

6 The good life

A Tibetan understanding¹

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Introduction

To understand the vision of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA, the government of the Tibetan community in exile) of a good life for a free Tibet, we can turn to the *Charter of the Tibetans in Exile* (henceforth the *Charter*), the document adopted by the Parliament of the CTA in 1991 as the constitution for the exile community and hopefully for a future free Tibet. That document outlines not only the administrative procedures governing the Tibetan Administration, but also the vision of the good life for Tibetans it is meant to facilitate. We will turn to that document directly at the close of this chapter. But we cannot understand this document and the vision it articulates without first contextualizing it through an account of how Tibetans themselves understand the good life. It is that shared cultural understanding that animates the dry legal words of that document. So, the bulk of this chapter will be devoted to establishing that context, to asking what Tibetans think that the good life is for an individual, so that we can see how that vision is realized in the *Charter*. We will discover a remarkable consistency between Tibetan religious ideology regarding the good life, individual Tibetans' own articulation of their visions of the good life, and the secular political articulation of the vision of the good life in the *Charter*.

When we ask what the good life is according to Tibetans, we must first recognize that there are a lot of Tibetans, and that they are a heterogeneous lot. So, just as we find many different conceptions of the good life in the United States today, we can expect to find a plurality of conceptions among Tibetans. Still, there might be some common ideas or strands of thought distinctive of Tibetan thought about the good life; we must, however, be cautious about overgeneralizing, even if we can discover them.

Moreover, even with this *caveat* firmly in mind, we must be careful about what we mean when we ask this question. There are many senses that it might have. On the one hand, we might adopt a purely *normative* reading of the question, asking what the most highly regarded prescriptive texts in philosophical literature say that the good life is. This might not tell us much. Compare asking the question in this register in our own culture. We might then turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and conclude that Americans or Europeans take it that the good life is a contemplative life characterized by action motivated by a fixed set of virtues. Or we

might consult the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and decide that we believe that the good life is one of happiness as a reward for action performed from respect for the moral law.

Neither would be a useful characterization of our own culture. On the other hand, consulting these texts would have a legitimate purpose in such an inquiry: they might tell us about the background ideology that *informs* our conception of the good life, one that we might take as a clue to our actual values. So, it might be close to true that there is a national consensus that a good life requires friends, a good character, material conditions, a bit of luck, and so forth, and that it should reflect our humanity—all Aristotelian ideas. And it may be part of that consensus that a good life is one lived with dignity, that permits the exercise of agency, and involves respect for others, all Kantian ideas. But reading the texts themselves cannot tell us that, and a good deal of flesh is needed on those textual bones to get at our actual conception; that flesh would have to be sought by consulting actual Americans.

For the same reason, reading normative Buddhist texts to give us some clues regarding Tibetan conceptions of the good life would be inadequate, although useful. We might well—and we will—consult some, but we still need to hear from actual Tibetans in order to understand the degree to which, and how, these texts inform everyday ideology.

On the other hand, we might simply observe how people live. We might ask ourselves what they pursue, following Mill's questionable dictum that the best way to determine what is desirable is to see what is desired. But the fallacy of equivocation in Mill's argument would vitiate this approach as well. People often fail to desire what they think they ought to desire; people often act against their considered values and sense of the good. One might believe deeply that honesty is the best policy, but nonetheless lie from time to time; one might even think that murder is wrong but make one's living as a hit man. So, while behavior is a clue to values, it is not an infallible clue.

I will propose and follow a middle way. I will first discuss one normative text respected by many Tibetans regarding what it is to lead a good life; that will give us some fix on at least one ideal. But then I will consider the results of a survey of contemporary Tibetans (at least contemporary Tibetans living in America), and compare what they say about the good life to what non-Tibetan Americans say. By examining the similarities and differences, and by calibrating these responses against a normative text, we may get a slightly more nuanced view of what Tibetans actually take the good life to be.

The religious vision: Patrul Rinpoche on the good life

Patrul Rinpoche (Orgyen Jigme Chokyi Wangpo, 1808–1887) was a titanic figure in the *ris med*, or *nonsectarian* movement that swept Eastern Tibet in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was renowned for his simple life, for his profound spiritual attainment and for the clarity of his teaching and writing. He was personally responsible for popularizing the practice now ubiquitous

among Tibetans of chanting the Avalokiteśvara mantra *om mani padme hum*, and his teaching and example have had a lasting effect on Tibetan practice and scholarship. But I turn to him here because while most Tibetan religious texts are addressed primarily or exclusively to monastic audiences, Patrul often wrote for lay audiences as well. He is best known for *Words of my Perfect Teacher* (*Kun bzang lama'i zhal lung*), but his beautiful poetic text *Essential Jewel of Holy Practice* (*Thog mtha' bar gsum du dge ba'i gtam lha sgom spyod gsum nyams len dam pa'i snying nor*) is the text aimed at lay people.² We will turn to that text for a *normative* sense of at least one influential Tibetan view of the good life.

Patrul Rinpoche addresses a lay patron asking for advice regarding how to lead his life. Near the beginning of the text he writes:

8. Granted, we are unable to perfect ourselves,
but it still makes no sense to neglect our minds.
Aren't we just throwing away our precious lives
When we fail to engage in Dharma practice?
9. Ordinary people are so degraded.
Their vicious thoughts and actions do no good for themselves or others.
And they are deceitful. What can you do for them?
Wouldn't it be best to withdraw from all of this?

(Patrul Rinpoche, 2017)

Several important points emerge from these early verses. First, a life that neglects religious practice is a wasted life; a life in which religious practice predominates is a good life. Second, the degradation of ordinary people consists primarily in the fact that they “do no good for themselves or others,” and in the fact that they are deceitful—that is, they are neither true to themselves or others; their lives fail to accord with their professed values. We might put this in existentialist terms by saying that they live inauthentic lives, lives led in bad faith. A good life, then, among other things, is a non-deceptive, authentic life, where *authenticity* is understood in the sense of Heidegger's *Eigentlichkeit*, or *owning*, or *being true to one's own life*.

But the third point, and perhaps the most important here, is that the best way to lead a good (beneficial, authentic) life is to withdraw from the affairs of the world, since the world is too degraded a place in which to fare well. This valorization of a renunciation of mundane affairs is central to Patrul's vision, and is a *leitmotif* of Tibetan normative accounts of good lives. (Indeed, following the classical Indian pattern of a good life, many Tibetans do renounce the world and even take robes late in their lives.) A truly good life, on this account—even a truly good *lay* life—is a life that renounces mundane entanglements and concerns in favor of spiritual practice, and that does so intentionally and with conviction.

Patrul Rinpoche reaffirms this point a bit later, after a long discussion of the vices of ordinary people and the difficulties of leading a good life among them, even if one attempts to do so earnestly:

15. Nobody is authentic anymore; they're all just impostors.
They utter not authentic speech, but deceptive lies.
Who can you trust? Absolutely no one. So, go!
Always live alone and keep your independence!

The resonances of the Tibetan *su mthongs* with Heidegger's *Eigentlichkeit* are powerful here. So Patrul Rinpoche affirms both the importance of authenticity in this sense to the good life, but also the need for retreat and for independence in order to facilitate self-cultivation. Lest there be any confusion regarding this ideal, he says a few verses later:

17. Conceal your body by living alone on a desolate mountain.
Conceal your speech by cutting off all contact and saying but little.
Conceal your mind by attending carefully to each of your own faults.
This is what it takes to be a concealed practitioner.

One might wonder whether this advice runs contrary to the bodhisattva practices of directly benefitting others so valorized in Tibetan ethical thought. After all, this admonition to withdraw seems like an admonition to pursue one's own good alone. And indeed, this kind of hermetic ideal has been called into question by some contemporary Engaged Buddhists, prominently including the Dalai Lama XIV. Patrul is explicit, however, that the life devoted directly to meeting others' needs is a wasted life:

20. Placing hope in everyone you meet, you greet them with a smile;
with so many demands, you are always running about:
first do this, then do that, torn between your hopes and doubts!
From now on, no matter what you face, stop acting like that!

One is reminded here of the Willie Loman of *Death of a Salesman*. Ordinary lay life, Patrul emphasizes, even if devoted to service to others, degenerates into a frenzy of ineffective activity that only stands in the way of meaningful self-improvement. He continues this theme more explicitly:

23. Nothing good has come from your useless knowledge.
Nothing good has come from working for this life.
Nothing good has come from your delusional thinking.
Now is the time to do some good. Chant the six-beat mantra.

A good life is not a life dedicated to mundane knowledge and understanding; simply working to improve one's position or that of others in this life is a waste of the opportunity afforded by a human life; even thinking that attending to everyday affairs—even for what might look like the best of reasons—is “delusional thinking” (*sems tshad 'khrul pa*). To do some good, Patrul suggests, is to work to cultivate the attitude of universal care (*karuṇā/snying rje*) to which he refers metonymically in the admonition to chant the Avalokiteśvara mantra. The good life, then, is the life dedicated to cultivating a caring attitude toward the world, an attitude that might appear to be manifested in mundane actions for the benefit of

others, but which in fact requires prolonged solitary meditative exercise to attain. This point is made clear in the following verse:

35. Subdue the enemy of hatred with the sword of love.
Protect the family of the denizens of the six realms with skillful care.
Reap from the field of confidence the harvest of experience and realization.
Accomplishing your life's work, chant the six-beat mantra.

One's life's work (*tshe 'dis las*) is to develop the qualities of love (*maitrī/byams pa*), care and confidence (*śrāddha/dad pa*). A good life is a life imbued with those qualities; this is the measure, not one's actions ("running about"). The criterion, Patrul emphasizes, is internal, not external. This is a commitment that, we will see, runs deep in the Tibetan understanding of a good life. Patrul emphasizes this distinction, and the need to focus on inner cultivation rather than external activity in a dramatic series of verses.

65. What has all you've done accomplished? It just leads to samsara.
Since you can see that it is all so meaningless,
from now on, please just stop acting this way.
Dropping all activities, chant the six-beat mantra.
66. What have all your words accomplished? They are just idle chatter.
Since you can see that they have caused so much pointless distraction,
from now on, please just stop talking this way!
Giving up all speech, chant the six-beat mantra.
67. What has all your traveling accomplished? It just wears you out.
Since you can see that your rambling mind has taken you so far from the
Dharma.
From now on, please let your mind relax in a single place.
At rest, relaxed and at ease, chant the six-beat mantra.
68. What has all your eating accomplished? It just produces shit.
Since you can see that your appetite is so insatiable,
from now on, please take nourishment from meditation!
Instead of eating and drinking, chant the six-beat mantra.
69. What has all your thinking accomplished? It has only caused delusion.
Since you can see that you have accomplished so little,
from now on, please don't plan for this life!
Cutting off all thought, chant the six-beat mantra.
70. What have all your riches accomplished? They just cause clinging.
Since you will have to leave it all behind so soon,
from now on, please give up your self-obsession.
Abandoning the pursuit of wealth, chant the six-beat mantra.

The last verse is not surprising. We expect a Tibetan Buddhist teacher to condemn the pursuit of wealth as a component of the good life. But the important, and perhaps surprising, thing to note about this series of verses is that Patrul Rinpoche treats the pursuit of wealth as on a par with a whole range of activities that one might think

of as contributing to the good life: actions (perhaps even generous, compassionate actions); speech (perhaps helpful advice); travel (even the life of a homeless mendicant); eating and drinking (hospitable, convivial activity with friends and family); and even thinking (careful reflection about values would be included). All of these are, for instance, on Aristotle's list of what is involved in the good life. Patrul rejects them all simply because they are *external*. The good life, he emphasizes, is one devoted to *internal* cultivation. To be sure, that cultivation might eventually be *manifested* in action, speech, thought, friendship, and other external phenomena, but those are mere manifestations of a good life, not the good life itself.

As I emphasized at the outset, this is a *normative* account of the good life, not a description of how ordinary Tibetans think about the good life, let alone of how they conduct their lives. But as we examine how ordinary Tibetans do think about that good life, it will be useful to have this normative account in the background. It is certainly in the background of their thinking. As we will see, while contemporary Tibetans may not valorize the solitary life of a recluse, and while they may not mention religious practice explicitly in their understanding of the good life, the emphases on moral cultivation rather than desire satisfaction, inner life rather than material goods, and non-egocentricity vs. egocentric goals that these practices are meant to inculcate, and that are so prominent in Patrul Rinpoche's account, are evident in contemporary Tibetans' conception of the good life.

How individual Tibetans see the good life: Some data

In order to find out how Tibetans understand the good life, we conducted a series of very brief structured interviews with 20 randomly selected Tibetans living in the United States and 20 randomly selected non-Tibetan Americans as a comparison group. All interviewees were between the ages of 16 and 60, with equal numbers of men and women in each sample. Interviewees were approached on the street or in shopping malls by one of the two research assistants, and signed consent forms. We asked three questions, and recorded the answers. The Tibetan participants were interviewed in Tibetan, and the other participants in English. The questions were:

1. What would you say constitutes a good life?
2. What makes your life a good life?
3. Think of someone else you know with a good life. What makes their life good?

By asking these questions without any preparation in everyday situations, we hoped to get spontaneous responses reflecting people's everyday understanding.

The answers were transcribed and blind scored by two independent scorers on a five-point Likert scale on each of three dimensions. There was very high inter-observer reliability in the scoring. The first dimension was *desire satisfaction vs. moral cultivation*. A score of 1 indicates that the answer was entirely in terms of the satisfaction of one's desires (e.g., earning lots of money and having a nice house and a good spouse); a 5 indicates that the answer was entirely in terms of the cultivation of moral qualities (e.g., being a kind and generous person). The

second dimension was *material vs. psychological goods*. A 1 indicated an answer that referenced external material possessions (e.g., a house, a car); a 5 an answer that referenced inner psychological states (e.g., being happy, or being content). The third dimension was *egocentric vs. non-egocentric goods*. A 1 indicated that the answer was entirely in terms of goods for the individual (e.g., that I am happy or that my children succeed), with a 5 indicating goods for others without reference to the individual (e.g., benefitting others, bringing about peace). These dimensions track not the methods Patrul mentions (isolation and religious practice) but the outcomes to which those practices are intended to lead.

We hypothesized that these three dimensions would be inter-correlated, tapping into the same general orientation toward moral goods—the orientation suggested in *The Essential Jewel*—and that Tibetans would score significantly higher than non-Tibetans given the normative account of the good life to which they are exposed through Tibetan Buddhist literature and teaching. We also hypothesized that age and gender would not correlate, as these questions are addressing ideas that are relatively culturally stable. Indeed we found that age and gender had no significant effect on the attitudes we scored. And we find that even this small sample demonstrates this difference powerfully.

Here is a graph depicting the differences in the three dimensions summed across the three questions.

The columns represent the mean sums of the scores on the three questions for each scale (maximum possible score 15). All of the differences were in the

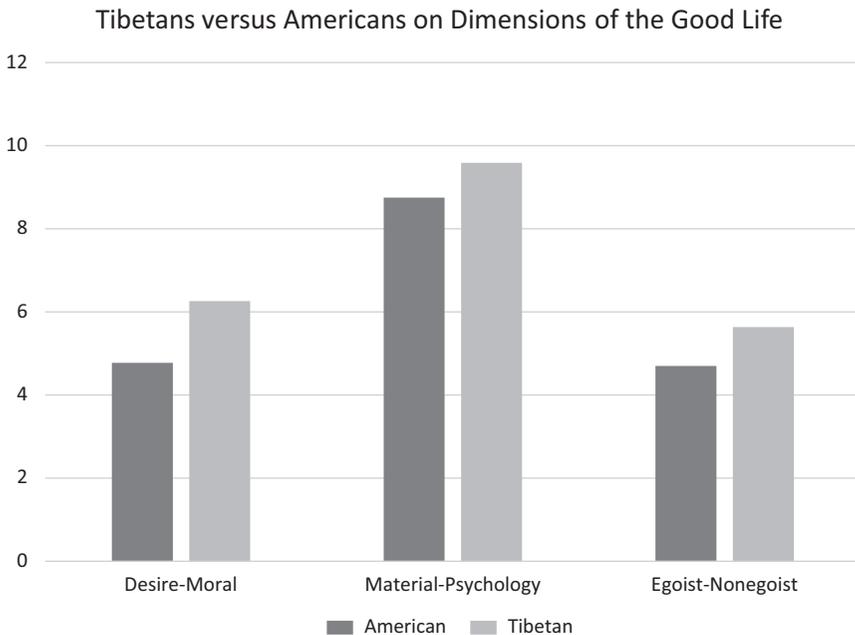


Figure 6.1 Tibetans versus Americans on dimensions of the good life.

predicted direction: Tibetans' responses were more likely to mention moral development than desire satisfaction; more likely to mention psychological states than material goods; and more likely to give non-egocentric than egocentric answers than were their non-Tibetan American counterparts. Two are highly statistically significant. The difference on the Desire Satisfaction/Moral Development scale is significant at the .002 level (that is, if the two populations were in fact identical on this measure, there is a probability of only 2/1000 that differences of these magnitudes would be observed in this sample); the egocentric–non-egocentric difference is significant at the .025 level (a probability of 25/1000 of these differences being observed by chance). The difference on the material vs. psychological goods scale reaches only the .16 level, not enough to be confident that it is not due to chance variation, but given the interrelation between these variables (Pearson correlations between .362 and .571, all significant between .01 and .02) we are pretty confident that with a larger sample, this would be found to be significant as well.

When we sum over these three dimensions, we get the following graph, with error bars representing a 95 percent confidence interval (that is, there is a 95% probability that the population mean falls within the range delimited by the error brackets), showing that it is highly likely that the means of the populations we sampled are different from one another on this dimension. Each column represents the *sum* of the means for the three questions, giving an overall index of the underlying difference between Tibetan and American conceptions of the good life, the core values that manifest as a conception of the good that is moral, non-egocentric and psychological, the kind of quality suggested by Patrul Rinpoche's account.

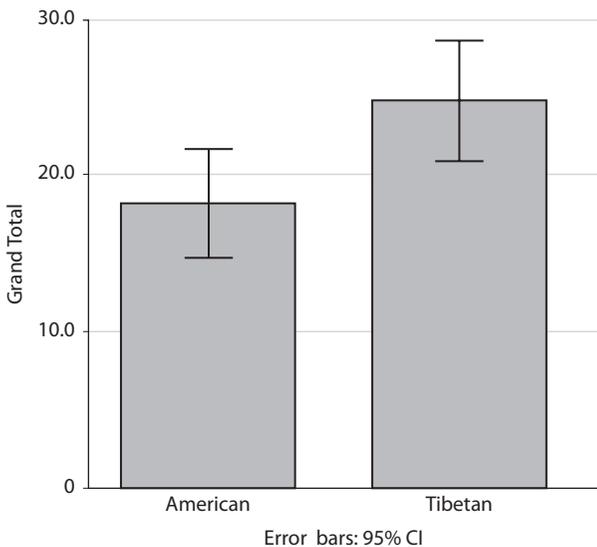


Figure 6.2 Overall good life index.

So, even this small sample shows that Tibetan's own conceptions of the good life, as reported in fairly spontaneous conversation, tracks the normative account represented in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy pretty closely (again, excluding the hermetic and practice-oriented prescriptions), and in a way that shows Tibetans' views to be dramatically different from those of non-Tibetans living in the same areas of the United States.

In particular, Tibetans typically take the good life to consist primarily in the cultivation of moral values, as opposed to the satisfaction of personal desires. This is consistent with Buddhist doctrine, and directly consistent with Patrul Rinpoche's text. Responses such as these are typical:

Good life to me would be when you are kind of content with what you have and then start giving back to others less fortunate.

Sense of responsibility or social consciousness and contented mind makes a good life.

I consider a good life should constitute a meaning, components like peace of mind, love, ethics (good behavior).

My late mother, who was very generous, strong and compassionate. The day before her passing, she told us that she has no regrets and worrisome because she has never harmed or hurt anybody in her life. She died very peacefully. Of course she has experienced many hardships throughout her life, especially during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet. She remained very strong and positive all the time.

Compare these with typical responses from the non-Tibetan Americans:

Good experiences, good memories, being surrounded by loved ones, a salary that would sustain your lifestyle.

Security. So, you know—safety, food security, shelter security, good health. I mean, if you do not have your health you're in real trouble. And being surrounded by people that are assets, people that make you better, people that you work with and make better, and limiting the number of liabilities that you have around you.

My family, my wife and kids, my work is interesting, living in this area and having lots of opportunities for outdoor activities. I'm not lacking in basic necessities in life, I don't have to worry about money.

Moreover, Tibetans at least appear to take positive psychological states as opposed to material goods to be constitutive of the good life. Here are some typical responses:

Good life is when you find inner peace.

For me good life is being mentally happy and healthy. When we are mentally healthy, we enjoy our life, environment and everything. Wealth is not

the only answer. Even if we do not have nothing (fancy) much to eat, if you are mentally strong and healthy, you still can have a good life with basic necessities.

Living a worry free life is a good life, I think.

Here are some non-Tibetan American responses:

When you have all the things you need to make you happy, like food and shelter—simple stuff. I think when we make things too complex for ourselves it just ends up making life a lot more difficult to be happy.

Good friends, good family, to live in a nice place, and to have meaningful work.

My girlfriend. She has a high-paying job and she has a partner who loves her and she has a dog and is doing what she loves and is in a good spot right now. She's breezing through life.

Finally, Tibetans' conceptions of a good life tend not to be egocentric, regarding a good life as one that benefits others. We find a lot of responses like the following:

I think, I really admire Bill Gates. He has everything but the life he leads is so simple and he is giving back in many big ways.

Someone I think that achieved good life would be H. H. The Dalai Lama. Because he certainly set himself free from attachment.

I am having a good life because my basic needs are met and able to help others and be kind all the time. Even the small act of trying to help others make my life good.

Something that I've wished is leading the life of my grandma. She had a good life and always admired her life. She had an incredibly loving and generous heart. She became a nun in her later life and spent her life studying and helping others.

I think my friend's mother has a good life because she raised her son and daughter by herself (single mother). Yet, she is happy and always helping other people.

Our non-Tibetan American responses, on the other hand, said things like this:

I'm surrounded by people who I love and am financially supported by my parents. I do things that I love to do. I've traveled the world. I usually end up doing things that I want to do and I'm satisfied with my life.

I am having a superb life. I have two wonderful children, an amazing partnership with my wife. My wife and I are in business together, we have a very good business. We love our home here in Cambridge, we have good relationships with our family, and you know we've had health scares, serious health scares, but we are good. Good health.

My family, my wife and kids, my work is interesting, living in this area and having lots of opportunities for outdoor activities. I'm not lacking in basic necessities in life, I don't have to worry about money.

My partner. When I think about my good life, it's just like, I just got a haircut and I'm gonna go home, and my partner and my dog will be there and it's like yay he's there!

Of course there is variation within each group, but the differences between the groups are dramatic. The one aspect of Patrul Rinpoche's admonition that we do not find to be widespread among the Tibetans we surveyed is the recommendation to withdraw from the world to seek solitude. Although two respondents mentioned monastics other than the Dalai Lama XIV as exemplars of the good life, neither of these was a hermit, and withdrawal was not mentioned as a reason that their lives were good. It may well be that in the modern world, this is simply too implausible a life for most people to conceive themselves leading. Or it may be that the Dalai Lama XIV's promulgation of a more engaged Buddhism as opposed to a hermetic Buddhism has undermined the ideal of the recluse. Nor, once again, was regular religious practice mentioned as a component of the good life.

One might wonder about the idea of authenticity that plays such a prominent role in Patrul's account. This idea did not come up directly in Tibetans' responses to our questions. It may well be that it is simply not as salient to laypersons as it is to monastic philosophers. On the other hand, the fact that the responses we encountered were so consistent with the religious framework to which Tibetans profess allegiance (all members of the Tibetan sample identified as Buddhists) may suggest that even if they do not thematize authenticity consciously, their reflection of Buddhist values is indeed authentic in precisely the sense intended by Patrul.

Once again, none of these are behavioral measures, and we have no way of knowing the degree to which Tibetans' actual conduct in pursuit of lives they deem to be good accords with their own conceptions or diverges from those of non-Tibetans. Moreover, we do not know how much the outlook of these Tibetans settled in the United States differs from that of Tibetans living in Tibet itself, or in other sites of exile in which Tibetan communities are less culturally porous. That question merits further study. But these data do suggest that the ideology regarding what makes a life good that saturates Tibetan culture, even when transported to the great cultural solvent that is the United States, is distinctive, and in close accord with the Buddhist teachings promulgated in Tibet.

The political vision: The *Charter*

With this understanding of the background ideology regarding the good life, we are prepared to address the *Charter*. Let us begin with Article 4—*Principles of the Tibetan Administration*. It reads as follows:

It shall be the duty of the Tibetan Administration to adhere to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as specified by the United Nations, and to also urge and encourage all other countries of the world to respect and comply with such Declarations, and shall emphasize the promotion of the moral and material well-being of the Tibetan people, the safeguarding of their social, cultural, religious and political rights, and in particular, the ultimate achievement of their common goal.³

Note just how this fundamental statement of principle reflects the values we have seen to animate individual Tibetans' view of the good life: a conception guided by the priority of morality over desire satisfaction; abstract goods over concrete goods; and universal over egocentric goods. After all, the first values enshrined are not the achievement of material prosperity but the respect for human rights. Abstract moral values take precedence over concrete material values, and the vision is guided by a universal declaration of rights, not a specifically Tibetan set of values.

We should note, however, that while this specific attention to human rights does not directly derive from canonical Buddhist ethical theory, the Dalai Lama XIV has been explicit in his endorsement of human rights. He has argued—and the CTA has been convinced—that a discourse of human rights is a means to realize values central to Tibetan Buddhist thought, including the reduction of human suffering, the extension of welfare and the establishment of impartiality in the public sphere. This discourse is hence central to contemporary Engaged Buddhism.⁴ These values are abundantly in evidence here in a document committed to the promotion of human rights, moral well-being and the safeguarding of cultural goods.

The final phrase, “their common goal,” can only be understood in this context as encompassing moral development and a society that works for the moral and spiritual well-being of all. It is also noteworthy that the *Charter* cites the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as a foundational document. On the one hand, that is a clear nod to a modernist account of human rights as the basis for civil society; on the other, it reaffirms what we have seen in our survey data as a Tibetan commitment to moral values and to universalism as constitutive of the good life.

This idea is reinforced in Article 7, *Renunciation of Violence and the Use of Force*, a statement unique among the world's constitutions, most of which explicitly reserve the use of force by the state (or even by citizens, as in the Constitution of the United States):

The future Tibet shall be a zone of peace and shall strive to disengage itself from the production of all destructive weapons, including Nuclear and Chemical; and, currently, the Tibetans-in-Exile shall refrain from all warfare as a means to achieve the common goal of Tibet, or for any other purpose.

Once again, the core ideas we saw expressed by individual Tibetans on the street that set them apart in their conception of the good life is reflected in this collective commitment against self-interest and the unbridled pursuit of that interest. This charter affirms that no use of force is justified, even at the expense of material interests. This founding document hence reflects the values we have seen articulated poetically by Patrul Rinpoche as well as in response to our queries by ordinary Tibetans. Our survey of the *Charter* can conclude with a discussion of Article 15 under the chapter on the principles governing the CTA. This article spells out the “primary aim” of the CTA:

The primary aim of the Tibetan Administration-in-Exile shall be to endeavor to maintain a just policy for the achievement of the common goal of Tibet, and in addition, at the present moment, to protect Tibetans in Tibet from present hardships and danger; and shall formulate a policy to secure just and equal opportunities for the economic development of Tibetans-in-Exile. Furthermore, it shall endeavour to provide reasonable opportunities to all Tibetan youth for the procurement of a modern education and the derivation of the ancient cultural heritage of Tibet; and in particular, shall also strive to provide adequate health services for sound mental and physical development.

Once again, while economic development is mentioned, it is hardly prioritized. Instead, we once again see the phrase “common goal of Tibet,” which we can understand in terms of the values we saw reflected in the interviews reported above. Education, cultural preservation and justice are at center stage. The CTA itself sees these as constitutive of the society it is in place to enable, a society whose highest values are moral values, not material development.

While the CTA is a government in exile, with no sovereignty and no legal authority, it is an elected body chosen by the Tibetan exile community. Its deliberations and documents, including the *Charter*, which was approved by an overwhelming majority of Tibetans in exile, reflect a broad consensus regarding the values Tibetans take to be normative and that they wish to see reflected in their social institutions. The consistency of this vision with Tibetan religious values and with those of ordinary Tibetans in part cements the legitimacy of the CTA and the *Charter* in the eyes of Tibetans.

If we attend to the actions of the CTA, both prior to, and subsequent to, the adoption of the *Charter*, we see that these are not empty words. The first organizations established when Tibetans came into exile were, in this order, the Tibetan Institute for the Performing Arts and Tibetan Children’s Village, followed swiftly

by the monastic universities and the Central Institute for Higher Tibetan Studies. Each of these is dedicated to the preservation of culture and to the articulation of the moral and religious values Tibetans hold dear. Concern for material development has always taken a second place to these.

So, whether we ask the question regarding the good life at the individual or the collective level, in the case of the Tibetan community the answer seems to be the same: that which makes life good is ethical development, not the satisfaction of desires; that which makes life good is the welfare of all, not one's own welfare; the goods that matter are abstract moral and spiritual goods, not material goods. One cannot help but admire this vision. And one cannot help but be impressed by the consistency we observe between the values articulated by prominent religious figures such as Patrul Rinpoche, their secular normative articulation by political institutions such as the CTA, and their espousal by ordinary Tibetans in spontaneous responses to questions about values. The consistency we see is additional evidence for the saturation of Tibetan culture by this conception of the good life.

Notes

- 1 Thanks to Avery Masters, Tenzin Kalsang and Jill de Villiers for valuable research assistance, and to Smith College for research support.
- 2 Patrul Rinpoche, *The Essential Jewel of Holy Practice*, trans. Jay L Garfield and Emily McRae (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2017)
- 3 *The Charter of the Central Tibetan Administration*. <https://tibet.net/about-cta/constitution/>
- 4 See Dalai Lama XIV, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001); *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, New York: Mariner Books (2012); J. Garfield, "Human Rights and Compassion, Towards a Unified Moral Framework," in J. Garfield, *Empty Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 187–205; J. Garfield, "The Dalai Lama XIV as an Indian Philosopher," in P. J. Harter and William Edelglass, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).