

Acknowledgements

When I was a young child, my brother would make fun of me for not understanding the term “inherit.” As a kid, any time someone—friend, sibling, or parent—would call me names, I would respond by saying that I inherited it from the name-caller. My brother would pull me aside and say, “You know you can only inherit traits through your parents, right?” Eventually it became a joke and, as only a kid would do, I would invert my brother’s taunting by doing it all the more to annoy him. Soon enough, I had inherited all my traits from everyone in my life—even pets!

As I will argue in the chapters that follow, there is a great deal more truth in children’s wisdom than we typically think, once we are reminded where and how to look. And I am not just saying that because in this case the child was me! Particularly given my Buddhist point of view on radical relationality, I firmly believe that we are made up of everything we are given—everything we inherit—from all the relationships in our lives. Certainly, as I will argue in this book, we all have the power to reappropriate and reshape what we are given, but the background that shapes our lives is first and foremost not a matter of choice. This is not so much a moral or political reality first—good or bad—but rather the

transcendental foundation of the possibility of all of morality and politics. Even still, I treasure the particular set of tools and values I have been given through all of my relationships; I am able to be proud of my life and projects largely because of these relationships. This book is as much a product of my relationships as it is the result of my own “individuality.” I have inherited so much.

The story of this inheritance must begin with my spouse Margaret. Her support throughout has been immeasurable—from doing the bulk of chores on a long writing day, to patiently editing draft after draft until I have no doubt she never wanted to read the phrase “second-generation Buddhist American” ever again. Margaret: this book would not exist without you. You have set an impossibly high bar in your support, but please know, my love, when you decide you would like to write a book someday (as I know you will!), I will be there trying my hardest to be for you everything you have been for me. I look forward to that day, as I look forward to every new day with you.

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Dad: when I first began this book, I had one fear. It was not one of the typical book worries—not being able to finish or getting trapped down some rabbit hole. My one fear was that you would read this book one day and see it as one more critique of how you raised me. You may not know this, but I hear the pain in your voice when you “tease” me for my past comments on your parenting. Given the circumstances, I know and treasure that you did the best you could (and beyond) with the tough situation you were given. I could write that what I am critiquing then and here is not you, but a wider structure of oppression, but I think that would miss the point.

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