



Interbeing and Compassion in the Thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh: A Textual and Ethical Analysis

Neha Malhotra*

PhD Research Scholar, Samrat Ashok Subharti School of Buddhist Studies, Swami
Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, India.

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*Corresponding author

E-mail address:

nehavibhumalhotra@gmail.
com

ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9978-7783>

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between interbeing and compassion in the thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh. It places his teachings within the wider framework of Buddhist philosophy by considering selected writings of Thích Nhất Hạnh alongside relevant classical Buddhist sources. Interbeing is understood as a relational view of existence in which all phenomena are interconnected and the self cannot be understood as completely separate or independent. This understanding can be related to the classical Buddhist doctrines of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), non-self (anātman), and emptiness (śūnyatā). In the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh, interbeing provides a basis for understanding compassion not simply as a moral virtue, but as an ethical response arising from an understanding of the nature of reality. The paper examines how these classical Buddhist teachings are interpreted within the framework of Engaged Buddhism. It also considers the role of mindfulness in developing the insight through which compassion is expressed in personal, social, and ecological life. From this perspective, interbeing extends compassion beyond individual moral conduct and connects it with social responsibility, ecological awareness, and global interdependence. The paper argues that interbeing connects an understanding of existence with ethical responsibility and provides a meaningful basis for understanding compassion as a transformative principle in contemporary Buddhist thought.

1. Introduction

The contemporary world is facing a range of problems, including social fragmentation, alienation, and ecological crisis. These conditions raise important questions about the ethical frameworks that guide human action. Although technology, globalization, and digital communication have developed rapidly, human suffering continues at both individual and collective levels. Such suffering is often associated with social inequalities and environmental degradation. In this context, Buddhist philosophy provides important resources for understanding existence, human relationships, and responsibility towards others. Among modern interpreters of Buddhism, Thích Nhất Hạnh is particularly significant for the way in which he relates classical Buddhist teachings to present-day problems (Hanh, 1999, 34; Hunt-Perry and Fine, 2000, 35–36). His interpretation of Buddhism, generally known as Engaged Buddhism, brings contemplative practice and ethical action together. It shows how wisdom and compassion can be expressed in responding to the suffering of individuals, society, and the natural world (King, 2009, 1).

One of the important contributions of Thích Nhất Hạnh to contemporary Buddhist thought is his use of the term *interbeing*. He uses the term to explain the Buddhist understanding of interconnectedness through philosophical reflection as well as everyday experience. Thích Nhất Hạnh explains that the term *interbeing* emerged while he was teaching the Heart Sūtra at Tassajara Zen Center in California. At that time, he was looking for a suitable way to explain the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) to contemporary audiences (Hanh, 2017, 27). He does not understand emptiness as nihilism or as a denial of existence. Rather, he explains it in terms of the absence of an independent and separate self. According to this understanding, phenomena arise through various causes and conditions and cannot exist completely on their own. *Interbeing*, therefore, does not replace the doctrine of dependent origination. Instead, it provides a way of making its philosophical meaning more accessible to contemporary readers and practitioners. In this sense, *interbeing* can be understood as a contemporary articulation of classical Buddhist doctrines such as dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), non-self (*anātman*), and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). At the same time, it gives these teachings a practical and ethical dimension. Thích Nhất Hạnh uses the example of a sheet of paper in which the cloud, sunshine, logger, and rain can be seen. Through this example, he explains that nothing exists independently and that every phenomenon is related to other phenomena (Hanh, 1999, 84; Hanh, 2017, 27). *Interbeing* is therefore not simply a new philosophical term; it is also a way of explaining classical Buddhist wisdom through experience and relating it to contemporary social and ecological conditions.

The ethical importance of this understanding is considerable. If all beings are interconnected, the suffering of others cannot be viewed as completely separate

from one's own existence. From this recognition, compassion (*karuṇā*) arises not only as a moral virtue or an ideal, but also as an ethical response to the interconnected nature of existence (Keown, 2005, 3). Within Engaged Buddhism, compassion therefore goes beyond individual moral conduct. It also involves responding to social injustice, structural violence, and ecological crises (Hunt-Perry and Fine, 2000, 35–36; King, 2009, 1). In this way, the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh connect contemplative insight with ethical action. Mindfulness, awareness, and compassion work together in shaping both individual and collective life.

The present study examines these questions through a close reading of selected writings by Thích Nhất Hạnh, particularly *Being Peace* (1987), *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (1999), and *The Other Shore: A New Translation of the Heart Sutra with Commentaries* (2017), together with other relevant writings on mindfulness, compassion, and Engaged Buddhism. These works have been selected because they provide an important basis for understanding interbeing as a philosophical, contemplative, and ethical framework. In these writings, Engaged Buddhism is not understood only as social activism. Rather, it is understood as a practical expression of Buddhist insight in which mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom are brought into responses to suffering, injustice, violence, and ecological degradation (King, 2009, 1; Hunt-Perry and Fine, 2000, 35–36). The study therefore examines interbeing both as a philosophical concept and as a lived ethical practice that connects contemplative awareness with compassionate engagement. The selected texts provide a basis for examining how Thích Nhất Hạnh develops interbeing as a philosophical idea as well as a practical framework for compassionate action in contemporary Buddhist thought.

Although scholarship on mindfulness, Buddhist ethics, and Engaged Buddhism has expanded considerably, the philosophical relationship between interbeing and compassion has received comparatively less attention. Existing studies have examined mindfulness mainly from psychological, therapeutic, and contemplative perspectives (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 144–156). Similarly, studies on Engaged Buddhism have largely discussed social activism, peacebuilding, and ethical responsibility (Hunt-Perry and Fine, 2000, 35–36; King, 2009, 1). These studies provide important insights into different aspects of Thích Nhất Hạnh's thought. However, they have given less attention to the way in which interbeing functions as an ontological basis for compassion as an ethical response. The relationship between ontology and ethics in Thích Nhất Hạnh's interpretation of Buddhist thought therefore requires further examination. This is the gap that the present study seeks to address.

In light of this gap, the present study provides a critical textual and thematic analysis of interbeing as a form of relational ontology that provides

a basis for compassion in the thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh. The study does not consider interbeing simply as a contemporary restatement of dependent origination or emptiness. Instead, it examines how Thích Nhất Hạnh interprets these classical Buddhist doctrines and presents them within a framework that responds to contemporary social, ecological, and global concerns. By examining his primary writings together with relevant Buddhist philosophical scholarship, the paper argues that interbeing is not only a description of reality but also provides a basis for compassion, mindfulness, and ethical responsibility. The study further argues that compassion can be understood not simply as an ethical ideal but as an expression of insight into the interconnected nature of reality. In this way, the study contributes to Buddhist Studies by examining the philosophical significance of interbeing in Thích Nhất Hạnh's thought and its role in connecting ontology with ethics. The central question of the study is therefore: How does the concept of interbeing function as the philosophical foundation of compassion within the framework of Engaged Buddhism?

2. Literature Review

The philosophical basis of interbeing in the thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh can be understood in relation to some of the central teachings of Buddhism. One of these is the principle of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which explains how phenomena arise through conditions and relationships. This principle rejects the idea that things exist independently or by themselves. Instead, it emphasizes that phenomena are conditioned and arise in dependence upon other factors (Harvey, 2013; Gethin, 1998). Closely related to this teaching is the doctrine of non-self (*anātman*), which rejects the idea of a permanent and unchanging essence within the individual. Identity is therefore understood as composite, changing, and relational (Collins, 1982; Gethin, 1998). Taken together, these teachings provide a basis for understanding existence not as a collection of separate entities, but as a process in which things arise in relation to one another.

These ideas are developed further within the Mahayana tradition through the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), particularly in the thought of Nāgārjuna. His philosophical analysis challenges the idea that phenomena possess an independent or inherent nature (*svabhāva*). Instead, phenomena exist only in dependence upon other phenomena (Garfield, 1995). This relational understanding also affects how distinctions between self and other, and subject and object, are understood. It therefore provides a philosophical basis for ethical concern and compassion. Garfield (1995) argues that the realization of emptiness cannot be separated from ethical concern because the absence of inherent existence points towards the interconnectedness of beings. Mahayana philosophy thus brings philosophical insight into close relation with ethical

responsibility. Thích Nhất Hạnh draws upon this understanding in *The Other Shore* (2017), where emptiness is presented not only as a philosophical teaching but also as an experiential understanding of interconnected existence through the idea of interbeing. His explanation of the Heart Sūtra further shows how the realization of emptiness can lead to compassionate engagement (Hanh, 2017).

Contemporary Buddhist scholarship has also examined how these philosophical teachings can be related to modern social, political, and ecological problems. The development of Engaged Buddhism is particularly important in this context. It seeks to bring contemplative practice into active engagement with issues such as war, inequality, human rights, and environmental degradation (Queen, 2000; King, 2009; Loy, 2003). Scholars have argued that Engaged Buddhism should not be seen as a rejection of traditional Buddhist teachings. Rather, it can be understood as an extension of those teachings in response to changing historical and social circumstances. Within this approach, mindfulness and compassion become important principles for responding to social problems and working towards transformation (Queen, 2000; King, 2009). This development shows how classical Buddhist teachings can acquire new ethical significance when brought into relation with contemporary concerns.

Within this wider development, the teachings of Thích Nhất Hạnh have received considerable scholarly attention. His teachings on mindfulness have influenced both religious and secular settings, including areas such as psychology, education, and healthcare (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; McMahan, 2008). His explanation of interbeing also provides a distinctive interpretation of classical Buddhist ideas and presents them in a form that is accessible and connected with everyday life (Hanh, 1999; Hanh, 1987). Through simple examples, metaphors, and experiential language, he explains philosophical teachings in ways that can be related to ethical awareness and daily practice. King (2009) and Loy (2003) have also noted the importance of this accessibility in the wider spread of Buddhist thought, particularly in relation to socially engaged spirituality. However, much of the existing scholarship has concentrated on the practical relevance, accessibility, and social influence of Thích Nhất Hạnh's teachings. Less attention has been given to the philosophical coherence of interbeing as an ontological framework. Consequently, the relationship between interbeing, mindfulness, and compassion has often been discussed in practical or ethical terms rather than examined together as a philosophical system.

Another area of scholarship concerns the relevance of Buddhist ideas of interdependence and relationality to environmental ethics, social theory, and ecological philosophy. Joanna Macy, for example, draws upon Buddhist ideas of interdependence to develop an ecological ethic based on interconnected-

ness and responsibility towards the natural world (Macy, 1991). Loy (2003) similarly discusses the ecological implications of non-duality and argues that the perceived separation between human beings and nature contributes to the environmental crisis. From this perspective, interbeing has important ethical significance in relation to ecological degradation because it emphasizes that human and non-human life cannot be completely separated. Such an approach also connects with wider discussions in environmental philosophy, where relational understandings of existence have been considered as alternatives to anthropocentric and strongly individualistic approaches.

Although mindfulness, compassion, Engaged Buddhism, and environmental ethics have each been studied from different perspectives, fewer studies have brought these themes together as parts of a single philosophical framework within the thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh. Existing scholarship often gives greater attention to one particular aspect, such as contemplative practice, social activism, or ecological responsibility. In doing so, it does not always examine the ontological assumptions that connect these different dimensions. This makes it difficult to see how interbeing can function as a basis through which mindfulness develops into compassion and compassionate action. The present study therefore considers interbeing not as an isolated concept but as a principle that connects ontology, contemplative practice, and ethics in Thích Nhất Hạnh's thought.

There is also a tendency in existing scholarship to discuss interbeing, compassion, and mindfulness separately. Many studies approach mindfulness mainly as a therapeutic or psychological practice and give less attention to its philosophical and ethical dimensions (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; McMahan, 2008). Similarly, compassion is often discussed as a moral virtue or emotional quality without sufficient attention to its ontological basis (Keown, 2005; Harvey, 2013). As a result, the deeper relationship between interbeing and compassion, particularly the way in which philosophical insight can lead to ethical responsibility, remains insufficiently explored in contemporary academic discussion.

Another issue concerns the relationship between Thích Nhất Hạnh's teachings and classical Buddhist doctrines. Although several scholars recognize this continuity, less attention is sometimes given to the transformative and reconstructive aspects of his interpretation. Interbeing may be treated simply as a more accessible restatement of dependent origination or emptiness. Such an interpretation, however, may overlook the way in which Thích Nhất Hạnh uses the concept to rethink ethical responsibility in a contemporary global setting (King, 2009; Loy, 2003; Hanh, 1999). This also raises questions about the originality and philosophical significance of interbeing as both an ontological insight and an ethical framework.

A further limitation is the relatively limited critical examination of interbeing itself. The concept is often valued for its accessibility, inclusiveness, and practical relevance, but its philosophical depth and conceptual distinctiveness have received less detailed attention. Questions concerning its theoretical scope, analytical clarity, and application in different social and cultural contexts also require further consideration. Such questions are important for placing Thích Nhất Hạnh's thought within wider discussions of Buddhist philosophy, comparative ethics, and contemporary moral theory.

In view of these gaps, the present study undertakes a focused analysis of interbeing as a form of relational ontology that provides a basis for compassion as an ethical practice. By combining textual interpretation with philosophical analysis, the study seeks to show how interbeing can provide a coherent and ethically meaningful framework for understanding compassion within Engaged Buddhism. In this way, the study contributes to discussions in Buddhist Studies, environmental ethics, and contemporary moral philosophy by drawing attention to the relationship between ontology and ethical responsibility.

3. Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research approach based on textual and thematic analysis, with particular emphasis on philosophical interpretation. The main corpus consists of selected works by Thích Nhất Hạnh, especially *Being Peace* (1987), *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* (1999), and *The Other Shore* (2017), together with other relevant writings on mindfulness, compassion, and Engaged Buddhism. These works are studied alongside important doctrinal sources from the Pāli Canon and the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, which provide the conceptual and philosophical basis for the analysis.

The study uses close textual analysis to examine key philosophical concepts such as interbeing, dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), and non-self (*anātman*). The primary texts are examined to understand the meaning of these concepts, their relationship with one another, and their philosophical implications in both classical and contemporary contexts. Attention is also given to the language, metaphors, and contexts through which these ideas are presented in the writings of Thích Nhất Hạnh. His pedagogical style is important in this regard because it influences how these philosophical ideas are explained and understood (Hanh, 1999, 84). Particular attention is given to passages in which Thích Nhất Hạnh connects interbeing with mindfulness, compassion, and Engaged Buddhist practice. These passages form an important part of the analysis.

The study also uses thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas and patterns within the selected texts. This helps to examine the relationship between

interbeing and compassion and to understand how both concepts are connected within the wider framework of Engaged Buddhism. By identifying and interpreting recurring themes, the study examines how philosophical insights are expressed through ethical principles and practices. The analysis also considers the relationship between doctrinal understanding and lived experience (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 79).

A comparative philosophical method is also used to place Thích Nhất Hạnh's interpretation within the wider development of Buddhist thought. The study compares his understanding of interbeing with foundational Buddhist doctrines such as dependent origination and non-self, as well as with the Mahayana understanding of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) developed by Nāgārjuna. This comparison helps identify both continuity and reinterpretation in Thích Nhất Hạnh's thought. It also allows the study to examine how traditional Buddhist philosophical ideas are presented in relation to contemporary ethical, social, and ecological concerns (Garfield, 1995, 304; Harvey, 2013, 114).

Overall, the methodology is qualitative, interpretative, and analytical. It focuses on critical engagement with the selected texts rather than on description alone. The study also draws on hermeneutical and philosophical approaches to examine the deeper ontological and ethical dimensions present in the texts. By combining close textual reading, thematic analysis, and philosophical interpretation, the study examines the relationship between interbeing and compassion and considers its significance for contemporary Buddhist ethics. This combined approach helps to understand how insight into interconnected existence can be related to ethical responsibility through the practice of compassion.

4. Discussion

4.1 Interbeing as Relational Ontology: Rearticulating classical doctrine

Thích Nhất Hạnh's understanding of interbeing can be understood as a contemporary interpretation of classical Buddhist ideas concerning the nature of existence. At its basic level, interbeing expresses the idea that all phenomena arise through conditions and in relation to other phenomena. In this respect, it is closely connected with the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). However, Thích Nhất Hạnh does not explain this doctrine only through analytical or scholastic language. He also explains it through ordinary experience, giving importance to awareness and ethical response (Hanh, 1999, 84; King, 2009, 1; McMahan, 2008, 15–16).

His familiar example of a sheet of paper illustrates this understanding clearly. When we look at a sheet of paper, we can also see the cloud, sunshine, logger,

and rain that have contributed to its existence (Hanh, 1999, 84). Through this simple example, Thích Nhất Hạnh shows that a phenomenon does not exist by itself but depends upon many different conditions. In this way, dependent origination is presented not simply as an abstract philosophical principle but as something that can also be recognized through ordinary experience. Interbeing therefore involves a change in the way reality is understood and experienced. The recognition of relationality is also important in Madhyamaka philosophy. Garfield (1995) suggests that understanding the relational nature of phenomena has implications not only for how reality is understood but also for how one responds to it.

Thích Nhất Hạnh therefore does not present interbeing as a completely new metaphysical doctrine. Rather, he reinterprets classical Buddhist thought through language that gives greater importance to direct experience and practical understanding. In this sense, interbeing provides a way of making the implications of dependent origination and emptiness more accessible to contemporary readers while remaining connected with their doctrinal foundations. Its significance lies not in proposing an entirely new theory of existence, but in presenting relational existence as something that can be understood and experienced in everyday life. This understanding also provides a basis for ethical awareness and compassionate action. The connection between philosophical insight, lived experience, and ethical response gives interbeing an important place in the thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh.

4.2 Interbeing and the Deconstruction of the Autonomous Self

From an ontological perspective, interbeing challenges the idea that the self exists as a separate and independent entity. Instead, it suggests that the self is formed through changing relationships with social, ecological, historical, and temporal conditions. This understanding is closely related to the classical Buddhist doctrine of non-self (*anātman*), which rejects the existence of a permanent and unchanging essence. At the same time, interbeing places particular emphasis on the relational character of identity, showing how the self develops through its connections with others and with the conditions in which it exists (Harvey, 2013, 114–115; Gethin, 1998, 133–134; Collins, 1982, 5–6).

Interbeing can therefore be understood as a contemporary expression of relational ontology. The distinction between self and other is not regarded as fixed or completely independent; rather, it is shaped by mutual conditions and relationships. This perspective also raises questions about assumptions associated with modern individualism, particularly the emphasis on autonomy, self-sufficiency, and separation. Loy (2003) argues that the belief in a separate self is an important source of both existential and social suffering (Loy,

2003, 20–21). Thích Nhất Hạnh’s understanding of interbeing offers another way of approaching identity by emphasizing that the self comes into being together with others and its surrounding conditions. Such a view creates space for a more inclusive and ethically responsive understanding of existence. Recognizing this shared and interdependent existence can therefore become an important basis for compassion. The deconstruction of the autonomous self is thus not only an ontological argument; it also has ethical implications for how individuals understand their responsibilities towards others.

4.3 Ontological grounding of compassion

The understanding of interbeing has important ethical implications. If existence is relational, the suffering of others cannot be regarded as completely separate from one’s own condition. Compassion (*karuṇā*), therefore, is not merely an ideal or a moral virtue. It arises from recognizing that beings are interconnected and that one’s existence is related to the existence of others (Keown, 2005, 3; Harvey, 2013, 183–184).

Thích Nhất Hạnh repeatedly emphasizes that an understanding of interbeing changes the way ethical situations are perceived. He explains that harming another is, in a sense, also harming oneself, while caring for others contributes to the well-being of the whole (Hanh, 1987, 72; Hanh, 1999, 162). This gives compassion a broader meaning. It is not simply something that one is expected to practice because of an external moral rule. Rather, compassion develops from seeing the interconnected nature of existence. For Thích Nhất Hạnh, compassionate action follows naturally from insight into interdependence. This position is also consistent with the broader Mahayana understanding that wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) are closely connected and cannot be separated in the process of awakening (Garfield, 1995, 304).

4.4 Interbeing and Engaged Buddhist ethics

Within Engaged Buddhism, the relationship between interbeing and compassion extends beyond individual transformation to include collective, social, and global forms of ethical responsibility. Scholars such as Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King have shown how Engaged Buddhism brings contemplative insight into conversation with social action and practical responses to problems affecting society (Hunt-Perry and Fine, 2000, 35–36; King, 2009, 1).

From this perspective, interbeing provides an important basis for social ethics. Suffering in the form of economic inequality, structural violence, and ecological degradation cannot be viewed as completely separate problems. Rather, these forms of suffering are connected with wider social and environ-

mental conditions. An ethical response to them therefore needs to take these relationships into account. Interbeing supports an engaged approach in which mindfulness, awareness, and compassion are expressed through practical action. As Loy (2003) points out, responding to collective suffering requires not only inner transformation but also attention to institutional and structural conditions (Loy, 2003, 18–19).

Engaged Buddhist ethics, therefore, is not simply a form of social activism. It can also be understood as an ethical expression of interbeing. Compassionate action arises from recognizing that one's own well-being is connected with the well-being of others and with the wider social and ecological community.

4.5 Ecological Ethics and the expansion of compassion

One important implication of interbeing can be seen in the way it understands the relationship between human beings and the natural world. By questioning the sharp separation between human and non-human existence, interbeing challenges anthropocentric approaches that can contribute to the exploitation of nature. Instead, it supports an ecological ethic based on relationality, where human well-being is understood as closely connected with the health of the wider ecosystem.

Joanna Macy has drawn on Buddhist ideas of interdependence to develop an ecological understanding that emphasizes mutual belonging and responsibility towards the natural world (Macy, 1991, 35–36). Similarly, Loy (2003) argues that the perceived separation between the self and nature is one of the factors contributing to the ecological crisis. He suggests that overcoming this sense of separation is important for developing a more sustainable way of living (Loy, 2003, 10–12). From this perspective, interbeing extends compassion beyond relationships between human beings to include the wider forms of life with which human existence is connected. Ecological responsibility, therefore, is not simply an environmental concern. Caring for the natural world can also be understood as an expression of interdependence, since human well-being is closely connected with the well-being of the world around us.

4.6 Critical evaluation: Limits and tensions

Although interbeing has considerable conceptual value, it also raises questions that need to be examined critically. One such question is whether interbeing should be regarded as a new philosophical contribution or primarily as a reinterpretation of established Buddhist doctrines such as dependent origination and emptiness. Its connection with these classical teachings is clear, while its distinctive contribution can be seen in the way Thích Nhất Hạnh explains them through accessible language, everyday examples, and practical experience

(Hanh, 1999, 84; King, 2009, 1). At the same time, this accessibility raises questions about the conceptual precision and philosophical rigor of the term.

McMahan (2008) observes that modern interpretations of Buddhism often involve processes of simplification and adaptation. Such approaches can make Buddhist teachings easier to understand and apply, but they may also leave some aspects of their doctrinal complexity less visible (McMahan, 2008, 15–16). This issue is relevant to interbeing as well. Thích Nhất Hạnh's use of metaphor and experiential language makes the concept accessible to contemporary readers, but these expressions may require further philosophical clarification when examined within an academic context.

The application of interbeing to different social and political contexts also presents certain challenges. Recognizing interconnectedness provides a strong ethical basis, but it does not, by itself, explain how particular forms of systemic injustice should be addressed. Interbeing may therefore need to be brought into dialogue with critical social analysis and approaches that connect ethical understanding with practical action. Such a combination could make its contribution to social transformation more concrete. These limitations do not, however, diminish the philosophical importance of interbeing. Rather, they point to the need to consider its ethical vision alongside social and political analysis that takes particular historical and cultural contexts into account. This can further strengthen the relevance of interbeing to contemporary global challenges.

4.7 Interbeing as a transformative ethical paradigm

Despite these limitations, interbeing remains philosophically and ethically significant. It brings ontology and ethics closely together by showing that the way reality is understood has consequences for the way human beings relate to one another and act in the world. When compassion is grounded in an understanding of relational existence, Thích Nhất Hạnh presents Engaged Buddhism as a way of thought that is both philosophically meaningful and relevant to everyday life.

From this perspective, interbeing can be understood as a transformative ethical framework. It views responsibility in relational terms and challenges the sense of separation that characterizes much of modern life. Interbeing therefore offers more than a philosophical explanation of interconnectedness. It also provides a way of thinking about ethical life in a world where people, societies, and the natural environment are closely connected, even when this connection is not always recognized. Compassion, in this sense, is not simply an ethical ideal that one is expected to follow. It becomes a practical expression

of recognizing the interconnected nature of existence. Interbeing thus brings philosophical insight into close relationship with ethical responsibility.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the relationship between interbeing and compassion in the thought of Thích Nhất Hạnh and has argued that interbeing can be understood as a form of relational ontology that provides a philosophical basis for ethical engagement. By placing interbeing within the wider framework of Buddhist doctrines such as dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and non-self (*anātman*), the study has shown both the continuity of Thích Nhất Hạnh's thought with classical Buddhist teachings and the ways in which he reinterprets these teachings in a contemporary context. His understanding of interbeing brings greater attention to their experiential, relational, and ethical dimensions and relates them to the conditions of contemporary life.

The analysis has further shown that compassion, within this framework, cannot be understood simply as a moral virtue or an ideal to be followed. Rather, it arises from the recognition of interconnectedness. When the rigid distinction between self and other is questioned, the meaning of ethical responsibility also changes. Care for others is no longer understood as something separate from one's own well-being, but as part of a wider condition of mutual responsibility and shared existence. In this way, interbeing provides an important basis for understanding compassion within Engaged Buddhism.

The study has also considered the relevance of interbeing to contemporary concerns such as social inequality, ecological crisis, and collective suffering. By connecting mindfulness with compassionate action, Thích Nhất Hạnh's approach brings together inner transformation and responsibility towards society and the natural world. It suggests that lasting ethical change cannot depend only upon external rules and regulations. It also requires a change in the way individuals understand themselves, others, and their relationship with the world in which they live.

At the theoretical level, interbeing provides scope for dialogue with other areas of study, including ethics, environmental philosophy, and social theory. Its emphasis on relationality and interdependence creates a connection between classical Buddhist thought and contemporary concerns. Its significance, therefore, is not limited to religious or doctrinal discussions, but can also contribute to wider debates concerning ethical responsibility, human relationships, and the conditions of contemporary life.

In conclusion, interbeing offers a meaningful philosophical framework for understanding compassion as an engaged and transformative practice. It

brings together the understanding of reality with the question of how one should live. In an increasingly interconnected but also fragmented world, Thích Nhất Hạnh's teaching of interbeing suggests that compassion develops through the recognition of the relational nature of existence. It therefore provides a useful basis for rethinking ethical responsibility in a manner that includes the individual, society, and the wider natural world.

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