, we consider the central passage at issue. We then turn to a discussion of the three possible interpretations. We close with a few comments on what is at stake.

Śāntideva and *Bodhicaryāvatāra*

The importance of the BCA in the Buddhist world is demonstrated by its distribution and influence across the Indian subcontinent over Buddhism’s last four or five centuries there, as well as in Tibet, Central Asia, and perhaps Sumatra. Its influence is reflected in an abundance of Indian commentaries that span five centuries. There are also two short summaries, the *piṇḍārthas*.