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Dynamic Encounters between Buddhism and the West

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7

Early Encounters with Buddhism
ALBRECHT CLASSEN

25

**Declaring Buddhism Dead in the 19th
Century**
TOMOE I.M. STEINECK

47

**Between Awakening and
Enlightenment**
IAIN SINCLAIR

75

Sublime Disappearances
JULIAN BUTTERFIELD

95

**Absolute Nothingness and World
History**
NIKLAS SÖDERMAN

115

**Befriending Things on a Field of
Energies**
GRAHAM PARKES

139

Wabi-Sabi and Kei
JASON MORGAN

159

The Question Concerning Technology
THIAGO MESQUITA CARVALHO

189

**Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonian
Approaches to the Skeptical Way of Life**
CHRISTOPHER PAONE

211

Two Paths
JASON K. DAY



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Dynamic Encounters between Buddhism and the West

Introduction

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This issue explores the manifold *encounters* between “Buddhism” and “Western culture” broadly conceived. It aims to problematize the assumption that an “encounter” is the meeting point in a third space between two monolithic, largely isolated, stable entities. Indeed, as the range of articles in this issue demonstrates, *encounters* between “Buddhism” and “the West” have historically been and often actively continue to be dynamic, mutually co-constituting, and inter-dependent. This issue represents one of the first attempts to both analyze such historical encounters, in an effort to highlight their dynamic transculturality, as well as actively engage with new possible dialogues forged through encounters across disciplines, cultures, and time periods. From the perspectives of various disciplines, such as German studies, Japanese studies, music, history of philosophy and comparative philosophy, this issue illustrates the multi-faceted and evolving domains commonly denoted by the umbrella terms “Buddh-ism” and “Western culture.”

The idea for this issue was motivated by the University of Cambridge Post-graduate Conference *Dynamic Encounters between Buddhism and the West* funded by the AHRC Cambridge, which we convened on 28 and 29 June 2021. Some of the articles found in this issue are edited versions of papers presented at this

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conference as a result of a double-blind peer-review process. We are very grateful to the various referees around the globe whose insightful feedback was crucial for bringing the articles to a high standard, thus making the realization of this issue possible.

The issue is divided into two main parts: **Part I** is titled *Historical Encounters*, and **Part II** *Comparative Encounters*. This choice of thematic delineation was made with the motivation of highlighting two distinct, yet complementary approaches towards Buddhist-Western dialogue. The former approach traces historical encounters across cultural boundaries, generally categorizable as “Buddhist” and “Western”. These essays can be read as sharing a common recognition of the dynamic nature of historical cross-cultural encounters, which are open to continuous re-interpretation and re-reading. As will become apparent, historical encounters between Buddhism and the West have themselves been subject to the dynamic back and forth negotiation that occurs when trying to understand “the Other”. Specifically, **Part I** is subdivided into two main sections: **Section 1) Buddhism and Christianity**, which concerns some encounters between Buddhism and Christianity in the Middle Ages and in 19th-century Japan, at the time of the Meiji Restoration; and then **Section 2) 19th-20th Century Encounters**, which deals with both Western receptions of Buddhism, intellectually and musically, as well as the Japanese Buddhist (specifically the Kyoto school’s) reception of certain Western philosophical ideas. On the other hand, **Part II** titled *Comparative Encounters* foregrounds an approach to East-West dialogue that is more philosophical, conceptual, and often with an eye on the contemporary world. Analogous to the first part, **Part II** is also divided into two main sections: **Section 3) Japanese Buddhism and Western Philosophy**, which examines certain resonances between Japanese Buddhist-inspired philosophy and present day Western philosophical narratives in an effort to dynamically engage cross-culturally with issues around ethics, ontology, and technology that affect humans. Then **Section 4) Philosophy as a Way of Life** is the final section of this issue, which also engages comparatively with Buddhist and Western philosophical systems in an effort to highlight the importance of re-imagining what “philosophy” means in the first place through the specific articulation of its role not just in conceptual, theoretical, and abstract thought, but as a way of living as well. In what follows, we will provide brief summaries of each essay so that the reader might get a general idea for the layout of this issue as well as a more concrete understanding of the kinds of topics explored herein.

Section 1) Buddhism and Christianity within **Part I Historical Encounters** begins with Albrecht Classen’s essay *Early Encounters with Buddhism: Some Medieval European Travelogue Authors Offer First Insights into a Foreign Religion. Explorations of an Uncharted Territory*. This article explores the encounters between Medieval Christendom and Buddhism, by taking into account some of the main travelogues of the period such as Marco Polo’s *Travels*, the anonymous

Niederrheinische Orientbericht, Odorico da Pordenone's *Relatio de Mirabilibus Orientalium Tatarorum*, and Mandeville's *Travels*. On the one hand, Polo's *Travels* convey two main teachings of Buddhism such as karma and rebirth. On the other hand, contrary to Polo, the *Niederrheinische Orientbericht* underlines that rebirth does not involve just humans but animals too. Buddhism's peculiar relationship with animals is emphasised by Odorico da Pordenone and Mandeville as well. Through a historical lens, Classen's paper highlights the effort made by Christian writers to understand and explain to themselves their encounters with the Other – an effort that could be read as itself an exemplification of the dynamic negotiation inherent in any cross-cultural encounter.

Moving from the Middle Ages to 19th-century Japan, **Section 1)** also features Tomoe I. M. Steineck's paper *Declaring Buddhism Dead in the 19th Century. The Meiji Oligarchy and Protestant Mission in Japan*, which focuses on the German Liberal Protestant mission in Japan between the 1880s and early 1890s, highlighting its contributions to the project of the Meiji Oligarchy aimed at eradicating Buddhism from the country. Steineck's essay foregrounds the malleability of Christian-Buddhist worldviews across particular social, political and economic contexts, which in Meiji Japan exemplify the dynamic encounter between Protestant-Buddhist narratives that largely led to the latter's marginalization for political and economic reasons.

Section 2) 19th-20th Century Encounters begins with Iain Sinclair's essay titled *Between Awakening and Enlightenment: The First Modern Asian Buddhist and the First Buddhist Englishman*. Here Sinclair exposes the historical collaboration between Paṇḍita Amṛtānanda, a Newar Buddhist native of the Kathmandu Valley, and Brian Houghton Hodgson, the East India Company's envoy in Kathmandu, to describe the last form of Buddhism surviving on the Indian subcontinent to Western audiences. Resonating with the theme of the dynamic negotiation of mutual understanding through historical encounters, we find a general effort on both sides to bring Buddhist worldviews into the rational discourse of Enlightenment philosophy – an effort that exemplifies the dynamically evolving understandings of what it means to be “Buddhist” or “Western”.

Carrying forward the theme of the dynamism in Buddhist-Western historical encounters of the 19th century, but this time in the domain of music, we turn to Julian Butterfield's article *Sublime Disappearances: Feeling Buddhism in Late 19th Century Western Music*. In this essay, Butterfield aims to show that the reception of Buddhism in the West in the 19th century also happened through the medium of feeling. The two main protagonists of this undertaking were the composers Wagner and Buck. They both endeavoured to accommodate Buddhism to Western audiences' expectations by resorting, in their own way, to the aesthetic discourses of the sublime, which was dominant at their time.

Lastly, the final paper of this section that also concludes **Part I** is Niklas Söderman's *Absolute Nothingness and World History: Universalizing Asian Logic as*

a *World-Historical Mission*. Söderman aims to show that the Kyoto school's founder, Nishida Kitarō's work, might be valuably read as expressing Buddhist insight through a framework of Western philosophy in an effort to reach universality. Through a historical exploration of 19th-20th century Japan, Söderman invites us to consider the often unforeseen dynamic effects of historical encounters, such as how Nishida's efforts, despite his own attempt towards universality in dialogue with the West, were received within wider Japanese intellectual discourse as an exemplary of Japanese particularity that was on a par with or beyond what was seen as "Western".

Next, we leave behind the historical lens of Part I and move to **Part II** entitled **Comparative Encounters**. Here we begin to shift our lens to attempts of bringing various features of Buddhism into dialogue with some Western philosophical milieus. Specifically, **Section 3) Japanese Buddhism and Western Philosophy** attempts to bring features of these traditions into dialogue in an effort to shed light on certain philosophical issues that are crystallized through such intercultural approaches. Specifically, we find comparative encounters between Zen master Dōgen and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as Timothy Morton's object-oriented ontology (OOO) and Zen master Sen no Rikyū, and Heidegger's philosophy of technology with Japanese Buddhism. This comparative theme is carried forward in **Section 4) Philosophy as a Way of Life**, which likewise utilizes an intercultural lens in an effort to show how the idea of philosophy as a way of life could be grounded in the dynamic dialogue between the Pyrrhonian tradition of ancient Greece and the Madhyamaka Buddhist tradition of classical India, as well as the transcendentalism of Edmund Husserl and early Buddhist meditative taxonomies.

Section 3) Japanese Buddhism and Western Philosophy opens with Graham Parkes' essay *Befriending Things on a Field of Energies (with Dōgen and Nietzsche)*. First, Parkes briefly reconstructs the idea of the world soul or *anima mundi* in the Western and the Oriental traditions. If in Western philosophy this idea ran from the Pre-Socratics through the Stoics, Epicureans, Plato, the Neoplatonists, Spinoza to Nietzsche and Bergson, in the East it was particularly developed in China by various schools of thought such as Daoism, Neo-Confucianism, Tiantai and Zen Buddhism. Second, Parkes analyses the similarities between Zen master Dōgen and Nietzsche, highlighting how their worldview in terms of fields of energy ultimately allows for an ethics that extends to material objects.

Recognizing the importance of material objects is also a central theme of Jason Morgan's article entitled *How Sen no Rikyū's Zen-Inspired Ideas of Human Placedness and Interpersonal Respect Enable a Human-Present World-Harmonizing (Wa) with Object-Oriented Ontology*. Drawing on the work of Timothy Morton, which extends this recognition of the significance of the non-human world from ethics to ontology, Morgan brings Morton's Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) into

dialogue with the thought of Zen master Sen no Rikyū in an effort to supplement the former's vision of how the human person can subsist in a deanthropocentrized ontological frame. Morgan argues that Sen no Rikyū's philosophy carries resources with which we might better explain how the human person exists qua a human person even in an OOO world.

This attempt to question Western assumptions of a sharp conceptual delineation between the human and non-human is taken up by Tiago Mesquita Carvalho in his *The Question Concerning Technology. A Japanese Reply*. Carvalho brings Japanese Buddhist understandings surrounding the interdependence of the human and non-human into dialogue with some Heideggerian ideas on technology, in order to shed light on issues surrounding the rapid pace of technological progress. Through such a cross-cultural examination, Carvalho examines the possibilities for a more nuanced, globally informed understanding of the place of human beings and nature in the context of the contemporary struggle to safely navigate the quickly growing technological world.

Finally, **Section 4) Philosophy as a Way of Life** begins with Christopher Paone's article *Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonian Approaches to the Skeptical Way of Life*. Paone, after showing the similarities between Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka Buddhism, suggests that we could possibly solve ethical problems related to Pyrrhonism through an intercultural dialogue with Madhyamaka. On the one hand, both Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka develop a skeptical practice to get rid of our attachments to ontological notions like ultimate reality, with the aim of achieving an inner tranquillity. On the other hand, while for Pyrrhonism there is "no intrinsic link between the skeptic's philanthropic care and skeptical practice", Madhyamaka does relate skeptical practice to compassionate behaviour. Hence, we obtain an enhanced understanding of Pyrrhonism, by actively placing it into a dynamic encounter with Madhyamaka Buddhism.

Lastly, Jason K. Day's *Two Paths: A Critique of Husserl's View of the Buddha*, is the final essay of this issue. Day seeks to demonstrate that *pace* Husserl's reading, the Buddha presents a way of studying consciousness that is a way of life. Specifically, he argues that at the core of Husserl's mischaracterization of the Buddha's phenomenological analysis of being is the distinction between pure theory and pure praxis, which on Day's re-reading of the early Buddhist *Majjhima Nikāya* can be dissolved. By dissolving this Husserlian dualism, Day goes on to demonstrate that "the only criterion for a universal science of being not met by the Buddha is to have a purely theoretical interest in consciousness" and rather than seeing this as a shortcoming, Day suggests we might instead question whether a purely *theoretical* interest is really a necessary criterion for a universal science of being. Like Paone's essay before him, Day too demonstrates the possibility of re-working and re-reading philosophical-religious concepts across cultural and temporal boundaries.

In conclusion, the present issue represents interdisciplinary scholarly approaches to the multitude of ways Buddhism and the West have historically encountered each other and continue to be brought into dialogue today. What is revealed is a multi-layered, complex, ever-evolving understanding of these cluster concepts from the past into the present. Moreover, the dynamic, interdependent, and multi-faceted nature of the encounters themselves suggests the difficulty in categorically drawing sharp boundaries between cultures – a thematic outcome that seems particularly pertinent in our contemporary world, which is in a state of constant negotiation between localization and globalization – a state that, in one way or another, it has always been in. Ultimately, whether we use Buddhist-Western encounters to look back at the past, to explain the present, or to attempt to shed light on the future, the contributions of this issue all demonstrate the indispensable intellectual resources that interculturality and interdisciplinarity carry with them.

Early Encounters with Buddhism

Some medieval European travelogue authors offer first insights into a foreign religion. Explorations of an uncharted territory

Albrecht Classen

University of Arizona*

ABSTRACT | Knowledge of Buddhism seems to have reached Europe not until the eighteenth century or later. Medieval Christians were, after all, primarily concerned with the conflicts butting themselves against the Jews and Muslims. Leaving mostly aside the comments by the armchair traveler John Mandeville, this paper will focus, instead, on three significant authors who based their accounts on extensive personal experiences, probably also with Buddhism, whether they understood the foreign religion or not, Marco Polo's *Travels*, the insightful comments by an anonymous who left behind the *Niederrheinische Orientbericht* and the work published by Odorico da Pordenone.

KEYWORDS | Buddhism; Religious Encounters; Marco Polo; *Niederrheinische Orientbericht*; Odorico da Pordenone; Travelogues

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1 Religious Conditions in Medieval Europe

The general interest in travel both for economic and religious reasons grew tremendously throughout the high and late Middle Ages, which brought countless Christians into contact both with representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church and of Islam, especially in the Holy Land and Egypt (Ohler 2004; Classen, ed. 2018). Since the late twelfth century, European travelers and merchants even endeavored to reach ever more distant countries and shores, and this soon took them as far east as the Black Sea, then to the territory of the Silk Road, and finally even China.

To what extent Asian travelers aimed for the West, we cannot yet tell – many Chinese travelers went as far west as to India: cf. Si-yu-ki (1884) – but we know for certain that the entire Black Sea basin was a major hub for international trade, bringing together, on the one hand, Genoese, Venetians, and Byzantines, and, on the other, Arabs, Persians, and many other merchants from the Middle East, perhaps even further East (Khvalkov 2018; Cristea and Pilat 2020).

We are still not in a good position to determine with all desired precision what cultural exchanges took place there, but recent research has revealed the extent to which ancient Indian (*Panchatantra*) and Persian (*Kalila and Dimna*) literature made their way to Arabic, and from there to Hebrew, Latin, and then the various European vernaculars (Classen 2020). Considering the various narrative traditions during the Middle Ages involving such genres as the fable, didactic literature, and mirrors for princes, we can be certain that the western world was more familiar with eastern literature than we might have assumed in the past (Classen 2021). We do not know yet, however, to what extent European Christians were aware of the religion of Buddhism, even though we can be certain of relatively close economic and perhaps also political contacts and trade between East and West (Schmitz-Esser 2018).

Concomitantly, we cannot be certain whether western customers really investigated or understood the images and symbols of eastern textiles which became quite popular in late medieval Italy and elsewhere (Müller 2020), or whether they simply accepted them as decorative elements of exotic quality without any further examination. Who would have cared about religious practices that were so far removed from those dominating the West, especially when linguistic and geophysical barriers separated both worlds so vastly?

However, counter to many expectations and assumptions, in light of the famous and highly popular account of *Barlaam and Josaphat*, which derived its inspiration from the life of Buddha from the first or second century C.E. (Faure 2022), we can confirm that some of the fundamental ideas of Buddhism migrated at least through this literary channel to medieval Europe, although the protagonist's experiences were then cast as characteristic of the Christian faith (Cordoni

und Meyer, ed. 2015). However, despite these significant cultural adaptations, the events as described by the countless translators always take place in an Indian kingdom where the monk Barlaam arrives at the court and succeeds in converting the young prince Josaphat to Christianity. India itself was a fixed entity in the mind of most European intellectuals, either through literary or biblical references (Knefelkamp 1991; Classen 2005; Classen 2020). Of course, this does not mean that they had a clear understanding of the country and the various religions there, but this did not develop anyway until the nineteenth or twentieth century. But by then the European concepts were already deeply colored by their Orientalizing gaze informed by colonialist perspectives (Said 1978).

Most pre-modern western literature seems to refrain from including references to India and countries further east, not to speak of the religion of Buddhism, but we have recently realized that globalism was already operating at that early time, as the rich corpus of medieval travel literature indicates (Phillips 2013; Beaujard 2019). At closer examination, with an open mind toward often ignored texts, we can actually discover an undeniable amount of comments about very distant lands and the various local cultures here and there. Granted, those comments often prove to be rather vague, they seem to be influenced by mythical thinking, or they were the results of fictional imagination, but they confirm, after all, a considerable interest in foreign worlds and their individual characters well before the modern age.

In the late Middle Ages, pilgrimage to the Holy Land increased in popularity, but the many accounts written in the various languages are mostly limited to the journey to the eastern Mediterranean and then to the various pilgrimage sites, including Egypt (Alexandria, Cairo, Sinai, St. Catherine Monastery). However, pilgrims normally did not go beyond the traditional scope of Christian interests, so we cannot expect any information about Buddhism there (Taylor, Craig, et al., ed. 2010). Similarly, diplomatic reports, if they exist in the first place, would not have concerned themselves with the world east of the Arabic-Muslim domain. Hence, we might have to close this paper before it has actually started with some negative conclusions. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions to the rule, and those will form the center of attention of this study (for the eastern world, see Getz 2000).

2 Marco Polo

We might have expected to receive a more detailed report about Buddhism in the famous *Travels* (or *Devisement dou Monde*) by Marco Polo (1254–1324) because of his great interest in factual details reflecting almost every aspect relevant in the eastern world, but the author then covers too much ground to go into many specifics of the various religions which he encountered (Polo, trans.

Latham 1985; I will quote from his work throughout). Moreover, his interest focused particularly on economic and political aspects, whereas cultural and religious features entered the picture only on some occasion. Previous scholars have additionally cast the author as primarily critical of Christianity who therefore resorted to and examined briefly the Eastern religions as a background foil to demonstrate the decline of the Christian faith (Conklin Akbari and Iannucci, ed. 2008). We must also not ignore the fact that Polo primarily aimed at his European Christian audience, trying to raise their interest in a foreign world without necessarily encouraging them to visit it or even to adapt to its own culture or religion. Polo, like virtually all of his contemporaries, intended to inform, to entertain, and to impress, but he was not a missionary, not religiously motivated, and not anti-European, as much as he conveyed his amazement about the wonders at the Mongol court.

Polo approached his task of describing everything he witnessed on his journey in a systematic fashion, discussing both the geography and the fauna and flora; he outlines the natural products available at various locations and comments on the people's habits and customs, including their religion. Many times, there are certain possibilities that the author might have referenced Buddhism, but it remains unclear whether that is definitely the case (Witte 1915). The common formula used by the author is "idolaters" (78) whenever he does not understand exactly what religion it might be which was practiced in one kingdom or another. Otherness, if not exoticism, ruled his approach to the East, so it does not come as a surprise that Polo regularly explored the various local cultures. The people of Kashmir, for instance, are identified by that term of 'idolater' and are associated with enchantment, powerful magic, and devil worship.

On his way down to the Indian Sea, Polo reached a kingdom which was richly populated by hermits and where one could find numerous monasteries, that is, institutions which the author could only describe by means of the terms he had available from back home. The hermits are introduced as resolute in their following the laws, "practising strict abstinence in eating and drinking and avoidance of all unchastity and taking the utmost pains to commit no sin that is contrary to their law" (79). Polo expresses his amazement at the old age which those hermits could reach, and he then adds that there are many monasteries in that country "where the brethren live an austere life and wear tonsures like Dominicans and Franciscans" (79). According to their customs, they do not kill any animal, but have Saracen (Muslim) servants do that job for them and thus help them to get enough food.

In another country, he also remarks that the people worship Muhammed ("Mahomet," 79), but he does not define their religion; instead, this turns into a formula which could always mean 'Islam' in very generic terms, or something else as well. Polo frankly admits that he has no clear idea who they are because they speak a language of their own, apparently not understandable to him (79).

He does not grant himself any space and time to explore more in detail who those people might be, and instead, he moves quickly from one kingdom to another, each time demonstrating more interest in the geophysical and economic conditions than in the cultural or religious framework of the respective people. But just this somewhat careless approach opens valuable perspectives for our analysis.

It often remains uncertain what Polo might be referring to, which carries considerable potential for us to interpret his comments in a more discriminating fashion. In the country called Uighuristan, the people are “idolaters, but they include many Christians of the Nestorian sect and some Saracens” (88; cf. Baum and Winkler 2003). This can only imply that the majority of people adhere to a different faith, which could have been Buddhism. Since the Islamization of that region, such as the second Uyghur kingdom, the Kingdom of Qocho, was not completed until the end of the fifteenth century (Soucek 2000), we may be able to trust Polo’s statement that the people were neither Christians nor Muslims. The term “idolaters” would thus be nothing but a stand-in for religious “otherness” which the European traveler could not understand. He was, of course, delighted to encounter some Christians, even though they were Nestorians, but it seems to have been difficult for him to engage with this other very new group of faithful people in any critical fashion. All Polo has to say about them amounts to some curiosity, some respect, but then also indifference: “The idolaters are very well versed in their own laws and traditions and are keen students of the liberal arts” (89).

In a subsequent section, the author praises them for their virtuous lifestyle, in which they avoid lechery, and then he embarks on a lengthy discussion of the men’s sexual interaction with women. This travelogue author highlights the external features of religious practices and does not engage with the specific spiritual aspects, so when he emphasizes their observance of the lunar cycle and vegetarian habits: “There is one such cycle in which for five days all the idolaters in the world kill neither beast nor bird; nor do they eat the flesh of animals killed during these days” (91). Their monks abstain from eating meat all their lives. But immediately following this section, the author returns to marriage practices which strike him as most unusual and fascinating at the same time because some men are entitled to marry up to thirty women and to treat them as their chattel (91).

Polo informs us about religious practices every time when he turns his attention to a different country, and we then hear commonly what the various religions are, e.g., “The inhabitants [of Tangut] include Nestorian Christians, idolaters, and Mahometans” (103–104). But then he immediately turns to the cities and road system because he as a traveler was naturally most interested in economic, architectural, and logistic aspects. In the province of Egrigut, for in-

stance, idolatry dominates, “but there are three churches of Nestorian Christians” (105).

More significantly, as we can already confirm, he stunned his audience with these reports about very non-European religions and religious customs and thus deeply challenged Christianity itself not by specific criticism, but by presenting, without any further comments, very alternative faiths as practiced in eastern Asia. Polo does not offer specific explanations, but expresses his amazement, if not admiration for the hermits and other religiously devoted individuals: “They sleep on mats of wicker-work. Altogether they lead the most austere lives of any men in the world” (112).

Most impressively, Polo regularly underscores the fact that he found representatives of various world religions living right next to each other without any group persecuting the other. Quoting the Great Khan, we are informed: “There are prophets who are worshipped and to whom all the world does reverence. The Christians say that their God was Jesus Christ, the Saracens Mahomet, the Jews Moses, and the idolaters Sakyamuni Burkhan, who was the first to be represented as God in the form of an idol” (119). As much respect as the Khan displayed for the Christian faith, he refused to convert because he did not observe the Christians as being intelligent and powerful, whereas the opposite was the case with the Buddhists (119). If the pope would have sent a large group of missionaries who would have been able to demonstrate power superior to that of his sorcerers, he might have considered such a move. For Polo, however, this was an impossibility, so he can only lament briefly that no missionaries were sent, meaning that the pope thus missed a great opportunity to achieve a major breakthrough in religious conversions also on the Asian continent (120).

As unspecific as Polo might be about the Buddhists he encountered in eastern Asia, he introduced them specifically to his Christian audience and thus began to build a significant bridge between both worlds, and this simply by exposing his European audiences to very different religious practices and faiths which he identified as valid, powerful, and influential, as much as he himself tried to highlight the presence of Nestorian Christians in the various parts of the Mongol empire and elsewhere as hopeful signs that Christianity was moving forward even there (Pasqualotto 2012).

As far as he could observe, according to Polo, Genghis Khan held the highest position of power and authority, and all representatives of the various religions performed similarly to express on his birthday their respect and love for this ruler, which signaled, as far as Polo was concerned, that they held equal esteem and influence.

The Buddhists appear first in this list, but there were no major differences in their customs to celebrate this special day. All the dignitaries then approach the ruler and pronounce, irrespective of what faith they might embrace, their admiration (140). An altar is set up where they all pay their respect to the Khan and

upon which they place their gifts, which signals, once again, that the Buddhists operated in the very same fashion as the Christians and Muslims at the Mongol court. We are not told in any particular manner whether the Buddhists enjoyed a higher status; instead, it is the Khan alone who occupies the central position in Polo's account, and under whom everyone has to submit in worship. From the author's point of view, the Buddhists were of course deeply anchored in the Mongol world, or they were fully acknowledged by the Mongol rulers, but so were the other religions as well, especially because the various religious leaders conformed with the ceremonial requirements at court.

In a later section, Polo changes the term for the Buddhists, suddenly calling them Cathayans due to the new location he was in (158), but there they operated the same way peacefully next to the other religions (158). In short, Polo is talking here about the Chinese zodiac, which is apparently recognized as critically important by everyone irrespective of the religious orientation. In that context, however, the author finally goes into more details and describes the common practice of worship in most households by the idolaters (160).

To what extent Polo had a clear understanding of Buddhism, or whether he only commented on ordinary customs which he could observe on a daily basis, cannot be determined precisely. He never uses the name of Gautama or Buddha but refers once to an "image representing Natigai, the god of earthly things, who guides the course of all that is born on earth" (160). Although he expresses contempt for their alleged disregard of their own souls and the afterlife, he acknowledges and describes the fundamental Buddhistic teachings regarding the soul:

they believe indeed that it is immortal, but in this fashion. They hold that as soon as a man is dead he enters into another body; and according as he has conducted himself well or ill in life, he passes from good to better or from bad to worse. (160–161)

Polo recognized here only the social ladder for the souls within human society, identifying the various social classes as open for rebirth, and he did not know about the danger for the soul to be reborn in a lower life form, such as a fish or a worm in case of bad karma (Gethin 1998; Gombrich 2009; Bronkhorst 2011). To be sure, we can recognize Polo's awareness of rebirth and immortality as fundamental pillars of Buddhist thought which he more or less managed to convey to his European audiences. He also painted a very positive image of the Buddhist population in the Mongol Empire outlining their belief system in at least rough brush strokes, in this case withholding most of his personal comments – certainly a surprising and valuable perspective within the late medieval context.

In later passages, dealing with subsequent parts of his journeys, Polo returns to the same descriptions of the native population and regarding their faiths, commonly identifying a mixed situation (177). In other kingdoms, there are

only idolaters (i.e., Buddhists), which Polo mentions quickly in passing because he is more interested in the gold found there, in snakes and serpents, and even monsters (178–179). The people of Zar-dandan are identified as idolaters, which Polo mentions briefly, and then are introduced through a description of their unique habits and customs, which leaves religion mostly sidelined (181). Nevertheless, there are also references to sacrifice and libation ceremonies to heal a sick person (183).

We consistently perceive the extent to which the author pays great respect to the various peoples, whether he calls them “idolaters” or not. The immediate connection of religion with money in one case might be curious, but it sheds light on the little importance which the author paid to religion as such, a feature which he simply noted but did not evaluate in any particular way (195).

I have resorted to the term of “Buddhism” throughout so far, but it is not really that clear whether Polo was aware of the difference between that religion and Hinduism, or any other religious groups. In Cathay, for instance, he observed the practice of worshipping many idols: “They declare that the supreme god has assigned to each of these its own distinctive faculty, one concerned with the finding of lost objects, one with ensuring the fertility of the crops and tempering the weather for their growth” (198). He specifically identifies here a non-Christian religion as a contrast, but the cult might not have been Buddhistic; instead, he probably observed different faiths, and in this case Hinduism.

Whatever the situation might have been, Polo insists with all earnestness that the custom to pray to one of the idols in a temple would produce guaranteed results since an old woman, working like a sacristan, would talk to the gods after incense has been burned and a sacrifice been made. With all sincerity, the author affirms that the gods certainly help, as he himself had tested and found to be true, though he subsequently tries to pretend that he did not appeal to the idols (199). We are left baffling whether the author actually believed it, or whether he only pretended to entrust himself to those gods. At any rate, as even his own excuse at the end underscores, he had embraced that religious institution and had found it to be working for himself at least in practical terms.

The author also associates idolatry with the burning of the dead, such as in the province of Manzi (204; cf., for instance, Williams 2012). He additionally uses the reference to idolatry as an identity marker for the various peoples whom he encountered. As in many other previous cases, Polo combines the term of “idolaters” with monasteries and abbeys (218), suggesting, once again, that he operated in a Buddhistic (or Hindu) world where such institutions were quite common. These references served him to create analogies to the western world, though it might be questionable to talk about “abbeys” as he does. Nevertheless, he observed religious communities and hence a supra-structure outside of Christianity with its great emphasis on monasticism.

To enliven his report, Polo also included accounts from his uncle, Messer Maffeo, who was told once by a Saracen about yet another religious group:

In such and such a place there is a community whose religion nobody knows. It is evidently not idolatrous, since they keep no idols. They do not worship fire. They do not profess Mahomet. And they do not appear to observe the Christian order (235)

However, as it turned out, they were Christians as well, though they had lost contact with their tradition and only worshiped three of the apostles, drawing inspiration from the Psalter, which was preserved in another language. This group was later acknowledged by the Great Khan as an independent religious sect (236), who thus proved to be very tolerant once again. Polo himself related this story in order to underscore the religious freedom at the Mongol court which Christians did enjoy, but this does not undermine the role played by the Buddhists whom the author encountered most of the time.

When he turns his attention to India, Polo becomes more specific and identifies the Brahmins who work as enchanter for the fishers to help them gain a good catch, although we would normally associate Brahmins with priests of the Vedic religion (261). The author also mentions the words which the king-priest of the province of Maabar utters in honor of his idols in the morning, and evening as a public ceremony: “Pacauta, Pacauta, Pacauta” (262). We further learn about the custom that a criminal condemned to die would commit the killing himself in honor of his idols, and about widows who fling themselves into their dead husband’s pyre in order to observe their marital vows (264–65). The deeper we explore Polo’s travelogue, the more we learn about other religious practices, whether they were Buddhist or not. He reports rather globally about non-Christian rituals and ceremonies and thereby gives them much credit, as exotic as they appear to be: “they have many idols in their monasteries, both male and female, and to these idols many maidens are offered in the following manner ... ” (270).

Of course, there is implied criticism, even fear of the foreign world, but overall, we can attest Polo a considerable degree of respect, if not toleration, of the Asian religion/s which he described with some accuracy, though he probably mostly misread the essential components of the theology behind the rituals and ceremonies. In the end, the comments about the non-Christians and non-Muslims turn into an almost meaningless and empty trope, “The people here are idolaters and tributary to none” (272; in reference to the kingdom of Motupalli). Polo actually betrays thereby that he does not really care about the religious difference and only states that they are idolaters in order to establish a formal difference to the Christians. Immediately following, both here and throughout the entire work, the author’s mercantile interests reemerge and dominate the narra-

tive where we are informed about the local products and raw material, and not so much about matters of faith.

One exception to this rule proves to be the section in which Polo introduces the group of Brahmans and characterizes them as the most trustworthy and selfless individuals in the world (277). And finally, in the section dealing with Ceylon (Sri Lanka) once again, Polo returns to a significant story which he had originally intended to tell, and this story suddenly proves to be the actual life story of Buddha himself; not in the vein of *Barlaam and Josaphat*, but in the original version, dealing with the young prince who is kept in an artificial space of bliss because his father wants to protect him from the sorrows and pain of ordinary life. However, he then encounters a dead man, and soon an old man, and both those experiences make him resolve to leave the artificiality of the palace where he had been pampered all the time by 30.000 maidens:

So he left the palace and his father and took his way into the high and desolate mountains; and there he spent the rest of his days most virtuously and chastely and in great austerity. For assuredly, had he been a Christian, he would have been a great saint with our Lord Jesus Christ. (283)

This prince then dies, and the corpse is brought to his father, who grieves bitterly and has subsequently a sculpture made in his image to be worshipped by people as a god. Most significantly, Polo then adds the account that this prince had died eighty-four times and had been reborn in all kinds of animals until he was finally reborn once again, but then as a god: "And he is deemed by the idolaters to be the best and greatest god they have. And you must know that this was the first idol ever made by the idolaters and hence come all the idols in the world" (283). With these remarks we have finally firm proof that Polo was familiar with Buddhism after all, not only in terms of its rituals and ceremonies but also with its basic theological tenets, although he names this prince as Sakyamuni Burkhan, "that is to say, Sakyamuni the Saint" (283), another name of Gautama Buddha (Komatsu 1989).

We can thus conclude that Polo's *Travels* in fact introduced the world of Buddhist Asia to the European audiences in somewhat tenuous terms, and this without much fanfare or a sense of western superiority. Christianity was, of course, for Polo the only 'true' religion, but he presented Buddhism (at times, probably Hinduism) as well and acknowledged its considerable importance in the many different Asian kingdoms and empires. Considering the astounding popularity of his travelogue, irrespective of some criticism voiced occasionally, we face here a fantastic opportunity to expand on our understanding of globalism in the Middle Ages, which also included the various religions.

3 *Niederrheinische Orientbericht*

An anonymous author from the Cologne area composed this fourteenth-century travelogue which presents some of the most expansive and detailed comments about the Orient available in the late Middle Ages (based on the manuscript W*3 of the *Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln*). The author might have been a merchant who spent more than twelve years in the Middle East (between ca. 1336/37 to ca. 1350) and returned with a wealth of knowledge about that world which makes the *Niederrheinische Orientbericht* a true narrative treasure for many different research approaches, including history, religion, geography, politics, and biology (ed. and trans., Brall-Tuchel 2019; a new critical edition has now been published by Micklin 2021; for a good introduction, see Brincken 1987).

We are here provided with deep insights into the world of the Holy Land, Egypt, Persia, Armenia, Georgia, and also further east, India. The author was particularly interested in the workings of the Three Holy Magi, and he added many details about the history and physical conditions of the various countries he visited. Although the *Orientbericht* draws extensively from a host of relevant sources, it was, as in the case of Polo's *Travels*, deeply determined by the author's personal experiences. Scholars have regularly emphasized the directness of the account, and the author's subjective responses to people's sufferings from wars and other problems (Brincken 1987, 999; Brall-Tuchel 2019, 22–23), which he correlates with the suffering of Jews back home at the hands of their Christian enemies (Cologne, August 1349; Cluse 2005, 11–12). The recent renewed interest in this fascinating travelogue derives from the astounding focus on local details pursued by the anonymous, who presents a much more realistic portrait of that eastern world than in most other late medieval narratives (Brall-Tuchel 2019, 23–24). This justifies placing the *Niederrheinische Orientbericht* next to Marco Polo's *Travels*.

As to be expected, fact and fiction, or realism and myth mingle, thus when the author engages intensively with Prester John and his expansive empire in India. All this, however, is complemented with a wealth of factual data concerning the geo-physical features of that world, the various populations (with a lot of mythologizing going on here once again), the political structures, the Sultan's court life, the relationships between the Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the culture of the Tartars (Mongols), the Caliph of Baghdad, and monsters.

When the attention turns to the Mongol empire, we are also confronted with remarkable comments about the Buddhist teachings. The author does not pay overly much attention, but he is very clear about the specifics which characterize that religion. As he remarks, the people there believe that a person's soul would enter a wild animal (reincarnation) and would thus be reborn. A person who led a good life would be given the privilege of his soul returning again in the body of a noble animal; in the opposite case, the rebirth would happen in a not noble

animal, such as a wolf or a fox. Because of this belief in reincarnation, animals are treated with great respect since they are regarded as the carriers of their predecessors and relatives (146).

When we comb through the text, which offers a rather sweeping view of the various kingdoms, peoples, and cultures from the Ottoman Empire to the Mongols, we recognize that the author was apparently quite aware of the presence of religious groups beyond the traditional monotheistic religions. At the Sultan's court, for instance, the assembly comprised Christians, Jews, and "heiden van allen zungen de in der werelt sint und sunge ere eyn na dem anderen eynnen sanck und loff van gode und van dem soldain" (92; "pagans speaking in all the tongues of the world, they all sing one after the other a song and give praise to God and the Sultan"). The author does not specify what religions those might be, but they are certainly of a different kind, possibly Buddhism or Hinduism. He also tries to differentiate further among the many different peoples in the eastern world, but it seems more like a compilation of names than a realistic listing, including Persians, Ismaelites, Agareni, and others (70).

In contrast to Marco Polo, the anonymous author deftly combines mythological references to monsters and Amazons with very concrete and specific information about plants and animals. For that reason, the brief comments about Buddhists are to be taken with a grain of salt since they appear to be more copied from other accounts than to be the result of personal studies. He cared more about miraculous stories about monstrous peoples than to assess carefully the situation on the ground in spiritual terms, but in this regard, this was nearly a *conditio sine qua non* of most medieval travel literature.

Nevertheless, this one, most significant paragraph all by itself underscores that Buddhism was already known and recognized by the author as a unique religion dominant in East Asia, even if the anonymous has not much more to say about it. But in contrast to Polo, he offers more specifics about reincarnation, which entails animals and not only people. Polo could only imagine that the Buddhists believed that the soul would be reborn in another person, whereas the anonymous indicated that according to their concept the soul would reappear in animals.

The difference between *The Travels* and the *Orientbericht* has also to be kept in mind. Polo reflected on his own extensive and far-reaching travel experiences, whereas the anonymous appears to have spent most of his time in the Holy Land, Armenia, and Egypt, and might not have ventured much further east. His knowledge about Buddhism and other eastern religions thus could have reached him only through second-hand sources (Brall-Tuchel 2019, 25).

Nevertheless, we can thus identify the *Orientbericht* as a second source confirming at least some tenuous knowledge about eastern religions in western literature. While the Christians had to suffer from prosecutions at the hands of the Muslims (112), the relationship among the various religious groups in the eastern

countries appears as balanced, or at least unproblematic. However, the author increasingly combines all kinds of information and mixes it so much that it becomes very difficult to distinguish between the Mongols (Tartars) and the peoples subjugated by them, many of whom are depicted in monstrous terms. We regularly hear about Christians, Muslims, and pagans (Buddhists?) as members of the same society (162) who observe similar religious practices regarding funerals, for instance. But we would search in vain for further references to Buddhism.

4 Odorico da Pordenone

The travelogue (*Relatio de mirabilibus orientalium Tatarorum*) by the Franciscan Odorico da Pordenone (ca. 1265/1281–1331), who also made his way to China, i.e., the Mongol court, similarly contains a brief reference to Buddhism, apart from many rather fanciful reports about miraculous events, monsters, religious practices, sacrifices, cities, agriculture, animals, etc. (Yule 2002; for a critical edition, see Marchisio 2016). Odorico composed a narrative that was somewhat comparable to Polo's *Travels*, but he was much more concerned with the suffering of Christian martyrs, and then also with many different forms of self-sacrifice by people in the Asian world for religious reasons. We learn, for instance, about the martyrdom of four friars in the city of Tana (79–96), about the kingdom of Minibar and the production of pepper (96–98), idolatry by various peoples using ox urine and feces (98–100), cannibalism (104–106), etc. In short, Odorico offers a wide gamut of anthropological observations which he freely mixed with religious commentary, entertaining his western Christian audience with often rather horrifying scenes of violence and killing in the name of various gods. He also does not shy away from introducing all kinds of marvels which he had allegedly observed in the East, and offers examples of kings' polygamy, their exotic armies of elephants, and of monstrous creatures (Reichert).

When he turns to the city of Cansay (today, Hangzhou, south of Shanghai), Odorico had the occasion to relate a curious scene which at first sight seems to reflect nothing but an unusual local religious custom, but at a second look reveals to be a crucial reference to Buddhism, similar to the way how the anonymous of the *Orientbericht* had related his limited knowledge. A man of high rank who had converted to Christianity one day takes him to a monastery (Buddhist?): "a certain great monastery of the people of the country" (129). There he is supposed to witness some amazing events so that he later would be able to report about them once he would have returned home. A monk leads him to a hilly area where he attracts many different animals by beating on a gong. They all sit down in an orderly fashion and are fed by the monk with scraps from the dinner table.

Once that is over, he beats the gong again, and all the animals disappear into their hiding places.

For Odorico, the entire setting causes him to laugh because the animals appear to him acting like human beings. Indeed, as the monk then explains to him, “These animals be the souls of gentlemen, which we feed in this fashion for the love of God” (130). When Odorico protests that those are just beasts without souls, he has to learn that according to the monks’ conviction, they all carry the souls of previously deceased people: “For if a man be noble his soul entereth the form of some one of these noble animals; but the souls of boors enter the forms of baser animals and dwell therein” (130).

As fragmentary as this brief account proves to be, it demonstrates explicitly an early encounter with Buddhism and an attempt to explain some of its abstract concepts of reincarnation. For Odorico, of course, this did not mean much in theological terms, since he quickly dropped the topic again, and instead, he then turns his attention to the splendor and vastness of that city: “For ‘tis the greatest and noblest city, and the finest for merchandise, that the whole world containeth” (130). We can be certain, however, that he allowed here a brief gaze into this foreign religion, though he did not really understand it fully. Foreignness clouded his comprehension, and all he could do was to include this brief scene into his account, a puzzle piece that meant little for him, but reveals to us that even here we can identify early references to Buddhism.

5 Sir John Mandeville

Although Mandeville’s *Travels* have commonly been identified as a fanciful compilation of various sources about the East, we can draw also from this travelogue to confirm that some basic elements of Buddhistic teachings were more commonly known, whether the western authors understood the details or not (Mandeville 1983). Here leaving all the fanciful monster lore aside, at one point this contemporary of the anonymous poet of the *Niederrheinische Orientbericht* also turns to some religious notions as practiced in the East and repeats more or less the same comments while discussing a monastery. A monk is feeding all kinds of animals who have arrived upon hearing a gong being beaten, and they orderly sit down to receive their food. Then we are told:

These monks say that those beasts which are pretty and gentle are the souls of lords and gentle folk, and those beasts which are not so are the souls of other men. They maintain that the souls of men when they leave their bodies enter into those beasts; that is their firm belief, and no one can shake their opinion. The souls of great men, they say, go into gentle and beautiful animals, and the souls of men of low

rank go into ugly animals; and therefore they give them meat and alms for the love of God. (139)

However, the narrator then undermines his own account by revealing that all those animals had been captured when they were still young and were hence trained to wait for their food, like in a petting zoo. Apparently, we are not even supposed to take this account seriously, since Mandeville next refers quickly to many other marvels which he had allegedly witnessed. This religious practice hence appears as something easily to be dismissed. Yet, within our context, we can accept even this highly superficial reference as confirmation that some aspects of Buddhism were broadly known in the West and could be experimented with fairly freely also for the entertainment of a Christian audience since they are presented only as exotic and marvelous, not to be taken seriously.

6 Conclusion

To be sure, medieval Christendom was still mostly concerned with its own religious issues, still struggling to establish its complete hegemony over many different deviant groups, heretics, pagans, mystics, and others. Yet, the early exploration of Asia by Christian missionaries and merchant travelers opened many new perspectives. For most of the time, the various authors indulge in monster lore when treating India or the Mongol empire (especially Mandeville), but at closer analysis we can discover that major authors such as Marco Polo, but then also the anonymous composer of the *Niederrheinische Orientbericht* and the Franciscan Odorico da Pordenone took considerable interest in the religious features which they observed on their travels or which they had learned about through older sources. In this process, some elements of Buddhist concepts also entered the picture, though it would go too far to claim that these three authors among others displayed a sincere interest in this Asian religion.

Yet, there are a number of explicit references and comments to be found, which allow us to claim that pre-modern globalism had also entailed the opening up to Buddhism, as tenuous as those few and still rather brief descriptions certainly were. The authors had obviously no clear idea about the many different sects, branches, or groups of Buddhists who lived in a vast continent much larger than Europe. Yet, the fact alone that they at least included those new perspectives about eastern religions proves to be highly remarkable for medieval authors, whether they actually toured through those parts of the Asian continent or not. No one really cared whether Mandeville's *Travels* were based on fact or fiction; since his account was so cohesive and insisting regarding its truth, the future audience believed Mandeville more than they believed Polo's *Travels* (Campbell, 1988, 141). All this is the more remarkable insofar as the four sources

examined here did not find many successors throughout the following centuries, at least with respect to the comments about the eastern religions. This would entail that these late medieval texts constitute impressive predecessors of modern globalism, if we pay close attention to some of the details included in all four texts.

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Declaring Buddhism Dead in the 19th Century

The Meiji Oligarchy and Protestant mission in Japan

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ABSTRACT | This paper elaborates the interaction of social ideologies and religion between the Japanese oligarchy of the first half of the Meiji era and the German Liberal Protestant Mission. The Protestant image conflict, the newly emerging science of comparative religion and social consolidation are considered in the context of the interests of both parties. German Protestant ethics and educational ideology were introduced as distinctly attractive nation-building strategies, appropriate for the purposes of the Meiji oligarchy. The parallels with the indigenous national doctrine of the Edo period enabled the ruling class to incorporate the new and Western ethical concepts, which founded their sympathy for the German Liberal Protestant mission. The influence of Liberal Protestant theology on Buddhist reformers is also discussed in relation to the mission's activity in the 1880s and early 1890s.

KEYWORDS | Buddhism; Japan; Imperialism; Shinto; Protestant Mission

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Aoki [Shūzō] recounted that the Emperor [Meiji] asked him about the visit of the Russian Crown Prince in Sendai, to which he replied, one could not hinder him from the visit (because of the Russian mission stationed there); but the most suitable means to counter the influence of the Russian church was not the dying Buddhism, but other forms of religion, springing from the same soil as the Russian church, but politically harmless (Protestants). The Emperor had shown acknowledgement by nodding. Position of the state on church cooperation now important. Wants my assessment. Some things I had already developed and promised him more. I emphasised [to him the] necessity of upholding the Mikado idea. (Spinner and Hamer 1997a, 198)¹

This March 23, 1891, entry taken from the Japan diary of the Swiss theologian and pastor Wilfrid Spinner (1854-1918), accentuates the position he held as a close advisor to Viscount Aoki (1844-1914), then Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Yamagata cabinet, and through him to the Meiji Tennō himself. He was the first missionary of the German-speaking Liberal Protestant Mission AEPM² to Tokyo. Although not registered as a hired foreigner *oyatoi gaikokujin*, the ideas he represented had a wider impact on the Japanese ruling class of the late 19th century, including the inner circle of the Meiji oligarchy, mostly comprised of former *bushi*³ class men. The excerpt draws attention to the oppression of Buddhism already in place in Japan, described as a dying religion. This situation was accelerated, however not initiated, by the presence of the Protestant missions, of which we will focus on the German-speaking mission that had been dispatched from Weimar under the auspices of the Grand-Duke Charles Alexander of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach (1818-1901). It unified Liberal Protestant supporters across the German-speaking realm, with Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), the founding father of comparative religious studies, an integrative discipline in the sciences of Imperialism,⁴ as a major endorser.

The period around the Meiji Restoration of 1868 is often addressed under two different issues – the governmental persecution of Buddhism as a foreign cultural element and the animosity towards Christianity are one aspect. The second is the Christianisation of the young samurai elite, who had lost their traditional norms with the fall of the shogunate. The alliance between the German mission and the Japanese oligarchy is at the intersection of these two issues. The German, or legitimately the Swiss-Weimar Mission, has so far received little attention in terms of its influence amongst the ruling circles and partially also

¹ All translations in this paper are by the author.

² Acronym of Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein (General Evangelical-Protestant Mission Association). It later developed into the Deutsche Ostasienmission (DOAM), before splitting again into the Deutsche and Schweizerische Ostasienmission (SOAM) in 1952.

³ The Japanese term for the upper class of bureaucratized warriors, also known as samurai.

⁴ The phrase "Imperial science" or "science of Imperialism" is based on the works of David Chidester (2014).

reflected in the reformist ideas of the Buddhist leaders in Japan. The AEPM's activities represented by Spinner and his stay in Japan (1885-1891) delivers the specific frame on which this case study is based.

This paper approaches the issue of "Buddhism" in Meiji Japan against the background of the influence of the German Protestant mission and its ties to the Japanese ruling class, respectively in combination with the relevant history of ideas in the German-speaking realm. It analyses the anatomy of anti-Buddhist sentiment in mid-Meiji Japan, which fuelled the narrative of Buddhism as an unauthentic, foreign religion only suited for the uneducated and unworthy, to a new level. This narrative developed in the conflicting field between "religion" and "superstition," which in German-language sources can be clearly identified half a century earlier in Siebold's (1832) *Nippon*. The confluence of the Japanese as well as the European agendas brought new impetus to the process that has been detectable in the Edo period (1603-1868). In this respect, the actions of one party cannot be analysed without understanding the other, especially regarding the marginalisation of Buddhism, or at least part of it, as a "lower" faith. Thus, the issue of why this mission was singled out by the Japanese oligarchy as an ally is important and worthy of attention. The quote at the beginning allows insight into a complex political and social line of thought. On one hand, it illustrates the precarious position of Buddhism. On the other, it also indicates that generally, Christianity was undesired, unless it was a certain kind of Christianity. The analysis of this circumstance leads to the elucidation of the question why Buddhism was declared dead, the key to which lies as much in the nature of the German mission as in the intention of the Japanese oligarchy.

The division of Buddhism into two levels, a higher and lower, mirrors a potent social agenda. I will draw on David Chidester's theory of the imperialist mechanism applying its measures of marginalisation in both regions, the European home and the colonial periphery, i.e., not only along the geographical divide between imperial centre and periphery, but also the social one between upper and lower classes (Chidester 1996, 4).

The issue of causation and correlation central to the discourse surrounding Meiji Japan, Imperialism, European Colonialism, and even more with regard to "religion," needs a careful approach. Recent contributions arrived at a nuanced discourse that also shed light on the imperial conducts of Japan with regard to and by use of Christianity, transcending past, monocausal narrations of Japanese passiveness (Anderson 2014). The increasing marginalization of Buddhism in early modern Japan, while in Europe the rise of Protestantism negated Catholic, Orthodox Christian, and all other prevailing pre-Christian elements, is a historical parallel that allows no space for passive narratives. Even if, as Siebold's writings show, now and then a reciprocal nod underpinned each respective direction. The events of Meiji carve out a picture where Western influence and

Japanese intentions were deeply related to each other, creating a complex web of causation.

With regard to this issue, terminology gain significance. “Religion” is one of the terms that must be addressed here. The term was a neologism in Meiji along with other new terms like “society” or “individual,” and even “love” (Klautau 2014, 246). “Shinto”⁵ also borders on our topic. Nevertheless, to remain close to the topic, I would like to refer to several dominant publications that shape the discourse,⁶ some more nuanced than others. My critique of the discipline of comparative religion is related to the critique of the Protestant use of the concept of “religion,” especially as the heir to imperialist taxonomy. On this point, I must add that the taxonomic argument, especially with regard to Scripture, is predominant. Proponents of a strict division between modern “religion” and previous forms of “faith” or “devotion” rarely employ the visual and material evidence of faithful/devotional acts.⁷ Inclusion of complex negotiations of faith and “religion” in older history contribute a wider angle in this respect.⁸ The fundamental contest between the secular and the religious (and the prerequisite of secularity as such) is also problematic (Van der Veer 2001, 14-38).⁹ It is my hope to touch on these aspects within the limited space of this paper.

1 The *Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein* (General Evangelical-Protestant Mission Association) and Liberal Protestantism

The AEPM’s arrival in Japan lagged behind its Anglo-Saxon and Dutch counterparts, as well as Russian Orthodox and French Catholic missions already working in Japan, when Spinner set foot on the shores of Yokohama in 1885. Nevertheless, contemporaneous voices predicted swift success owing to the Germanophile mood amongst the elite (Iglehart 1960, 78-79; Spinner and Hamer 1997a, 31). The mission was a specific endeavour by and for the Liberal Protestant faction in German-speaking society. Liberal Protestantism in its homelands faced a strong contest against the Lutherans, Reformed, and others, such as the Pietists (all frequently summed up as orthodox). Their faith rooted in liberal The-

5 For the discourse on the concept and terminology of Shinto, see: Teeuwen (2002); Yoshida (2003); Satō (2007). For an overview of Shinto discourse, see: Teeuwen and Breen (2010); Teeuwen and Rambelli (2003). For in-depth historical and linguistic analysis in Japanese, I recommend Yoshida (1996).

6 Smith (1982, 1998); Maxey (2007, 2014); Isomae (2005, 2012); Josephson (2006, 2012); Shimazono (1998); Shimazono and Tsuruoka (2004); Asad (2008).

7 Schopen (1997, 1998) is a rare and consistent advocate of the material heritage of Buddhism as the proper and authoritative evidence on which to build concepts of its act of faith. Note the contrast to Jonathan Smith’s contribution in the same volume of 1998.

8 See Steineck (2018), Shimazono (1998), and Klautau (2014). I refer to Japan-related discussions only.

9 Van der Veer justifiably opposes the dualism of the secular and the religious, critiquing the notion of the secular in general and the exclusion of religion from the public sphere in particular. This is a relevant argument regarding the influence that German “secularism” exerted, also within, and through the conduit of, the Liberal’s mission ideology.

ology, a form of Christian modernism, and propagated a decidedly anti-dogmatic theology. The denomination's affirmation of science and progress was widely and sharply criticised as a wholesale attack on the Protestant faith from other denominations. The Liberal Protestants saw their ideology and religious conducts in great contrast to the other Protestant denominations, which is consistently expressed in the Manifesto written by their founder Ernst Buss (1843-1928) in 1876, as a blueprint for the mission. While diplomatically drawing a familiarity of origin, Buss characterises other missions as "dogmatically complicit," "ponderous", in nature, who make "the error of narrow-mindedness and intolerance" (Buss 1876, 171). But the manifesto was published to wider acclaim, because he enthused the upper-class followers in the German-speaking realm of the German Empire (notably Saxony) and Switzerland for mission propagated as immensely innovative.

They were part of the movement which grew out of the renewed sense of crisis in the German-speaking realm after the Napoleonic invasions, carrying the seed "of temporal immediacy" (Niebuhr 1959, 26) onto a new level, and a direct responsibility to God, expressed as heightened individual responsibility. Both were characteristics of Protestantism, but the latter surfaced more as a secular morality as it found expression as contributions in the secular, public sphere. The general Protestant elements of rejecting the ecclesiastical and the special emphasis on scripture (*prima scriptura*) and the word were still retained.

The affirmation of scientific knowledge was a unique characteristic, by which the Liberal Protestants dissociated with orthodox denominations. It encompassed a wider array of progressive, modern worldviews that were cause for controversy especially in the 19th century. Within the twofold experience of time between the religious and the profane (Halbwachs 2012, 259), their strategy located them in the contemporary cultural memory of the profane realm (*saeculum*). It instigated a departure from the eternalisation of time in the religious realm.

2 *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit*

The two concepts are central to the Liberal Confession, however not exclusively. *Bildung* strongly reflected New Humanist ideals. For Humboldt, *Bildung* was an asset that needed to be developed by exposure to and study of the classical disciplines and classical fine arts in order to promote ethics to one's full human capability – their God-given potential. His essay *Über Religion* defines it as follows: "For all *Bildung* has its origin only in the interior of the soul, and can only be induced by external events, never produced" (Humboldt 1995; Sorkin 1983). Its influence is reflected in Schleiermacher's theology following a little later, who defines religion as a concept that "necessarily springs forth of its own accord

from within every better soul, that it has an own territory in the mind" (Schleiermacher 2011, 204). *Bildung* is thus coloured in a religious, or more specifically, Protestant hue. Moses Mendelssohn's (1729-1786) attempt "to promote the ability of Jews to belong to a universal community by showing their capacity for *Bildung*" (Almog 2019, 86-87) demonstrates the extent to which it was deemed exclusively Protestant and not universal at all.

Sittlichkeit is deemed as the sibling of *Bildung*, "actually one and the same" (Humboldt 1995, 563). Humboldt articulates it further as the "voluntary submission to the moral law (*Sitte*) [which is] thus based on the principle of duty" (Humboldt 1995, 562). It emanates a fluid duality combining the nature of a secular, legal codex and a religiously informed moral, in line with Humboldt's understanding of religion as a tool to serve the state (Petersen 2007, 111). Both uniquely effected the formation of a religiously shaped national consciousness in the 19th century German-speaking realm, which gains importance in our context. Their significance was strongly emphasized in the AEPM mission, making the endeavour a religious-ethical elevation of foreign "lesser" cultures, to "provide a ... more accurate insight into God's educational plan, and the nature of true religion" (Buss 1876, 253-254). Connecting to the notion of religion elaborated here, an account out of Spinner's diary may be of interest. Spinner had set himself the diplomatic goal to be "religious" first, and less "enlightening" (Spinner and Hamer 1997a, 81), when interacting with other denominations. His understanding of religion between ethics and religiosity shows a fluid boundary. Despite his tenet, his religiosity appeared to have been insufficient to other Protestant denominations. The Japanese orthodox Protestants represented by the *Nihon kirisuto it'chi kyōkai* (the United Church of Christ in Japan) and their leaders, such as Uemura Masahisa (1858 - 1925), frequently and publicly accused him of being "a dangerous rationalist" (Spinner and Hamer 1997a, 168, 179). In late 1890, Spinner just about averted a petition to Weimar prepared by the orthodox Japanese Protestants to have him removed, due to his degenerating influence on young Christian Japanese (Spinner and Hamer 1997b, 260).

For a mission to commence, three strategies had to be established. The first concerned the qualification, or nature, of the missionary. This was a principal issue for all missions in the field (Lovett 1899, 51), yet the AEPM required an unusual level of educatedness, and also trained their candidates accordingly, in theology, several languages, the history of Europe and the mission area, comparative religion, and so on. This formular was in fact remarkably close to Humboldtian model of higher education, yet for the purpose at hand, it is noteworthy to see the strong emphasis on education in a holistic sense, underlining its link to the ethical ideal of *Bildung*. Spinner, in this context, was a model candidate, except he was not a missionary candidate at all, but a full founding member of the mission with several degrees in theology and philosophy, fluent in many languages. The idea of a scientific mission, however, was not particularly new. The

strategy of scientific mission emerged at the end of the 17th century from the pen of Gottfried Leibniz, as the very first mission strategy specifically designed for Protestantism. Some Jesuits like Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) had followed a similar design as missionaries to the Ming court. Both examples were already intricately linked to the study of indigenous culture and its form of religiosity at that time. Suffice it to say that Buss was building on a tradition of ideas and examples, but his statement that this would be the first implemented scientific mission was no deception, for Leibniz's proposal had been too far ahead of its time. The second strategy concerned the choice of the mission target, which was equally a fiercely debated issue between and within any denomination (Warneck 2015, 460). The process highlights a “planetary consciousness” (Chidester 1996, 8) analogous to the colonial expansions. The idea always moved in close proximity to the political interests of a nation, as well as the Imperial sciences of comparative religion and Orientalist studies, acting as a taxonomic classification of the world for the mission. As the AEPM envisioned that they were “preferably suited for cultured peoples and the educated classes” (Buss 1876, 318-319) it chose East Asia based on the analysis of available data. These decisions led, in the next instance, to the choice of method: the salvation of the individual soul, or the “conquest” of the domain for the Grace of God. The latter required the conversion of the ruler or ruling class of a target region, in order to gain the entire territory according to the theocratic tradition of *cuius regio, eius religio*. These three strategies fleshed out as the AEPM's choice to mission top-down, targeting the ruling elite of a “cultured” territory, sending highly educated missionaries. The reality, however, looked less self-governed but all the more advantageous. The mission had changed its target from India to Japan and hurriedly appointed one of its most highly qualified young members at the request of Aoki, who was already a high-ranking diplomat, because the preparation of the actual missionaries was still in progress.

3 The AEPM in Japan

Aoki Shūzō actively sought a German-speaking mission and conferred with Bismarck about his desire for a liberal denomination, to eventually find his way to the AEPM (Spinner and Hamer 1997a, 76). Owing to Aoki's own motivation, Spinner was quickly able to gain a foothold amongst the higher circle in Tokyo. He was offered a tutorial position at the German Doitsugaku Kyōkai Gakkō School endorsed by the imperial Prince Arisugawa (1835-1895) and co-funded by Aoki. Spinner's involvement in the community was characterised by a proactive approach to the Japanese population, which was limited to the upper classes for ‘business’ purposes, but much more open in private life. For the mission, he nev-

ertheless specified the “German-educated Japanese” to be his most desirable objects (Spinner and Hamer 1997a, 6).

The intra-German relationship in Japan, especially the professional one between the officials and the mission, was marked by confessional and cultural rivalry between Prussia and Weimar. Having succeeded in gaining permission to live in a Japanese quarter, he set course to establish a German-speaking congregation. Admittedly, the Prussian envoys in Tokyo did not make it easy for him, because despite Bismarck's blessing, confessional distrust hindered cooperation. This firstly underlines the close connection between denomination (Prussia was mostly orthodox) and geographical affiliation, and secondly the closeness between Western territorial claim and the mission on site. The liberal theology he embodied for the other German-speaking expatriates led to the same conflicts that prevailed at home.

Spinner began to gather first-hand experience and testimonies of Japanese temples and shrines, religious rites, and festivals early on. The observations also extended to economic and social aspects of life. This de facto autonomous study of religions, rites and social constructs bears witness to his self-understanding as a comparativist of religion and culture, as much as a missionary. It resulted in a well-structured, but ultimately unpublished collection of Japanese sacral images on the one hand. On the other hand, his activity as a comparative scholar can be gauged by his participation in numerous conferences and publications of the two major scientific societies that had recently been founded in Tokyo: the Asia Society and the German East Asiatic Society. He quickly became integral to both, taking part in organisational matters and contributing his own research. The sum of both activities connected him to Western and Japanese intellectuals of the progressive group, as well as young students of the former *bushi* class aspiring to governmental, bureaucratic, and other top positions. The contributions, mostly of a Shintoist nature, signal his participation in the prevailing paradigm or scientific code of conduct triggered by German Romantic Orientalism with its focus on 1) the East, 2) the study of culture as a search for identity, and 3) the focus on antiquity. The intensity of the work that went into the academic work, i.e., comparative religion and cultural studies, and the level of results that were achieved, was remarkable despite the relative unfamiliarity of Spinner's publications in this field. In the process, he interacted with eminent scholars of Japanese studies such as B.H. Chamberlain (1850 – 1935), the translator of *Kojiki* Karl Florenz (1865–1939), or the collector and medical doctor Erwin Baelz (1849–1913).

4 The Japanese Protestants and the Influence of the AEPM

Spinner also pioneered a Protestant “salon” where he regularly taught theology with regard to the undogmatic analysis of the bible, discussing religious and political matters with active politicians and aristocracy. These salons posed key occasions where he encountered the luminaries, who were or would go on to grace the halls of political history, such as Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), Inoue Kaoru (1836–1915), Katsura Tarō (1848–1913), Miyoshi Taizō (1845–1908), Wadagaki Kenzō (1860–1919), and Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838–1922). Among the Japanese bourgeoisie, he frequented academics, senior officials – most of whom had studied abroad, medical doctors associated with eminent clinics, lawyers, and active Protestant intellectuals and theologians. Kozaki Hiromichi (1856–1938) is perhaps the most eminent of Protestant scholars in Spinner’s vicinity, considering his scope of influence. Initially, he entered Spinner’s life as the translator for the theological “salon” lectures and remained a close colleague. When Kozaki later delivered his speech at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in his capacity as director of the Dōshisha University, its content remarkably mirrored Spinner’s words. Kozaki “already [had] done away with some Christian doctrines ...” (Kozaki 1893, 1013–1014) and stirred controversy by his belief that “the missionaries must either cooperate with us or join native churches and take their place side by side with native workers” (Kozaki 1893, 1014). He was literally torn apart by Haworth (Barrows 1893, 1098) who defended the significance and authority of the Western missionary a few days later, yet, Kozaki was merely repeating Spinner’s own mantra that the goal of the missionary “should be to become superfluous” (Spinner 1892, 70).

Kanamori Michitomo (1857 – 1945), Ukita Kazutami (1860 – 1946), and Morita Kumando (1858 – 1899) were other leading figures at the Dōshisha University in Kyoto, with whom Spinner interacted frequently. Ebina Danjō (1856–1937) also deserves mentioning as one of the most independent Japanese leaders whose vision of a Christian Japan was indeed remarkably close to the contextual strategy propagated by the AEPM. He held sermons in Spinner’s congregation, and on a few occasions taught at their theological academy. Spinner had exerted a verifiable influence on these like-minded Protestants. Two accounts may testify to this in addition to Kozaki’s speech. First, the “locally” (Japanese) trained and ordained pastor of the AEPM, Minami Hajime (1865–1940), pioneered the discourse on Schleiermacher in Japan (Fukai 2014). Secondly, Ebina “evoke[d] ... the giants of German thought he particularly admired, such as Johann Fichte, Gotthold Lessing, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and especially Friedrich Schleiermacher [in his sermons]” (Anderson 2014, 69).

5 The Discourse on Educational Reform

Within the course of his mission in Japan, Spinner worked several times with the authorities, conducted research at local institutions such as schools, universities, and hospitals, and inspected infrastructures such as factories and a crematory. While he was invited to schools, e.g., in Kyoto, to give lectures on education, he himself began contemplating the feasibility of a theological academy for the liberal Protestants. Aoki contributed and worked with Spinner for this cause, raising funds and awareness amongst the elite. Spinner considered the Dōshisha University in Kyoto as a model for a Christian higher education institution that he wanted to implement in Tokyo. His interests as well as his popularity as an expert on education is unsurprising, considering the relatively recent success of educational reforms in Prussia through Humboldt. Furthermore, the notion of *Bildung*, which was a cornerstone of this reform, formed the core ideology of the Liberal Protestants. It is feasible that Viscount Aoki had taken interest in the reformatory concepts that had carried Prussia into a new stage of self-formation as a unified German Empire (leading the not so convinced former duchies), which motivated him to invite a mission with the closest ideology. The cooperation and close partnership between the two men is unambiguous evidence of this and the visit of the AEPM to Japan, perhaps even the choice of Spinners as a fully educated theologian and philosopher, must be considered a Japanese agenda. Their encounter in Tokyo was no coincidence.

It is thus understandable that an educational publication is so far Spinner's most widely read contribution. It is included in the volume *Gakumon to chishiki-jin (Science and Intellectuals)* within the *Compendium of Japanese Intellectual History from the Early Modern to the Modern Period*, which ranks highly for the history of philosophy (Katō, Matsumoto, and Yamamuro 1996). Entitled *Gakujutsu to shūkyō (Science and Religion)*, the chapter sums up Liberal Protestant theology by presenting a harmonious combination of science and religion as the ideal state of man. It was originally published by Spinner in a Protestant periodical in Japanese (possibly translated by Minami Hajime). "In order to prove why science and religion are interrelated," Spinner "first look[s] at the various faculties of the human spirit" (Spinner 1996, 287). He consistently advocates the necessity of progressiveness, of scientific thinking for a healthy state of religion. "If religion does not include science (*gakujutsu*) and lacks the virtue of thought (*shikō*), it will become disruptive, superstition and blind persistence will prevail, and it will eventually become corrupt" (Spinner 1996, 288). However, since "science within religion is named theology and forms the basis of philosophy," the basis of human behaviour is necessarily dictated by religion. Science is promoted as a balancing element in the hegemony of religion. Ultimately, the intention of the chapter overlaps completely with the Protestant concept of the Liberals: "alongside clear thoughts, there must also be a warm and gentle sense,

a virtuous and sincere will. The development of thought must be accompanied by the progress of the senses and the will. That is to say, religion must always accompany science" (Spinner 1996, 289).

The chapter comprehensively highlights the temporal presence and the urgency of progress that Protestantism entails, with a particular emphasis on the theology of the Liberals that enables a Christian, "religious" progress in the companionship of science. It delivers the ideal of a reform plan that affirms scientific progress while insisting on a civil ethic based on codes that allow for broad possibility of interpretation and adaptation: *Bildung*. The effect of the concept more or less persists outside of Christianity. The very element that allows for an increasingly secular interpretation of education in historiography today also allows for a complete re-insertion into a foreign cultural context, for such virtues are de facto never the privilege of a single culture.

The reasons why these views, despite coming from a Christian theologian and philosopher (note that for him, philosophy derives from theology), enthused the Japanese oligarchy, lies in the applicability of the ethical concepts into a Japanese context, for instance Shinto.

The ethics applied may be fundamentally religious but would appear secularised. The proposed path avoids conflicts around religion, but still regulates a strong public code, which in addition has a nationalist impulse. The application of it was also already tested in the field, apparently with great success, as far as could be verified in the 1880s. The German-speaking realm with its plural states grew rapidly in strength despite the trauma of the Napoleonic invasion, and it proved to be an advantage that they were not too involved in the colonial race at this time (from the Japanese point of view).

Another advantage of the ethics offered by liberal Protestants is that it aids the marginalisation of superstition against religion along the line of visual symbols. Given that Aoki and his fellow oligarchs were contesting the salvific efficacy not only of Buddhism but also of all other forms of religions merged with it (Shugendō mountain asceticism, Daoism, geomancy, communal religious associations, etc.), it was logical for them to draw the line at the use of visual icons and symbols. In this context, Spinner positioned himself against rituals, visual symbols, and a dogmatic understanding of the superhuman in general, in accordance with the theology of his mission. He accommodated keywords of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* within the superordinate term of *Vernunftsreligion* (religion of reason). However, Spinner's writings displayed some ambiguities between the secular and the religious (Chidester 2014, 14), making a truly clear demarcation difficult for the analysis of religion as a concept. At best, it seems to be a fluid distinction.

6 The Marginalisation of Buddhism in Edo Japan

The expulsion of Buddhism from the ritual space of Japan (Antoni 1995, 139), as well as the strategic restriction of its institutional power reached its zenith when the decree of *shinbutsu hanzen rei*, the “determination (of difference) between *kami* and Buddha,” was issued by the Meiji authorities in March 1868. The decree unleashed a wave of destruction described by the term *haibutsu kishaku*, the discarding of Buddhism and the destruction of Shakyamuni, against the visual presence of Buddhism in public spaces. The scale was unprecedented, as far as the written sources allow an assessment, even compared to the eradication of many Buddhist sacred sites from individual feudal territories in the Edo period. Buddhism de facto met with little favour from other thinkers after the government introduced the *Danka* system in the 17th century, which used temple communities for political oversight, giving Buddhists a powerful yet questionable standing. Incidents and waves of eradication of the visible presence of certain groups were indeed not uncommon in Japanese history, markedly within Buddhism, such as the persecution of certain groups of *nenbutsu* practitioners, or individual sects within the Nichiren school, which lasted for three centuries (Hisaki 1971, 134-146). Conflicts arose with a growing awareness of Shinto as a public religious entity on par with Buddhism, whilst criticism on Buddhism was also a part of Confucian output, with the polemics mainly aimed against the paradigm of confluent worship. The *kokugaku* scholars, literally the school of national learning, whose development mirrored parallels to German Romanticism, ultimately became the torch bearers of the Meiji Restoration and its ideology. More precisely, their path to reconnect to the ancient “origins” in order to formulate an identity free of foreign influences, bore similar traits to the German-speaking realm. The development of the *kokugaku* under the leadership of notable scholars such as Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769), Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) and Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) eventually produced theories that, not only were Buddhism and Confucianism un-Japanese, but “the real reason for the decline of Japan” (Antoni 1998, 136). Especially works by Norinaga like the *Naobi no Mitama* (Motor 1825) were attempts at imagining an authentic Japanese culture. The decline of their culture was perceived on both sides of the continent as an inability to defend the country, the consequence of which was submission to foreign influence. However, just as the Napoleonic threat sparked the imagination of an authentic culture in Prussian and other German regions, the *kokugaku* movement had gained momentum under the growing threat of Western presence in Asia around the early 19th century.

The purging of Buddhism along the divide of visual representations was especially successful and had been campaigned for a longer time. An unambiguous source for this marginalisation of Buddhism already in the early 19th century is the volume by Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866): *Nippon* (Siebold 1862). It il-

illustrates how the teachings of Buddha got “lost [in the] picture halls ... calculated for the sensuous” (Siebold 1832, 38). The phrase links Buddhism to the ‘threat of sensuality’ that the ‘female Orient’ posed for rationalist German men (Germana 2017, 33), steeped in Kantian and Hegelian thought. “According to Japanese scholars,” Siebold writes, “the dogmas and the cult of Buddhism as it exists in Japan can be divided into two classes, the higher and the lower. The latter makes up the popular religion and expresses itself in a sensual cult, in idol worship ...” (Siebold 1832, 36). Since he admits to being “indebted to the communications of several Japanese scholars for some clarification on this matter” (Siebold 1832, 36) the Japanese domestic view must be considered as a relatively autonomous drive in providing this divide.

7 The Influence of Liberal Protestantism on Buddhist Reformists

In the late 19th century, Prominent Buddhist leaders such as Nanjō Bunyū (1849–1927), Inoue Enryō (1858–1919), and Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911), to name a few, responded by transforming their schools both structurally and doctrinally. Bunyū was the first, and most renowned, overseas student to engage with the rising discipline of comparative religion directly under the tutelage of Max Müller. He even arrived in Oxford far earlier than Spinner and his later publications were widely read also amongst German Protestant (Schmiedel 1889). Inoue sought to establish the sustainability of Buddhism through comparisons with German philosophy and a cleansing of its teachings from “superstition.” With his anti-government petition, Mokurai paradoxically had a profound influence on the shaping of the imperial state and its position towards the concept of “Shinto,” by advocating the separation of state and religion (Krämer 2017, 239). The philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō (1856–1944), albeit not a Buddhist cleric, should also be mentioned due to his connection to Inoue Enryō and his role in the development of a religiously influenced concept of education, represented in his *Commentary on the Imperial Rescript on Education* (*Chokugo engi*, 1895) (Antoni 1990, 104). Nationalism in Imperial Germany between 1884 and 1890 was formative for Inoue and accelerated his interpretation of the *Imperial Rescript on Education* in the direction of religious veneration, which also places him in the realm of German (Prussian) influence (Shimazono 1998, 64). Despite his residence in Europe, Inoue was a lifelong opponent of Christianity. However, this did not hinder him from adopting *Sittlichkeit* and replacing Christianity with Shinto. In other words, Inoue’s experience cemented his and his fellow official’s belief in the effectiveness of the Imperial German politics and public education to heighten the national feeling, with a fluid perception of where the secular ended, and veneration began.

Two Buddhist reformers are of special interest regarding the influence of German-realm Liberal Protestantism. One is Inoue Enryō, the other being Sakaino Kōyō (1871-1933). Both Enryō and Kōyō elaborated new strategies to pave a way for Buddhism out of the accusation of disseminating irrational and superstitious teachings. Both argue strongly in favour of a rational cleansing of Buddhist religiosity. But, whilst Enryō conducts research of common beliefs of the demonic and refutes them in light of modern science, Kōyō adopts the undogmatic reading of holy scripture to depart from a literal understanding, which he terms ‘poetic Buddhism’ (*shiteki bukkyō*) (Wu 2022). Enryō’s strategy superficially creates a clear division, which is however, as Josephson elaborates, not quite as simple as affirming scientific evidence and discarding all things that cannot be proven by it (Josephson 2006, 156). Rather, he limits himself to rationalising “shadows,” in terms of demonic or penalizing symbols of faith, in accordance with the teachings of European Enlightenment. This strategy aimed at educating the public to adopt ethics, not by the threat of superhuman wrath, but through reason. The primary concern to eliminate superstition and to disengage from a literal, dogmatic understanding of scripture and ritual (in the sense of faith) is common to both Buddhist reformers, in both cases a response to the new wave of demarcation of religion.

It is most interesting that in connection with Kōyō, Wu comes across the second missionary of the AEPM, Otto Schmiedel (1858-1926). She focuses on a public exchange of opinions between Kōyō and a reader of his publication on “poetic reading,” who recalls a lecture by Schmiedel on a similar concept called “poetic expression” within Liberal Theology. Kōyō agrees with this comparison, replying that he “cannot help but be grateful for this deep understanding” (Wu 2022, 135). Although Wu does not find direct evidence for the AEPM to have served as a blueprint for Kōyō’s strategy, such an influence is nevertheless possible and would place the AEPM in the proximity of Buddhist reformists, too. To gain a better understanding, I shall take a closer look at the content. The book by Schmiedel on the “poetic reading” of miracles, *Kiseki shōron*, was translated and published by Minami Hajime in 1891. Schmiedel begins his investigation by denying the reader the distinction between religion as a whole and the part of religion within the whole, namely miracles (Schmiedel 1891, 20), which is a rhetoric of mediation between miracle belief (superstition) and religion (rationality), rather than a frontal polemic against the former. He follows up with rather complex assessments, listing theories of Protestant theology such as *Vermittlungstheologie* (Schmiedel 1891, 213; Dierken 2001, 373). However, the theology of *Vernunft* (reason) remains the highest standard in the trajectory of religious development. The fact that Schmiedel takes up a long series of examples of religions, cultures and regions points to comparative religion as a fundamental compass. With this equation, any reader was naturally inclined to adopt the most effective and progressive strategy towards “belief in miracles,” which

was nevertheless a rationalisation with a conciliatory note. But it is indeed feasible for Buddhist reformers to gain insight into rationalisation through a volume rich in theological content such as this, moreover available in Japanese.

8 The Superstition Debate as Image Conflict and Prognosis of Social Conflict

In textual analysis, superstition was understood as phenomena and effects on life that could not be explained scientifically, or an action that even thwarted a desired outcome (praying instead of taking medicine). The reforms of the Buddhist schools attempting to cooperate with governmental intentions, ultimately launched a new understanding of Buddhism that systematically subjected the lower classes (poor and uneducated) or the naïve (children, women, elderly) to re-education through official governmental campaigns.

In practice, these beliefs were always linked to actions, such as rituals. Hardly without exception, they involved a material component. As the most visible part of the category of superstition, the material component generally involved the purchase of apotropaic objects, offerings, necessity for certain food, adornments, or the like. They belong to the fundamental actions of common life. The social differentiation between the educated, the rational and progressive, and the uneducated, the superstitious, to whom religiosity had to be conveyed through images and rituals, inevitably led to a contempt of the way of life of the lower classes. These were classifications that grew from the same soil as 'secularised' ethics, whose vocabulary already oscillated between theological and social discourses. The division along this use of images surfaces in texts on comparative religion, for example by Max Müller (1874, 56; 1897, 7). He famously made the distinction between a worthy religion and the "vulgars and non-descript crowd of bookless or illiterate religions" (Müller 1897, 7; 1897, 52-53) by the evidence of, well, books, as opposed to pictures. Neither did Siebold's quite educated, and scientifically versed rhetoric eradicate his dislike against the worship of images, in which "sensuous" is a key term already hinting at its antonym: educated – *gebildet*.

9 Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, Japan's nationalist narrative encountered a concept similar to the one it had long nurtured itself through its discovery of the Liberal Protestant worldview. While the concepts of legitimisation for the Meiji government were strongly influenced by Edo period nationalist ideologies, there was room for the consolidation of the status of the ruling class by aid of Protes-

tantism. The need to accelerate technological progress is certainly one element of this equation to protect against invasive powers. But the notion of progress came after the notion of a nation-building ideology. The concept of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit* had made Protestant values available for the progressive mind, at least in the German-speaking realm. In addition, the constructed moral superiority of the educated man (*Gebildete*) was of decisive advantage for the marginalisation of all classes below the *bushi* in accordance with the old caste system (or rather a mirror image of the old status in a new system). Therein lies the seed for the concept of *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western knowledge), the combination of the Japanese spirit with Western science propagated by *kokugaku* fractions. Regarding the time of mid-Meiji, there was an element of Western spirit present in the *wakon*. Yet the idea that was fused to *Bildung* was expressed through comparative religion in the age of imperialism. As in the case of Mendelssohn, the concept remained discriminatory. The component of comparative religion in the luggage of the AEPM accelerated the marginalisation of Buddhism and all forms of worship related to icons. However, the fact that this science was applied in Europe as well as in the periphery and led to social Imperialism (Chidester 1996, 4) is less often addressed in discourses on decolonisation.

An inherent desire for political and social consolidation of the German Protestants decided for the Japanese side their preference over Russian Orthodoxy. This is rooted in the Liberal Protestant fabric to reject social instability. Their class consciousness is poignantly described by Hübinger in his volume on the German Liberal Protestants: “They always aimed at reform in the state, not emancipation from the state” (Hübinger 1994, 8). Fittingly, Spinner promotes the authority of the Meiji oligarchy in every way, specifically emphasising his support in upholding “the Mikado idea,” the monarchy centred around the Tennō. Regardless of the Western domination imposed on Japan at this time, the Japanese clearly made their own decisions and strategically implemented them as it suited their needs. They moved at a high political level to implement the close observation of global politics to their advantage. They saw the opportunity of the Protestant liberal ideology with its concepts of ethics and education, which they separated from their connection to the Christian faith. Spinner and his colleagues were exemplary refiners of political systems who did not envisage an overturning of social structures, but offered a progressive, competitive formula that could bring Japan on par with the Western empires. The skilful strategy the AEPM had prepared was only one side of a game with two very astute protagonists.

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Between Awakening and Enlightenment

The first modern Asian Buddhist and the first Buddhist Englishman

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ABSTRACT | The last form of Buddhism surviving on the Indian subcontinent was revealed to the West for the first time through a collaboration between Paṇḍita Amṛtānanda (1774–1835), a Newar Buddhist native of the Kathmandu Valley, and Brian Houghton Hodgson (1801–1894), the East India Company's envoy in Kathmandu. The groundbreaking account of Buddhism that Hodgson published, with Amṛtānanda's guidance, drew on traditional learning and texts preserved only in the Himalayas. However, it also included formulations of doctrine that were fundamentally new. Both hoped, for different reasons, that Buddhism might engage the hearts and minds of the nascent West. Nonetheless, Hodgson's work was soon put aside by textualists more interested in classical sources, and Amṛtānanda's innovative writings have remained overlooked in studies of Buddhism and modernity. This article reassesses the first attempt to bring the ancient religiosity of awakening into the rational discourse of the Enlightenment.

KEYWORDS | Modernity; Colonial; Tradition; Buddhism; Sanskrit; Nepal; Nineteenth Century

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1 Introduction: British India, Modernity and Buddhism¹

Just as the Enlightenment in Europe was kindled in part by discoveries of other peoples and ways of thinking, the sheer extent of the differences that Europeans encountered in South Asia fueled the modern study of religion. Buddhism, unfamiliar to Westerners in the early colonial era, was especially mysterious because it had disappeared as a living presence from India, the land of its birth, while remaining widespread elsewhere. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, fundamental questions about whether Buddhism was theistic or atheistic, and whether it was or was not part of Hinduism, had not been answered (Almond 1989, 15, 97). Such questions had socioreligious dimensions and implications for the governance of the colonies in the “Indies.”

In 1828, brilliant new light was shed on the situation of Buddhism with the publication of Brian Houghton Hodgson’s “Notices of the Languages, Literature, and Religion of the Bauddhas of Nepal and Bhot.” For the first time in modern discourse, the religion of the Buddha was described with reference to the scriptural texts in Sanskrit that had been authoritative across South Asia, and with the aid of a pundit belonging to the associated Buddhist tradition. But the follow-up “Sketch of Buddhism,” centred on a dialogue between Hodgson and his Nepalese pundit Amṛtānanda, made claims that other scholars could not verify in their sources, and which led to their work being put aside in the fast-changing modern discourse on Buddhism. Hodgson and Amṛtānanda had in fact tried to articulate Buddhism in a new way, anchored in the scriptural tradition but reoriented towards modern audiences.

Amṛtānanda was the first Buddhist of the South Asian heartland to display modern tendencies in his writings, and Hodgson did his groundbreaking work on Buddhism both as a scholar guided by the emancipatory ideals of the Enlightenment and as an ardent private student of the religion. These extraordinary figures and their milieu, Kathmandu Valley in the early nineteenth century, have not, however, been noticed in previous surveys of modern Buddhism (e.g. McMahan 2008). A few words on how modernity is construed in relation to Buddhism are then in order. This article makes use of manuscript sources that expand what is known about these incipient Buddhist moderns, although there is no scope here to examine every facet of their collaboration.

The beginning of the modern era is often associated with the second or third decades of the nineteenth century, or the start of the Industrial Revolution (Robertson 2020, 302–305). But since there is no consensus on where or when ex-

¹ This is a rewritten version of a previously unpublished paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Nepal Mandala in Kathmandu. It was revised in part during the author’s fellowship at the Humanistic Buddhism Centre of Nan Tien Institute in 2022. The present paper makes use of manuscript scans provided by the British Library, and has benefited from perceptive comments on previous drafts by the late Hubert Decler and an anonymous reviewer.

actly modernity begins, or on what in particular separates it as an intellectual movement from the humanism of the Enlightenment, it is useful to understand modernity in a more general way. Modernity is not simply originality or newness; it is a thought process in search of betterment, aware of how and why innovation is sought. The Habermasian abstraction of modernity as an attitude of deliberate distancing from the past is compatible with Buddhist subjectivity, notwithstanding the fact that Habermas' theory gives little attention to non-Western historical contexts. In the incidents of encounter, discovery and reinterpretation that are discussed in what follows, a "consciousness of a new epoch [that] formed itself through a renewed relationship to the ancients" (Habermas 1981, 3) indeed begins to emerge.

2 Amṛtānanda, Hodgson and Early Nineteenth-Century Nepal

The new directions taken by Paṇḍita Amṛtānanda come out of his position as the first Buddhist on the Indian subcontinent to explain his religion to a Westerner. An innovative, well-connected thinker and a prolific writer, Amṛtānanda has nonetheless received little attention outside a couple of short studies in Newar and English (Śākya 2002; Joshi 2004). Amṛtānanda was born into a Buddhist family of the Mahābuddha branch of Rudravarṇamahāvihāra in Lalitpur, Nepal, which was renowned for its tradition of learning and punditry (Śākya 2002, 56, 66–67). Unlike the modern-minded Buddhist Newars who lived under harsher social conditions in later generations, he was not a reformer, revivalist or an activist, but a traditional literatus drawn into the colonial knowledge-creation enterprise, which had just reached into Nepal at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Amṛtānanda's knowledge of Sanskrit, long the *lingua franca* of Buddhism in the South Asian heartland, was outstanding for his place and time. He rewrote a Sanskrit treatise on prosody to suit Buddhist tastes (Mitra 1989, 86), composed a rudimentary grammar of the Sanskrit and Newar languages (Joshi 2004, 42), and wrote several original works in Sanskrit, most of them relating to Buddhism (Śākya 2002, 104). In general, he acted as a confident custodian of the Sanskrit Buddhist literary legacy, as has been noticed, for instance, in the way that he copied and extended Aśvaghōṣa's famous epic poem, the *Buddhacarita* (Johnston 1935, viii; Mitra 1989, 145). These literary talents eventually led Amṛtānanda into the clerical service of the British Residency in Kathmandu, while also putting him in a commanding position to do something new with the Sanskrit Buddhist legacy.

Brian Houghton Hodgson's intellectual orientation led him to study areas that were at the frontier of Anglo-European experience in the early nineteenth century. A descendant of a formerly well-to-do Derbyshire family, he trained for a career in the East India Company, and in 1821 was posted to Nepal (Waterhouse

2004, 1–3). Hodgson's scholarly training had emphasised the paradigm of political economy. As a teenage student at the East India College, he was taught by Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834), one of the foremost political economists. Hodgson's association with this towering figure of Enlightenment thought has been credited with inspiring his “comprehensive study of the institutions and constitutional problems of Nepal” (Hunter 1896, 23; Waterhouse 2004, 3). In a report for the College printed during Hodgson's student days, Malthus reaffirmed that future Company employees had to be educated to (Malthus 1817, 6, 10):

dispense justice to millions of people of various languages, manners, usages, and religions; to administer a vast and complicated system of revenue ... Their duties are those of statesmen.

Most of Nepal was *terra incognita* to the British at the time and Hodgson soon embarked on the study of everything in Nepal that might interest the Company and the scholarly community in Britain and Europe. In 1833 he was promoted to Resident, a powerful position comparable to that of ambassador, which he held until his dismissal in 1842 — the end of his stay in Kathmandu and his diplomatic career (Hunter 1896, 125, 216).

The expansion of Company rule, together with the growing demands on its administrators and the wider maturation of scientific discourse, helps to explain why Hodgson studied Nepal in such a variety of ways, working on subjects that now belong to unrelated and specialized fields: geography, economics, law, linguistics, ornithology, zoology and so on. Hodgson's efforts to share his discoveries on the last bastion of Buddhism on the Indian subcontinent were motivated by the fact that Buddhism still puzzled Western cognoscenti. Nonetheless, the study of Buddhism stands out as an anomaly in his otherwise entirely materialist and science-oriented research efforts. The subjectively experienced religion of awakening had no place in the objectivism of the Enlightenment or in the business of modern, non-theological rule.

Hodgson presented his work as a self-conscious modernist, claiming to have lived by an adage of Francis Bacon: “they that reverence too much old times are but a scorn to the new” (Bacon 1801, 114; Hunter 1896, 23). The title of his first collection of essays, *Illustrations of the literature and religion of the Buddhists*, published in 1841 and reprinted in 1874, evokes the ethos of Enlightenment on at least a literal level. His trailblazing studies of Buddhism aimed to introduce a “new subject” to “enlightened Europeans” (Hodgson 1836, 29; 1841, 94; 1874, 65). However, Hodgson was not a classicist at home in the European academies, as were his correspondents Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852) and the Hungarian Tibetologist Alexander Csoma de Kőrös (1784–1842). Hodgson's preference was to study Buddhism in the field, where he could receive first-hand commentary from the local experts. In this he was assisted above all by his “old friend” Amṛtānanda —

“chiefly through his kindness, and his influence with his brethren in the *Bauddha* faith” (Hodgson 1830, 222; 1841, 30; 1874, 35).

Hodgson’s frequent remarks about his camaraderie with his “old *Bauddha* friend” demonstrate that the first substantial encounters between Buddhists and modern Westerners were not bound to be inherently difficult. With respectful curiosity on both sides, there did not need to be a prejudicial clash of civilizations like the “vain debates” ignited by missionary activity in Sri Lanka from the 1830s onwards (Young and Somaratna 1996). Nor did Western engagements with Buddhism have to remain the province of romantics, exemplified in the case of theosophist Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), the American who whimsically adopted Buddhism in Sri Lanka in 1880. Amṛtānanda’s and Hodgson’s partnership in documenting and rearticulating Buddhism for Western minds preceded and laid the ground for these better known developments.

3 Amṛtānanda’s Writings: On the Cusp of Modernity

Few Europeans had visited the Kathmandu Valley before the early nineteenth century, and the Buddhist community there had given no attention to their presence in South Asia up to that point. The novel elements in Amṛtānanda’s writings are no doubt due to his extraordinary personal contacts with the British. Yet it is neither Westernness per se, nor the colonial period itself, that most differentiates Amṛtānanda’s work from that of his predecessors. Nor is his body of work distinguished by its occasional focus on non-religious topics such as prosody, lexicography and so on; Buddhists long before him had also shown interest in such topics. Instead, like the Nepalese artists Hodgson employed to portray local wildlife in a naturalistic manner for the purposes of scientific illustration (Waterhouse 2005, 7), Amṛtānanda is distinguished from his predecessors by his adjustment to a new way of seeing the world, empirical and agnostic, and different from, yet still grounded in, what had come before. It is this conscious distance from inherited habits and preconceptions, unparalleled among his Buddhist contemporaries, that constitutes the main measure of modernity in his work.

The writings produced by Amṛtānanda for Hodgson show a shift in the pundit’s mode of expression — from the prescriptive towards the descriptive, from depicting things as they ought to be to things as they are. Several examples are found in a miscellany compiled by Amṛtānanda in 1826, the *Dharmakośasaṃgraha*. Here the shrines on the sacred hill of Swayambhu are described factually and prosaically (Mukundarāja 2002, 74), in contrast to the mythopoetic descriptions of the premodern *Svayambhūpurāṇas*. His short biography of the Buddha, likewise, condenses florid classical narratives — often drawn from the ancient

Lalitavistara — into a dense abstract for modern consumption. The achievement of awakening is described in traditional yet minimally embellished terms:

The monk Sarvārthasiddha, having reached the bower of awakening, was diamond-seated at the Bodhi Tree as a result of breathing meditation, [having] undertaken six years of hard practice. Then, having become the defeater of Māra, attaining awakening, he became awakened with the name of Śākyasiṃha the Great Buddha, the Bhagavān possessing the six superknowledges and a splendid body with the thirty-two marks and eighty minor marks. Then, in the Deer Forest of Benares, sat on his fourth seat, surrounded by many monks, having put in front Brahmin, bodhisattva and wheel of dharma, he was doing the Dharmacakra Sermon.²

What marks the *Dharmakośasaṃgraha* as the product of a new era is its status as a commission for a non-Asian “sahib” of the colonial period, which brings it partly within the cultural and chronological ambit of European modernity.³ Innovative stylistic features in the *Dharmakośasaṃgraha* and other works commissioned for Hodgson show that it was written for a new kind of audience. Amṛtānanda often incorporates loanwords from Newar and Tibetan into his Sanskrit prose in a transparent way, flagging them with phrases such as “thus in the vernacular ...” (*iti bhāṣāyā*). For instance, the phrase “image of his Holiness Śākyasiṃha” is furnished with the glosses “*shā kya thub pa* in the Tibetan vernacular” and “*kvācapāla deva* in the Nepalese vernacular.”⁴ These glosses are not linguistically exact — the Tibetan term usually translates the name Śākya-muni, and the Newar term is a generic name for the principal image housed in a monastery — but they enrich the text semantically and add to its usefulness. The overt presence of Sino-Tibetan words in a Sanskrit Buddhist work is another sign of a changed epoch in which the centre of the living Buddhist religion has shifted out of the Indian heartland.

While many more examples of newness in his work for Hodgson could be given here, on the whole, Amṛtānanda’s other writings are conventional in their style and subject matter and could not be seen as the work of an author yearning to break away from tradition. The slight modern tendencies that are seen in

2 *bodhimaṇḍapam anuprāpya bodhivṛkṣe vajrāsana āsphānakadhyānataḥ śa varṣāṇi duṣkaram cakāra* [read: *cacāra*] *sarvārthasiddho bhikṣuḥ* | *tato mārjīd bhūtvā bodhim āśāya buddho babhūva śākyasiṃhanāmā mahābuddhaḥ śa abhijñāḥ dvātriṃśallakṣaṇāśītyanuvyañjanavirājitaḥ bhagavān* [||] *tataḥ kāśyām mṛgadāve caturthāsanaṣṭho bahubhir bhikṣubhiḥ parivṛto dharmacakraṃ bodhim sattvaṃ* [read: *bodhisattvaṃ*] *brahmāṇaṃ ca puraskṛtya dharmacakravayākhyānam akarot* | (*Dharmakośasaṃgraha*, ed. Mukundarāja 2002, 49–50). Author’s translation.

3 *śrīsāhebājñāyā lekhaḥ* (read: *likhaḥ*) *amṛtaḥ śākyasānaḥ* (*Dharmakośasaṃgraha*, ed. Mukundarāja 2002, 202): “Amṛta the Śākyan religious writes at the command of His Grace (śrī-) the Sahib [Hodgson].” Author’s translation.

4 *tatra prathamatarāṃ śrīśākyasiṃhabimbaṃ* | *kāmbojadeśīyabhāṣāyā śākya thūmbā iti* | [*nepāla-bhāṣa-yā*] *kvācapāla deva iti* (*Dharmakośasaṃgraha*, ed. Mukundarāja 2002, 208–209, sic). Author’s translation.

Amṛtānanda rather reflect his exposure to colonial administrative methods and their expectations of pertinent, verifiable and actionable information.

3.1 Amṛtānanda and Knox, the First Briton to Accept Buddhism

Amṛtānanda's unprecedented role in disseminating Buddhism to the British had started well before his dealings with Brian Houghton Hodgson. The way in which he sought to win the hearts and minds of East India Company officials over several decades is very unusual in his milieu and points to political as well as religious motivations. Over fifteen years before meeting Hodgson, Amṛtānanda had been in contact with Captain William Douglas Hunter Knox (1763–1829), who headed the East India Company's second embassy to Nepal.⁵ Knox arrived in Nepal in 1801, in the aftermath of the 1792 Sino-Nepalese war, which briefly brought Qing dynasty troops to the edge of the Kathmandu Valley, seen at the time as close to the northern frontier of British India (Kirkpatrick 1811, vi–viii). The Company's embassy sought to cooperate with the Hindu Gorkhali kings who had replaced Hindu-Buddhist Newar rule in Nepal, but it also represented a potential challenge to these kings. In a history of Nepal later written by one of Amṛtānanda's relatives, Guṇānanda, these years are remembered for their bad omens, disasters, violent court intrigues and sacreligious acts by Gorkhali despots (Wright 1874, 262–263). In this atmosphere, it would be understandable if well-connected Buddhist Newars had seen the East India Company as the regional power least threatening to their interests.

Toward the end of Knox's short stay in Kathmandu, Amṛtānanda presented him with an illuminated manuscript of the *Lalitavistara* copied in his own hand. The gift of the *Lalitavistara* marks a historic moment: the first known transmission of the dharma — Buddhist teaching in the Sanskrit language — to a Westerner. The manuscript itself is now preserved in the British Library (MS Thomas 1935, 1420–1421, No. 7800). Amṛtānanda's gift represents a traditional transaction of “givable religion” (*deyadharmā*), but what is novel is not just that the recipient of the gift was a person from outside the Eastern Hemisphere, but also that the relevant points of protocol were updated to reflect this fact.

The colophon of the gifted *Lalitavistara* lauds Knox with Persian titles and in Sanskrit as one “whose liberality surpassed the Hindu divinities and proved him to be an *Avatāra* of Buddha” (Thomas 1935, 1421). Here Amṛtānanda could have been alluding to the fact that Captain Knox was previously stationed in the Bodhgaya district, the place where the Buddha attained awakening. There Knox engaged with local literati by starting a Persian–Hindi translation contest (Blumhardt 1899, 50). This episode shows that Knox was interested in cultures other than his own, and that he may have been able to communicate directly with Amṛtānanda, who was Persian-literate, about the fact that he had resided at

⁵ For Knox's dates see n. a. (1870, 350), and on the second embassy and its wider historical contexts, see Sanwal (1965, 84–114).

Bodhgaya. As is well known, Amṛtānanda felt a connection with Bodhgaya — he lived in a compound containing a unique miniature replica of the Bodhgaya shrine — and later went on pilgrimage there (Hodgson 1841, 204–205; 1874, 135; Śākya 2002, 74). He seems to have become well acquainted with Knox because he finished copying the *Lalitavistara* at a critical time in Knox's stay. The manuscript's date of completion — February 27th, 1803 — was just two weeks before an ultimatum from the Company to the Nepalese government was due to expire.⁶ When it went unanswered, Knox closed the embassy in Kathmandu and left for good (Sanwal 1956, 111–112), taking the manuscript with him.

The *Lalitavistara* manuscript was also endowed with innovative iconography that incorporates the first portrayal of an Anglo-European as a recipient of Buddhist teaching. The manuscript cover depicts five figures in a horizontal tableau (Waterhouse 2004, plate 2). On the right, Captain Knox is portrayed sitting in a chair wearing military dress — a scarlet coatee and bearskin hat — and holding a prayer wheel. On the left, Amṛtānanda is depicted kneeling with hands clasped. Both men are turned towards three objects of worship in the middle: in the centre, the Swayambhū stupa of Kathmandu, identifiable as such by its shrines; the Arapacana form of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī on the left; and on the right, an inverted triangle (*dharmodayā*) standing for the secret goddess Guhyeśvarī. Pride of place is given to Buddhist tantra and the Kathmandu Valley faithscape, rather than to exoteric Buddhism and India. The manuscript's final folio similarly depicts Amṛtānanda handing over the manuscript to Knox, with Swayambhū again in the centre (Waterhouse 2004, plate 3).

Amṛtānanda's gift of the *Lalitavistara* visually and textually idealises the participation of the *sahib* in the Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley. If there was any hope that British colonialists might take up this tradition of Buddhism in the long term, or even intervene some day on the side of Buddhist Newars, it was a hope that would never be realised. Nonetheless, the manuscript itself and its striking iconography was not forgotten by its British custodians. Amṛtānanda's *Lalitavistara* manuscript generated two copies and a summary written by a Brahmin pundit (Thomas 1935, 1421). It was later displayed at the 1911 Festival of Empire and Imperial Exhibition in London's Crystal Palace, "chiefly noticeable as a fine modern example of the ancient Nepalese and Tibetan miniature illustration" (Hendley 1913, 89). This extraordinary manuscript has remained an obscure curio, even as it documents the first transfer of South Asian Buddhism by its sympathisers from the Eastern to the Western hemisphere.

3.2 Buddhas of Meditation, as Opposed to Buddhas of Flesh

In his dialogue with Hodgson, which started in 1824, Amṛtānanda coined two terms that soon became widely accepted in modern scholarly discourse. He dis-

6 The date of the manuscript is given as *naipālike 'bde guṇanetraratnair [3-2-9] yute ca śāke dvibhujādrīcīṃdaiḥ | ... nśrīnepālasamvat 924 śrīśāke 1724 śrīvikrama 1859 miti phālguṇavadi 6 roja 2 subham* (Thomas 1935, 1421).

tinguished the “thought buddha” who manifests in meditation from the “manish buddha” of flesh and blood – the *dhyānibuddha* and the *mānuṣibuddha*. The main referents of the term *dhyānibuddha* are the five gnostic Buddhas of the five directions, Vairocana et al, whereas the *mānuṣibuddhas* are the seven earthly Buddhas, up to the historical Śākyamuni, who are believed to have taught humankind in successive epochs. These two terms sharpened a distinction between subjective and objective manifestations of Buddhahood that was not so clear in the premodern religion. The historical Buddhas could also be objects of contemplation (*buddhānusr̥ti*), and any contention that the gnostic buddhas lack presence or reality would clash with traditional buddha-body theories.

Modern thought, by contrast, seeks to differentiate the apparitions of the inner world from living beings who existed in historical time. “Apt as Buddhism is to forget the distinction of divine and human nature” (Hodgson 1828, 422–423; 1841, 18; 1874, 12), Hodgson solicited detailed definitions of the two Buddha types from Amṛtānanda. In 1825 Hodgson asked the missionary William Carey (1761–1834) to translate these definitions. Carey obliged by sending back a full English translation, but expressed strong reservations about the value of the material and asked Hodgson to “not send me more to translate, as I must be forced to return it untranslated” (transcribed from MS Dhungel 2008, vol. 18, no. 7, fol. 112b). Hodgson’s publications do not mention his correspondence with Carey on this subject, and liberally use the terms *dhyānibuddha* and *mānuṣibuddha* in a show of confidence in Amṛtānanda’s teaching. It is worth giving the relevant part of Carey’s unpublished translation verbatim, as it stays close to Amṛtānanda’s text and retains the flavour of the period in which these subjects were being discussed in English for the first time:

5. *Of the Dhyani-booddha*. The word is compounded of Dhyani, and Booddha. He who thinks or meditates is Dhyani. What is thought of in the mind is Dhyana. Sacred meditation, or that by which a person is saved from the world is also Dhyana. A dhyani-booddha is a mental Booddha. He who is produced or made such, by the power of the thought of his own or another’s mind is a Dhyani-Booddha. The first five were Vairochana, Ukshobhya, Ratna-sambhava, Umitabha, and Umogha-siddha. There are also many Dhyans [*dhyānibuddhāḥ*] produced from the atmosphere, and some from the Lotus (perhaps Brahma) without a maternal womb, by their own will Oupapadookas, who traversing the circle of wisdom and acquiring the highest wisdom are Dhyani-Booddhas. The names of the first four have been already mentioned, many others viz. Samgeeta [*Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*] etc. past, pafsing, and who will pafs, are not mentioned through fear of prolixity.⁷

7 Transcribed from MS Dhungel (2008, vol. 18, no. 7, fols. 110b–111a). The corresponding Sanskrit text reads: *dhyānibuddha iti | tasyārthaḥ | dhyānī cāsau buddhaḥ dhyānibuddhaḥ | dhyānī nāma · dhyānāni vidyate yasya sa dhyānī · sa cāsau buddhaḥ | dhyānaṃ nāma dhyāyate bhāvayate manasā · samādhim*

6. *Of the Manooshi-Buddha.* This word is compounded of Manooshin, human, and Booddha. He who having lain in the womb is born from his own promises (made in a former life), performing the ten prescribed actions, having left the state of a householder becomes an ascetic, lives on alms, attending the tree of knowledge acquires wisdom is a Manooshi-Booddha. These are numerous, viz. Shravanka-yonisha, Prutyeka-yonisha, Muhayanika, etc. gone, pafsing, and will pafs, throughout the Satya, Treta, Dwapara, and Kali Yoogas.⁸

The distinction between “thought buddhas” and “mannish buddhas” helped to differentiate objects of praxis from the preachers of the scriptural tradition. The word *dhyānibuddha* was quickly adopted to designate a mode of the religion that was becoming familiar to Europeans through colonial exploration in the early nineteenth century. As the detritus of tantric Buddhism was uncovered at defunct sites such as Bodhgaya, Sanchi, Borobudur and so on, it was realised that these sites preserved the common iconography of the *dhyānibuddhas*, which was still part of the living tradition in Nepal but extinct in India (Hodgson 1841, 103, 207–211; 1874, 71, 133–135). The term took on a life of its own in the West, acquiring overt historical and geographical associations. In the emerging hypothetical distinction between “Northern” and “Southern” Buddhism, the figures of the *dhyānibuddhas* were associated with the “North,” even though Hodgson pointed out several times that these figures were also prevalent far to the South in Java (Hodgson 1841, 211; Yule and Hodgson 1873). Eventually the term *dhyānibuddha* was identified as a neologism originating in nineteenth-century Nepal (de la Vallée Poussin 1908, 94; Saunders 1962). However, the nomenclature devised by Amṛtānanda had already left a deep mark on modern scholarship, even in dictionaries and encyclopedias (Regamey 1959, 1343; Jobs 1962, 1062).

3.3 Four Schools of Thought on Cyclic Existence and the Natural World

The avant-garde centrepiece of Hodgson and Amṛtānanda’s ‘Sketch of Buddhism’ was an exposition of cosmogenetic theories. Four theories were discussed under

jagaduddharaṇādikaṃ aneneti dhyānaṃ tad vidyate yasmin sa dhyānī · sa eva buddhaḥ dhyānibuddhaḥ | iti padārthaḥ || sa dhyānibuddhaḥ mānasibuddhaḥ | svasyāny asya vā dhyānaprabhāvat svasmān manaso bhāvanata eva samutpanno yo buddhaḥ sa dhyānibuddhaḥ | iti bhāvārthaḥ || viśeṣārthaḥ tu | te ca vairocānādayaḥ pañca · ādyāḥ vairocānākṣobhyaratnasambhavaṃmitābhāmoghasiddhāḥ | atha ca bahavaḥ saṃti dhyānibuddhāḥ ye mātṛpitṛrahitāḥ · gaganataḥ samupajātāḥ katicana kamalataḥ samutpannā · mātṛgarbhaṃ vinā svecchataḥ saṃjanya aupapādukāḥ saṃtaḥ bodhicaryāṃ caraṃtaḥ samyaksaṃbodhim āśādy sambuddhāye te · dhyānibuddhāḥ | te ca ādyāḥ pañcabuddhāḥ prāg likhitāḥ | anye ca nāmasaṃgītyādayo bahavo dhyānibuddhā gatā gacchāṃti gamiṣyāṃti | vistarabhayān nāmāni na likhitāni (“Terminology of Buddhism,” transcribed from MS Keith 1935, 1397, no. 7727, fol. 104; see also Dhungel et al 2008, vol. 26, no. 16).

8 *mānuṣibuddha ity asyārthaḥ | mānuṣī cāso buddhaḥ mānuṣibuddhaḥ | manuṣye bhavaḥ mānuṣī · sa cāsau buddhaḥ mānuṣibuddhaḥ | iti padārthaḥ || mānuṣyaṃ garbhaṃ āśṛitya svasvapratijñāto jātaḥ manu · daśākarmāṇy ācaran gr̥hasthacaryāṃ ujritvā pravrajyāṃ upagato bhikṣur bhūtvā bodhivṛkṣam upāśino bodhim āśādy buddhaḥ iti mānuṣī buddhaḥ | iti bhāvārthaḥ || viśeṣārthaḥ tu | te ca mānuṣibuddhā bahavaḥ saṃti · śrāvakaṃpratyekamahāyānikāḥ · te ca paśyādāyāḥ śākyasiṃhāṃ tāḥ · mahāyānikā buddhāḥ · anye · śrāvakayānikāḥ pratyekayānikāḥ asaṃkhyeyā · mahāyānikā api asaṃkhyeyāḥ gatā gacchāṃti gamiṣyāṃti · satyatretādvāparakalīṣu ...* (“Terminology of Buddhism,” transcribed from MS Keith 1935, 1397, no. 7727, fol. 104).

the names Svābhāvika, Aiśvarika, Kārmika and Yātnika. Hodgson called them “four schools of Bauddha philosophy,” and discussed them in several articles (Hodgson 1828, 423; 1841, 19; 1874, 13). Amṛtānanda’s own terminology is more narrow and specific; he refers to a “genesis-account of the four kinds of cyclic existence” (*caturvidhasya saṃsārasya samudbhava-māhātmyam*; cf. Thomas 1935, 1395, Nos. 7719, 7720). Their exposition was an intellectual co-creation: “I conceived the idea of drawing up, with the aid of my old friend [Amṛtānanda] and his books, a sketch of the terminology and general disposition of the external parts of Buddhism” (Hodgson 1830, 223; 1841, 30; 1874, 36).

It is now known that the “Bauddha philosophy” presented by Hodgson in fact put forward a novel interpretive structure (Gellner 1989, 8). In spite of Hodgson’s transparency about how it was formulated, the actual extent of both its novelty and its fidelity to tradition has not yet been made clear. And unlike the new term *dhyanibuddha*, this “philosophy” did not straightforwardly correspond to anything then or since discovered about Buddhist philosophy. It was soon noticed in the pages of scholarly journals that “something had gone wrong” in this exposition (Lopez 2004, 58). The modern expression of Sanskrit Buddhist thought was going off the rails just as it was getting underway.

It will be shown here that the four views of cyclic existence, the “four schools,” are derived from the ninth canto of Aśvaghoṣa’s *Buddhacarita*, verses 60 to 67. The fact that these verses were important for Amṛtānanda was noticed long ago (Johnston 1936, 135 n. 61), but they have not previously been related to Hodgson’s “Bauddha schools.” With the identification of the *Buddhacarita* as the classical locus for the four categories, it is plain to see what these categories originally referred to, why they were regarded as relevant to modern minds, and how new meanings came to develop around them. The theories in question are conveyed by Aśvaghoṣa as a dialogue between the buddha-to-be Siddhārtha Gautama and one of his father’s ministers. In this dialogue Siddhārtha, who had just become a wandering ascetic in the hope of overcoming birth and death, is debated by the minister on the subject of rebirth in an effort to persuade him to return home. It is the ideology of the minister’s speech that Hodgson associates with the “Bauddha schools,” even though his speech represents pre-Buddhist worldviews rather than the teaching of an awakened mind (cf. Johnston 1936, 135 n. 62).

Under pressure to reveal the sources for his “Sketch of Buddhism,” Hodgson named the *Buddhacarita* as an authority in his 1835 follow-up article. His anxiety about setting the record straight on the four “Bauddha schools” shows in his “express invitation” to the Asiatic Society to reprint the entire 1835 article in order to correct a minor typesetting error (Hodgson 1836a, 28–29; 1836b). His revised presentation of the “schools” brought in other textual authorities — which were supplementary, and will not be discussed here — such that the *Buddhacarita* was obscured as the main inspiration for the “system.” Hodgson’s revised

translations of the verses in question (Hodgson 1835, 296–297; 1836a, 73–74; 1841, 107–108; 1874, 74) are free in places but prove that his confused treatment cannot be solely attributed to what he called “want of languages.” His translations of the pivotal verses, 9.61–63, can be compared with the following literal translations of the same verses, presented in the original order of the *Buddhacarita*:

11. That hands and feet, and belly and back, and head, in fine, organs of whatever kind, are found in the womb, the wise have attributed to *Swabhāva*; and the union of the soul or life (*A'tma*) with body, is also *Swābhāva*. (*Buddha Charitra Kāvya*.)⁹

When, conceived in the womb, it develops hands, feet, abdomen, back and head, and when it is united with its *ātman*, those in the know explain that as inherent disposition (*svābhāvika*). [9.61]

9. Who sharpened the thorn? Who gave their varied forms, colours, and habits to the deer kind, and to the birds? *Swabhāva*! It is not according to the will (*ichchha*) of any; and if there be no desire or intention, there can be no intention or designer. (*Buddha Charitra*.)¹⁰

Who made the thorn's sharpness, or the diversity of deer and birds? All of this occurs as a result of inherent disposition (*svābhāvataḥ*); there is no creation by willpower (*kāmakāraḥ*), much less effort (*prayatnaḥ*). [9.62]

6. Some say creation is from God: if so, what is the use of *Yatna* or of *Karma*? That which made all things, will preserve and destroy them; that which governs *Nirvritti*, governs *Pravritti* also. (*Buddha Charitrakāvya*.)¹¹

So too others claim heaven is due to a Sovereign (*īśvarataḥ*); in that case, what is the use of man's effort (*prayatna*)? Whatever the cause of world creation (*pravṛtti*), it is certainly tied to the cause of cessation (*nivṛtti*). [9.63]

Hodgson's presentation of the four theories of cyclic existence can now be checked against its classical locus. *Svābhāvika* doctrine, inherent disposition, is meant to account for natural phenomena such as morphogenesis and species

9 *yat pāṇipādodaraprṣṭhamūrdhnām nirvartate garbhagatasya bhāvaḥ | yadātmanas tasya ca tena yogaḥ svābhāvikaṃ tat kathayanti tajjñāḥ* (*Buddhacarita* 9.61, ed. Johnston 1935, 103).

10 *kaḥ kaṇṭakasya prakaroti taikṣṇyam vicitrabhāvaṃ mrgapakṣiṇām vā | svābhāvataḥ sarvam idaṃ pravṛttaṃ na kāmākāro 'sti kutaḥ prayatnaḥ* (*Buddhacarita* 9.62, ed. Johnston 1935, 103).

11 *sargaṃ vadantiśvaratas tathānye tatra prayatne puruṣasya ko 'rthaḥ | ya eva hetur jagataḥ pravṛttaḥ hetur nivṛttaḥ sa eva* (*Buddhacarita* 9.63, ed. Johnston 1935, 103).

diversity. It has a rough analogue in a pre-Enlightenment worldview characterised as the doctrine of qualities or causal powers. According to this view, things are believed to act by virtue of a unique quality, power or propensity in them, their particular thingness (Hutchison 1991, 245). Although the doctrine of qualities had been deprecated in Enlightenment discourse from Molière onwards as unscientific, Hodgson's imagination was fired by its counterpart in *Buddhacarita* 9.61–62, which he wrongly believed to be Buddhist philosophy. These classical musings on “the diversity of deer and birds” resonated with Hodgson's discoveries in the natural sciences, which are honoured in the scientific names of the Tibetan antelope, *Pantholops hodgsonii*, and of several other species including birds such as the Tibetan partridge, *Perdix hodgsoniae* (Datta 2005, 137, 156, 168). Hodgson hoped that the thought of the Buddha might shed light on the question of how species changed over time, which intrigued many other nineteenth-century naturalists. Ultimately, Hodgson's zoological findings were credited by luminaries such as Charles Darwin, another Malthus aficionado (Darwin 1868, 26, 36 n. 68, 95, 102), while the cosmogenetic theories of the *Buddhacarita* were never cited as an inspiration for his natural history achievements.

The doctrine characterised by Amṛtānanda and Hodgson as *yātnika*, “involving personal effort” (*prayatna*), is contrasted with *svābhāvika* doctrine and *aiśvarika* doctrine, pantheism, in *Buddhacarita* 9.62 and 9.63. Together these positions capture the tension between determinism and free will well known in Western philosophy. The fourth doctrine of cause and effect, here called *kārmika*, is not treated in the *Buddhacarita* verses in question. Karma is, however, the main subject of the *Buddhacarita*'s fourteenth canto, which tells of the newly awakened Śākyamuni having a vision of sentient beings undergoing rebirth according to their good or bad deeds. Here the process of karma and rebirth is put forward as the correct understanding of cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*), as opposed to the three pre-Buddhist worldviews taught in the ninth canto. “Kārmika” causation is standard Buddhism, and Hodgson correctly associated it with the core doctrine of dependent origination (Hodgson 1836a, 80). In short, Amṛtānanda's and Hodgson's Svābhāvika doctrine corresponds to the doctrine of qualities, Aiśvarika doctrine is creation theism, Yātnika doctrine corresponds to the philosophy of self-determination, and Kārmika doctrine is metempsychosis, the doctrine of rebirth.

While Hodgson's groundbreaking paper on Buddhism and its “schools” was in press, an important article on Indian tenet systems was published. It revealed to Western scholars the names of the four schools of Buddhist exegesis discussed in Hindu philosophical works in Sanskrit: the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra and Mādhyamika (Colebrooke 1827, 558–559). Shortly afterwards, Alexander Csoma de Kőrös established that the four exegetical schools of Buddhism treated in Hinduism were also accepted in Tibetan Buddhism (Kőrös 1834, 276; Kőrösi 1838, 143). These are the schools recognised today by insiders and

outsiders alike as constituting Buddhist philosophy proper. Although Hodgson found “no authority in *Saugata* books” for them (Hodgson 1836a, 82 n. ‡), Eugène Burnouf concurred with Csoma de Kőrös, pointing out that the four exegetical schools of the Vaibhāṣika and so on were in fact discussed in major Sanskrit Buddhist works, the *Abhidharmakośa* and *Prasannapadā* (Burnouf 1844, 445–448, 559), which had been put at Burnouf’s disposal by Hodgson himself. At the same time Burnouf damningly remarked that Hodgson’s Nepalese informants “gardent un profond silence” about the four exegetical schools of the Sanskrit mainstream, while only they and Hodgson knew about the Svābhāvika and so on (Burnouf 1844, 445). As far as Burnouf could tell, Buddhists in Nepal had ignorantly confected a philosophy in response to Hodgson’s questions. Over thirty years after initial publication, in a note to a reprint of his “Quotations,” it had to be conceded that (Hodgson 1874, 23 n. †):

My Bauddha pandit assigned these titles [Svābhāvika et al.] to the Extract made from his Sāstras ... I erroneously presumed them to be derived from the Sāstras, and preferable to Mādhyāmika &c., which he did not use ...

The creative cornerstone of Hodgson’s presentation of Buddhism had in this way been found to be unverifiable and therefore unusable. In the words of his own biographer, “his work fails of course in several respects to fulfil the punctilious demands of modern scholarship” (Hunter 1896, 280). The Protestant-influenced methodology of Buddhist studies that emerged in the course of the nineteenth century only accepted primary textual sources and emic interpretive traditions as authoritative. Yet Hodgson had indeed been reporting emic interpretations, grounded firmly in an ancient Buddhist text; it was just that he did not disclose (or realise) that these interpretations had been devised specifically for him.

As for Burnouf’s charge that Newar Buddhists knew nothing about the four classical Buddhist schools of exegesis, it should be pointed out that Amṛtānanda had some knowledge of the textual authorities mentioned by Burnouf, because he had summarised the *Prasannapadā* (under the name *Vineyasūtra*) in his *Dharmakośasaṃgraha* (Mukundarāja 2002, 197; Hodgson 1828, 431), and had of course supplied the copies of the texts that reached Burnouf via Hodgson. Although Amṛtānanda may still have been unaware of the four standard exegetical schools of Buddhism, he was responding to questions on cosmogenesis, not scriptural exegesis as such.

3.4 Ādibuddha Paramountcy

The presentation of Buddhism devised by Amṛtānanda and Hodgson nominated the Ādibuddha, the Primally Awakened, as its fundamental organising principle. In doing so they again foregrounded and centralised an understanding that had previously been only tacit and secondary in classical texts. The notion of the Ādibuddha as a kind of “first intellectual essence” (Hodgson 1841, 110; 1874, 77) was not present in all of the disparate streams of South Asian tantric Buddhism that existed in Nepal at the start of the colonial era. It is only in the Kālacakra tantric system that the Ādibuddha is a universal figure, and Amṛtānanda’s familiarity with this system is unusual in the Nepalese context.¹² Although Kālacakra tantrism is marginal in Newar Buddhism, on the whole, in the fifteenth century it informed two new Buddhist literary productions — the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* and the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* — which positioned the Ādibuddha at the centre of cosmogenesis (Sinclair 2015, 442–452). The theism-friendly passages in the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha* on the Ādibuddha, which had appealed to Hindu rulers, were elaborated on by Amṛtānanda for Hodgson (Sinclair 2015, 456–458). Relevant passages from these texts were also given a prominent place in the “Sketch of Buddhism” (Hodgson 1830, 232–233, 242, 247; 1841, 60–61, 72; 1874, 50, 54).

In the scheme outlined by Amṛtānanda and Hodgson, the Ādibuddha, formulated as a monad (*ekāmnāya*), comprises the classical dyad of insight and means (*prajñā-upāya*), female and male. This dyad is succeeded by the Triple Jewel of Buddhism — the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha. These three in turn subdivide into the five *gnostic buddhas* and their consorts, the nine scriptures of the Sanskrit mini-canon and the host of bodhisattvas (Hodgson 1835, 319–323; 1836a, 94–96; 1841, 133–136; 1874, 93–96). This differentiation of the Ādibuddha into subcategories is broadly compatible with Buddhist doctrine. However, the reformulation of these doctrinal categories as a set of integrated dependencies, expressing the whole of Buddhism as the hierophany of a single transcendent figure, is a distinct innovation. It renders the religion as a whole more intelligible to Western universalism, and caters to the Enlightenment preoccupation with one-substance metaphysics (Robertson 2020, 301–303) that sometimes comes through in Hodgson’s writings.

Amṛtānanda’s and Hodgson’s monistic scheme nevertheless added elaborations that are neither scripturally condoned nor necessary for a modern articulation of Buddhism. For instance, they position the Ādibuddha as the generator not just of the gnostic *dhyānibuddhas* but also of the corporeal *mānuṣībuddhas*. Furthermore, the cosmogenetic process is tied to so-called Aīśvarika doctrine — that is, Brahmanical creation theism, according to its abovementioned classical locus — whereas the cosmogenesis of the Kālacakra is, strictly speaking, agent-

12 Amṛtānanda’s nomination of the *Kālacakratantra* as one of three principal Buddhist tantras followed in Nepal (Hodgson 1841, 71; 1874, 49) is quite idiosyncratic. According to Bhīmḍyo Gurūju, the late Cakreśvara of Bu Bāhā, Amṛtānanda was a practitioner of the Kālacakra six-part yoga in a lineage that survived him for two more generations (personal communication, 2001).

less and nontheistic (Sinclair 2015, 446). Such divergences from tradition contributed to the Buddhism of Nepal later being incorrectly perceived, “on Hodgson’s authority,” as aberrant and “essentially monotheistic” (Gellner 1989, 12).

4 Hodgson’s Partiality to Buddhism

Brian Houghton Hodgson enjoyed unprecedented, unrivalled access to the last form of Buddhism surviving on the Indian subcontinent during his stay in Nepal. His collecting activities were enabled and encouraged by a senior representative of South Asian Buddhism, unlike those of the few foreign scholars who gained entry to Nepal later in the colonial era. When, for instance, Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917) visited Lhasa in search of texts, he faced suspicion and a polite interrogation about his personal faith in the Dharma (Das 1881, 30–31). Although Das and other later itinerants in the Himalayas may have been able to disguise their motives, it was more difficult for Hodgson, who resided in Nepal in a prominent official capacity for two decades, to feign his enthusiasm. Hodgson was aware of the fact that Nepal’s Gorkhali rulers remained willing to pit Qing-controlled Buddhist Tibet against the British (Hunter 1894, 78). In this context, his frequent complaints about the “corrupt Buddhism of Nepal,” or the “monstrously impractical and impious array of human perfectibility” in his sources (Hodgson 1841, 87, 92; 1874, 63, 60), come across as overly deferential to his readers’ low opinions of South Asian religions. He did not disclose the full extent of his massive investment in studying the topic, nor of his cordial personal relations with Himalayan Buddhists.

4.1 Tibetan Buddhists, Tibetologists and the *Vajrasūcī*

Second only to Hodgson’s focus on revealing the texts and doctrines of Buddhism in Sanskrit was his effort to amass the teachings of Buddhism in the medium of Tibetan translation. This effort involved Hodgson meeting Tibetans in the Kathmandu Valley, learning some Tibetan, undertaking ethnographic studies of Himalayan peoples “preferring for the most part the Tibetan model of that faith,” and eventually delivering copies of the Tibetan canon — which had not previously been the subject of modern study — to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. Hodgson also used his cordial relations with Tibetans to open up access to tantric Buddhist texts and images kept secret among the Newars (Hodgson 1830, 230; 1841, 57; 1874, 40).

Between 1828 and 1830 Hodgson corresponded with the tenth Dalai Lama (Ngag dbang blo bzang ’jam dpal Tshul khrims rgya mtsho, 1816–1837) about obtaining texts kept in Tibet. Hodgson’s affinity with Buddhism and Buddhist communities stands out in one letter of this correspondence. As the letter has not yet been published, it is discussed here on the basis of its summary in the Cam-

bridge Hodgson Papers catalogue (Dhungel et al 2008, vol. 102, no. 18). In the letter Hodgson asks the Dalai Lama for copies of Sanskrit Buddhist manuscripts kept in Tibet. The existence of Sanskrit manuscripts in Tibet had not been reported before by Western scholars. His inquiry precedes by over half a century the famous expeditions to Tibetan monasteries by outsiders in search of Sanskrit manuscripts, which began with the journey of Sarat Chandra Das to Lhasa (Das 1881, 30). Being confined to Kathmandu, Hodgson was evidently following up a lead provided by an insider familiar with the monastic libraries of Tibet (Hodgson 1828, 436; 1841, 33; 1874, 22):

the *Bhotiyas*, with whom I have conversed, assure me, that they got all their knowledge from India, that their books are translations, that the originals, here and there, all exist in *Bhot*, but that now no one can read them.

Further on, Hodgson's letter "appeals to His Holiness' great compassion and stresses the potential for spreading the Dharma and describes Tibet as the pure land for the dharma scriptures free from the influence of outsiders or impure objects" (Dhungel et al. 2008). This appeal eventually bore fruit, with the Dalai Lama delivering a printing of the Tibetan canon to Hodgson by 1838 (Hunter 1894, 270). While Hodgson's approach can be seen as ingratiating or even insincere, it does commit him to an acceptance of Buddhist norms and values far beyond what was required of either his scholarly pursuits or his position. He exceeded the brief of East India Company agents in the early nineteenth century to not "interfere in any degree beyond what the public welfare and safety absolutely require" in local religious affairs (Philips 1940, 165), as he did on other occasions.

While corresponding with the Dalai Lama, Hodgson succeeded in publishing the *Vajrasūcī*, a classical anti-Brahmanical and anti-caste tract which had been privately propagated among the Buddhist Newars for centuries. Hodgson quickly published a translation, guided by Amṛtānanda's excited participation (Hodgson 1831, 61; 1841, 192; 1874, 126), and facilitated the publication of the Sanskrit text by Lancelot Wilkinson (1805–1841), a Political Agent of the Company based in India. The arguments of the *Vajrasūcī*, which poked holes in Brahmanical scriptural claims, provoked indignation among Brahmins even before it had been published (Hodgson 1831, 61; Wilkinson 1839, 4). Hodgson went so far as to encourage missionaries to learn from the antistrophe of the *Vajrasūcī*:

there is no method of assailing Brahmanism comparable to that of 'judging it out of its own mouth'.

Christian missions in Calcutta were soon thrilled to receive new ammunition against “this most unnatural and perverse institution of caste ... calculated only to hold the mass of men in a condition of abject mental and social servitude” (Cinsurensis 1840, 167). Here Hodgson revealed not only his distaste for Brahmanism, which was widespread among his British contemporaries, but also and more unusually his enthusiasm for the humanistic potential of Buddhism, which would later receive much more attention from others (Wilson 1877, 283–315; Almond 1988, 72–76). He sent a signed copy of his article on the *Vajrasūcī* to his father, as if to signal that his work on Buddhism was motivated in the main by egalitarianism.¹³

Hodgson’s favourable view of Buddhism was communicated to Tibetans. In an episode that is supposed to have taken place in about 1821, but which was recorded only in 1837, the Tibetan yogi Zhapkar (Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, 1781–1851) recalls his monastic disciples meeting with a “foreign notable residing in Nepal” who has been identified as Hodgson (Ricard 2001, 433, 446 n. 56). This “notable” is said to have borrowed and had translated a collection of Zhapkar’s songs, reflecting: “This person [Zhapkar] seems to be a real Buddha; teachings like these are certainly beneficial to the ethical principles of a country” (trans. Ricard 2001, 433). No work by Zhapkar has been identified in Hodgson’s earliest inventory of Tibetan printed texts (Hodgson 1828, 431–433; 1841, 29–31; 1874, 20–21). However, the yogi’s anecdote reflects known proclivities of Hodgson, such as his book collecting and keen interest in Buddhist teaching.

The expense lavished by Hodgson on the study of Buddhism — he purchased hundreds of Tibetan as well as Sanskrit texts, and commissioned dozens of original writings — is not the approach of a disinterested scholar. Hodgson’s receipts show, for instance, that he paid 1,200 Shah-issue silver coins to procure a printed copy of the Tibetan Buddhist canon (Dhungel et al 2008, vol. 93, no. 10). He bragged about his spending (Hodgson 1841, 146; 1874, 103):

I cannot but smile to find myself condoled with for my poverty when I am really, and have been for ten years, *accablé des richesses!*

This growing personal stake in understanding Buddhism also dimmed Hodgson’s view of his less invested yet more focused scholarly rivals. In a letter to Burnouf, Hodgson slighted Alexander Csoma de Kőrös — whose research, unlike Hodgson’s, was directly funded by the East India Company — as a suspicious character (Yuyama 2000, 57). During the years in which he corresponded with Hodgson, Csoma de Kőrös made massive strides in the study of Tibetan Buddhism, starting with the publication of his dictionary (Kőrös 1834) and continuing with his groundbreaking survey of the Buddhist canon in Tibetan translation (Kőrösi 1836). His work was more accurate and comprehensive than Hodgson’s, and it

¹³ Papers of Brian Houghton Hodgson, Royal Asiatic Society Archives, GB 891 BHH/15/2.

made solid use of material sent to Calcutta by Hodgson himself. In defence of the sources used for his “Sketch of Buddhism,” Hodgson fumed (Hodgson 1835, 288; 1836a, 29; 1841, 94–95; 1874, 65):

these [Sanskrit] ‘original authorities’ ... are original in a far higher and better sense than those [in Tibetan] of DE KOROS ...

There was much more in this vein (e.g. 1841, 32–33), even though Csoma de Kőrös had done Hodgson the favour of independently confirming some of his findings. However, the feeling of rivalry was without doubt reciprocated. “What would Hodgson... and some of the philosophers of Europe not give to be in my place when I get to [Lhasa]!” was a “frequent exclamation” of Csoma de Kőrös recorded by his British handlers, along with his unelaborated accusations of “mistakes” in Hodgson’s papers (Campbell 1842, 304–306).

Hodgson’s expensive studies of Buddhism were then seen as a race for priority of discovery by himself and his competitors alike. Yet his work in other fields, in which he also sought to exploit the advantages of his posting to a remote colonial frontier, was respected and did not engender such bitter competition (Pels 1999, 93). While he fostered friendships with Asian Buddhists, his responses to Europeans who studied Buddhism, such as the Sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832), were often touchy overreactions (Hodgson 1841, 138, 145; 1871, 97, 102). The study of Buddhism was the only subject that aroused such strong feelings in Hodgson.

4.2 Hodgson’s Induction into Buddhism in Nepal

Hodgson’s collaboration with Amṛtānanda was much more wide-ranging than he reported. Among the masses of documents generated by Amṛtānanda and preserved in Hodgson’s personal papers, unpublished and largely unstudied, are transcripts of private teaching sessions. One example concerns the visualisation of the mandala of the four-armed Mañjuśrī (Thomas 1935, 1402, No. 7745). Here Hodgson was once again working through a text composed for him, and taught to him face-to-face, by Amṛtānanda:

Description of Dharm Chukcar Mundla. Munjusry is sitting in the *Kornica* or centre of a *Lotos* with *Bujer Āsan*. His colour is that of *Saffron* he has one head and four hands, by two of which he is performing *Dharma Chukra Moondra* putting his hands on his breast and from the other two in one he has a book and in the other a *jupmala*, and is beautified himself by the undermentioned ornaments viz. *Chuckry*, *Koondull* (or a large ring worn in the ears) *Kunthi* (or a short necklaces [sic]) *Rochuck* (or stomacher) *Makhla* (an ornament worn in the waist) and *Napoor*. Out of this *Kornica* of *Kamal* or the centre of the *lotos*

there are two circles and out of that circle are eight *Dull* or leaves of the lotos and these leaves are without a single mark.¹⁴

This is a record of oral transmission. It has an unpunctuated, unpolished style, which indicates that the writer is dictating speech. There are impromptu Anglicisations of Newar pronunciations: “chukcar” or “chuckra” for *cakra*, “bujer” for *vajra*, “koondull” for *kuṇḍala*, “dull” for *dala* and so on. Hodgson’s ethnographic publications include wordlists transcribed in a similar manner (e.g. Hodgson 1828, 410ff). This, however, is a record of a teaching session on tantric Buddhism, which is open only to initiates, and which Amṛtānanda was evidently imparting to a Westerner for the first time.

Hodgson initially came up against the secrecy prohibitions surrounding tantric Buddhism in Nepal while trying to procure the major Buddhist scriptures, which included tantras. By the nineteenth century, the nine texts of the Buddhist mini-canon had incorporated the transgressive *Guhyasamājatantra* as a substitute for the then-scarce *Tathāgataguhyaka*, a non-tantric text. Tantric Buddhist initiation was needed in order to procure all of the scriptures of the mini-canon, by which “only can a knowledge of genuine *Buddhism* be acquired” (Hodgson 1828, 424). Such permission, or initiation, he seems to have eventually received (Hodgson 1830, 230; 1841, 57; 1874, 40):

The Nipāl Bauddhists are very jealous of any intrusion into their esoteric dogmas and symbols; so much so, that though I have been for seven years enquiring after these things, my old *Vajra Achārya* friend [Amṛtānanda] only recently gave me a peep at the esoteric dogmas ... I at last got my *Bauddha* assistants to draw up the veil of the sanctuary, to bring me copies of the naked saints, and to tell me a little of the naked doctrines.

“Naked saints” was meant literally. Breaking through the secrecy that surrounded tantric Buddhist deities in Newar Buddhism, Hodgson was given detailed drawings of the goddesses Vajrayoginī, Siṃhinī and Vyāghrinī, depicted bare except for their bone ornaments, which he soon managed to get published (Wilson 1828, 464–465). When Newar officiants drew up the veil further for Western scholars in the 1970s, it became clear that the initiation process involves male initiands in physical contact with a female partner, guided by a guru (Asha Kaji et al 2009, 150). The eyebrow-raising claim that Amṛtānanda “had a sexual relationship with” Hodgson’s future wife, Meharunnisha Begum (Joshi 2004, 43), has not yet been investigated in connection with the possibility that Amṛtā-

¹⁴ *namo ratnatrayāya || dharmacakramanḍalam || prathamam aṣṭadalakamalam · madhyakarnikāyām dharmacakramamjuśrīḥ ekamukhaḥ kuṃkumavarṇaḥ caturbhujāḥ dvābhyām · hṛtpradeśe · dharmacakramudrām dadhānaḥ dvābhyām daśavāmābhyām · jāpamālāpustake vibhṛāṇaḥ cakrikunḍalakaṇṭhacakraamekhalānupurālāṃkāṛālāṃkṛtāḥ kamalopari kulīśānaḥ* (transcribed from “Dharma Chakra Mandal,” MS Thomas 1935, 1402, No. 7745; Dhungel et al 2008, Vol. 28, No. 7). See also *Dharmakośasamgraha* (ed. Mukundarāja 2002, 220).

nanda procured a tantric consort for Hodgson. Hodgson did not tell his readers how he gained his authorisation to study Buddhist tantra, but it is evident that a formal induction of some kind had taken place (Hodgson 1830, 252; 1841, 85; 1874, 15):

There is indeed a secret and filthy system of *Buddhas* and *Buddha-Sakties*, in which the ladies act a conspicuous part; and according to which, A'DI-BUDDHA is styled *Yógambara*; and ADI-DHARMA, *Jñān-Eshwarī*. But this system has only been revealed to me, and I cannot say any more of it at present.

The two deities mentioned by Hodgson here belong to the system of the *Catuspīṭhatantra*. This is one of the advanced tantric Buddhist systems upheld in Nepal, and it centres on the male *Yogāmbara* and the female *Jñānaḍākinī* alias *Jñāneśvarī*. Documentation of the instruction Hodgson received in this system has survived. It includes diagrams of the mandala of *Yogāmbara-Jñānaḍākinī* (e.g. MS Thomas 1935, 1400, No. 7738) and manuals for yogic invocation, *sādhana*, of the kind that preceptors give to initiates to guide their tantric practice. The manuals received by Hodgson were not only handwritten by Amṛtānanda but were also for the most part Amṛtānanda's compositions. They leave little to the imagination. One is labelled "Yogambara & Jnyaneshwari — copulated" in English (MS Thomas 1935, 1401, No. 7739). It defines the secret enshrined tantric deity, the *āgamadevatā*, as one who is "frequented only by an initiated, sexually coupled pair" (*dīkṣitayor mithunayor eva gamanam*).

In Amṛtānanda's systematization of Buddhist doctrine, the differentiated female and male, *prajñā* and *upāya*, come together in the Primal Awakening of the Ādibuddha. Accordingly, in another tantric practice manual composed for Hodgson, he introduces the goddess *Jñāneśvarī* into a scene of Ādibuddha revelation cribbed from a text of the Kālacakra system.¹⁵ Here Amṛtānanda complies with an obscure traditional directive that allows the practice of the *Catuspīṭhatantra* to be interpreted "by way of the Ādibuddha's statements" (Sferra 2005, 259). However, Amṛtānanda's priority in composing these tantric handbooks was not to follow tradition strictly, but to impose the thematic coherence and universalism that his *sahib* student expected Buddhist teaching to have — above all in the secret and sexually charged practices of tantric Buddhism.

With his deep and long-standing commitment to the study of Buddhism, it is not surprising to find that Hodgson was identified as a Buddhist. Another overlooked document, a copy of a Nepalese regnal chronicle scribed by Amṛtānanda in 1828, starts by praising Hodgson's faith in the *triratna*, the Triple Jewel that comprises Buddhism:

15 *iha khalu śrīdhānyakaṭake mahācaitye ... ādibuddhaṃ viśphārya ... deśitāvān jñāneśvarīmāhātmyaṃ* (transcribed from "Account of the first Tantrika Devi named Jnyaneshwari — wife of adi Yogambara," MS Thomas 1935, 1400, no. 7738; Dhungel et al 2008, vol. 27, no. 8). This part of Amṛtānanda's text is adapted from Raviśrījñāna's *Amṛtakanikā* (ed. Lal 1994, 1).

In this land of Swayambhu [Kathmandu Valley], the Lalitpur-resident Amṛta the Wise [Amṛtānanda], his heart gladdened by the Sahib's order, has written the *Traces of Kings*. His Grace Hodgson, devotee of the Triple Jewel [*triratnabhaktaḥ*], engaged in all pursuits, what greatness he has ...¹⁶

Again, Amṛtānanda's praise not only flatters his honoree but also captures a quality perceived by others. The epithet "engaged in all pursuits" (*sakalārthayuktaḥ*) shows familiarity with Hodgson's scholarly project. The characterisation of Hodgson as a "devotee" (*bhakta*) acknowledges religious inclinations towards Buddhism. Hodgson often made declarations to the contrary to his Anglo-European audience: "I had no purpose, nor have I, to meddle with the interminable sheer absurdities of the Bauddha philosophy or religion" (Hodgson 1841, 140; 1874, 99). Such disavowals betray concern that his work on Buddhism might taint his reputation as a naturalist, ethnographer and administrator. But in Nepal, Hodgson had been recognised as a Buddhist — the first Buddhist Englishman.

5 Conclusions

Hodgson's and Amṛtānanda's groundbreaking presentation of Buddhism, created for Westerners in the early nineteenth century, is conceptually as well as chronologically a modern project. Enthralled by the intellectual novelty of Buddhism, Hodgson invested heavily in research, corresponded and clashed with scholarly contemporaries working across the globe, and disseminated Buddhist critiques of Brahmanical doctrine in print. While he pioneered and personified the model of the Enlightened scholar of Buddhism who could not express sympathy for his object of study in public, he was privately being tutored in Buddhism and was seen as a Buddhist, or a sympathiser, by Asian Buddhists. Amṛtānanda, for his part, devised nomenclatures and conceptual structures that made his tradition more accessible to modern minds. He acknowledged the new reality of an Indo-Newar Buddhism encircled by Hindu and Tibetan politics, and accepted the British as participants in the Buddhist world. Together the pair achieved an impressive list of firsts: the first published account of Buddhist theory and praxis based on primary sources and guided by a native Buddhist expert; the first publication of a complete text and translation of a Buddhist philosophical tract; the first authorised teaching of Buddhist tantra to a non-Asian student; and so on.

Although some of Hodgson's and Amṛtānanda's work on Buddhism has been called modern by others, it lacked the exacting literalism, reproducibility and

¹⁶ *svayambhūḥṣetre 'smiṃl lalitanagariyo 'mṛtabudho 'likhat sāhebājñānmuditahṛdayo rājapadaviṃ || 1 || triratnabhaktaḥ sakalārthayuktaḥ śrīhādaseno mahimāsyā kena || ...* (transcribed from "Modern Newar History of Nepal," MS Thomas 1935, 1548, No. 8184; cf. Dhungel et al 2008, vol. 26, No. 10). Author's translation.

transparency that would come to define modern Buddhist studies. Amṛtānanda himself was a traditional pundit who contributed to modern scholarship only indirectly. Both were concerned with a tradition that was and is marginal in the global Buddhist context, yet they managed to demonstrate and secure the primacy of Sanskritic terminology and ideas in the modern scholarly discourse on Buddhism. Nor did they seek to foment a modern social movement, although they had definite interest in the potential of Buddhism to spread and bring about sociopolitical progress. As just a fraction of Hodgson's and Amṛtānanda's output has been taken into account here, its impacts on subsequent Buddhist modernism and the modernities of Asia and Western Europe warrant further study.

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Sublime Disappearances

Feeling Buddhism in late-nineteenth-century western music

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ABSTRACT | This essay explores how the Buddhist-inspired works of two late-nineteenth-century western composers, Richard Wagner and Dudley Buck, interpret Buddhist source material through the aesthetic discourse of the sublime dominant in post-Romantic music. In the opera *Parsifal* (1882), Wagner develops his philosophy of *nirvāṇic* sound into experimental passages intended to provoke spiritually intense feelings of transcendence, while Buck's 1886 musical adaptation of Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* derives the sublime style of Handelian oratorio to engage his audience in a grand celebration of moral renewal. Despite their different approaches to mediating the sublime, both Wagner and Buck use it to present Buddhism directly to the *feelings* of their listeners, while by the same token dissolving its troubling foreign embodiment into sound. Ultimately, this essay argues that such appeals to feeling represent a significant yet under-explored dimension in Buddhism's history and experience in the west, contributing to its subjectivization and detraditionalization.

KEYWORDS | Western Buddhism; Buddhism and Music; Nineteenth-Century Music; Aesthetics of the Sublime; Richard Wagner; Dudley Buck

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Recent scholarship describes the reception of Buddhism in the nineteenth-century west in terms of discovery (Almond 1988; App 2014), encounter and awakening (Batchelor 2011), invention (Masuzawa 2005), and curation (Lopez 1995), to name a few notable approaches. The distinct nuances of each suggest the variety of interpretive processes by which Buddhism became known in the west. At the same time, they collaborate in constructing whatever happened to Buddhism in the modern west as—precisely—a matter of knowing. Aligned with Edward Said's critiques of orientalism, the prevailing rhetoric of encounter and interpretation, or even invention, contributes to the notion that Buddhism came to be in western culture through exercises of western knowledge.

In one sense, arguing against this position would be difficult. The dominance of European intellectual enterprise—archaeology, philology, philosophy, and so on—in determining the contours of “Buddhism” for western discourse is undeniable. Yet explaining this hermeneutical process solely in terms of knowing makes us liable to miss the attendant forces that have so enduringly engaged westerners with Buddhism. Feeling—alongside knowing—brought Buddhism into its western manifestations.

Indeed, a degree of affective force can be detected behind any decision to investigate, criticize, or experiment with “the Buddha's Religion”: westerners in great number have done all these things since at least the late eighteenth century. Evidence of the abundance and significance of westerners' feelings about Buddhism is not in short supply, even among its most thoughtful interpreters: as Roger-Pol Droit (2003) has shown, for instance, European philosophers' assessments of Buddhism express powerful feelings of hope and fear that reflect the social, political, and religious insecurities of the post-Enlightenment. Yet feeling did not remain merely subliminal to European discourse on Buddhism. By the turn of the nineteenth century, it had become an explicit preoccupation of German Romantic thinkers, whose circles frequently converged with those of orientalist scholars.¹ For early Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), himself an important Sanskritist, feeling took on definition not just as the non-cognitive, pre-conceptual, thus ineffable ground of physiological and psychological experience, but as both a fundamental stratum of our rational subjectivity and perhaps our best avenue for transcending conceptual limitations altogether and approaching the non-discursive truth of the Absolute (Schulte-Sasse et al. 1997, 244-245). This faculty, though involved in all rational activity, was seen to be powerfully accessed in the creation and perception of art and essential to philosophy: according to Schlegel (1991, 14), “all art should become science and all science art: poetry and philosophy should be made unified.”

That the Romantic preoccupation with aesthetic feeling took shape often in such proximity to orientalist “science” suggests how entangled Romantic aes-

¹ For instance, in the social worlds of Johann Gottfried Herder and the Schlegel brothers, or later—as we shall soon find—in Richard Wagner's own coterie.

thetics would become with the western exploration of Asian religions. Moreover, the fact that subsequent western artists did explicitly engage Buddhist material in their own feeling-laden works, as we shall see, demonstrates the conviction that whatever Buddhism's content might be, it could be best communicated through its aesthetic dimensions. Growing up alongside and increasingly through Romantic art and its inheritors, Buddhism in the west had no choice but to become an even more distinctly felt entity, to be known through powerful artistic mediations of feeling, by audiences typically larger than those of the latest scholarly translation or philosophical tract.

This "sentimental history" of Buddhism in the west, implied though it necessarily is within the better-known intellectual genealogy, has been curiously underexamined. David McMahan (2008, 117–147), for instance, acknowledges the importance of Romantic ideologies of feeling in the development of "Buddhist modernism" but shies away from describing nineteenth-century European artists' direct engagements of Buddhism, instead focusing on D.T. Suzuki and other twentieth-century Buddhists' appropriations of Romantic discourse. He thus leaves unexplored a period during which many nineteenth-century artists were engaging Buddhism, self-consciously, with important consequences.² In response, this essay seeks to demonstrate the importance of feeling—and its mediation by Romantic discourse—in the development of western Buddhism, and to suggest how these Buddhist-Romantic mediations echo back into the history of western art. It does so by telling a story of two late-nineteenth-century artists, Richard Wagner and Dudley Buck, who quite differently attempted to interpret Buddhist ideas and narratives to audiences in western Europe and America through the peculiarly Romantic medium of music.

Wagner and Buck both engaged the aesthetic discourse of the sublime dominant in nineteenth-century art to accommodate Buddhism to western audiences' expectations while simultaneously opening and intensifying the ways their audiences could *feel* that content: despite their many differences, Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882) and Buck's *The Light of Asia* (1886) both aimed to convey through their Buddhist-inspired music feelings of astonishment, ecstatic absorption, and perhaps even intimations of the timeless, infinite, and absolute. Wagner sought in the touted Romantic powers of music an expression of the otherwise ineffable transcendence of *nirvāṇa*, while Buck's more conservative approach nevertheless aimed to draw the listening public into a grand, anthemic celebration of moral renewal. Through these sensational treatments, Wagner and Buck also achieve a strange disappearance of their Buddhist foundations into ambiguous half-presences, itself arguably a sublime effect that anticipates developments in both the Buddhism and aesthetics of the twentieth-century west.

² Marc Lussier is closer to engaging this history than McMahan but emphasizes "the confluence of mental operations and social commitments" between Romanticism and Buddhism over "direct contact and subsequent influence" (2011, 94).

These two composers' attempts to render Buddhism sensible in the extreme, even supersensual, manner promised by the Romantic discourse on the sublime helped transform unthinkable elements of the newly "discovered" Buddhist religion into alluring, accessible aesthetic experiences. Ultimately, I will argue that their appeals to the sublime helped attune Buddhism to the west's growing investment in the primacy of felt experience and the transcendence of traditional religious forms.³ Demonstrating the significance of the Romantic imperative to feel within the history of Buddhism in the west, this essay finally suggests the resonance of a nineteenth-century "Buddhist sublime" with the avant-garde and postmodern aesthetics of twentieth-century western art.

1 A Musical History of the Sublime

According to Richard Taruskin (1989, 249), "the history of music in the nineteenth century could be written in terms of the encroachment of the sublime upon the domain of the beautiful—of the 'great' upon the pleasant—to the point where for some great musicians, with Wagner at their head, the former all but superseded the latter as the defining attribute of *Tonkunst*, the art of tones." Seen in the light of its increasing dominance in post-Romantic music, in great part through Wagner himself, the fact that Wagner's and Buck's musical adaptations of Buddhist ideas and narratives are so consistent with the aesthetics of the sublime is unsurprising. Yet both composers were clearly purposeful in pairing their Buddhist sources with sublime stylization, respectively drawing from a considerable aesthetic tradition to achieve specific ends in their Buddhist works. Before detailing how *Parsifal* and *The Light of Asia* engage the sublime, then, we should survey its development in western aesthetic discourse to determine how its ideology and related musical techniques came to feel necessary to the two composers' Buddhist projects and what Buddhism stood to gain from this aesthetic manipulation. Moreover, as Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (2009, 16) has argued, the "musically sublime" is far from monolithic, encompassing in its history a diversity of potentials that will help us contextualize the important differences between Wagner's and Buck's approaches to a "Buddhist sublime."

The grand narrative of the sublime's suffusion of western music—and the reciprocal development of the so-called "musically sublime"—begins in the mid-eighteenth century with the career and critical reception of George Frideric Handel (1685–1759).⁴ Following the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French and English translations of Longinus's early common-era Greek tract *On the Sublime*,

3 Both characteristics of modern "detraditionalization" take root in the nineteenth century most famously through the thought of Schleiermacher. As McMahan (2008, 42–44) has observed, they are critically important to the development of Buddhist Modernism.

4 According to Brillenburg Wurth (2009, 102), nineteenth-century composers such as Wagner shifted from an enthusiasm for the sublime *in* music to explorations of the "musically sublime:" that is, they sought the sublime not in music's representative powers but in its own ineffable, ephemeral qualities.

the critical term “sublime” had experienced a great popularity in European letters, with a profusion of early-eighteenth-century tracts celebrating the works of Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden, especially, in Longinian terms of thematic grandeur, stylistic bombast, and readerly astonishment. As Claudia L. Johnson (1986, 519–522) shows, critics first began to associate Handel’s oeuvre with sublimity not in reference to his musical compositions but to his vast output, which in scale resembled that of the “sublime” English poets. They also celebrated the grandeur of his works’ Biblical subject matter, which the libretti dramatized far more liberally than traditional church music ever had.

Before long, however, critics began to appreciate the sublimity of Handel’s compositions in properly musical terms. Anticipating Edmund Burke’s observations in his landmark 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of Sublime and the Beautiful*, Handel’s works became celebrated as sublime for their rugged, asymmetrical forms.⁵ Breaking with—and indeed de-forming—the measured, symmetrical rationalism dominant in contemporary Italian opera, for instance, his compositions involved drastic shifts in register, tempo, dynamics, and orchestral color that directly contravened Baroque ideals of beauty and caused their listeners a sensational, if not straightforwardly pleasant, excitement. As Johnson (1986, 520–525) demonstrates, these shocking characteristics of Handel’s compositions prompted critics such as John Mainwaring to refer directly to Longinus’s (Roberts 1907, 137) key discussions of the flawed colossus and the imperfect genius in celebrating the strong affective responses that they provoked.

Following Handel’s death, the sublime quality of his compositions was exaggerated in commemorative performances that assembled unprecedentedly vast orchestral and choral ensembles as a kind of competitive spectacle. The stunning visual and sonic volume achieved by such ensembles regularly led critics to cite Longinus’s terminology of *ekstasis*—being pushed outside of our default sensory settings—and Burke’s related commentary on the invigorating potentials of intense sound. In Brillenburg Wurth’s (2009, 11) synthesis, “sublimity, in this Handelian context, was above all *mass*... a transgression of form in terms of size” that relatedly de-formed eighteenth-century audiences’ sense of the possible, and even challenged the possibilities of sense, with at least the intimation of transcendence. Following a 1784 commemorative performance of Handelian oratorio, a critic cited by Johnson (1986, 516) writes that “the immense volume and torrent of sound was almost too much for the head or the senses to bear... we were elevated into a species of delirium.” His invocations of overwhelming ex-

⁵ Johnson (1986, 525–526) suggests that the volume and dynamism of Handel’s composition celebrated as sublime in contemporary music-critical discourse actually influenced Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry*, published during the middle period of Handel’s career. Indeed, although Burke (1990, 75–76) mentions no composers by name, the foremost characteristics of sound that he values as sublime are “great variety and quick transitions,” “intermittence,” and “excessive loudness,” qualities consistently emphasized in contemporary Handel criticism. Burke’s supporting, sonic metaphor of “the shouting of multitudes” meanwhile resonates with a familiar image of the Handelian choir.

cess and elevation in relation to *sound* are notable. These Longinian tropes' application directly to the experience of hearing Handelian music, and the likelihood that such characteristics actually influenced Burke's aesthetic theory, mark a key development in the musical history of the sublime.

The second "sublime genius" of the western musical tradition—at least for our purposes—exerts a key influence in its Romantic development. Like Handel, whom he idolized, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) was famed for the extraordinary dynamism of his compositions. Like Handel's, Beethoven's expansive works also involved tonal and rhythmic asymmetries as well as sudden, extreme shifts in volume and orchestration that—in their capacity to subvert "architectonic" formal and semantic expectations—evoked the "complex pleasure" that had become associated through Burke and now Immanuel Kant with the sublime.⁶ On the grounds of these qualities and their consonance with an increasingly metaphysical sublime, Taruskin identifies Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, specifically, as "a milestone—perhaps the point of departure (1989, 249) in the history of the sublime's "encroachment" on the beautiful in nineteenth-century music. Beethoven's preference for wordless music and his historical position after Kant ensured that his approach to the sublime and its reception were more invested in his works' relevance to the ineffable realm of personal, subjective feeling and metaphysical truth: following Maynard Solomon's (1986) analysis of the Ninth Symphony, Taruskin (1989, 248) argues that whereas much eighteenth-century music embraced a precisely encoded, public semiotic, Beethoven's early-nineteenth-century compositions embodied meanings that nonetheless "cannot be fully comprehended according to some socially sanctioned code. They... become subjective, hermetic, gnomic."

Although separated by 150 years, these observations resonate with E.T.A. Hoffmann's 1813 essay *Beethoven's Instrumental Music* (1989, 96–103). Here, Hoffmann suggests that Beethoven perfects the "peculiar nature of music" to both communicate our "innermost mysteries" and transport us, in the same motion, "out of the everyday into the realm of the infinite."⁷ His criticism exploits the quasi-mystical dimension of Idealism, privileging the artistic genius as a kind of high priest of subjective experience, gifted with the ability to present the otherwise inaccessible, ineffable absolute aesthetically: enthusiastically breaking from Kant's more cautious treatments of the subject (and neglect of music),

6 Briefly, Kant's theory of the sublime involves the perception of things "absolutely great," whose magnitude and/or intuited threat pushes the distressed subject to the limits of their powers of apprehension, but by the same motion awakens them to the "supersensual," transcendent faculty of reason which is conscious of this inadequacy and *can* comprehend the infinite (2007, 88–89). This experience—with its passage from pain to self-satisfied pleasure—demands that "the soul, not nature, deserves to be the object of the respectful awe typical of the sublime feeling" (Brillenburg Wurth 2009, 4). Kant's centering of the subject as both the source and object of the sublime feeling departs importantly from previous theories and has important consequences for the critical reception of the Beethovenian sublime.

7 Beethoven himself understood Kant's philosophy as equating "the moral law within us, and the starry heavens above us" (Taruskin 1989, 251).

Hoffmann seems confident that the noumenal is within reach for the musical genius. Although Taruskin (1989, 249) is critical of such Romantic ardor, he reiterates that Beethoven's musical semantics "are not so private as to render the musical discourse altogether incomprehensible, but they do render its message ineffable and to that extent, oracular." The music seems to point to some meaning beyond the limits of imaginative apprehension and language, but not beyond intuition. Whereas Handel's spectacular, straightforwardly semantic music and its massive performances unleashed excesses of sensation and engaged the community in sublime experiences (of itself, in an important sense), Beethoven's compositions and their reception made sublime effects matter within the experiential dimensions of subjectivity and their opening into the wordless, transcendent realm of ideas. His work was appreciated by early-nineteenth-century critics as sublime in the Kantian sense that its overwhelming qualities induced in the listening subject the realization of ineffable, "supersensual" truths: through the intense feelings unleashed by the Grand Style in music, subjects came to know about themselves. No longer content to be beautiful, music after Beethoven needed to be "absolutely great," not only in affective power, but also in metaphysical, indeed spiritual, import.

Almost sixty years after Hoffmann's essay, Wagner would reiterate these elements of Beethoven's "sublime" genius—with some significant, added details—in his commemorative 1870 essay on the composer. By this point in his career, the sublime quality of music supposedly revealed by Beethoven, its ability to reveal the absolute, was something Wagner strove to elaborate in his own compositions. Yet thanks in large part to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), as we shall find, Wagner had begun to interpret the sublime in peculiarly Buddhist terms.

2 The Schopenhauerian Confluence

The characteristically Romantic notion that music "possesses a mysterious and self-contained character that stands in opposition to the world of everyday experience" and "[unveils to us] a secret domain" (Lippman 1999, 123) is significantly elaborated and amplified in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* (1818). With its confluence of post-Kantian metaphysics and quasi-Buddhist asceticism, his masterwork is the true kernel from which this essay springs.

Here, Schopenhauer re-inscribes Kant's metaphysical binary of noumenon and phenomenon in terms of the absolute reality, or will, and its sensible manifestation as representation or appearance. Underlying all existence, will is "an aimless and invisible drive pushing forth different life forms... and finally annihilating them just as blindly and vigorously" (Brillenburger 2009, 74). Noume-

nal, it is omnipresent yet elusive. We cannot perceive it directly, but everything that exists, including ourselves, is an act of will made perceptible. As such, we are metaphysically bound to the constant, blind, ultimately unquenchable striving of the will, and subject to the chaos it demands of phenomenal existence. The resonance with the Buddha's second Noble Truth—of the fundamental relationship of desire and suffering—is notable: as Stephen Cross (2013, 39) has shown, Schopenhauer was aware of the basic lines of Buddhist doctrine as early as 1813, and famously cultivated his philosophy's relationship with Buddhism throughout the rest of his life. Having given Kant's system this pessimistic reiteration, Schopenhauer goes on to prescribe a quasi-Buddhistic practice of renunciation: to the extent possible, freeing ourselves from suffering demands that we realize and renounce the activity of will that grounds our existence.

Schopenhauer's metaphysical structuring also enables him to develop a theory of aesthetic contemplation and its value to the renunciant. Elaborating Kant's aesthetics, book three of *The World as Will and Representation* asserts that all aesthetic contemplation has the power of momentarily stilling our will and thus elevating us into a fleeting experience of liberation, or pure, will-less knowledge. Unlike the beautiful, however, which achieves this effect without resistance from the subject, Schopenhauer (1969, 201–202) describes the “elevating” power of the sublime as a “struggle” in which the subject first perceives the object of aesthetic contemplation as actively hostile to their existence, thus activating and making them aware of their most basic will—to continue existing. If the subject is able in this moment to catch and subdue the reaction of the will, they have not only been elevated to will-less knowledge, but also to a clear perception and renunciation of their own will. Enough exposure to this educative aesthetic experience thus serves the renunciant's practice.⁸

Later in book three, Schopenhauer discusses the arts and the kinds of aesthetic experience they stimulate. His metaphysical distinction between the world as will and as phenomenal appearance asserts a division between the “temporal” art of music and the plastic arts of sculpture, painting, and even poetry: whereas these latter exist only as phenomenal representations within the phenomenal world, music “does not copy or imitate (individual) things within that world, but rather runs parallel to it, like an analogy with its own independent status” (Brillenburg Wurth 2009, 75). In fact, music—in its immediate, non-representative nature—directly taps and makes perceptible the will: it “never expresses the phenomenon but only the inner nature, the in-itself of all phenomena, the will itself” (Schopenhauer 1969, 261). This distinction demands that the contemplation of music—beyond providing momentary deliverance from the misery of willful existence, as in the appreciation of painting, for instance—confronts us directly with noumenal reality in a rare, sensible manifestation. In a

⁸ The likely accidental resonance of Schopenhauer's account of the sublime with Buddhist meditative traditions involving the contemplation of charnel grounds and corpses, for instance, is interesting.

kind of analogy with the sublime theorized earlier, music becomes a means for the subject to recognize, observe, and turn away from the activity of the will. Schopenhauer's system thus singles music out for its inherent, metaphysical association with the sublime, and identifies it—beyond its Romantic configuration as a portal to the “secret domain” of the infinite—as a vehicle of liberation from the suffering of existence. These ideas, as we shall soon see, would determine to great extent Wagner's own view of music as a sublime spiritual force.

3 *Parsifal*

In his essay on Beethoven, Richard Wagner (1813–1883) extends Schopenhauer's Buddhist-inflected theory of the musically sublime to emphasize music's ability to rupture the boundaries of time, space, and identity, effecting the listener's “mystic passage” out of the phenomenal world in “a spiritual experience of self-loss” and dissolution into the infinite (Brillenburg Wurth 2009, 86). By 1870, Wagner had been immersed in both Schopenhauer's philosophy and his own enthusiastic engagement with orientalist scholarship for over fifteen years.⁹ Shortly after reading *The World as Will and Representation* for the first time, in 1854, he read Eugène Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du buddhisme indien* (1844), a work to which he returned, with Carl Friedrich Koeppen's *Die Religion des Buddha und ihre Entstehung* (1857), throughout the rest of his life. In two letters from 1855, Wagner expresses his excitement over the “sublime” religion of Buddha, detailing his Schopenhauerian understandings of worldly bondage and rebirth, and their ultimate transcendence through renunciation and compassion in the experience of *nirvāṇa*.¹⁰ As Hermann Danuser (1994) and Ulrike Kienzle (2007) have argued, the late 1850s saw Wagner developing these understandings into distinct musical techniques. Expressing the quasi-karmic persistence of events, concepts, and identities through epic time with repeated musical passages (*Leitmotiv*), he also devised methods of rupturing musical time in sonic expressions of total self-loss and absorption. By 1859 he had given these techniques their most celebrated realization in *Tristan und Isolde*, whose famous, final chord dissolves the striving, motif-driven chromaticism of the entire work into an overwhelming impression of release.¹¹

Yet the influence of Wagner's Buddhist reading extended beyond his musical theories and techniques: inspired by a “legend” from the Buddha's biography re-

9 Buschinger (2017) shows that Wagner's earliest serious conversations on Asian religion were likely with his brother-in-law, the orientalist Hermann Brockhaus, who had studied with Eugène Burnouf in Paris in the 1830s.

10 In these two letters, Wagner also describes his conviction that “only in light of Buddhism can Christianity liberate itself” (Borchmeyer 2007, 16) from its current stagnation. Likely influenced by Schopenhauer, Wagner's antisemitic idea that Buddhism could somehow restore Christianity to its purest form is vital to understanding his decision to “translate” *Die Sieger* into *Parsifal*.

11 Despite being completed in 1859, *Tristan* was not performed until 1865.

counted by Burnouf,¹² Wagner experimented with sketches for an opera entitled *Die Sieger* (*The Conquerors*) from 1856 until his death in 1883. In brief, the story concerns a low-caste woman, Prakriti (Savitri in later sketches), who is tormented by love for the Buddha's favorite disciple, the Brahmin Ānanda, and pleads to be united with him, only to learn from the Buddha that her present agony is the karmic retribution for her callous treatment of a similarly love-tormented, low-caste suitor in a previous Brahmin birth. The Buddha explains that she must expiate her misdeeds through renunciation, joining Ānanda in chastity in the Buddhist order as a spiritual sister. Her transcendence of the will and initiation into the *sangha* occurs as the Buddha gives his final teachings and finally passes into *parinirvāṇa*: his originally reluctant allowance of a woman into the order is the condition for his own, final transcendence.¹³

Despite Wagner's sustained enthusiasm for the ideas he found in his Buddhist source material, *Die Sieger* never proceeded beyond the sketches. Interestingly, he seems to have left the work unrealized not due to the challenge of expressing *nirvāṇa* musically—which he seems to have faced head-on *Tristan*, for instance—but to another aesthetic issue: his anxiety over the potentially cheapening effects of directly portraying “exotic” Asia. Richard and Cosima Wagner's writings reveal the composer's xenophobic ambivalence toward the “unartistic” trappings of his Asian sources, suggesting his desire to free a Buddhist “essence” from what he considered to be aesthetically stultifying foreign packaging.¹⁴

The concrete figure of Śākyamuni Buddha, then, with all his exotic accoutrements, never fully emerges onto the Wagnerian stage. Yet, as Welbon (1968, 178), Kienzle (2007, 40), App (2011, 49), and Buschinger (2017, 36) have shown, Wagner himself considered his final completed work, *Parsifal*, to embody the musical and spiritual values of his original Buddhist project in supposedly essentialized—in fact Europeanized—form.¹⁵ In this “Festival Play for the Consecration of the Stage” (*Bühnenweihfestspiel*), a sheltered young man of noble family, Parsifal, must renounce his past and expiate his own youthful misdeeds to redeem a fallen ascetic order, which he has been prophesied to one day lead. The young seeker absolves himself and the community of Grail Knights through his progressive attainment of compassionate wisdom, particularly through his relationship with the tormented woman Kundry, who is trapped in a series of painful rebirths for having laughed at the Redeemer on the cross.¹⁶ “By pity made wise,” Parsifal comes into his own redemptive power in an increasingly intense series

12 Urs App (2011, 177) identifies the tale as having been excerpted from a collection of hagiographical episodes titled *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*.

13 The precise relationship between Burnouf's account and Wagner's reworking is detailed by Buschinger (2017, 33–38).

14 Dorothy M. Figueira's (1994, 109) discussion of Cosima's diary entries from 1881 provide insight into Wagner's reticence toward “mango trees and lotuses and such.”

15 The opera loosely adapts Wolfram von Eschenbach's 13th-century Middle High German romance, *Parzival*, itself likely an adaptation of the French *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes.

16 Echoes of Prakriti/Savitri's narrative arc are clear, and even amplified, through Wagner's Christian “translation.”

of awakenings that conclude with his healing of Kundry, his consecration as leader of the Grail Society, and her final passage beyond rebirth. Despite its setting in the waste-forests of medieval Europe and its oblique incorporation of Christian mythology, *Die Sieger's* Buddhist vision of redeeming wisdom-through-compassion is unmistakable here.

As a text, *Parsifal's* suffusion with the “sublime” ideals of redemptive compassion and release in *nirvāṇa* is clear. Yet Wagner also crafted this outline into music-theatrical performances that could stir the emotions—and ideally the spirituality—of his audience, a majority of whom were likely unfamiliar with Buddha, Schopenhauer, and Burnouf. Musically, Kienzle (2007) and Brillenburg Wurth (2009) have both characterized climactic moments in Wagner’s mature works in terms of temporal slippage; consistent with his stated ideals of the musically sublime, Wagner deploys sonic “fragments floating in a tactical harmonic sequences that are no longer (completely) determined by predictable tonal dynamics but that cut short the sense of time progressing in a rigidly balanced environment” (Brillenburg Wurth 88). Set within Wagner’s already disorienting “endless melody” (*unendliche Melodie*), the effect of these departures from traditional rhythmic and tonal progression is a sustained deprivation of the listener’s sense of overview, or notion of what comes next: a simulation of timelessness.

In *Parsifal*, such musical moments mark climactic transformations in the heroes’ inner realities and are accompanied in performance by dramatic shifts in staging. In Act I, as a Grail Knight informs Parsifal that “here, time becomes space,” a sacred forest is transformed by means of a lengthy musical passage (*Verwandlungsmusik*) and movable stage decorations (*Wandeldekoration*) into the cavernous Grail Temple. Act II reaches its climactic “slippage” when Kundry, empowered by Parsifal’s ardent vision of the suffering Redeemer, becomes able to recall her past lives and primordial sin; these nearly simultaneous musical ruptures meanwhile reveal the act’s seductive garden setting to be a sorcerer’s illusion, which promptly dissolves. Finally, Parsifal’s redemption of the Grail community in Act III restores a ruined wasteland to health as Kundry achieves her final release from rebirth: according to Danuser, Wagner composed the finale to simultaneously resolve a multitude of “agitated” motifs operative throughout the drama, such that ultimately “prayer and redemption are thus suspended—trembling yet at rest—in a single space” (1994, 78).

Assisting these sublime musical elements are the technical innovations of mature Wagnerian music-drama—the total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*)—which would have transformed the performance of *Parsifal* into an unprecedentedly absorbing, even overwhelming aesthetic event for late-nineteenth-century audiences. In his theatre at Bayreuth, for instance, Wagner created a “mystic abyss” beneath the stage, in which the orchestra was hidden from view, creating the astonishing illusion of sourceless sound. He had dimmable electric lights in-

stalled in the hall, such that the stage—also lit with vivid electric light—was the only plainly visible part of the interior. Such techniques intended to induce the audience's total deliverance from the technical realities of the performance and a consequent surrender to and absorption within its idealized surfaces. This “phantasmagoric,” almost totalitarian technique was famously criticized by Theodor Adorno (2009, 74–85) as the predecessor of cinema, and is clearly reminiscent of Longinus's (Roberts 1907, 97) remarks on the use of poetic figures in sublime literature: namely, that the reader should remain unaware that the poet has used any techniques at all. From its foundations in his post-Romantic theory of the musically sublime and its relation to *nirvāṇic* transcendence to its specific musical and proto-cinematic techniques, Wagner crafted *Parsifal* to evoke overwhelming affective responses from its audiences, indeed to involve them in experiences of timelessness and placelessness. It specifically engineered the Buddhist material Wagner had gleaned from Burnouf into an opportunity for late-nineteenth-century European audiences to feel intensely, with ideally spiritual consequences.

Beyond the above effects, Wagner's final work involves one further, important element I wish to characterize as sublime, namely, the disappearance of the Buddha as a distinct presence from the work, or the indeterminacy of *Parsifal*'s Buddhist origins in its performance. Despite its spectacular staging, Wagner's ultimate treatment of its source material is implicit and suggestive at most: *Parsifal* disappears the Buddha. Motivated as this may have been by the composer's xenophobia, the suffusion—or indeed the sublimation—of the explicitly Buddhist opera *Die Sieger* into this ostensibly different presentation has the peculiar, emotionally compelling effect of a haunting; the sense that *Parsifal* is the worldly echo of a reality that itself has passed into “the land of being no longer,” as Wagner described *nirvāṇa*. It is notable that although Christian mythology is more vividly represented in *Parsifal* than Buddhist, it too is withheld from explicit presence: neither God, Christ, nor any other Christian figures are ever mentioned by name, and Parsifal himself ultimately takes on the role of “the Redeemer” (*Erlöser*). I characterize this double disappearance, this haunting silence of Buddha and Christ at the heart of *Parsifal* as sublime in that it resonates with Longinus's comments on the sublimity of wordlessness,¹⁷ Brillenburg Wurth's (2009) identification of the sublime with indeterminacy, and Wagner's own statement, from his 1861 essay “Music of the Future” (*Zukunftsmusik*): “The poet's greatness is mostly to be measured by what he leaves unsaid, letting us breathe in silence to ourselves the thing unspeakable; the musician it is who brings this untold mystery to clarion tongue” (1995, 344). The Buddha exerts an astonishing power within Wagner's final work precisely as an absence, without speaking a word. While this half-presence may not have been immediately evi-

17 “‘Sublimity is the echo of a great soul.’ Hence also a bare idea, by itself and without a spoken word, sometimes excites admiration just because of the greatness of soul implied” (Roberts 1907, 61).

dent to Wagner's late-nineteenth-century audiences, the similarly compelling, unnerving half-presence of Christ in *Parsifal* was. It is precisely what prompted Stéphane Mallarmé, probably in line with Wagner (Badiou 210, 147), to understand *Parsifal* as a ceremony transcending the inert dogmas of the past, sublime in its own, evidently boundless form; a hopeful harbinger of the unmoored spirituality of the future.

4 The Light of Asia

Wagner has been the chief example in this case study not merely because of his cunning appropriations of the discourse of sublime genius or his self-consciously Buddhistic elaborations of the musically sublime, but also because of the abundance of literature proceeding from him. The extensive critical engagement with Wagner's life and work both empower this essay and make it vulnerable to a certain parochialism. Wagner is no doubt unavoidable and important, yet a comprehensive outline of the "Buddhist sublime" in western music demands we acknowledge—if only as a brief, revealing counterpoint—the very different achievement of his less-remembered American contemporary, Dudley Buck (1839-1909).

A well-known church organist and prolific composer, Buck trained in German conservatories but was predominantly active in New England, within a musical milieu whose great contemporary popularity has been forgotten today largely due to its stylistic conservatism (Orr 2008, xi). In 1886, Buck completed his most extensive work: an adaptation of Edwin Arnold's 1879 epic-poetic retelling of the Buddha's biography,¹⁸ *The Light of Asia*, for large choral-orchestral ensemble, tenor, soprano, and bass, in the oratorio form made popular by Handel during the previous century.¹⁹ In the "sentimental history" of Buddhism in the west, Arnold's poem deserves considerable attention: according to Droit (2003, 157), it exemplifies a late-nineteenth-century shift in the western suspicion of (Schopenhauerian) Buddhist "nihilism" to an optimistic celebration of the Buddha's moral message, palatable to an increasingly secularized Victorian bourgeoisie. Arnold's poem was a global bestseller, popular in great part for its compelling yet reassuringly familiar style, which eschewed poetic innovation and emulated the "sublime" English poets that Handel himself had been compared to, along with Arnold's Victorian contemporaries Tennyson and Longfellow. Buck's decision to adapt *The Light of Asia* for music appears to have had less to do with a personal investment in Buddhism than a perceived opportunity to reinforce musically the moral values and aesthetic excitement that Arnold had so

¹⁸ Based loosely on the *Lalitavistaraśūtra*.

¹⁹ Arnold's poem also inspired the English composer Isidore de Lara to compose an opera, *La Luce dell'Asia* (1892), which debuted at Covent Garden but seems to have enjoyed less success than Buck's work.

effectively stirred in his audience: as Buck's biographer N. Lee Orr (2003, 415; 432) suggests, his adaptation conforms to both the Victorian conviction in the morally strengthening social influence of choral music and an "antimodern" orientalism, popular in late-nineteenth-century America, that "yearned for pious simplicity and a lost innocence... to counter the weightlessness of contemporary life."

Buck's approach is thus ideologically and stylistically conservative. If *Parsifal*'s philosophical and technical inventiveness represent Wagner's "music of the future," then *The Light of Asia* represents a deliberate, reactionary turning against the aesthetic currents of modernism, toward historical precedent, not for the stimulation of the art-cult but for the edification of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Although Buck experiments here with Wagnerian *Leitmotiv*, *The Light of Asia* follows the formal parameters of Handelian oratorio. It speaks a more accessible, semantic musical language, hearkening to a time before Beethoven's "ineffable" musical messaging, aiming more at evoking its audience's enjoyment and understanding than blowing their minds. His approach proved popular enough: *The Light of Asia* was distributed as a piano score even before its stage debut and toured major concert halls of the United States and England in the late 1880s to some acclaim.

Although *The Light of Asia*'s scale and its textual and musical pedigrees suggest the larger-than-life affective impression that the work intends, its goal is not to dissolve the self in musical experiences of formlessness, *pace* Wagner, but to invigorate the community by triumphally amplifying their sense of tradition and shared moral beliefs. Reflecting this conservatism and suggesting the light impression it would make on music-historical memory, reviews of *The Light of Asia*'s 1889 London performances comment rather nonchalantly on its irresistible charm and simultaneous lack of "strong character" (Orr 2008, 98).

Despite these divergences from Wagnerian music-drama, I submit that *The Light of Asia* lays just as valid a claim to the sublime in its clear invocation of Handelian grandeur and its evident conviction in this aesthetic's "elevating" power. Wagner did not hold a monopoly on the sublime at the end of the nineteenth century, and the disparities between his and Buck's approaches reveal the flexible capabilities and consequences of this aesthetic category; in 1886, it could encompass both Wagner's heady aesthetic program and Buck's populist triumphalism. Moreover, although Buck himself may not have been as moved by Buddhism as Wagner, his setting of Arnold's already affectively charged Buddhist text to music at once comfortable and emotionally rousing for his popular Victorian audience is perhaps even more immediately relevant to the "sentimental history" of Buddhism in the west than *Parsifal*'s more oblique treatment. Regardless of its intentions or intellectual, artistic caliber, Buck's Buddhist composition transformed the life story and teachings of the Buddha into enjoyable, if not sensational, celebratory evenings at the concert hall for thousands of westerners during a period when popular impressions of the so-called Buddhist "cult

du néant” were barely free of the earlier nineteenth century’s charges of nihilism. Such appeals to popular taste and the comfortable, even desirable affects associated with them are doubtless essential to the west’s “discovery” and consumption of a benevolent Buddha. At the same time, the fact that *The Light of Asia*’s market-ready Buddhist sublime proved to be a less consumable product than *Parsifal*’s more abstract treatment is ironic.

One final point of comparison between Wagner’s and Buck’s Buddhist compositions suggests itself here. Whereas *Parsifal* abstracts the embodied presence of Buddha into its narrative, thematic, and musical configurations, the Buddha is in an important sense the focal point of Buck’s work: following Arnold’s poem almost verbatim, it tells his story explicitly. At the same time, however, *The Light of Asia* importantly resembles *Parsifal* in its refusal to stage the Buddha’s body—bound up as it troublingly was with fleshy foreignness. Although the score calls for soloists to sing the words of Buddha and other characters, these are consistently presented by the soloists not as direct speech but as quotations, and in any case are refracted and deepened by the chorus, which carries the omniscient perspective of Arnold’s epic narrator. The Buddha’s presence here is narrated from afar, given in quotations, deflected into sound, and sonically diffused amidst a massive ensemble. By writing an oratorio, which in performance visually presents only a European orchestra, choir, and soloists, Buck, too, avoided having to present the “mango trees and lotuses” of Asia, maintaining a tolerable degree of exoticism but assimilating the Buddha to more elevated, Victorian aesthetic standards. Though *The Light of Asia* tells the story of the Buddha, its deflection of his presence into rousing, sublime sounds basically communicates the attitude that—much more than his body and even more than his ideas—what really matters is how he makes us—or can be made to make us—*feel*. In many ways at the antipodes of *Parsifal*, the *Light of Asia*’s treatment of Buddhist narrative is similarly disembodied. Is this vanishing trick—like *Parsifal*’s—sublime?

5 Gone?

In their very different attempts to adapt Buddhist source material to western music, both Wagner and Buck subjected the Buddha to a strange placelessness. On one hand, as is clear at least from Wagner’s remarks, this ambiguous presencing has something to do with a xenophobic anxiety over representing Asia directly: invoking the exotic phenomenal circumstances of Śākyamuni Buddha’s life was felt to somehow cheapen the “sublime” conceptual content of his teaching, which both composers seem to have held would be powerfully relevant to western culture—if only its essential effects could be liberated from their distracting Indic embodiments. Perhaps the first thing that *Parsifal* and *The Light of Asia* suggest to us is that if the Buddha were to teach, persuasively, in the con-

cert halls of the late-nineteenth-century west, his performance would need to involve both vanishing acts and ventriloquism. In other words, he would need to disappear into the music: itself a sublime transformation.

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse on the sublime in music laid the groundwork for such “freeing” effects. Through the strangely abstract, disembodied quality of music—specifically as it had been shaped by Romantic philosophizing—the Buddha would be able to bypass his embodiment and convey the ineffable content of his teaching appropriately wordlessly, or at least in the rarified, immaterial realm of pure sound; to vanish from material being and thereby speak all the clearer, directly to our feelings. Although both *Parsifal* and *The Light of Asia* involve text, and explicit Buddhist teachings in the case of the latter, their settings to “sublime” music entail the words becoming less vehicles of semantic meaning than opportunities to project ineffable feeling (or at least feelings that were marketable to European concertgoers).

Indeed, both works suggest that for Wagner and Buck, knowing about Buddhism in the way of those who had “discovered” it was insufficient to an authentic engagement—or experience—of the material. Their recourse to musical feeling intended that their western audiences should be granted a kind of deeper, more personal access to or initiation into Buddhism than they would be able to receive in the publications of Burnouf, Koeppen, or Max Müller. Such emphasis on affective *experience* as a legitimate mode of engaging Buddhism has, perhaps through mediations such as these, become characteristic of Buddhism’s western elaborations, often in close relationship to the dynamic of “detraditionalization”: we see both operating vigorously in Wagner’s and Buck’s works, which present Buddhism—unmoored from any orthodoxy—directly to subjective feeling. Although the distinction between knowing and feeling is never absolute, or even clear, the two composers’ development of a Buddhist sublime through music thus suggests that what happened between Buddhism and western culture through the long nineteenth century involved, alongside “discovery,” “curation,” and so on an affective and in no small part musical *attunement*—of Buddhism to western audiences and vice versa.

If the western “experience” of Buddhism was shaped by the aesthetics of the sublime, we should finally consider the possibility that this affective attunement exerted its own influence in the development of western aesthetics in the twentieth century. Characteristic of much Romantic art is a yearning gesturing toward a “beyond,” either of something irretrievably lost or transcending the work’s phenomenal surface: Wagner’s and Buck’s works, however problematic their motivations, follow suit by pointing to the presence of a figure who nonetheless is absented from concrete presentation. Although both composers were likely unaware of Buddhist debates on the Buddha’s continued existence following his *parinirvāṇa*, *Parsifal*’s haunted “ceremony of the future” and Buck’s quotational, disembodied evocation of the Buddha can be interpreted as aesthetic sugges-

tions of the Buddha's own irresolvable absence/presence in the world. Gone, his presence flickers in the music, which by its own nature as sound is both "there" and not there. At least in Wagner's work, there is a self-conscious attempt to emphasize the ontological instability of sound: grandiose, his sounds point at the same time to their own passage and ultimate dissolution, in musical configurations Wagner explicitly associated with sublime *nirvāṇa*.

Although she neglects the Buddhist undercurrent, Brillenburg Wurth (2009) suggests that Wagner's development of the "musically sublime" helps complicate the distinction between Romantic and postmodern sublimes discussed by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1991). Wagner's music gestures Romantically at a "beyond" while also emphasizing the astonishing indeterminacy of the very medium being presented *now*—the "immanent sublime" which Lyotard finds in many works of the twentieth-century avant-garde. As Brillenburg Wurth (2009, 130–131) points out, this immanent sublime is epitomized by American composer John Cage's (1912–1992) landmark 1952 composition *4'33"*, in which presence and absence fully interpenetrate in the riveting sonic indeterminacy of a performance in which no instrument is played. Cage, who attended D.T. Suzuki's lectures at Columbia in the early 1950s, articulates in distinctly Zen-inflected language in his "Lecture on Something" (1959) an approach to composition that draws attention to the nonduality of sound and silence, "so that listening to this music one / takes as a springboard the first sound that comes along; the first / something springs us into nothing and out of that nothing arises the / next something; etc. like an eternal current. Not one sound fears / the silence that extinguishes it. And no silence exists that is not pregnant with sound" (Cage 1999, 135). Although Cage was likely uninterested in Wagner's music and Romantic ideology generally, the resonance between the two composer's musical engagements with Buddhism and the development that these engagements have entailed in the western aesthetic discourse of the sublime is considerable. Through the turn of the twentieth century and evidently beyond, Buddhism seems to have encouraged in western art and aesthetics an exploration of ambiguity as a sublime force.

Acknowledging the entanglement of Buddhism with western approaches to sublime feeling now leads us back to a question we should have asked from the beginning: how did Buddhists in Asia prior to the nineteenth century understand and discuss the aesthetic dimensions of the Dharma?

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Absolute Nothingness and World History

Universalizing Asian logic as a world-historical mission

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ABSTRACT | This paper discusses the role that the Kyoto School played in prewar debates on Japanese subjectivity and Japan's global role. The focus is on the school's founder, Nishida Kitarō's (1870-1945) work, and its interpretation in wider intellectual debates. Nishida rarely wrote on Buddhist philosophy and can be called a "Buddhist thinker" only with strong caveats. Nevertheless, we may view his philosophy as expressing Buddhist insight through a framework of Western philosophy in an effort to reach universality. Despite his intentions, Nishida's efforts came to be received, within wider Japanese intellectual discourse, as an exemplary of Japanese particularity that was on par or beyond what was seen as "Western." The approach of this paper considers the discursive context of Nishida's later work as a central motivation for its concerns and its reception, considering what his philosophical position was articulated in dialogue with and how it reflected the wider discourse it participated in.

KEYWORDS | Nishida Kitarō; Kyoto School; Nationalism; World History; Modernity

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1 Introduction

Nishida Kitarō, along with other philosophers of the Kyoto School, began to discuss the issue of Japan's world-historical role in the 1930s partly as a way to point out that the modern Western viewpoint on society, culture and norms was not truly universal in its character and that a plural conception of the world as a unity of particularities was a more appropriate description of actual universality. This discussion itself was framed by a wider debate on Japanese national identity and the role of Japan in East Asia at the time, where Japan was expanding its own imperialist reach in direct competition with Western colonial powers, which meant that the issue was deeply political from the start.

A characteristic feature of the Kyoto School's approach to the discourse on Japan's national identity and the nature of Japanese subjectivity was to ground their discussions and ontology in the notion of absolute nothingness as the fundamental ground for reality and being. While different Kyoto philosophers each took their own viewpoint on the issues bubbling in Japan's prewar national discourse, they were connected through the philosophical framework they brought to bear on the problems. This framework had grown from Nishida's philosophical work, and while Nishida himself at first resisted involvement in the political debates of the day, having a clear distaste for the nationalist fever that was gripping the country (NKZ 12, 471-472), eventually he was also drawn into engaging directly with the issues of the day from the world-historical standpoint he had developed.

This article clarifies how Nishida's own work toward producing a universal logic entangled him in a growing discourse on Japan's national identity and how his resulting vision of globality and the world-historical mission of nations tied in and conflicted with the nationalist politics in Japan's own imperialist strife with Western powers. This article aims to introduce the complexities of producing philosophical work amid political conflicts, in general, and to look into Nishida's case, in particular, with the discursive context as a central motivation for its concerns.

A key theme of Nishida's and, by extension, the Kyoto School's philosophical project in prewar Japan was work toward elevation of Japanese particularity to universality by showing how what was viewed as universal would not necessarily be only a product of Western modernity, but that Japan could likewise produce (in the Kyoto School's case) philosophy that was equally universal in its applicability (Stromback 2020, 2; Feenberg 2019, 57; Sakai 2008, 187-189). At the time, this effort linked their work to a wider discourse centered on the cultivation of a distinct Japanese national identity that had become particularly trenchant in the 1920s and 1930s due to the tension between Japanese modern nation-building efforts and what was perceived as Japan's struggle with westernization and its

impact on the nation's traditions and way of life. This led intellectuals to seek ways to overcome Western modernity, both to maintain Japanese particularity and to transcend the seeming universality of the Western model for modernity. The Kyoto philosophers resisted retreat towards nativism and instead sought ways to show how Japanese particularity could become universalized and thus contribute to what they saw as the global progression of world history. While Nishida's own focus on experiential reality and the self's relation to the world emerged mostly prior to focus on such identitarian issues in intellectual debates (Kasulis 2018, 446-447), his early writings already presaged these issues and displayed Nishida's outlook (at least provisionally) as a liberal and cosmopolitan or pluralist, whose strong individualism was tempered by a view of an organic connection between the individual and society that saw the nation as an entity in its own right (Goto-Jones 2005, 52-66).

It was within the later identity-focused discourse that the younger Kyoto philosophers became interested in finding a way to express and elaborate on Nishida's philosophy that was based on the experiential nature of reality, and together with Nishida's articulation of the logic of place and the idea of absolute nothingness which drew on Buddhist philosophical concepts like nondualism, no-self and emptiness, a new ground for a seemingly universal philosophy was created. But while Nishida sought to move away from particular forms of thought, ironically, his efforts came to be received within wider Japanese intellectual discourse (and even among others in the Kyoto School) as expressing a "Japaneseness" equal or superior to what was viewed as "Western", directly casting his ideas to the role of supporting Japanese particularity. In effect, the result was that Nishida's philosophical logic, which was meant to convey what can be called Buddhist insight into the nature of reality and the self's relation to the world, came to be interpreted as an exemplary of Asian (and explicitly opposed to Western) thought, and as such, it was represented as expressing a particularly Japanese subjectivity grounded on a more authentic understanding of the world. This politicized his ideas within the prevailing problematization of modernity in Japanese discourse and the anxieties it provoked about the erosion of culture and identity. In this sense, the Kyoto philosophers' "pursuit of universality and their concern for overcoming modernity have an inherent connection" (Osaki 2019, 16), as the apparent universality of the modernity in question had resulted from Eurocentric historical processes having been universalized as measures of societal advancement. It was a standard that other countries could only fail to reach, and overcoming it became reified as a goal in itself within Japanese pre-war intellectual discourse, leading up to the notorious 1942 *Bungakkai's* "Symposium on Overcoming Modernity" that was widely interpreted as intellectual legitimization of Japanese war efforts after the war, and in which Kyoto School scholars Nishitani Keiji, Suzuki Shigetaka, and Shimomura Toratarō also participated (Osaki 2019; Krummel 2021; Ichijo 2022).

This article will first discuss Nishida's views on absolute nothingness and universality to orient the general discussion, addressing the ways in which Nishida's philosophical interest in the issue of universality came to be entangled with the wider discourse on Japanese modernity and national identity, and how Nishida's notion of absolute nothingness grounded the Kyoto School's approach to these issues. After this, the article moves to consider how this led Nishida to develop his ideas on world history and how the issue of tradition was connected to the contribution particular nations would make through their world-historical mission towards developing a global world. This also calls for a discussion of Nishida's position in comparison to its context, which returns us to the controversial topic of Nishida putting Japan forward as a potential place of mediation for a global world, and how this ties together with how he sees universality and absolute nothingness expressed in the unfolding of world history.

2 Fundamentality and Universality

A key notion in articulating Nishida's new, universal and what could be seen as markedly Asian logic was the concept of absolute nothingness (*zettai mu* 絶対無) that was fundamental to the philosophical system Nishida was developing. Absolute nothingness functions for Nishida as a polyvalent, but central idea that grounds other concepts he uses in systematizing his view on the constitution of reality. Moreover, it provides, for Nishida, the absolute metaphysical ground that neither comes to being nor passes away and encompasses everything without being defined in opposition to anything, absolving it of any opposition that could relativize it. Importantly, it negates the opposition between subject and object as the first step towards reaching its originary ground, and with the loss of that defining relationship between all things, all things are affirmed just as they are (without any subjective bias of a self)—negating the negation itself. This also means that the identity of each thing at its core is “absolutely contradictory”,¹ emerging from a dialectic of being and nothingness, and existing only in relation to the existence and non-existence of other things. It also implies that as one becomes aware of this dialectic at work in the ground of one's own self and is able to perceive the nothingness within oneself, one may directly experience the connection one has with the absolute ground, connecting this view particularly to the Mahāyāna Buddhist discourses of self-awakening.

In short, absolute nothingness functions as the absolute metaphysical ground for Nishida, based on which reality is defined as a dialectic of being and nothingness. Although it is conceptually rooted in Buddhist views on emptiness and no-self, James W. Heisig points out that it was a major shift to move from

¹ Nishida uses the term “absolutely contradictory self-identity (*zettai mujunteki jikodōitsu* 絶対矛盾の自己同一).

the idea of self-negation to an idea of nothingness as a metaphysical absolute, and this was not something that came from Buddhism nor did Nishida present it as such; instead, what was important was that it was a markedly “Eastern” idea (Heisig 2001, 62; Cestari 2010). It is also here that we can draw on the importance of Japanese aesthetics informing and motivating Nishida’s views, as the modern division of East from West—the Orient from the Occident—was always as much an aestheticized separation as anything else. This was especially so with philosophy if we understand modernity and its specific rationality as a Western project, as this formulation tends to frame universal rational values as distinctly Western while discounting other, competing rationalities, but leaves the aesthetic realm and its values as a place for actual plurality.

With the emphasis on the Eastern character of the idea of nothingness, it becomes easier to see its connection to issues of cultural aesthetics and national identity. Nishida himself already brought up explicitly the Eastern flavor of the idea of nothingness in his book *From Actor to the Seer* (*Hataraku mono kara miru mono e*) in 1927, when he talked about formlessness as distinctive to Eastern ontology (NKZ 4, 6). This kind of “Easternness” is relatively easy to see as a modern construction used to emphasize the aesthetic separation of the East from the West, and while the idea of nothingness used by the Kyoto School did draw on traditions like Mahāyāna Buddhism and Daoism, its discursive construction as markedly “Eastern” was a modern conceit used to articulate positions, separations, categorizations and images that were distinctly modern and tied to the national identity formation of Japan as a wider cultural discourse.

Nishida introduced the concept of absolute nothingness in 1927 through his logic of place (*basho no ronri* 場所の論理), designating it as the foundational ground for all reality, encompassing both being and non-being. Over the following decade or so, this idea developed into how, for example, the idea of nothingness was presented as “Oriental Nothingness” by Hisamatsu Shin’ichi in *Tōyōteki Mu* (1939), where the “orientality” builds on a dichotomy between European and Asian cultures on the basis of their grounding in being and nothingness, just as Nishida had suggested earlier. Over the 1930s, this cultural dichotomization became increasingly entrenched in the Kyoto School of philosophy, and it was used to articulate an aestheticized cultural divide, through which one could draw on a variety of cultural resources and use them to support an ideal model of Japanese subjectivity in contrast not only to the Western other, but also to the rest of Asia. This identity discourse itself traded heavily on the relationship of Japan to the West and the rest of Asia, and especially on aesthetic differentiation as a source of particular value for Japanese identity. A lot of heavy lifting was done by the nationalistic and identitarian orientation of Japanese intellectual discourse of the 1930s, with the Kyoto School and its views settling within a wider debate on Japanese subjectivity and its place in the world. Their work was thus carried out in dialogue with this broad field of identitarian signification—for ex-

ample, how the discussion of absolute nothingness as central to Japanese national subjectivity presumed a whole active discourse on national identity, national polity, ethnicity, tradition, modernization and history.

3 Nishida's Universality

Still, it is necessary to point out that what Nishida was developing was at least not intended as a culturally chauvinistic exercise. Brett W. Davis notes that Nishida saw East and West essentially as branches of the same tree, which meant that although they had a common root, the historical direction was towards diversification rather than unification, whereas Nishida's own philosophy of the historical world sought to disclose the trunk they have in common (Davis 2013, 195-194; see also NKZ II 14, 404-406). This also applied to the philosophy Nishida saw himself as developing, where he sees the relationship between Western and Eastern logics as differentiated products of a shared root and thus complementary to each other (NKZ II 12, 289).

This view relied on Nishida's specific understanding of universality, which also requires some explanation to better grasp his philosophical argumentation. The approach he developed from the late 1920s onward can be seen as reinterpreting the Hegelian dialectic through his own logic of place and the way the determination of a place (*basho* 場所) is grounded in absolute nothingness. For Nishida, self-determination of place means that nothingness works to determine itself by becoming the world as a concrete universal and thus the ground in which all things are placed. This results in a plurality of particular worlds that are neither forced to integrate into greater wholes nor unify with each other, but instead emerge from Nishida's dialectic of self-negation as many concrete universals in themselves (see NKZ 7, 419). In Nishida's later philosophy, the world itself acts as a dialectical universal (*benshōhōteki ippansha* 弁証法的一般者), which means essentially that the world forms as a place of mediation in which individuals can creatively interact, but at the same time the world is a place that arises through those interactions. These can be seen as two different aspects of the world: the world as a place of mediation and interaction is what Nishida refers to as the world as a place of nothingness or the dialectical universal (Nishida 1987, 62; NKZ 11, 389), while the world that emerges from that interaction would be the immanent world as a place of being or becoming. Both of these are ultimately grounded in absolute nothingness, and emerge through the dialectical process of self-negation.

To understand the importance of self-negation for Nishida, it is useful to think of it in similar terms to Hegel's dialectical movement of the absolute spirit realizing itself through the unfolding of world history, but replacing the absolute spirit with absolute nothingness. The self-realization is dialectical and self-

negating, as the movement towards realizing synthesis requires the negation of the earlier positions. Still, in terms of these dialectics, synthesis should not be seen as simply implying unification, but rather emphasizing that a difference between the opposites is also preserved in the process of negating that difference. Nishida took to heart Hegel's idea that while unification in synthesis may produce a new determination or identity, at the root of all movement and vitality is contradiction that necessitates activity (Schultz 2012, 331; Hegel 1969, 439). This view is encapsulated in Nishida's central concept of absolutely contradictory self-identity, as this concept is the product of the dialectical synthesis that produces identity without annihilating the fundamental difference or contradiction alive at its root. In this sense, a dialectic of negation and affirmation can also be seen as constitutive of the lived, historical reality that an individual experiences.

4 Nishida's View on World History

For Nishida, the space occupied by contradiction and difference as part of vitality of existence means that even in a global world, each culture can and must retain its uniqueness. This happens through becoming aware of the plurality of the world and, in response, relativizing and thus self-negating oneself in this global world of dialectical mediation so as to preserve one's own particular perspective. This is not a preservation of clinging to the past, however, but of developing oneself and finding in one's own cultural tradition that which is its own particular contribution. This leads to each nation having this as their "world-historical mission" in contributing their particularity to a global community, which essentially means that unlike Hegel, Nishida included non-Europeans as full participants in how world history was being realized.

In this sense, each nation-state, together with its history, forms a concrete universal that is a whole in itself, but is still placed within a wider universal and, ultimately, in the universal of universals, which is absolute nothingness. Nishida sees the need for this universal of universals in mediating this plurality of concrete universals. Whereas Hegel saw an ultimate universal in the world as a whole, Nishida finds it in the absolute nothingness that encompasses all concrete universals. This would also be connected to the concrete universals themselves being particular self-determinations of absolute nothingness, which works to expand the scale of Nishida's understanding of individuals themselves being similar self-determinations, albeit on a smaller scale. This is because Nishida's place of absolute nothingness is not to be seen as a passive ground, but rather as a self-determining formless potential. In his later works like "The World as a Dialectical Universal" (NKZ 7, 305-428), Nishida saw this as happening historically, with history itself shaped by the dialectical interaction between individuals and what Nishida termed as their cultural "species" that had them-

selves been formed historically and dialectically. The interaction between the individual and “species” was the key, as individuals are determined by their culture, and that culture, in turn, is counter-determined by individuals.

Although issues like history, society and politics remained marginal to Nishida’s work until the 1930s, Nishida’s own universalist viewpoint remained remarkably consistent throughout his career, even if it criticized “Western” universality and viewed progress towards a “universalism of particulars” as an evolutionary process that rejected forceful universalization of any particularism (Goto-Jones 2005, 97, 99-100). Criticisms from Tosaka Jun (Tosaka 2020; Shimizu 2015) and especially from Tanabe Hajime (Tanabe 2020; Heisig 2001, 109) for the abstractness, lack of historical dimension and aestheticist nature of his philosophy, drove Nishida to attach significantly more attention to the importance of historical and embodied context. This led to his interest shifting to the “historical world” and “historical body” and away from his more abstract, decontextualized philosophy:

The critics suggested that Nishida ignored the world determined by individual human action by replacing individual human subjectivity with trans-individual experience or consciousness and eventually shifting human agency to the world as a universal. In response, Nishida began to articulate the world as a dialectical universal. The basic idea is that the world is a place of mediation between acting individuals. It is not a transcendent topos that one-sidedly determines individuals but a topos that arises with them through their creative interactions. (Maraldo 2019)

When Nishida first turned to the issues related to history and society, he was generally more interested in articulating the logic behind the formation of the historical world than in the actual movements of world history. The formation of the historical world is, after all, much closer to foundational issues of the self’s relation to the world, which had been a bedrock of Nishida’s philosophical focus through his career. Still, this does not mean that an individual would have been disconnected from the movements of world history, since the formation of a particular historical world and its shape was seen by Nishida as directly related to its world-historical mission.

Nishida positioned his view on the self-formative production of historical reality as an alternative to Hegelian and Marxist interpretations of history, where its dialectical relationship between past and future works to constitute the present. In Nishida’s hands, this dialectic was cast as an identity of contradictories, where the mutual opposition of the past and future forms an identity as a historical world in the absolute present (NKZ 9, 163-165). Nishida avoided references to Buddhist influences in order to emphasize the universality of the logic he was developing (Arisaka 2014, 9-10), but his dialectic of nothingness and me-

diation was rooted in Buddhist metaphysics—for example, the logic behind the identity of contradictories necessarily involves the mutual determination of the opposites in question, which is in line with the Buddhist principle of dependent origination. Hence Nishida's philosophical approach focused on dialectics that function to unite elements that seem contradictory, but are necessarily co-constitutive of the world. The opposition is neither removed nor lessened through this procedure, but the opposites are instead integrated into an ongoing process. This led to Nishida's vision of the world progressing in a dialectical manner through these oppositions towards the creation of a global world as a process through which everyone participates in forming and transforming the world. This means that society is by its nature a form of production (*poiesis*) that is specific to its own epoch and always a particular example of the ongoing mode of production of the historical world (NKZ 9, 167).

For Nishida, a dialectic terrain is thus formed by the co-constitution of the subject and the world via a process of renewal of tradition, which emerges through a tension between future aspirations and past tradition as the contradictory self-identity of the present. Nishida divides this dialectic of history into an immanent pole representing the temporal and the teleological where renewal takes place via a subject's poietic practice through which the universal world expresses its form, and a transcendental pole representing the spatial and the material where the creative function of the universal world causes the emergence of particular empirical objects dependent on their environment (NKZ 10, 280; Iida 2008, 79). Iida Yumiko notes that

These two-way dialectical processes make a constant mutual regeneration of the universal in the particular, the past tradition in the present, while constituting a harmonious state of nation at each given historical time. (Iida 2008, 79)

In line with his logic of place, Nishida sees the individual subject functioning as a part of the world as its “productive element” (*sōzōteki yōso* 創造的要素) (NKZ 8, 315-316)—but with a free will that emerges from the foundations of the world in absolute nothingness—and providing for the nation as a place or substratum a distinctly bodily and temporal aspect of poietic practice (Iida 2008, 79-80). This locates the *poiesis* of history into the body and present, producing history anew through the locus of the present.

Nishida also emphasized the importance and the role played by Japanese national polity (*kokutai*) in the realization of Japan's world-historical mission, and he saw the national polity centered on the Imperial House which gave it its fundamental grounding in myth and the religious realm that Nishida viewed as necessary for the self-formative process of a historical society and for the development of Japan's specific historical inheritance (Jacinto 1994, 142-143). The lineage of the Imperial House contributed to its transcendent role that united

history and myth as a prototype of the national polity, which in turn functioned as an ideal structure for the whole of Japan and which Nishida saw as representing the unique national subjectivity of Japan and thus its activity on the world-historical stage.

5 Nishida on the Importance of Tradition

A few more words are necessary about the notion of tradition in Nishida's philosophy. Nishida saw tradition as based in socially produced myths that are foundational elements in the construction of a social world, growing out of the emotionally charged activities of a group and its common hopes, while tradition itself functions as a principle that brings together the past and the present by unifying and organizing contingent social phenomena into a historical reality (Jacinto 1994, 134-135). Echoing his view on the relationship between individuals and their cultural "species", he also holds the view that "genuine perception is only possible from within tradition, for each and every thing is something historical", but he also connects this seeing with active doing, pointing out that it is only through the manifest perception, insight, and activity of individuals that tradition can work to create a historical world (Jacinto 1994, 135).

It bears noting that calling this process of social construction "tradition" (*dentō*) directs our attention to certain aspects of it: what Nishida is talking about can be generally seen as falling within the realm of the historical constitution of the social, but framing it as "tradition" tends to reify an understanding of that historically constituted process and emphasize the importance of cultural continuity in a way that still prioritizes the past. On the other hand, though, Nishida's focus on tradition as constitutive of a nation's historical reality is not surprising given his historical context where the production and articulation of a unified historical reality were a priority among intellectuals in Japan's modern nation-building efforts. In this sense, claiming a tradition or lineage provided historical and discursive legitimacy for the unity and present form of the Japanese nation-state.

Nishida then connects this with his idea of societies emerging from a ground of ritual and myth to argue that historical reality itself requires a collective subject to bring together social and individual demands of a concrete historical world, and in his view, it is tradition that works to manifest the specific subjectivity of a group of people or *ethnos*. This is vital for him as the subjective self "is not born into this world by coincidence but in an historically specific manner, namely socially, through tradition" (NKZ 10, 293-294), meaning that the self emerges from and as part of an *ethnos*, as part of its historical inheritance and mission in the dialectical development of the world. Since the historical world is produced again and again over time, tradition also develops and sets a new task

as the historical mission. In contemporary times, Nishida's progressive view of history saw that task to be the forging of a global world, but recognition of this task itself required the perspective of tradition that arose from a self-identity shaped by tradition as its performative intuition, namely the self's fundamental orientation and productive participation in the creation of the historical world.

6 A Nation's World-Historical Mission

The critique of modernity from the younger Kyoto philosophers mentioned above ties together with the view Nishida developed of the historical world and the world-historical mission nations have in the world, which arguably amounted to a vision of cosmopolitan pluralism (Goto-Jones 2005, 33, 94, 122; Yano and Rappleye 2022). While Nishida's philosophical focus in his historical turn was directed to the relation between individual consciousness and the historical world, grasped through concepts like performative intuition (*kōiteki chokkan* 行為の直観) and Japan's cultural development as a global orientation,² the younger generation of the Kyoto School focused more on issues related to society, state and nation—in general, toward the explicitly political realm and application of their teachers' philosophies. This interest culminated in their participation in two highly visible public symposia – the *Chūōkōron* debates in 1941–1942 (related to issues of world history, Japan's world-historical role, and the war) and the above-mentioned “Symposium on Overcoming Modernity” in 1942 (Kawakami and Takeuchi 1979; Hiromatsu 1989; Horio 1994; Williams 2004; Calichman 2008; Osaki 2019). What has been later revealed by the publication of the so-called “Ōshima memos” was that they were also cooperating with the Yonai faction of the Imperial Navy that sought to curb the military adventurism and ultranationalism of the Imperial Army (Tōjō faction) through efforts aimed at shifting public opinion (Horio 1994; Ōhashi 2001).

The *Chūōkōron* debates, along with the participants' monographs like Nishitani's *View of the World, View of the State* (*Sekaikan to kokkakan*, 1941), Kōsaka's *Philosophy of the Ethnic Nation* (*Minzoku no tetsugaku*, 1942), as well as Kōyama's *Philosophy of World History* (*Sekaishi no tetsugaku*, 1942) and *Japanese Issues and World History* (*Nihon no wadai to sekaishi*, 1943) sought to articulate and assess Japan's world-historical standpoint as an agent for creating the kind of global world Nishida envisioned, a pluralistic world order that had stepped beyond an Enlightenment teleology leading inevitably to a Western modernity.³ Nishida himself finally weighed in directly by applying his philosophy to Japan's situation and its war in Asia with his 1943 essay, “The Principle of

² Nishida discussed this, for example, in his 1938 lectures on the “Problem of Japanese Culture” (*Nihon bunka no mondai*, NKZ 14, 387–418).

³ For detailed and critical analysis, see Osaki (2019).

the New World Order” (NKZ 12, 426-434; translated in Arisaka (2019) and Nishida (2019)).

The views Nishida expressed there were based on his 1941 essay “The Question of Raison d’Etat” (*Kokka riyū no mondai*), where he had outlined his view on the progressive nature of history. Nishida had already begun discussing philosophy of history in his 1913 essay “History and Natural Science” (*Rekishī to shizen kagaku*), but it was in his 1931 essay “History” (*Rekishī*) that Nishida delved into it in more detail, noting that the philosophical recognition of the significance of history had emerged through works of thinkers like Wilhelm Dilthey and Wilhelm Windelband around the turn of the century (Yusa 2021, 213). In the “The Question of Raison d’Etat,” Nishida stated this significance in terms of three periods moving from individual to national to global self-awareness (NKZ 10, 337), and he reiterated this point in his 1943 essay.

There, Nishida outlined a progressive development in world history from an 18th century era of individualistic self-awakening in the West as a time of individualism and liberalism to a 19th century era of state self-awareness that produced imperialism and a sense of historical mission for states to strengthen themselves through the subordination of other states, eventually resulting in the world wars. Against these, the 20th century was to be seen as an era of emerging global self-awareness, in which states could become aware of their common world-historical mission to work towards creating a global world that was not limited to the Western domination that the previous era had produced. Nishida thought that if states did not reach self-awareness that allowed them to realize their world-historical mission, they would remain mired in class struggles that were based on 18th century foundations of individualistic self-awareness which resisted the prioritization of states’ self-awareness over the individual (Nishida 2019, 306-307). The implication is that the actual self-awareness of the states about their world-historical mission to constitute a global world would also involve the harmonization of the nation with the state, with the state controlling the world-historical formative power of the ethnic nation (NKZ 12, 397-398).⁴

The formation of a global world, in Nishida’s view, first required an intermediate process of forming a particular world, through which each ethnic nation-state would transcend itself to connect with its neighbors to follow a supranational tradition to establish non-Western worlds. This global world would not be based on universalizing the Western world, but rather would allow each nation to maintain its own historical uniqueness and thus realize its own particular world-historical mission through its contribution to the construction of a universal, global world. Nishida saw the ethnic nation less as a biological and more as a socio-historical concept that required a political state in order to be functional in the world, meaning that the ethnic nation would be contained within the

⁴ This point is connected to what can be seen as the Kyoto School’s effort to harmonise ongoing tensions between populist ethnic nationalism and government statism at the time, see Söderman (2022, 8-9).

greater universalizing force of the state and could thus avoid falling prey to ethnic nationalism (*minzokushugi*) as a narrow and exclusivist ideological direction that would seek to isolate Japan from the world (Doak 2008, 155; NKZ 12, 398).

The conflicts caused by the 19th century expansionism were still left unresolved by the end of WWI and had thus resulted in a second world war. Nishida argued that the Wilsonian solution, which the League of Nations proposed in terms of national self-determination, merely worked to transpose the 18th century individualism onto the international stage and was thus ineffective. But the situation could be resolved through the formation of a global world in the sense that he proposed, where the states would have to both develop their own unique positionality and transcend themselves to follow their regional tradition at the same time, in order to form a truly global world in which each could fully express its own unique particularity as part of a pluralist whole (Nishida 2019, 307). Nishida used this view to reinterpret the imperial slogan *hakkō ichiu* ('Eight corners of the world under one roof') as expressing a pluralist principle whereby the "Emperor graciously declared to allow all states to obtain their own places" (Nishida 2019, 307-308), citing here a passage from the 1940 "Imperial Rescript for the Conclusion of the Tripartite Pact" between Japan, Germany and Italy. This resulted in an arguably cosmopolitan interpretation of the imperial slogan that was markedly at odds with its ultranationalist interpretation, which took it to mean bringing all under the rule of the Emperor.⁵ Nishida's reading can thus be seen as offering a very different reading from the dominant propagandist view, even if he did not dwell on the issue. Instead, he pressed on to emphasize the need for East Asian nations freed from European colonization to carry out their world-historical mission and stated that this is the principle of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere (Nishida 2019, 308).

The Japanese national polity that Nishida outlined bore little similarity with the political and international reality of the Japanese empire; where he articulated a vision of the national polity spreading its influence as a self-negating mediator that renounced imperialism and colonialism along with the use of military force and would work to preserve regional traditions and agency of other peoples and states, the Japanese empire did the exact opposite within the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. This rift between the vision Nishida gave and the reality on the ground have since provided ammunition for both his critics and defenders, since on surface level his position can be read either as seeking to legitimate the practices of Japanese empire or, on the contrary, implicitly criticizing the state for failing to align with these ideals. On a closer and more contextual reading, though, the picture becomes a lot murkier, as Nishida can be viewed as having engaged in what Ueda (1994, 90) has called a tug-of-war over meaning, or as Ishihara puts it:

⁵ While this was mostly formulated as referring to Asia within the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, Allied Forces actually interpreted it as meaning the whole world (see International Military Tribunal for the Far East 1948, 85-86).

... a closer reading of his writings where he employs those controversial terms reveals that he was attempting to not merely reiterate the discourse, but rather, to redefine the terms based on a global and multicultural standpoint. Far from a narrow-minded nationalism, Nishida believed that each nation and culture must go beyond itself to contribute to the making of the world. (Ishihara 2021, 156)

In this sense, Nishida's own philosophy can be seen as calling for nurturing a pluralist world in order to maintain its vitality through the 'contradictions' at the root of its constitution. Absolute nothingness functioned as the ground to both enable and harmonize the differences, while Nishida saw Japan as having the potential to take a mediating role on the global stage, partly due to its historical position as a power outside of Western universality, and partly due to its own tradition and cultural aesthetics that Nishida saw as emphasizing formlessness and self-negation.

7 Analyzing Nishida's Historical Views against Their Context

Nishida's analysis of Japan's historical formation and its world-historical role placed the Imperial House at the heart of Japanese world and its national polity, which drew criticism after the war for Nishida's faithfulness to the Emperor. It should be remarked, though, that he was specifically talking about the Japanese world and its state formation as part of its world-historical mission, not about other countries and their world-historical missions, and at the time, the Imperial House was undeniably at the center of the Japanese state and its national polity, already on the basis of its 1889 Meiji Constitution. From a contemporary perspective, Nishida's formulation of the Imperial House as embodying the absolute present in the way it contains elements of the past and future does stick out as a peculiar way of abstracting and mythologizing what is still essentially a political institution, but it follows directly from the way he views tradition, with the Imperial House's continuity correlating with the notion of the absolute present in unifying past and future.

As mentioned above, Nishida also placed ethnic nations (*minzoku*) as the driving force in the formation of historical worlds, but warns that

mere nationalism [*minzokushugi*] is national egoism because it does not contain true globality, places its own nation at the center, and considers the whole world from such a self-centered position. What derives from it would inevitably fall into aggressionism or imperialism. Today, it is obvious that Anglo-American imperialism is based on national egoism. (Nishida 2019, 310)

This, it has been argued (Yusa 1991, 207; Ueda 1994, 90) should be properly read as implicit criticism, even if directing the criticism of nationalism against the Atlantic powers might seem like glossing over how the same criticism would certainly apply to the Japanese.⁶ However, Nishida wrote this at a time when direct criticism of the government was essentially impossible, and together with his pluralistic reading of world history and its development, the general thrust of his argumentation should have made it clear that he was implicitly criticizing what he saw as nationalist arrogance among the Japanese elite and the military. While his avoidance of direct confrontation gave some cover against assaults from the militarists and ultranationalists, it seems also clear from their reactions that the implicit criticism did not escape them, so it is perhaps not surprising that from June 1943 onward, the government suppressed the Kyoto School's ideas from the press (Horio 1994, 303).

Nishida's emphasis on the importance of national sovereignty and each state's agency is visible in his condemnation of "national egoism." In a more anecdotal sense, Shimomura Toratarō recollected in his comments to Nishida's "Principle of the New World Order" and other similar political writings a conversation between Nishida and government officials who had come to visit him, where Nishida angrily aired his views:

If it is a co-prosperity sphere, it means that every participant must be satisfied. If we just decide on the nature of the co-prosperity sphere by ourselves and coerce the others, we would be just restricting their free will. That is no co-prosperity sphere ... In a real co-prosperity sphere, other participants would urge Japan to lead them. Only then can we call it a Holy War. (NKZ 12, 471)

Although Nishida was critical of the government and the war, he also seems to shift into Japanese exceptionalism at the end of his essay, when he makes the argument that the essence of Japanese national polity lies in its unique principle of subjectivity that empties itself and embraces others, or can contain others by emptying itself (Nishida 2019, 311; NKZ 12, 434). On the one hand, this returns Nishida to his emphasis on the necessity of mediation for the emergence of a plural and global world, but at the same time it turns the discussion to the special character Nishida and the Kyoto School accord to Japanese subjectivity in having a particular closeness through its tradition to the notion of absolute nothingness (NKZ 4, 6; Osaki 2019, 117), thus making Japan especially suited to exemplify the logic of Nishida's global, world-historical world. Aside from the questionable prioritization of Japan, there is the further problematic aspect in Nishida's use of the idea of Japan as a place of mediation. There is a dissonance between Nishida's position and the way he expressed his views: Nishida con-

⁶ See Arisaka (1996, 87-99) for analysis of positions both defensive and critical of Nishida, which also remains an ongoing division to this day: cf. Osaki (2019) and Yusa (2021).

trusted a true “imperial way” (*kōdō*) of self-negation and mediation with an illegitimate way of imperialism (*teikokushugi*) that sought confrontation and domination, but even so, he expressed that self-negation as Japan enveloping other subjects:

While a practice of self-emptying in order to open oneself up to others is surely an essential moment in dialogue, and while in a religious sense we may think that there is a depth-dimension of the true self that compassionately embraces all beings, on a political and cultural level the presumption that one nation can “envelop others” is precisely the presumption of a political or cultural empire. (Davis 2013, 188)

An uncharitable reader might draw the conclusion that Nishida believed that all nations should be brought under Japan (as would be indicated by a conventional reading of the imperial slogan *hakkō ichiu*), but a closer consideration suggests that Nishida sets up Japan as an example for others through what he sees as its affinity for emptying itself that both allows it to maintain itself and to embrace others. In his view, taking this approach could resolve the world-historical challenges left by 19th century imperialist conflicts and allow for a formation of a truly global world where each country would be able to realize its own world-historical mission, maintain its agency and connect freely with each other. Ultimately, though, he expressed his views in a way that was both compromised by its use of imperialist language and readily adopted for arguing for further Japanese particularist positions in a highly fraught political climate.

8 Conclusion

As history proves, Nishida’s vision did not come close to fruition during his lifetime, and he passed away just months before Japan surrendered to the Allied powers. The Kyoto School’s, and even Nishida’s, reputations were tainted by their involvement in the wartime political debates, and for decades their works that related to politics and society were directly overshadowed by their later religious philosophy and philosophy of religion. Only since the 1990s has much attention been given to this period in their philosophical efforts, and the judgment has often been harsh on its value. Whether their pluralist vision of a global world and efforts to sway Japan’s course towards a less disastrous direction can overcome their questionable ideological stances and often statist theoretical positions remain an open debate to this day. Nishida’s passing and lack of direct involvement shielded him from most of the postwar vitriol, but as Osaki Harumi (2019, 127-161) argues, his influence was foundational for the philosophical approaches taken by the other Kyoto School members.

Nishida's concern with overcoming the universalization of Western rationality was both motivated by the context of Japan's nation-building effort and in turn contributed to it by challenging the imposition of what he saw as the universalization of Western particularity. From his standpoint, it would have made sense that just as a Western particularity had been universalized, the same could be done with other particular approaches, in order to build up a truly plural and global world. This required both an understanding of their tradition and the ability to see what their potential contribution would be in terms of challenging oversights of the Western framework.

While Nishida's focus was on philosophy and he seems to have sought to open the intellectual realm to a plurality of positions, the discourse his work participated in had only one position as the target, and there was little he could do to avoid his work being interpreted as valorizing a Japanese particularity. In effect, this resulted in the reification of his philosophical concepts to denote that particularity and its more authentic superiority in comparison to imported Western concepts. As Nishida himself worked within the same discursive context and the Overton Window it afforded, it remains difficult to fully deny his own complicity in this process, but it seems clear that his work was directed against the narrow-minded nationalism and militarist expansionism he found objectionable to individual freedom, which, following his own logic, also extended to the supra-individual level of nations.

Acknowledgments

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Abbreviations

NKZ = *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* [*Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō*]. Tokyo: Iwanami, old edition 1966–67, new edition 2002–09. (Citations are from the older edition, unless otherwise indicated.)

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Befriending Things on a Field of Energies

With Dōgen and Nietzsche

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ABSTRACT | A major factor behind the current ecological crisis is our dysfunctional relationship with the things we deal with in our everyday lives. This pathology derives mainly from our utilitarian perspective, through which we see things as mere means to our ends, and more broadly from a sense that they consist of “inanimate” matter. But this worldview is relatively recent and quite parochial, as becomes clear when we consider the East-Asian philosophical tradition with its idea of the world as a field of *qi* energies. Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist and Neo-Confucian thinkers developed sophisticated accounts of how humans and things share a common nature, which culminate in the philosophy of Zen Master Dōgen. A comparison with corresponding ideas in Friedrich Nietzsche suggests that these accounts may have general validity. More friendly attitudes toward things can enrich our experience and reduce the damage we inflict on the natural world.

KEYWORDS | Animism; Buddha-Nature; Dōgen; Inanimate Things; Nietzsche; *Qi*

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We find ourselves in 2023 in quite a predicament as far as the natural world is concerned: a crisis with the climate; pollution of the air, earth, and water; wide-spread deforestation; decimation of fish, wildlife, and insect populations; and general biodiversity collapse. A major factor here is that people in the overdeveloped world tend to be alienated from natural phenomena, cut off from them by urbanisation and the ubiquitous screens of information and communications technology. But we also have a deeply dysfunctional relationship with the “inanimate” things around us, including human-made things, and this also exacerbates our environmental predicament. The pathology derives mainly from our utilitarian perspective, through which we see things as mere means to our ends, and more broadly from a sense that things are configurations of lifeless matter. For Aristotle they were material that has been formed by some external agent, while Newton much later called matter “inanimate and brute.” More salutary views of things can be found in other thinkers and traditions.

Among the abundance of Buddhist ideas and practices that can help us remedy our dysfunction, those of the thirteenth-century Sōtō Zen master Dōgen stand out for their relevance to our interactions with so-called “inanimate” objects. Some people might dismiss Dōgen’s views as overly alien, East-Asian, Buddhist and esoteric, because they derive from the practice of *zazen* and consequent “non-ordinary” experiences. And so, to dispel the impression that Zen ideas are irrelevant to a crisis that derives from mainstream western and post-Cartesian ways of thinking and doing, it will be instructive to bring in the ideas of a bona fide western thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche, to see how closely several features of his philosophy resonate with Dōgen’s ideas on this topic.

The idea of “befriending” things may come across as primitively animistic, but that impression comes from a modern, parochial, post-Cartesian prejudice. And given the power of that prejudice, I’ll be devoting the bulk of this essay to a consideration of other philosophies—all of them formidable—that see things quite differently. After all, the term “animism” gained currency only in the nineteenth century, when the anthropologist, E. B. Tylor ascribed the condition to “savages and barbarians” for their tendency to “personify” things and treat “inanimate objects” as if they had souls and wills (Tylor 2010, ch. XI).

But do we moderns not do the same when we swear at a tool for frustrating our purposes? Is someone who does that regressing to a primitive mode of life—or can things really respond wilfully when we fail to pay them sufficient attention? If they appear to be doing that, wouldn’t we do better to withhold blame, take responsibility, and say “I’m sorry”? After all, things are almost always the innocent party, so a more friendly approach would surely improve our interactions. If we sometimes talk to ourselves when alone, why not bring into the conversation things that we deal with every day? (Tea cups, knives, pens, coats, bicycles, towels, pillows, etc.) That would surely make the world a livelier place.

In any case, the motivation for the entire exercise is that a friendlier attitude toward the things we deal with can both enrich our lives and reduce damage to the natural world on which we depend for our existence.

1 Soul of the World

In the beginning, Thales of Miletus (“father of western philosophy”) is said to have said: “the mind of the world is a god” and “all things are full of gods,” meaning that “a divine power moves the basic stuff” of the universe. The whole world, including things like the iron-attracting Magnesian “stone, and amber,” is thus in motion and generating motion. It’s all “ensouled,” *empsychon*, endowed with soul as “something kinetic” (Kirk & Raven 1957, 93-96).

A younger friend of Thales’ most famous student, Anaximenes of Miletus, identified “the underlying nature” of all things as “one and infinite: air” (*aēr*), which he equated with god or a field that produces gods. When “rarefied” by heating, *aēr* becomes fire, and when “condensed” by cooling it becomes “wind, then cloud, water, earth, and stones; and the rest come into being from these.” As wind especially, the one underlying nature is “always in motion.” The traditional paraphrase of Anaximenes runs like this: “From air all things come to be, and into it they are again dissolved. As our soul, being air, holds us together and controls us, so does air (as wind or breath) enclose the entire cosmos” (Kirk and Raven 1957, 144, 150, 158). This assimilation of *aēr* to *psychē* means that the human soul is one with the world.

Platonic cosmology regarded the world as, in the words of Plato’s *Timaeus*, “a truly living thing, endowed with soul and intelligence ... containing within itself all living beings that are naturally akin to it.” According to the creation myth in that dialogue, the Divine Craftsman makes the world soul, places it in the centre of the physical world, and then diffuses it throughout and around the body of the cosmos. From the remaining ingredients of the world soul he makes the human soul, with a corresponding structure though at a lesser grade of purity. And so, for a good human life the best course is to impart to one’s soul “the harmonies and revolutions of the universe,” thereby assimilating our minds to the mind of the world, and our bodily movements to the motions of the cosmos.¹ The idea of the world soul, or *anima mundi*, persisted throughout the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions, culminating in the Renaissance philosophy of Marsilio Ficino.

The early Stoic philosophers understood the world as generated by two principles: *god* as the active principle, who acts on *matter* as the passive. God as divine reason pervades and directs the world through *pneuma*, or breath, which informs and animates all things through differing degrees of condensation and

¹ Plato, *Timaeus* 30b, 34b, 41d-e, 90d.

rarefaction. At its most condensed, this breath holds things like rocks together, while at its most rarefied it acts as the life force, or soul, of animals and humans (Inwood and Gerson, 72).

A later Stoic thinker, Marcus Aurelius, emphasised the human intellect's participation in the divine mind that orders the world, and the soul's participation in the breath that animates all things, including the human body.² In thinking, it is not just I who think, because it could also be the divine mind of the world thinking through me. In moving, my body is moved by the cosmic breath: inhaling, it keeps bodies together; and exhaling, it has them interact with other bodies.

Now, if these ancient views seem to us moderns quaintly animistic—anima/psyche/soul everywhere—that's because the advent of Christian philosophy basically eclipsed the idea of the world soul. God the creator became the prime Animator of things, and created the human being in his own image, making it radically different from all other creatures.

On the basis of this difference, thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas denied soul to animals because they lacked reason and intellect, thereby reinforcing the ontological rift between humans and the rest of creation. Only outlier mystics like Saint Francis acknowledged a close relation between humans and animals, and he even treated air and fire as brothers, and water and earth as sisters. A family man without a (real) family. But mainstream Christian philosophy gave little thought to our relation to the so-called inanimate, since to hold that the whole world is ensouled would verge on the heresy of pantheism.

Thanks to the enormous influence of the post-Cartesian dichotomy between human minds as “thinking stuff” (*res cogitans*) and physical things as “extended stuff” (*res extensa*), which even put the human body on the lifeless side of the divide, along with animals and things, this kind of division between animate and inanimate has come to seem quite natural. Nevertheless, side-currents of “world soul” thinking persisted in the Western tradition, running from the Epicureans through Spinoza to Nietzsche and Bergson, and resurfacing in contemporary figures like Deleuze and Latour (see Bennett 2010). And when you consider the world's other philosophical traditions, our post-Cartesian worldview of human souls in a mechanistic world of lifeless molecules begins to look even more peculiar.

2 Fields of Energy

Dōgen is a profound and difficult thinker, so we stand a better chance of understanding him if we are familiar with the background to his ideas in ancient Chinese understandings of how the world works. Angus Graham characterises the

² Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 8.54.

Daoist philosophy of Zhuangzi, who was roughly contemporary with the early Stoics and was also a major precursor for Dōgen, in terms that allude to a pattern of cosmological thinking found in various cultures: “All things can be conceived as condensing out of and dissolving into a universal *ch’i* [*qi*], which as Yang is pure and so free moving and active, and as Yin is impure and so inert and passive.” In the particular case of the human being, Graham cites chapter 22 of the *Zhuangzi*: “[A] man’s life is the assembling of *qi*. The assembling is deemed birth, the dispersal is deemed death. ... Running through the whole world there is nothing but the one *qi*” (Graham 1989, 328). This “one *qi*” is also invoked in chapter 6, when Confucius says to a follower that Daoist sages are able to “go roaming in the single *qi* that breathes through Heaven and Earth.”

Like the gods and soul of Thales, the air and wind of Anaximenes, and the divine breath of the Stoics, the Chinese term *qi* does not mean just “life energy”: *qi* also configures things like rivers and rocks and seas—every thing. Through its continuum of condensation and rarefaction it corresponds to the Greek *aēr*, and with its yang and yin polarities to the active and passive principles of the Stoics. *Qi* further differentiates itself through yin and yang into the four seasons, and then the “six atmospheric energies” and “five processes” of terrestrial transformation (wood, fire, soil, metal, water), so as to inform *everything*—what the Chinese call “the myriad things.”

When the *qi* energies are relatively condensed, they form local configurations such as living bodies or (at the extreme of *yin*) inert bodies like rocks; but in their most rarefied form, known as *jing* (quintessence), they pervade invisibly the entire universe. Thanks to this universal medium we have the phenomenon of “sympathetic resonance” (*ganying*), a stimulus-response interaction among beings of like kind. In the first hexagram of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), a yang line in fifth place means that the sight of a great human being brings benefit to others through sympathetic resonance. The “Commentary” makes the general point: “Things that accord in tone resonate together. Things with similar energies tend to come together.”

This kind of “influence” on others lends its name to another hexagram, *xian* (no. 31), which could also be translated “resonance.” Above is a lake, and below is a mountain: “the yielding above, the firm below,” according to the commentary on the judgment. “These two energies resonate with one another (*ganying*) and come together”—and in a cosmic context: “Heaven and earth resonate with one another and the myriad things are born.” Along with such examples of erotic attraction and generation there are musical ones—unsurprisingly, in the context of resonance.

The standard image is of two zithers with the same tuning: when a particular note is plucked on the string of one instrument, the corresponding string on the other vibrates in sympathy. This image comes up in several ancient classics (including *Zhuangzi*, ch. 24), echoing the “Commentary” on the *Yijing*’s first hexa-

gram: “Things of the same kind naturally attract each other; things sharing the same *qi* naturally join together.” Further correlations flow (in later texts) in the heavens over earthly things: “Clouds above a mountain look like bushes; above water they resemble fish scales; above an arid landscape they look like leaping fire; above a flood they look like rolling waves.”³ They often do, as long as *you* look.

In his “Discourse on Music,” the great Confucian thinker Xunzi writes that music (as well as traditional dance) influences the body’s energies by stimulation and response: “Whenever depraved sounds arouse, discordant *qi* responds, and in modelling itself disorder is generated; when correct sounds arouse, accordant *qi* responds, and as it takes form order is generated.”⁴ A distinctive feature of the sage, for Xunzi, is the capacity for “responding to change” (*yingbian*) spontaneously, which requires refining one’s *qi* as much as possible. As Angus Graham has pointed out, such pre-reflective responses come through the medium of the “quintessential.” It’s this kind of spontaneity that allows one to get on the Way (*dao*): “Something’s nature harmonising with what is generated, the quintessential as it meets something being aroused and responding spontaneously ... is called ‘natural’” (Graham 1989, 244).

A passage in the *Annals* describes how the sage-ruler simply adopts the appropriate ritual position—and the people are moved to follow his example because “his refined essence (*jing*) has circulated among them”. Nor is such circulation the sole prerogative of the sage: quintessence also flows among family members separated by distance, as well as between lovers who are apart (Lü Buwei 2000, 9/5).

3 Resonant Buddha-Nature

The ideas of *qi* energy and sympathetic resonance also play a major role in Chinese Buddhist thought. The first great Buddhist thinker in China, Sengzhao (early fifth century), was a great admirer of the Daoist classics, and his writings ensured that several schools of Chinese Buddhism remained open to earlier indigenous ideas. Sengzhao paraphrases *Zhuangzi* in emphasising that *qi* pervades everything: “The sage ... views the transformation of all things with the clear understanding that they are all one *qi* energy, and therefore he is in accord with whatever he may encounter” (Chan 1963, 351). And his characterisation of the sage echoes Xunzi’s account of sympathetic resonance with things: “His spirit functions through responding to occasions, yet there is no deliberation therein” (Sharf 2002, 115).

³ Lü Buwei, *Annals*, Book 13, sec. 2.1; see also 20/4.

⁴ Xunzi, Book 20, sec. 3, cited in Graham (1989, 260).

A Buddhist counterpart to this notion of all-pervasive *qi* is the idea of “buddha-nature”: the inherent capacity for becoming enlightened, ascribed at first only to humans and later to all sentient beings. The Chinese translation (fifth century) of the *Nirvana Sutra* explicitly excludes “insentient things such as walls and fences, tiles and stones” from the realm of buddha-nature (Sharf 2007, 211). However, the Mahayana schools of Buddhism that developed in China generally emphasised the *nonduality* of “form” and “emptiness,” and of “samsara” and “nirvana”. This means that becoming enlightened is not a matter of leaving the world of delusion and crossing over to the farther shore, but rather of *waking up* and realising that the other shore is right here and we’re already there. This radical emphasis on nonduality tended to undermine the traditional idea that only human beings have buddha-nature.

Proceeding from the idea of “emptiness” as a field of interactivity, the Madhyamaka Buddhist thinker Jizang argued that buddha-nature (*fo-xing*) must be all-pervasive and conditioned by sympathetic resonance. On the premise that “all sentient beings have buddha-nature,” he shows that “the *qi* energies of the Buddha and of sentient beings are of the same kind,” and that this “correspondence of natural kinds” is the condition for sympathetic resonance. Jizang goes so far as to claim that “stimulus-response is the great tenet of the buddha-dharma, the essential teaching of the many sutras,” explaining that “to stimulate means to bring or summon forth, and to respond means to go forth and meet in welcome” (Sharf 2002, 122).

Jizang’s near-contemporary, Zhiyi, was the founder of the Tiantai School, and another thinker interested in sympathetic resonance, which he likened to the “causes and conditions” (*yinyuan*) or “co-dependent arising” of Indian Buddhism. Zhiyi wrote: “‘Cause and condition’ refers to the fact that through this cause all beings stimulate the Buddha, and this condition gives rise to the Buddha’s response” (Sharf 2002, 130). It’s through participation in buddha-nature as the field of interactivity that we experience such phenomena as the efficacy of ritual, karmic actions and reactions, responses to appeals to a buddha, action at a distance, and instances of telepathy.

The Tiantai Buddhist patriarch Zhanran reaffirmed the consequences of nonduality for the buddha-nature of the insentient: “The individual of the perfect [teaching] knows, from beginning to end, that the absolute principle is nondual, and that there are no objects apart from mind. Who then is sentient? What then is insentient? Within the Assembly of the Lotus there are no differences” (Sharf 2007, 214). According to the first chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, the audience for the Buddha’s discourse on “Innumerable Meanings” at Vulture Peak was likewise innumerable, comprising hosts of Buddhist luminaries, kings, gods, dragons, stupas, banners, curtains, jewels and so forth—all interconnected by their listening to the discourse of the Awakened One.

Zhiyi had already said there are no things apart from mind. While human consciousness is special in being “discriminating,” the rest of the world has a different form of awareness: “All physical objects in the universe—vases, clothing, carts, and carriages—all are an indiscriminating form of consciousness [insofar as] mind and matter are nondual.”⁵ Correspondingly, according to Zhanran on the buddha-nature of insentient beings: “All [dharma] are mind-only. Thus one particle of dust is complete within the Buddha-nature of all sentient beings ... We know that a single particle of dust and a single mind are identical to the nature of mind of all sentient beings and Buddhas” (Penkower 1993, 423, 45).

A later work traditionally attributed to Sengzhao, the *Treasure Store Treatise*, assimilated his understanding of *qi* with the idea of buddha-nature: “It fills everything: it completely suffuses the grass and the trees and fully pervades even the ants. It reaches to even the tiniest mote of dust and to the very tip of a strand of hair; there is nothing that exists that does not embody the One” (Sharf 2002, 246). A Chan Buddhist text from the same period, *Record of the Masters and Disciples of the Lankavatara*, poses questions that presuppose nonduality and interactivity, and thereby the vitality of insentient things: “At the moment when you are in the temple sitting in meditation, is your body not also sitting in meditation beneath the trees of the mountain forests? Are earth, trees, tiles, and stones also not able to sit in meditation? Are earth, trees, tiles, and stones not also able to see forms and hear sounds, wear a robe and carry a bowl?” (Sharf 2017, 122). These things would obviously not sit, or see and hear, in the same way as humans do, but rather in their own more natural style.

The teachings of Mahayana Buddhism emphasise the belonging together of wisdom and compassion. When you gain insight, and come to appreciate co-dependent arising, you are naturally drawn into the interactivity. And since the human body is a particular configuration of energies within the larger energy-field that is the world, Chinese Buddhist thinkers (and later the Neo-Confucians) adopted the maxim: “All things are one body with the human.” Fazang, founder of the Huayan school of Buddhism, wrote that “to achieve perfect wisdom” is at the same time “to arouse the great compassion, which considers all things as one body with oneself” (Chan 1963, 418).

This idea derives from a radical re-interpretation of the idea of Dharmakaya, the “ultimate reality-body” of the cosmic Buddha Vairocana, as meaning this very world we live in (understood as buddha-nature, or emptiness). When asked to justify the idea that insentient beings have buddha-nature, the Chan master Nanyang Huizhong replied: “At the moment when sentient beings receive the prophecy of their future buddhahood, all the lands of the three-thousand great-thousand worlds are completely subsumed within the body of Vairocana Buddha. Beyond the body of the Buddha, could there still be some insentient object to receive the prophecy?” A contemporaneous text suggests that the fourth Chan

⁵ Zhiyi, *Sinianchu*, cited in Ziporyn (2000, 164).

patriarch, Daoxin, had already made the connection between the buddha-nature of the insentient and its ability to expound Buddhist teachings. He is said to have put it in the form of a question: “The Nirvana-sutra says: ‘All beings have buddha-nature.’ If you say that walls, fences, tiles, and stones do not have buddha-nature, then how could they preach the dharma?” (Sharf 2007, 221, 216).

Returning to Huizhong: when asked by a student about the meaning of the saying “the mind of an old buddha,” he replied: “Insentient things such as walls, fences, tiles, and stones are all the mind of an old buddha.” When the student points out that the Nirvana Sutra characterises buddha-nature as “everything except insentient things such as walls, fences, tiles and stones,” Huizhong replies that, to the enlightened, “mind” and “nature” are not different. And if walls, fences, tiles, and stones as part of the physical world participate in the mind of an old buddha and the body of Vairocana, it was perhaps natural for Huizhong to take the further step of saying that “insentient beings expound the Buddhist teachings (*wuqing shuofa*)” (Sharf 2007, 220-21). Things do this simply by doing their (buddha-nature) thing: by arising and interacting and perishing on a field of dynamic emptiness.

4 Buddhist and Neo-Confucian Syntheses

The related ideas of the buddha-nature of the insentient and the insentient expounding the buddha-dharma were enthusiastically received and developed in Japan, especially by the great ninth-century Buddhist thinker Kūkai, and then some four centuries later by Dōgen. Like Huizhong, Kūkai brings the Dharmakaya as Vairocana down to (heaven and) earth by equating it with the physical universe. Dainichi Nyorai (“Great Sun Buddha”), as Kūkai calls Mahavairocana, is preaching the dharma simply “for his own enjoyment” and not for human benefit—since the historical Buddha (Gautama) as the Nirmanakaya takes care of that. Nonetheless, we human beings can listen in to this self-teaching, insofar as Dainichi “deigns to let it be known to us.”

In line with the Chinese teaching of sympathetic resonance, though drawing more from Indian understandings of the power of “seed syllables” in mantras, Kūkai understands the world as basically *vibrations*: “reality as resonance” as a prominent scholar of Shingon Buddhism has put it (Kasulis 2018, 116). The name for Kūkai’s esoteric Buddhism, Shingon, is the Japanese translation of the Sanskrit term *mantra*. So, after sufficient practice in reciting appropriate mantras, the practitioner becomes able to tune in to the different vibrations of pillars, say, or fences, by listening with the “third ear.”

The world is also expounding the teachings through visible “signs”: between the “bindings” of heaven and earth, for Kūkai, is a *sutra* written by “brushes of mountains and ink of oceans.” The idea is that practice in visualising Buddhist

mandalas will open the “third eye” to what things are telling us, through striations on rocks, or patterns in vegetation or water. Dōgen will follow Kūkai in regarding the world as a Buddhist sermon that can be heard, and as a scripture to be read.

To round out our sense of the philosophical background to Dōgen’s understanding of things: he began by studying and practising Tiantai Buddhism (Tendai in Japanese), and then spent several years in China, where he inclined more toward Chan Buddhist ideas and practices. But there was another philosophy prevalent in China when Dōgen went there, promoted by the so-called “Neo-Confucian thinkers,” who blended Daoist and Buddhist with Confucian ideas in highly creative ways. Since they, too, regarded the human as one body with the world, and the world as operating on the pattern of sympathetic resonance, I mention a few of them before we move on to the things themselves.

The eleventh-century thinker Zhang Zai was a *qi* philosopher par excellence, who argued that the whole world consists of *qi* energies flowing between the polarities of yin and yang. In his treatise *Western Inscription* he comes across as the St. Francis of Song dynasty China: “That which fills the universe I regard as my body, and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.”⁶ Here we can see an extension of the traditional Confucian virtue of *ren*, benevolence or humane-ness, beyond one’s fellow human beings—a move also made by Zhang Zai’s younger contemporaries, the Brothers Cheng.

According to Cheng Hao, “The humane man regards Heaven and Earth and all things as one body. To him there is nothing that is not himself. Since he has recognized all things as himself, can there be any limit to his humanity? ... To be charitable and assist all things is the function of a sage.” (Well, perhaps *he* is the St. Francis of Song.) And in a wonderful allusion to befriending things, Cheng Hao writes what could be an epigraph to the present essay: “All things form one body. ... Simply because of selfishness, man thinks in terms of his own person, and therefore ... belittles them. If he lets go this person of his and views all things in the same way, how much joy would there be!” (Chan 1963, 530, 533). How much joy indeed.

The other brother, Cheng Yi, follows Zhang Zai in understanding everything as *qi*, and modifies the traditional notion of “heaven above and earth below” by claiming that earth is “inside” and surrounded by heaven—meaning that the most rarefied *qi* encompasses what we think of as “matter” all around. “Earth has assembled like a mist, and because over a long period it has not dispersed, it is considered the counterpart of heaven. Earthquakes are simply movements of *qi*.” The premise of rarefied *qi* as all-pervasive again leads to world as sympathetic resonance: “Within heaven and earth there is nothing but stimulation and response. ... Whatever moves stimulates, and what is stimulated must respond.

⁶ Chan (1963, 497); for a good overview of *qi* cosmology, see Tucker (1998).

That to which it responds again stimulates it, and when stimulated it again responds, so that the process is endless” (Graham 1992, 33, 38).

In a *qi*-based cosmology our customary distinction between animate and inanimate, while useful on the level of common sense, is philosophically irrelevant. And that is the point of this long historical excursion around the background: to show just how recent and parochial our post-Cartesian idea is, of human souls with a monopoly on sentience, as thinking beings connected somehow (but how?) to bodies in a world of lifeless physical extension. Parochial and peculiar: though the idea may feel right to us, it pales in comparison with the overwhelming congruence of several highly sophisticated philosophies from our own and foreign traditions. Peculiar and impoverished, and thereby enervating: a restricted view that cuts us off from sources of vitality in the things around us.

5 Nurturing Things Alive

As far as such things are concerned, the Confucian way of life that prevailed in China for some two thousand years granted them careful attention. The “ritual propriety” (*li*) that the Confucians promoted as a way of enhancing social harmony required a cultivation of one’s interactions with things as well as persons. Many passages in the *Analects* describe Confucius treating the things around him with appropriate style and grace.

Insofar as ritual propriety is a distinctively human practice, Xunzi understands it as a way of “nurturing” our basic humanity. Insofar as we appreciate such things as “carved and polished jade, incised and inlaid metals, and fabrics embroidered with various patterns,” they serve to nurture the eye. The various musical instruments played during ritual events, or on festive occasions, serve to nurture the ear. And in general we are nurtured by the rooms we inhabit and the furniture and equipment we live with (Xunzi 1988, 19/1b).

In the context of ritual, interior decorations and items of clothing also have a symbolic function: to project influence and affirm one’s position in the social hierarchy. Special care is called for when handling ritual implements—spilling the goblet of wine while ascending the steps will ruin the ritual—and such care is to be extended to all the other things one deals with in the course of everyday living. And since the appurtenances of ritual were originally drawn from the natural world, to handle them skilfully helps to integrate one’s activity into the natural order. “Through rites,” Xunzi writes, “Heaven and Earth are conjoined ... the four seasons observe their natural precedence ... and the myriad things all prosper” (Xunzi 1988, 19/2c).

As for the rituals accompanying funerals and burials, “one uses things of the living to adorn the deceased, and send them to their grave in a fashion that resembles the way they lived.” Things that were companions to the person while

alive are put into the tomb to accompany the corpse—but are deliberately deprived of their functionality beforehand, as an acknowledgement that they will not actually be used. Headgear is included without the strings to bind the hair, and musical instruments are not adjusted or tuned: a matter of highlighting their presence by subtracting their function (Xunzi 1988, 19/7a). All in all, a fine affirmation of the belonging-together of persons and their things.

Anticipating the later Neo-Confucian extension of humaneness, the Daoist thinkers expanded the Confucian practice of “reciprocity”—putting oneself in the other person’s position—to *all* the myriad things. An effective way of doing this, and attuning the body’s energies to the field around it, is by practising skills using hand tools, as a special mode of befriending things and materials.

One of several significant “skill stories” in the *Zhuangzi* concerns Carpenter Qing (ch. 19), who was able to carve bell-stands that struck people as supernaturally fine, a manifestation of *shen*, a rarefied form of *qi* energy. When asked how he achieved this, he replied that the key factor is a preparation that will preserve his *qi*. After seven days of fasting to “quiet the mind” and empty the heart of distractions, he goes into the mountain forests and opens himself up to the ways the trees around him are growing. Like Michelangelo, who could see the completed statue in a raw block of stone, Qing must be able first to see the bell-stand in the right tree. He does this by “matching the Heavenly to the Heavenly,” which means attuning the natural flows of *qi* through his body with the natural energies of the tree. Thanks to his human nature, the natural flow can perform the work of culture—in this case high culture.

Similarly, Butcher Ding, in the *Zhuangzi*’s best known skill story (ch. 3, “What matters in the nurture of life”), has practised carving for so long that he no longer perceives the carcass through the senses but rather through spirit (*shen*). Working, like carpenter Qing, on the basis of sympathetic resonance, he lets “the promptings of spirit begin to flow,” so that his cleaver detects the “Heavenly perforations” (natural gaps) in the joints, making for effortless carving. A clear case of being good friends with his blade, which is still sharp after nineteen years of use.

There is a correspondence here with the art of garden making, which in China and Japan proceeded from the premise that all the garden’s constituents, along with the gardeners, are configurations of *qi* energy. According to the practice of *fengshui*, which informed the development of the classical Chinese garden, the earth is a field of energies, and rocks are special “kernels” of *qi*. You build a garden basically by setting the rocks, which the world’s oldest garden-making manual (Japan, eleventh century) describes as a mutual collaboration. “Choose an especially splendid rock and set it as the Principal Rock. Then, following the request of the first rock, set others accordingly. ... Then set the back rock, following the request of the first group of rocks” (Takei & Keane 2001, 183). The garden maker is to respond to the energy patterns of the stone; and the

more familiar he becomes with those, the better his sense of where the rocks belong.

This dialogical approach to garden making, based on a sense that the garden's constituents share a common nature with the makers, is quite different from most western approaches to the art. Think of the construction of the French formal garden, where landscape architects make a plan in advance, which is then imposed upon the passive site. With respect to the gardens at Versailles, for example, it's hard to imagine Le Nôtre consulting with the trees intended for a *bosquet* concerning where they would like to be situated, and how they would like to be pruned.

Let us now turn to some earlier branches of the Zen dialogical approach to things, in the philosophy of Master Dōgen.

6 Dōgen's Turning while being Turned

In a discussion of buddha-nature, Dōgen follows Tiantai as well Chan Buddhism in taking it to encompass not only grasses and trees, earth and pebbles, but also human-made things such as fences, tiles, and walls. By wholeheartedly interacting with these things, he tells his monks, "you attain the way." This is because "Grass, trees, tiles, and walls practise [zazen] together with you. They have the same nature, the same mind and life, the same body and capacity as you" (Dōgen 2010, 650).

Like his predecessors, Dōgen emphasises the importance for Zen practice of respecting and caring for things, from ritual implements to cooking utensils and ingredients. The monks working in the temple kitchen are to use the polite forms of Japanese nouns and verbs when referring to the things they use to prepare and cook the food, and they are also to ensure that everything is in its proper place. And what determines the proper place in the kitchen is less the mind of the cook and more the things themselves—as long as one is open to their request. Of course the coffee grinder belongs in a place that is convenient for those who use it, but things will work better if the user takes the trouble to find out where the grinder feels most comfortable and at home.

Dōgen encourages the monks to perform their duties with "parental mind," telling them: "You should look after water and grains with compassionate care, as though tending your own children" (Dōgen 1985, 65). I'm using the term "befriending things" because it suggests something mid-way between taking parental care of them and treating them with deferential respect by using the polite forms of language. I came across the idea in 1973, in Ed Brown's Sōtō Zen-inspired *Tassajara Cookbook*. On the book's last page he recommends "being good friends with the knives," and the dish sponge, the kitchen counter, the floor, and food scraps and trimmings (Brown 1973, 242). Yes, friends especially

with the knives, since they work best when the blade is kept sharp—and that makes carelessness especially dangerous.

When it comes to doing the cooking, Dōgen calls the fully engaged handling of utensils and ingredients “turning things while being turned by things,” a mode of responsiveness that anticipates the Zen garden maker’s mode of collaborating with the rocks on the basis of companionship. What prevents us from working with things in this way is the “means-ends mindset” (my term) that so often informs our attitude. A certain amount of instrumental thinking is of course necessary for our survival, but it tends to demean the things we deal with. If, following Kant, we should not treat people as means rather than ends, and especially if we should avoid “using” our friends, we might want to apply that principle to using *things* as well. And if we liberate things from constant subjection to our own purposes, we find the change of attitude enhances our interactions.

Returning to things like tiles and walls, and the idea that they can be companions in one’s practice: this is partly because they can expound the buddhadharma. Following Huizhong and Kūkai when they insist that “insentient beings expound the Buddhist teachings,” Dōgen writes that we can learn from such things as pillars and lanterns. And so, he continues: “Look to trees and rocks, fields and villages, to expound dharma. Ask pillars about dharma, and investigate with walls.” And not just things are sutras, but also doings: “It is having a meal, putting on a robe, and engaging in activity” (Dōgen 2010, 73, 696).

Certain activities are more revelatory, because more central to our existence, than others: eating, for instance, and clothing ourselves. And certain things likewise: eating bowls (also used in begging for food) and Buddhist robes are emblematic of the Zen monk and the transmission of the dharma down through the generations. In some cases particular bowls and robes were actually handed down along with a transmission of the teachings; in others they were replaced along the way.

Dōgen encourages his students to regard eating bowls as belonging to “the buddha ancestors,” or as actually “the body and mind of buddha ancestors”—and even to understand them as “the treasury of the true dharma eye,” which is the title of his masterpiece (Dōgen 2010, 721). Their temporal extension, as with many things, often exceeds that of humans, and yet “they are not limited to new or old, ancient or present.” In eating from the bowl we commune with the ancestors, who nourished their lives with such eating bowls in the past. Even if the ones we use have not been handed down to us from a previous practitioner, we are to treat them with the respect due to practices that endure from generation to generation.

Nevertheless, a bowl (like everything else) is impermanent, and so we have to be careful not to break it. Especially because it’s not just a bowl: “Eating bowls are eating bowls as a compound of all things,” Dōgen writes. “Eating bowls are assembled as all things. The total mind is assembled as eating bowls. The

empty space is assembled as eating bowls. Eating bowls are assembled as eating bowls” (Dōgen 2010, 723). Behind these extravagant utterances, poetic in their imagery, are the vast philosophical edifices constructed in Tiantai and Huayan Buddhism. Such discourses anticipate Heidegger’s discussions of the thing (in his essay “The Thing”) as something that gathers, or assembles, the four great powers of Heaven and Earth, Gods and mortals. It turns out that things that are “near”—the jug, whose containing emptiness and connection to the gods he evokes almost poetically, and the bridge, which gathers the earth as landscape on either side of the flowing river—are able to generate an entire world around themselves (Heidegger 1975, 163-80).

Another component of Zen practice that deserves respect is the *zafu* you sit on for *zazen* (though I’ve never seen mention of its being passed down, like the bowl or the robe, to subsequent practitioners). In any case, you bow to the cushion before and after sitting—which makes perfect sense, since it is what supports you, literally, in your practice. Having used mine for decades, I wonder sometimes what will become of it after I am gone. That’s the thing about our things: our current possessions fall into two classes, those that we’ll part from before we depart (because they break or wear out), and those that outlive their owners (because the latter eventually break down). Clothes are an especially poignant case, since the oldest ones—usually the best loved—eventually become unwearable and irreparable. Sad, but it’s all impermanent, after all. On the other hand, the garlic press I’ve been using for almost fifty years will surely outlast me. Not so sad, because I know someone else will use it when I am no longer here.

Turning to the Buddhist robe: traditionally it’s an assemblage, patches of fabric sewn together, optimally soiled and discarded cloth that has been washed clean and made pure. Purity of the material is a major concern, and so the best robes are composed of “excrement-cleaning cloth,” since that fabric undergoes the greatest transformation from soiled to pristine (Dōgen 2010, 117, 128). An extreme example to illustrate a moderate philosophy, a philosophy of conservation of resources. The idea is that we can counter any tendency toward compulsive acquisition by repairing or restoring things that we need to use. We thereby refuse that pernicious demand of consumer culture, which perpetuates itself by encouraging us to throw things away and let them go to waste.

The Buddhist robe and eating bowl may be extraordinary things, but they are emblematic of how “ordinary things” can be if we adopt the appropriate viewpoint. From the perspective of utility and instrumental thinking, things we use always have a connection to other things (as Heidegger’s discussion of tools in *Being and Time* amply demonstrates). But as Zhuangzi pointed out (long before Heidegger), when things are working well they withdraw into obscurity: when the shoes and the belt fit comfortably, the feet and the waist are forgotten, and we lose the sense of interconnection (ch. 19). If we are going achieve a good

fit with the world, we do well to follow Dōgen's advice to stop thinking with "ordinary mind" and open ourselves to the wider context.

Or, in Nietzsche's words, we can "become *poets of our lives*, especially in the smallest and most everyday things."⁷ A turn to Nietzsche's take on the issues we have been dealing with here will confirm, from a quite different perspective, that broader horizons can enhance our interactions with things more than narrower views.

7 Nietzsche's Good Neighbours

Nietzsche was interested in Buddhism as a religion as well as a philosophy, but his understanding was restricted by the availability of German translations and commentaries, which at that time concerned only early, Indian schools. He thus tended to dismiss Buddhism as nihilistic—while in fact, his own life-affirming philosophy is remarkably consonant with later, Mahayana Buddhist thought, of which Dōgen is a prime representative. Basically (as I have argued elsewhere), what corresponds to the Buddhist understanding of the world as *buddha-nature*, and the Daoist notion of a field of *qi* energies, is Nietzsche's idea of the whole world as "will to power—and nothing besides" (Parkes 2015).⁸

As in the East-Asian traditions, the world as will to power is a field of interpretive energies, with "things" as differing, dynamic condensations and configurations of those forces. As one prominent Nietzsche scholar (innocent of Chinese philosophy) once wrote about Nietzsche's rejection of materialistic atomism in favour of an energy-field view: "it can be shown with some probability that *to be* is to be energy in an always shifting energy field" (Lampert 2001, 42). Everything is immanent here—it's all will to power and *nothing besides*: no need for any transcendent creator or agent acting from outside. And so Nietzsche criticises the western philosophical tradition for focusing on (nonexistent) things such as "the Absolute" or "the Beyond," thereby diverting our attention away from what is really important for life. As he writes in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (§16): "We must again become *good neighbours for the nearest things*, and stop looking past them contemptuously toward clouds and monsters of the night" (my translation; see Parkes 2021b)

A major factor here is that "Words and concepts constantly mislead us into imagining things as being simpler than they are, and separate from each other" (§11). If we can avoid being misled, we come to see they are all interacting, in often complicated ways. And just as Dōgen believed that we attain a fuller experience of things if we drop the means-to-ends perspective, so for Nietzsche a suspension of the drive for self-preservation will have a similar effect. "Now one

⁷ Nietzsche, *The Joyful Science* §299 (my translation).

⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* §36 (my translation). For a detailed discussion, see Parkes (2011; 2015).

sees much that one has never seen before, and for as far as one can see everything is spun into a net of light, and as it were buried in it" (§308). A vision worthy of the Buddhists and Daoists—a net of light in which all things dissolve into their interrelations.

A lyrical evocation of this kind of experience comes up in the speech "Before the Sunrise" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Contemplating a cloudless sky before dawn, which bathes all things in a uniform and directionless illumination, Zarathustra merges with this "abyss of light" with whom he is "friends from the beginning." This merging lets him pronounce his blessing, which is "to stand over each and every thing as its own Heaven, as its round roof, its azure bell and eternal security." A supremely caring stance toward the things of the world.

In Platonism, things are what they are only in relation to the Ideas as grasped by reason. In Christian thought, everything is what it is only in relation to the Creator. In daily life, things are what they are in the light of my projects and plans, and the overarching purpose of my activities. This is like things being seen in sunlight, where one side is brightly lit from a single direction and the rest is in shadow. When we deal with things from the perspective of utility, we see only one aspect of them, thereby closing off many of their possibilities. But through identifying himself with the cloudless, starless, pre-dawn sky, Zarathustra adopts an open, impartial and non-judgmental stance that lets things be what they are, insofar as he "redeems them from their bondage under Purpose" (see Parkes 2020).

If we are to befriend things as neighbours and companions, Nietzsche suggests, we need to give up our usual inaccurate conception of them as "separate from each other, indivisible, each existing in and for itself," and realise that it is all "a continuous, homogeneous, undivided, indivisible flowing"—just like a sea of *qi*. Through befriending the things in our neighbourhood and understanding their "affinities and antagonisms," we can move out, through their interconnectedness, from the local to the global. And if we ask *which* things in particular we are to befriend, we find the answer where Nietzsche connects the experience of "the whole interconnection of all things" with "the thought of the eternal recoming of all things."⁹

Nietzsche prefaces his first mention of "eternal recoming" (in an unpublished note) by remarking "the infinite importance of our knowing, going wrong, our habits and ways of living for *all* that is to come" (Nietzsche 1980, 9:11[141]). This prospect, at every moment of our lives, demands a careful, Zen-like attention to what we are doing. Because *what if*, however you act in this moment, whatever you do, you have to re-enact, and do over and over again, for ever and ever? As Zarathustra says, "all things are knotted together so tightly" that my ac-

9 *The Wanderer and His Shadow* §11; Nietzsche (1980, 9:11[21], 11[148]). I translate *ewige Wiederkunft* as "eternal recoming" (rather than "eternal return," which properly translates *ewige Wiederkehr*) to preserve the allusion to the usual meaning of *die Wiederkunft*: the second coming (of the Lord). The assonance with "eternal becoming" is also apt.

tion on something in this moment—as at every moment—affects *everything* that is to come. As Nietzsche exclaims when he first publishes the idea: “The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you want this once more and innumerable times more?’ would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight!”¹⁰

And suppose you get it right sometimes and can say an unqualified Yes to this activity, you tend to want that innumerable times more. But Zarathustra later asks, “Did you ever say Yes to a single joy? Oh, my friends, then you said Yes to all woe as well. All things are chained together, entwined, in love —”. This is why affirming eternal becoming is tantamount to what Nietzsche calls *amor fati*, love of fate: it involves saying Yes to everything that has contributed to any single moment of your life that you want to affirm. It’s a matter of *loving the world*, because you experience it as “perfect”—*vollkommen*, complete. Because the joy is wedded to the woe, the vine longs for the vintner’s knife, and the wise man belongs with the fool.¹¹ Hunger and satiety, work and leisure, illness and health: the opposites, like all things, hang together. (That’s Heraclitus, whom Nietzsche often channels, but it could just as well be Zhuangzi or Laozi).

So, for Nietzsche, if we love the things we concern ourselves with, they will be few—because if they were many, we wouldn’t have time to attend to them all properly. But full engagement with those fewer things can extend to the whole world of constant becoming. And that is just what Dōgen means when he talks of *zenki*: fully engaged activity, or dynamic functioning, in the totality of buddha-nature.

When you ride in a boat, Dōgen says, “you adjust the sail and the oar.” And since “the world of the boat” embraces “the sky, the water, and the shore,” when you ride in a boat, “your body, mind, and environs, together with the entire earth and entire sky, are the boat’s full dynamic functioning” (Dōgen 2010, 451). Any engaged interaction with some thing that we have befriended thus grants us participation in “the dynamic functioning of *all* things”—as long as we are paying full attention. This means (as a later poet wrote) looking “with an eye made quiet by the power / of harmony, and the deep power of joy,” so that we can really “see into the life of things.”¹² Because then we can become friends with them.

8 Contemporary Voices

Let’s finish with some more recent reflections on our topic from several perspectives.

10 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On the Vision and the Riddle” §2; *The Joyful Science* 341 (my translations).

11 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “The Drunken Song” §19.

12 William Wordsworth, “Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey.”

The Kyoto School philosopher Nishitani Keiji, who was deeply influenced by both Dōgen and Nietzsche, and whose thought is a paragon of the Zen philosophical tradition, published his masterpiece in 1961, *Religion and Nothingness* in the English translation (1982). In the case of Kantian philosophy, Nishitani writes, things are regarded as *objects* that appear as *representations* to us as subjects of consciousness. As finite humans we can experience things only as they appear to us, and not as they are “in themselves”. For Nishitani, all Kantian concerns with sensation, reason, representations and so forth remain on what he calls “the field of consciousness,” the level on which we usually operate. But for Zen thinking there are two further fields of experience, beneath and increasingly more extensive than consciousness: the field of *nihilicity*, and below that the field of *emptiness*. Nishitani likens this last, persuasively, to “the field of the Great Affirmation” in Nietzsche’s thought. (Nishitani 1982, 121-24)

We’re actually living on that field already—the Buddhist idea of “original awakening”—but we’re too caught up in sensing and reasoning and being conscious to notice that there’s something important going on at a deeper level. Down there, things are no longer contents of our consciousness or targets of intentionality, but are encountered on their “home ground.” Nishitani cites the poet Bashō:

From the pine tree
Learn of the pine tree,
And from the bamboo
Of the bamboo.

We come to understand trees not by gauging them by our human standards of usefulness, but by entering as far as we can into *their* ways of being, and engaging them on their home ground. No longer lingering around the circumference and observing things from the outside, Nishitani writes, we instead “leap” toward the centre, to “the middle,” the heart of the matter (Nishitani 1982, 127-30). We get through to things by way of love, and compassion, and sympathy—just as with human friends.

Moving now from Japan to the United States and Europe, let’s engage the psychologist James Hillman, whose depth-psychological account of our dysfunctional relationship with things harmonises with what we’ve heard so far. In 1982 Hillman published a seminal essay, “Anima Mundi: The Return of Soul to the World,” in which he laid out the therapeutic benefits of the idea of the world soul.¹³ The impetus was his realisation that the sources of modern psychopathology are often in the outside world rather than the minds of people seeking therapy. Part of the problem is that we’re crowded round by soulless things and substances—plastics, vinyl, polyester—intended to be uncared for and

¹³ See the section “Respecting the *Anima Mundi*” in Parkes (2019).

thrown away before long. In a later book he writes: “The idea of an *anima mundi* (ensouled world) translates into care for things” (Hillman 1995, 89).

We like to think that natural things and things we manufacture serve our purposes, but Hillman says that’s the wrong way round: more fulfilling to regard ourselves as in service to things. “Treating things as if they had souls, carefully, with good manners—that’s quality service.” He invites the reader to imagine the world soul as residing in every thing, to avoid things being “treated as dead objects and left in neglect.” To cultivate this attitude requires that we pay them careful attention: “Notice what is right under your nose, at your fingertips, and attend to it as it asks, according to its needs. Aesthetic sensitivity. Precision consciousness.” This kind of attending and serving, Hillman points out, is the meaning of the Greek term *therapeia*; and so people in therapy do well to get out and act as therapists for our ailing planet (Hillman 1995, 76-81).

A key factor in this kind of service to the world is “maintenance” (from a Latin root meaning “hold in the hand”). Hillman distinguishes two manual functions: “One hand holds the reins and steers the wheel. This is the fist of control and the pointing finger of direction.” The other kind of handling keeps in touch with things, giving us a feel for the job we are engaging in. Both functions are necessary, but the implication is that we tend to undervalue the open hand that feels. And now that modern technology plays a larger role in our lives, both functions are in decline: “As instrumentation advances we no longer give our hands to the things we live and work with all day, except at our extremities, digitally” (writing in the mid-1990s, Hillman was probably typing those words rather than writing by hand). And now we have smartphone-raised digital natives, who keep in touch mainly through thumbs tapping screens. He regrets the impoverishment of our situation by the seductions of consumerism: “Meanwhile we lose the sensuous pleasure things can give us in the frenetic pleasure of acquiring them” (Hillman 1995, 86-88).

If a lot of this sounds like Zen, that’s because Hillman finds prime examples of the requisite “aesthetic sensitivity” and “precision consciousness” in such Zen-influenced practices such as “flower arrangement, tea ceremony, calligraphy” and so forth. And when he writes, “the Japanese mind is set in a culture that pays devout attention to sensate details,” we can surely ascribe this to Zen’s distinguished contributions to that culture (Hillman 1995, 73).

In keeping with this idea, Yuriko Saito has observed that “Japanese culture has a long tradition of honoring artifacts such as knives, needles, and dolls and expressing respect and gratitude toward them when retiring them by giving them to temples or shrines for a proper service and disposal.” In this context she cites the art critic Yanagi Sōetsu, who in his book *The Beauty of Everyday Things* characterises artifacts made by unknown craftsmen as “our loyal companions and faithful friends, willing to help out when help is needed.” Such things work for us, he writes, “unselfishly, carrying out effortlessly and inconspicuously what-

ever duty comes their way.” It’s no surprise that Saito, in a chapter titled “Care Activities with the Material World,” refers to Dōgen and to Zen Buddhism as a philosophy that “advocates respecting and appreciating the Buddha nature of everything whatsoever” (Saito 2022, 129, 155; Yanagi 2019, 36).

The contemporary American author Ruth Ozeki, who is also a college professor and Zen priest, has written a wonderful novel inspired by the idea that insentient beings expound the Buddhist teachings, *The Book of Form and Emptiness*. Even before Part One begins, a voice (speaking in a different typeface from the one used in the bulk of the book) urges the reader to listen to a book that’s talking. “Things speak all the time,” it says, “but if your ears aren’t attuned, you have to learn to listen.” But it’s obvious that books can speak to us, “so try something more challenging,” like a chair or a pencil. “Can you hear the wood whisper? The ghost of the pine? The mutter of lead?” (Ozeki 2021, 3). Throughout the novel the reader (over)hears things of all kinds talking. Ozeki was apparently inspired by Jane Bennett’s book *Vibrant Matter: A political ecology of things*—but even more so by the ideas of Zen Master Dōgen.

The young protagonist of *The Book of Form and Emptiness* is sent out for psychological counselling because he hears things speaking to him and naturally talks back sometimes. All the authors we have considered here (except E. B. Tylor) would encourage him to continue the conversation with “insentient” communities, and to ignore the ignoramuses who deplore such behaviour. Better by far to behave energetically so as to befriend things on the open field of the world.

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Wabi-Sabi and Kei

How Sen no Rikyū's Zen-inspired ideas of human placedness and interpersonal respect enable a human-present world-harmonizing (Wa) within object-oriented ontology

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ABSTRACT | Timothy Morton is one of the best-known proponents of object-oriented ontology (OOO), which eschews privileged reference to human beings. In particular, Morton emphasizes the emptiness of all dharmas as a central theme of Western philosophy. OOO thus becomes a Buddhist awakening within the heart of the intellectual tradition of the West. However, in my view Morton's OOO lacks a robust vision of how the human person can subsist in a deanthropocentrized ontological frame. In this paper, I suggest Zen philosopher and *chanoyu* (tea ceremony) practitioner Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591) as informative toward envisioning a patterning by which the human person can exist qua a human person even in an OOO world. I argue that Rikyū's notion of *kei* (respect), contextualized by *wabi-sabi* (an *Einfühlung* toward objects), can help humans situate themselves, and enhance their regard for one another as well as for things (*wa*, human-present world-harmonizing), within an object-oriented ontology.

KEYWORDS | Sen no Rikyū; Chanoyu; Wabi-Cha; Timothy Morton; Object-Oriented Ontology; Zen

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*The garden path, the hut,
The host and the guest—
All are whipped together
In the tea and are without distinctions.*

—Sen no Rikyū, as cited by Tsutsui Hiroichi

1 Introduction

Many, at first blush, may think that object-oriented ontology (frequently abbreviated “OOO”) is a metaphysics which elides human beings (Dugin 2021, 54-57; Davis 2015; de Luca 2022, 140). If ontology is to be object-oriented, such thinking may go, then what place can there be for people in such a philosophical scheme? (Roy 2018, 42-43) However, as noted OOO philosopher Graham Harman points out, OOO does not aim to erase humanity, only to balance ontology out so that humans no longer occupy one half of the ontological field (Harman 2018; Wilde 2020, 8-10; Freedgood and Schmitt, 2014, 4-5; Stewart 2016, 32). Thus, as Harman explains, OOO stands as a corrective to Cartesian dualism, the Kantian noumenon-phenomenon split, and the centuries of modernity built on these overly anthropocentric, as Harman argues, ideas (Harman 2018; locs 678-689, 794-808; Peters and Peters 2013, 194).¹ The “amazing achievements” of human beings, Harman argues, “do not automatically make human beings worthy of filling up fifty per cent of ontology” (Harman 2018, loc 678; Husserl 2012, 90-97). Human beings still exist on the mainline Harmanian OOO reading, then. They just do not stand at the center of the existence of everything else.

However, the place of the human in the thinking of another highly noteworthy OOO philosopher, Timothy Morton, is considerably more contested. If Harman’s OOO involves a gentle demotion of the human from Cartesian/Kantian metaphysical co-author, as it were, to metaphysical participant and observer equal in ontological status to all other things which can be seen, felt, believed, or imagined, then Morton’s OOO is a considerably more aggressive line of questioning about how human beings ought to be, both within the Marxist-inspired ecological framework which Morton adopts in much of his OOO writing, as well as within his more general Heideggerian metaphysics in which the human is seen as equally *Weltarm*, “world poor,” as whatever else one might encounter in the universe (Morton 2017, 14; cf. Heidegger 2000, 47; Bégout 2013; Hayes 2007b; Jenkins 2018, 58-61).

¹ Not everyone is convinced (Rayman 2020, 179-180).

Much of the uneasiness which I feel reading Morton as to how the human person is supposed to live a rich and human life in a *Weltarm* universe stems from this very notion of *Weltarm*, the Heideggerian notion which is how Morton frames what he calls “solidarity with non-humans,” or the equal worlding of all things (and this category appears to be as broad for Morton as for other OOO thinkers, including fictional characters, but also balanced by subsistence). This co-worlding extends even to vegetation (Haecker 2021, 3) and quasars, thus leaving the place of the human person, at least as I understand him and her, to be even more contingent on the Mortonian ecological OOO arrangement. *Weltarm*, on the narrowcast interpretation I am adopting in this paragraph, would seem a poor foundation on which to build a human world (Lippit 1994, 792-794). The overall portrait of Morton’s OOO, as I understand it at least, is that there remains a need to find a place for the human person even after he and she have been radically decentered. Morton’s OOO is highly refined on the object and ecology side of ontology, in other words, but still, on my reading, too *Weltarm* for human beings (Morton 2008, 93-94; Colebrook 2021, 523-524; Goodfellow 2019, 19). We need some way to be in the world with other human beings that is amenable to our human natures and so conducive to harmonious relations with our fellow humans.

My hangup with Mortonian OOO centers on *Weltarm*. I recall here that Heidegger’s *Weltarm* is part of a three-*Welt* array in which animals are world-poor (*Weltarm*), objects are *Weltlos*, without world, and human beings are *Weltbildend*, world making (Crockett 2018, 67-68). It would seem that OOO, to remain true to its objective of decentering the human from Heidegger’s human-centered *Dasein* (as “the worlding of the world takes place providentially in and for *Dasein*, the being who has language and can ask the question of being”), must find some way in which *Weltlos* things can join humans in a *Weltbildend* world (or vice-versa) (Crockett 2018, 68; Hayes 2007a, 285-287). Human beings may not be ontologically superior to plants and stones, but we still have human natures unlike those other things. Perhaps I am smuggling anthropocentrism back into OOO, but my reading of OOO is that it does not necessitate the humiliation of the human, only his or her ontological balancing out. *Weltarm* would seem, then, at first glance, to be a disappointing compromise.

And yet, Morton’s *Weltarm* may be much richer than it first seems. There is a way to a human place in Morton’s *Weltarm* OOO after all, and that way leads, not through Heidegger or any other Western thinker or thought, but rather through Buddhism.² Buddhism as a complement to Mortonian *Weltarm* ecological OOO is

² Heidegger, via Aristotle and Augustine, may also provide a route, at least indirectly. If, in an Augustinian sense, and in keeping with Aristotle’s understanding of the soul, the “soul is an artifice and therefore nonoriginary, unnatural, and separate from the eternity of God,” and if “this separation from the absolute fullness or plenitude of being is what opens up the possibility for the soul to strive towards the infinite perfection of God,” then an OOO-inclined Heideggerian reading may allow the aporia-driven human to find ontological plenitude in objects as readily as in God. “Living towards something (*Leben auf etwas zu*),” after all, does not specify what the “something” will or should be (Hayes 2007a, 265, 269). One can

not as out of left field as it might sound. For one thing, there are clear affinities between many interpretations of Buddhism and OOO, such as between OOO's real-sensuous object distinction and the Two Truths doctrine of Buddhist thinkers Nagarjuna (ca. 150-ca. 250) and Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) (Morton 2007b, 48). Surprisingly, however, the key to a Buddhist reconfiguration of Mortonian OOO comes directly from Morton himself. While not immediately apparent on reading many of his books and papers, Morton seems to have been influenced in his OOO thinking by Buddhism to a considerable extent. Morton makes Buddhism explicit enough in his OOO thought, and in ways that go beyond general affinities, to inspire a hope that Buddhism may re-humanize (*not* re-anthropocentrize) OOO in ways conducive to human flourishing. In *Dark Ecology*, for example, Morton quotes at length from a 1993 work by controversial Tibetan Buddhist figure Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche to warn of the dangers of a lingering capitalist, consumerist approach to "spirituality" and the natural environment, in contrast to the Tibetan Buddhist approach of detachment and recognition of *śūnyatā* (Morton 2007b, 137-138; Duckert 2012, 274-275).³ And in *The Ecological Thought*, Morton avers that "A worm could become a Buddha, as a worm" (Morton 2010, 114). There are many more Buddhist-linked notions in Morton's works, some of which I introduce in more detail below. Suffice it to say that there is warrant for reading Morton's OOO as Buddhist-inspired ontology.

Buddhism in general, though, is not specific enough to re-coordinate Morton's OOO for the human person. I retain here the Heideggerian emphasis on the "facticity of death" as partially constitutive of human worlding to suggest that we need a human figure, at least initially, to show us how to be human (while going beyond anthropocentrism) in a universally *Weltarm* world (Komjathy 2022, 2). Therefore, in this paper, I propose the highly Buddhist-inflected philosophy of another object-oriented thinker (although, to my knowledge, never characterized as such before the present essay), the Japanese Zen adherent Sen no Rikyū. Rikyū is almost always understood in the West, and in Japan as well, as having advanced the tea ceremony to an extraordinary level of intricacy and philosophical richness. This is true, of course. Rikyū did, indeed, take the acts of preparing, serving, and drinking tea, which had begun to be combined and repurposed as a ritual by Rikyū's predecessors and others in the Japanese cultural sphere long before Rikyū's time, and establish them as an enduring and ceremonial aspect of Japanese culture. But many may not be aware that Rikyū was a devoted Zen Buddhist, and that Buddhism suffuses the tea ceremony he brought forth (Ito 1998).

take a similar approach through Heidegger's *Weltarm* thinking. "If [the] capacity for speech [in humans] depends upon the capacity of sense perception we share with members of other animal species, we must begin to reconfigure our understanding of the primacy of speech as exclusive to the human domain" (Hayes 2007a, 290). We are world-builders, in other words, but dogs (which have the Buddha nature) and orchids may be so, too.

3 See also Sam Littlefair, "Groundbreaking Scholar Timothy Morton Wants Philosophers to Face Their 'Buddhaphobia,'" *Lion's Roar*, September 2, 2017, available at: <https://www.lionsroar.com/groundbreaking-scholar-timothy-morton-wants-philosophers-to-face-their-buddhaphobia/> (last accessed August 28, 2022)

In particular, Rikyū applied Zen-inspired approaches to human life—both with other humans and with objects and the world around—to the tea ceremony, thereby transforming the tiny tea hut where his tea ceremonies were performed into a kind of cosmos of harmonious human-human and human-object (and also object-object) interaction (Handa 2013, 245-246). There is much philosophical richness in Rikyū's thought, and almost all of it is connected in some way to Zen, and to how Zen can teach us how to live like human beings.

In proposing a Rikyuan Zen humanization of OOO, I will use two of Rikyū's key concepts, namely *kei* (敬) ("respect") and *wabi-sabi* (侘び寂び) (*Einfühlung* toward objects), to map out a way in which Rikyū's Zen tea ceremony can humanize Mortonian *Weltarm* OOO such that the human person can nestle into that philosophical outlook in a more distinctly human way. *Kei* and *wabi-sabi* may or may not be distinctly human modes of existence, but they are, all the same, modes of existence which are open to human beings, modes of existence which have been proven (by Rikyū's own life not least of all) to enable human beings to live more aesthetically and interpersonally rich and harmonious lives.

First, what do I, and much more important what did Sen no Rikyū, mean by *kei* and *wabi-sabi*? By *kei* I, along with Rikyū, mean an open and self-deprecating Other-orientedness, a performative graciousness which is accepting of the Other in a way inviting of the enhancement of the human in both the Other and the Self (Mamiya 1937, 15). *Kei*, which is both a way of approaching the Other and a way of comporting oneself to make oneself Other-approachable, is a term suffused with interpersonality (Takeuchi 1944, 67-68). A good definition of *wabi-sabi* and how these conjoined concepts are emplaced in the tea ceremony and the wider realization of Zen ideals comes from Dorinne Kondo:

Perhaps the Zen doctrine bearing most directly on the tea aesthetic is the emphasis on the *mundane* as a sphere of action and a source of beauty.⁴ The Buddha nature, hence the path to Enlightenment, is to be found in every sentient being and in the most everyday activities. Extending this exaltation of the mundane to the aesthetic realm, Zen describes a fusion of opposites in which the beautiful and the ordinary are no longer distinct. This leads to the aesthetic appreciation of imperfection and poverty, of *sabi* and *wabi*. Inasmuch as the qualities can be defined, *sabi* is the beauty of the imperfect, the old, the lonely, while *wabi* is the beauty of simplicity and poverty ...⁵ So closely are these qualities associated with the tea ceremony that the ceremony of the great master Sen no Rikyu was called *wabi cha*, or *wabi* tea. (Kondo 1985, 292, emphases in original)

⁴ Recall that Heidegger emphasized the importance of aesthetics, of "being-opened for something that is around me" (Hayes 2007a, 274).

⁵ See furthermore Iwai (2006, 30-31).

Kei is what you do with human persons, in other words, and *wabi-sabi* is how, where, and with what you do it. Or, *kei* is how you share world with the Other, and *wabi-sabi* is how you share world with objects.

Even better for OOO is that, ultimately, on the Rikyū understanding, there is very little, perhaps no, difference between *wabi-sabi* and *kei*. I suggest that a marriage of the human person in Rikyū's tea-cosmos with the ecological OOO of Timothy Morton could produce a truly human-friendly Buddhist metaphysics instructive of how human beings can and should engage with the natural world (Babich 2017; Latta 2009, 873; Sugimoto et al., 2019).⁶ Morton can have his tea cakes and eat them too: we can all live in harmony with non-humans, can even be in solidarity with non-humans, as long as we have human-intelligible guidelines for how to live the everyday of that worlding. The Zen-tea concepts of *kei* and *wabi-sabi* are the answers to the *kōan* which Morton's ecological-ontological interventions pose.

2 De-Heideggering Being and De-Anthropocentrizing Marxism

A very good overall explication of Timothy Morton's take on object-oriented ontology can be found in his 2017 book *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (Morton 2017). Morton is crystal clear on the very first page of his work that his is an ecological approach to OOO on the one hand, and that it is heavily informed by Marxism on the other.⁷ "Whoever severs himself from Mother Earth and her flowing sources of life goes into exile," runs the Emma Goldman (1869-1940) epigram to Morton's introduction. (One of Morton's central ideas in the book is a kind of ecological alienation he calls the "Severing.") This epigram is followed by the first sentence of the introduction, which reads, "A specter is haunting the specter of communism: the specter of the nonhuman" (Morton 2017, 1). What Morton wants to do, as I understand him, is thus to rejigger Marxism for the Anthropocene (Kim 2019; Hudson 2014).⁸

Marx is the baseline, then, but Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), too, figures prominently in Morton's rethinking of metaphysics in an ecological key. The way to have solidarity with non-humans, Morton argues, is to give everything world. "World needn't be a special thing that humans construct," Morton writes (Morton 2017, 37).

⁶ A very helpful glossary of tea terms is available in Hanes and Nintze (2008, 52-53).

⁷ Morton is hardly alone in reading ecology through Marx, and vice versa. See, e.g., the 2020 runaway Japanese bestseller 'Das Kapital for the Anthropocene' (*Hitoshinsei no 'Shihonron'*) (Saitō 2020). Morton is also not unique in arguing for paying greater attention to, and evincing greater openness toward, the "nonhuman" (du Toit 2016).

⁸ This can have repercussions in various surprising fields (Hohmann 2021).

World is always and necessarily incomplete. Worlds are always very cheap. And this is because of the special non-explosively holist inter-connectedness that is the symbiotic real; and because of what OOO calls ‘object withdrawal,’ the way in which no access mode whatsoever can totally swallow an entity. ‘Withdrawn’ doesn’t mean empirically shrunken back or moving behind; it means ... *so in your face that you can’t see it.*” (Morton 2017, 37; emphases in original)

Elsewhere, as well, Morton references Heidegger’s “world” thinking, and critiques it in the context of *Dasein* (Morton 2018b, 113). *Weltarm* is a curious concept in the *Dasein* array, Morton avers, because while *Dasein* seeks to dislodge the human-centrism of being, *Weltarm*, conversely, privileges it (Morton 2018b, 113-114; Brickey 2022, 140-141, and Harman 2013, 227-228). This insight into the anthropocentrism of the *Weltarm* idea in Heidegger seems to have propelled Morton on a quest to put as much distance between himself and the German philosopher as possible. This is what he does in *Humankind*, in a big way. And it revolutionizes ontology, OOO, and Marxist ecological thought. Indeed, the farther Morton goes from Heidegger, the more *Dasein* recedes into the background with the German thinker. Morton’s “hyperobjects,” for example, an idea which he developed before *Humankind* and which involves the worlding of great, sprawling entities such as ecologies and climate change, de-privilege human epistemology in worlding in a way of which Heidegger probably could not have dreamed (Meis 2021; Hudson 2021/2022).

3 Buddhist Shadows in Timothy Morton’s *Weltarm* OOO

While Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Heidegger, as well as other Western thinkers such as Luce Irigaray (Morton 2022, 11-12), Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Charles Darwin (1809-1882), G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) figure prominently in *Humankind*, in many of Morton’s other books and essays Buddhism peeks out much more noticeably from behind the curtains of the thoughts playing out on the stage of the text. For example, in *Being Ecological*, Morton notes that “many Buddhist meditation teachers ... write about ecology” (Morton 2018, 77), and also speaks about the ecological significance to the karmic flashbacks one experiences, according to Tibetan Buddhism, in the liminal *bardo* phase between reincarnations (Morton 2018, 55-56; Morton 2013, 54). In a 2007 essay, Morton engages with Hegel’s (and Arthur Schopenhauer’s (1788-1860) and Theodor W. Adorno’s (1903-1969)) views on Buddhism from a decidedly Buddhist perspective (Morton 2007a). In *Dark Ecology*, Morton makes a perceptive, and profound, etymological comparison between Greek and Tibetan, working Buddhism into his understanding of how one may “become familiar with a stranger

(thought, lifeform, stone) such that the strangeness is canceled out” (Morton 2016, 92):

[Immanuel] Kant [(1724-1804)] cleaved to the idea that a thing was ultimately a mathematical correlate of itself in a human mind, perhaps in the manner of someone clinging for dear life to a stalk in a flood ... The stalk Kant clings to says that a thing exists because I can mathematize it. *Mathematics* comes from the Greek *mathēsis*, which means *getting used to*, acclimation. The Tibetan Buddhist for *getting used to* is *göm*, which is also the term for *meditation*. There is *mathēsis* and there is computation: a limited, logistical application of *mathēsis*. In the same way meditation consists of awareness, an open part, and mindfulness, a logistical part. (Morton 2016, 92)

Other of Morton’s Buddhism references are even less oblique, even less couched in criticisms of Western philosophers. In *Nothing*, for instance, Morton comes right out and says that he is “a proud ‘X-Buddhist’ member of the Drupka Kagyü sect of Tibetan Buddhism” (Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton 2015, 190; Wallis 2016; Wigder 2019). It seems unmistakable that Morton is approaching OOO from a very definite Tibetan Buddhist commitment.

As such, it cannot be said that Morton is indifferent to the place of the human in his ontology. If anything, Morton’s books are about just this, about how to place the human in the universe and the ecosphere while not privileging the human above other entities. And much of this reflection is Buddhist-themed. For instance, Morton speaks with great respect in *Being Ecological* about Buddhist meditation. “Mind ‘minds,’” Morton writes:

just as the ocean has waves. Movement is intrinsic. This fact becomes especially interesting when the meditation object is mind as such: when mind tunes to mind. What is experienced here is not absolutely nothing, but rather a strange beingness that cannot be pinned down to a presence I can point at. There is a deep ontological reason for this: appearing (waves) is intrinsic to being (ocean), yet different. (Morton 2018, 142)

There is much Tibetan richness here, but there is also a certain slipperiness to Morton’s understanding of humanity in passages such as these. On the one hand, it is very helpful to have Morton’s thoughts on meditation so we can know how to place mind in context and can thereby understand how humans can interact. On the other hand, however, Morton’s insights about “mind tun[ing] to mind” (and he is speaking here in extension of the legendary Buddhist metaphor about “meditation as a form of tuning,” as in a sitar (Morton 2018, 141)) can easily be rendered in the case of mind “tun[ing]” to the minds known by other human

beings. In *Hyperobjects*, by the same token, Morton references the Buddhist practice of “tonglen: ‘sending and taking’, a meditation practice in which one breathes out compassion for the other, while breathing in her or his suffering,” but here, as well, Morton shifts the conversation from human suffering to a much wider consideration of environmental degradation (Morton 2013, 127). Likewise, in a 2012 essay, Morton interprets the “guilt” and “shame” of ecological degradation by means, in part, of Buddhist reflections on sadness (Morton 2012, 17-18). In a 2016 interview, Morton counters that “*Dasein* is not human” in response to his interlocutors’ question, “Is Buddhism how you ended up avoiding the traps of Marxism?” (McIntyre and Medoro 2016, 172-173) And in the introduction to *Nothing*, Morton and his two co-authors write in the introduction that on the Tibetan reading, Buddhism is both an inward- and an outward-directed enterprise (Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton 2015, 3). In *Dark Ecology*, Morton invokes “the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara” as a model of compassion for “all sentient beings,” which of course includes humans, but also non-humans too (Morton 2016, 150-151).

It is therefore not clear, to me at least, how, as a human being, I am concretely supposed to live in Morton’s OOO universe. I cannot be as the ocean is, at least not yet. I need someone to take me by the hand and let me know how to live a human life in an object-oriented ontology. I turn, therefore, to Sen no Rikyū, and he invites me in to his little teahouse to have a cup of bitter green tea.

4 Tea Time: Respect, Object-Oriented Einfühlung, and the Space for Human Persons in *Chanoyu* OOO

General knowledge of Sen no Rikyū in the West can be traced to Japanese pan-Asianist Okakura Tenshin’s (1863-1913) 1906 introductory monograph *The Book of Tea* (Levine 2016, 15). This introduction has tended to produce the impression in the West that Sen no Rikyū is just about tea, and that tea ceremony is a distinctly Asian practice which must be approached as a foreign cultural element. Even among Western scholars, the *chanoyu* (茶の湯), or tea ceremony, has often been considered in an anthropological way, or otherwise as a ritual evocative of a cultural type (Anderson 1987, 475).

However, the life and art of Sen no Rikyū are much more elastic than the flat moniker “tea master” might at first suggest. Indeed, it is impossible to understand Rikyū or his work in any way other than as religious, and specifically Zen Buddhist (Anderson 1987, 475; Lomas et al. 2017). Rikyū’s involvement with Zen Buddhism was, in fact, pervasive (Kokushi Daijiten Henshu linkai 1987, 482). Current Urasenke *iemoto* (grand master) Sen Sōshitsu XV (十代千宗室) (b. 1923) holds that “tea is the practice or realization of religious faith, no matter what

you believe in” (Anderson 1987, 478). In Japan, the tea ceremony is implicated with “Buddhist and Shinto ritual calendars,” thus imbricating tea deeply within the experiential religious life of Japanese people (Anderson 1987, 483; Anderson 1987, 489-495). Beyond this religious coloring, or in fact because of it, the tea ceremony is not Asian; it is human (and also object-oriented), and therefore open to all. *Chanoyu* has only incidental cultural coloring. Its ethos is universal—it seeks to habituate the human person to a world of objects and other human persons, in peace.

It should also be mentioned, contra the common Western understanding, that Rikyū did not invent the tea ceremony out of whole cloth. As a teenager, Rikyū (born Yoshiro) became interested in the tea ceremony already fashionable in the Sakai area. At seventeen, Rikyū studied *shoin-no-cha* (書院の茶) (“drawing room tea”) in the Nōami (能阿弥) (1397-1471) style, and later studied Murata Jūkō (村田珠光) (1422/1423-1502) -style *wabi-cha* under wealthy merchant and tea aficionado Takeno Jōō (武野紹鷗) (1502-1555) (Kokushi Daijiten Henshu linkai 1987, 481; Takeuchi 1944, 45-48; Kinoshita 1936, 23). And, of course, rituals involving the drinking of tea extend much farther back into the Japanese, and East Asian, past than does the lifespan of Sen no Rikyū (Anderson 1987, 479-480).⁹ So, there is much more about tea than Rikyū. But there is also much more to Rikyū than tea.

What sets Rikyū apart is the whole-of-life approach he took to *wabi-cha*. A contemporary Japanese designer, Satō Kashiwa, said in an interview in 2021 that he views Sen no Rikyū as a fellow designer, someone who was interested in implementing a holistic philosophy and design concept in his work (Morgan 2021). This is borne out in practice. For example, one of the most striking things about *chanoyu* is the equality of all human participants, something reinforced constantly. Guests enter the tea hut or tea room through a very small door (躡り口) (*nijiriguchi*). In Rikyū’s time, warriors had to remove their weapons before entering. Even Rikyū’s patron, the powerful shōgun Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉) (1537-1598), obligingly removed his swords and scabbards before paying call on Rikyū for tea. The very entrance into the “tea world” is not just indicative of equality. The passage from the mundane outer realm to the ritualized sphere of tea is meant to call to mind a transition from “everyday life” to “ritual event” (Anderson 1987, 483; Handa 2013, 243). Rikyū intentionally grounded this passage from the secular to haven or refuge in the Lotus Sutra (Anderson 1987, 483). The *akemono* (掛け物), or hanging scroll, in the *tokonoma* (床の間) alcove in the tea room is also usually a Zen didactic saying in calligraphic form, while the repast and sake served to guests are redolent of Buddhist monasteries and Shinto *nao-rai* (直会) rituals, respectively (Anderson 1987, 487). Rikyū’s *chanoyu* was about how to live a human life in an often inhuman, war-wracked world, and among an array of non-human things. *Chanoyu* was for the whole person, body and soul, mind and senses, stomach and heart.

⁹ And beyond East Asia as well (Takeuchi 1944, 52-57).

I will consider here two key facets of Rikyū's *chanoyu*, *kei* and *wabi-sabi*, as especially conducive to the whole-of-life transformation which Rikyū sought for himself and for his guests. First, *kei*, in the context of *chanoyu*, is taken from *wakei seijaku* (和敬清寂), a phrase indicating that the ideals of *chanoyu* are harmony (*wa*), respect (*kei*), purity (*sei*), and what is often translated tranquility, but what might better be termed silent equipoise (*jaku*).¹⁰ This ideal, often called "that which explains the spirit of *chanoyu*" (*chanoyu no seishin wo iiarawasu no ni*), is not a rejection of the world, but an attempt to live in quiet peace with it and with others in it (Suzuki 1958, 74-76; Fujimura 1939, 120-127). *Wa* has even been described as the state of blending existentially with the Other, and then forgetting even that one has done so (Mamiya 1935, 3). Further, *wa* and *kei* are conceptually in harmony with one another *prima facie*. Taken altogether, *wakei seijaku* as the heart of *chanoyu* is rooted in the presence of the Other, both other hearts and other things (Ogiwara 1946, 3-5; Awakawa 1966, 261-262).¹¹

As anthropologist and tea practitioner Jennifer L. Anderson points out:

a practitioner of *chado* [i.e., tea ceremony] usually conceives of and ritually expresses an emotional and intellectual requirement for cosmic order in a more immediate way [than in Chinese Taoism and Japanese Shintō]. The concepts of harmony (*wa*) [(和)], respect (*kei*) [(敬)], purity (*sei*) [(清)] and tranquillity (*jaku*) [(寂)] are all distillations of specific aspects of this need. They have become the central litany of tea values, the most commonly recognised and recited words in *chado*. Every symbol, every movement and every thought in tea ritual eventually relates back to one of these ideas and, through them, to a universal urge to order. (Anderson 1987, 491)

While Anderson appeals to anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1926-2006) argument that "ritual functions to relieve the suspicion 'that life is absurd and the attempt to make moral, intellectual, or emotional sense out of the experience is bootless'" (Anderson 1987, 491), I think it is a bit different than Anderson says. The human person is the centerpiece of the tea ceremony. This is not placative or comforting, but a direct confrontation, Zen-style, with reality. It is not to apotheosize the human, but to bring him or her into harmony with the world, that one boils water and whisks up a bowl of tea. *Chanoyu* is not a ritual on the Geertzian understanding, then. It is an awakening and an adjustment, a noticing and a re-ordering of learned human behavior. There is no comfort in *chanoyu*. There is, instead, a new way of understanding where one sits in the cosmos (most certainly not in the middle or at the top). Or, to put it another way, the tea ceremony is for enacting an object-oriented ontology in which the human per-

¹⁰ On the social context of this phrase, see Nishibori (1946, 60), and Sen (1943, 96-113). *Wa* is of course a concept which predates *chanoyu* (Watanabe 1940a; Watanabe 1940b; Okuda 1959, 209).

¹¹ The term *wakei seijaku* originated in Song Dynasty China, but by Sen no Rikyū's time it was already a long-established phrase in Zen, and Rikyū and his teachers would have understood it as such (Takahashi 1941, 26-28; Tanaka 1905, 146-148).

son can come into harmony with other human beings while foregrounding and cherishing the existence of objects (Weiss 2010).

Anderson continues in her explication of Geertz's view of ritual by arguing that, "to achieve these goals," that is to allow the religious ritual of the tea ceremony to "make sense out of parts of human life which otherwise seem uninterpretable and [to] convince man that he can somehow affect his place in the larger scheme of things," those taking part in the tea ceremony must:

(1) establish their credentials; (2) identify the portion of the culturally defined cosmic model to be manipulated; (3) define the specific sphere of endeavour; and (4) project the results of the effort to those affected [by the ritual]. In *chado*, the concept of purity (*sei*) relates to establishing the credentials of the practitioner and associating the ritual field with the cosmic model. Harmony (*wa*) and respect (*kei*) clarify the area of endeavour. A special kind of tranquillity (*jaku*) is the projected result. (Anderson 1987, 491-493)

Notice here that harmony and respect "clarify the area of endeavour." This is of crucial significance for our purposes in this essay, as the "area of endeavour" is, on my reading, none other than the scope of object-oriented ontology, that is, the realm of the human with the human, the human with objects, and objects with other objects. (This is strengthened by Anderson's characterization of the tea ritual as "creating ... a metaphorical relationship between physical space and the cosmos" (Anderson 1987, 493), which dovetails neatly with Harman's focus on the metaphor as central to OOO.) The human person can have a place in OOO, even in a radically de-anthropocentrized OOO such as Timothy Morton advances. All it takes is some Zen training, preferably in the mode of Rikyū's *chanoyu*.

I say this because, in the tea ceremony, the concepts of *kei* and *wabi-sabi* blend, so that humans can be at peace with one another, and with the things around. This, after all, is what I understand the ideal of humans in an OOO arrangement to be. A key aspect of *kei* is to accept the other for who he or she is, to practice *omotenashi* (おもてなし), or the full acceptance of the human Other in the midst of the everyday—a phrase commonly translated in English as "hospitality" (Wakafuji 1963, 62). And a key aspect of *wabi-sabi* is to appreciate the unfinished nature of things, to accept and even celebrate the incompleteness and imperfection of objects in the world (Handa 2013, 232). A cracked and asymmetric teacup, on this reading, is preferred over a perfectly-shaped and flawless one. The same goes for human beings, who are presumed to be imperfect and who are to be respected just as they appear before one. One reflects deeply on one's own place in the world, and with direct and honest simplicity welcomes the Other into the world that the two now share (Wakafuji 1963, 68, 75). And share, not just with one another, but with a myriad of inanimate objects which are presented in the tearoom with at least as much respect as is shown to hu-

man persons. Everything comes together. Everyone forms a whole which, to rebound to Mortonian thinking, is less than the sum of its parts, and in a way that is very humanizing indeed.

Consider, for example, the use of utensils and other items in *chanoyu*. In presenting the “*raku*” (楽), or delightfully imperfect, teacup to the guest, the host in the tea ceremony shows the “front” of the cup to the guest, the part, that is, which “combines superior features with ... irregularities” (Handa 2013, 235). The guest admires the cup, and then turns the “front” back to the host when returning the vessel (Handa 2013, 235). Both guest and host have now formed a silent bond. Both have now recognized, wordlessly, that objects are not perfect and can be filled in with the heart, and that the heart is not perfect and can be cheered by objects, and that both people and objects can be known and respected by other human beings.¹² Solidarity with non-humans is important, and so is solidarity with humans.¹³ Zen Buddhism, on the Rikyū and Mortonian readings, can provide patterns and cadences to help us understand how to achieve both paradigms going forward. The tea ceremony is object-oriented ontology with a drink served at the end.

5 Conclusion

Sen no Rikyū’s object-oriented ontological approach went far toward soothing the pitiless nature of the period of civil war in which he lived. Not only did the tea ceremony capture—for a time, at least—the wild heart of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, but other strongmen of the time, too, found in the drinking of tea and the cherishing and exchange of tea objects such as cups and whisks a cultural grounding, a way of being in the world which did not involve the shedding of blood (Sankei Shimbun 2022, 16; Pitelka 2019). In the tea house, all were equal, all were treated with respect. In the world of *wabi-sabi*, the human heart could know pathos for people and things, could be at home in a world in which humans are often strangers, to one another and to the material universe. As architecture scholar Rumiko Handa puts it:

By producing artifacts and environments that clearly showcased the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent nature of their physical aspects, Rikyū succeeded in guiding tea participants to the ontological

¹² On the connection between imperfection in the tea ceremony and incompleteness and imagination in linked Japanese verse (see: Handa 2013, 231-232).

¹³ Note that Heidegger’s *Vorhandenheit* (to-hand-ness) and *Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand) need not necessarily work in an object-human direction. An ontological flatness, such as OOO suggests is possible, is not excluded by the comingling of human and object worlds (Cheung 2014, 509-512, 520). *Chanoyu* implements, like other objects, have the ability to retain the trace of human presence and re-present those traces later—OOO in human-crossed action (Tatsumi 2003, 299).

contemplation of their own imperfect and transient existence. (Handa 2013, 229)

Sen no Rikyū himself put it best in the poem cited epigrammatically at the outset of this essay.

*The garden path, the hut,
The host and the guest—
All are whipped together
In the tea and are without distinctions* (Anderson 1987, 495)

“A tea master,” Anderson states, “uses the many symbolic aspects of *chaji* [i.e., extended tea ritual] to recreate a cosmic model which includes a human factor” (Anderson 1987, 495). Or, as Rikyū again puts it, “through concentrating on *chanoyu* both guests and host can obtain salvation” (Anderson 1987, 495).

To live among human persons and objects is a risky affair. Life is fraught with uncertainty, as Zen reminds its adherents with each passing moment. Rikyū was not exempt from the perils of existence in an OOO world, a world which is clearly not at the beck and call of human beings. Rikyū fell afoul of Hideyoshi’s violent temper, perhaps for refusing to go along with Hideyoshi’s request to make a member of Rikyū’s family a part of the cultural entertainment, perhaps for being suspected of opposing Hideyoshi’s planned invasion of the Korean peninsula, or perhaps for disapproving of the gaudy gilded tearoom which Hideyoshi had had built. In any event, Hideyoshi ordered Rikyū to commit ritual suicide (Fukui 2012). *Chanoyu* is an existentially perilous endeavor.

Rikyū complied with Hideyoshi’s command, after composing a Buddhist poem to the dagger he used to disembowel himself (Okada 1886, 255). The blade, Rikyū raptured, was to be the implement of his enlightenment. Even in death, Rikyū showed respect to people and things, and placed himself on an equal ontological footing with objects and with fellow human beings.

Object-oriented ontology is an emerging Western philosophy which also has deep and often unexamined roots in non-Western ways of thinking about and being in the world. The example of Sen no Rikyū, and the deeply Zen Buddhist *chanoyu* which he developed as a way of humanizing human persons and cultivating regard for objects, can help human beings today understand how to navigate OOO. Zen Buddhism, in other words, can light the way to a new frontier in Timothy Morton’s radically de-anthropocentrized, *Weltarm* ontology.

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The Question Concerning Technology

A Japanese reply

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ABSTRACT | This paper explores the common idea that Japanese Buddhism presents conceptual resources for an alternative understanding of the challenges of the Anthropocene. Using Heidegger's thought, I examine how Japanese Buddhism envisages the relationship between human beings and nature and its bearing on how technology is conceived. The idea that a whole culture's commendable or reprehensible environmental performance can be entirely inferred from its metaphysical background should be dismissed. Japan is a case in point given its ruinous environmental history. I nevertheless accept that comparative studies are relevant as the Japanese art of gardens is an example of a focal practice able to co-exist with technology while revealing nature as it is itself and not as a resource. In this way one may overcome the West's Frankenstein syndrome by which technology is seen as something beyond control, but also has implications on how man-made disasters can be taken as natural events.

KEYWORDS | Japanese Buddhism; Heidegger; Technology; Gardens

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1 Introduction

The several dialectic opposites that in the West are usually employed to reason about human beings and nature appear in a different light if one takes the compass to be Japan. In an increasingly globalized world, scientific knowledge and technological innovation flow in and out of nations according to where they happen to find marginal profits and reduce cultural differences. As is well-known, Japan is a country in which tradition linked to festivities, rites, ceremonies and processions is still alive and flourishing, alongside a concomitant and practically ubiquitous presence of the most varied cutting-edge technological artifacts and infra-structures. This conciliation is all the more intriguing when it is known how the atomic age began with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I start by considering that Japan's current relation to nature and technology must be examined further upstream, mainly in art and religion. It is from them that the laws of motion that even today are still present in Japanese daily life constitute a relationship with things that is unlike ones found in the West.

In this paper I do not intend to surrender to easy caricatures that simply establish the image of a Far East as opposed to the West. It would be a little too easy, as Roland Barthes (1982) wrote in his *Empire of Signs*, to imagine a fictional country, an almost living laboratory, called Japan, whose mirror image would give back the background of Western uninspected assumptions that pervade the history of its philosophical thinking. An account of the relationship with nature and technology in Japan is first and foremost a recognition that globalization does not proceed only through the accelerated pace of a steamroller that levels everything in its path. Notwithstanding how global trade, transportation and information networks are profoundly bringing the planet together in a kind of *techno-utopia*, globalization is also unfolding by emphasizing other regional logics.¹ Like Gray points out, before the forced opening to the West, Japan was a unique experience in human history as a culture with forms of life that reversed technological evolution. The country also created its own version of Modernity and capitalism by combining knowledge and industrialization while maintaining its already existing social structure. Industrialization in Japan did not entail a break with the feudal social order nor did the "growth of knowledge and innovation in ideas" break apart old social structures (Gray 1998, 169). In other words, each culture today is invited to constantly update itself in the face of the challenges that the ongoing accelerated transformation of the planet poses. Whatever the West and the Far East may be and have been in their respective

¹ Although the idea of paradise is transversal to all cultures and epochs, only the West has succeeded in transforming an internal, individual idea of paradise, associated with moral progress and practices of religious observance, into an external and historical possibility of establishing that paradise. Hereafter it can be constructed, produced and distributed in the course of historical time: techno-utopia. For the origin of the term, see Mattelart (2000).

geographical and cultural senses, they do not remain sheltered, but renew themselves by adapting to a changing geopolitical and technological environment. Japan will hence be approached mainly from a philosophical-cultural point of view while acknowledging that cultures are not static and are subjected to social and material changes and transformations across history.

At the root of every civilization there are religious and artistic forces that allow themselves to be glimpsed even when they acquire a secular expression. I intend to explore what such religious and artistic traditions can express about the Japanese experience of nature and technology in order to assess how the two are conceptually framed in the West. This will be accomplished by exploring how religious concepts trekked in Japan to artistic practices and perspectives about the essence of the relationship between human beings and nature. In this context, it is important to question the assumption that the "conceptual resources" of a somewhat alien religion and culture might be available to be scrutinized outside its cultural social and linguistic milieu. If the concepts of a religion alien to the West may be apparently capable of providing valuable insights to the environmental crisis or to the present predicament with managing and regulating technologies, it should not be necessarily inferred from this that they can be imported to Western culture given that its ontological presuppositions are radically different (Rolston III 1987, 176).

Cross-cultural comparative exercises seem, however, to be important given the local nature of global challenges. Since the ravaging environmental destruction, several humanities curricula have attempted to identify the underlying reasons for such phenomena across the West. Philosophy and environmental ethics, in particular, began to expose how Western basic philosophical and theological assumptions paved the way for an understanding, taming and exploitation of nature through science and technology. A parallel theme has been the contrast between how other civilizations and cultures, specifically in the East, had a different, more harmonious approach to nature that was not based on considering it as a well of resources like in the West. It was suggested that in such Eastern cultures, namely Japan, human beings were so much part of the environment that a "love of nature" was an intrinsic aspect of these cultures. Yuriko Saitō (1985) for instance, has argued that the traditional Japanese love of nature is based "upon the conceived identity between man and nature". The evanescent aspects of nature in Japan echo the transience of human life and are further transformed into an aesthetic pathos. These cultures would thus present valuable lessons for our environmental predicaments. Nonetheless, if Japan has been the scene of abundant environmental incidents, disasters and chronic pollution, that is generally indicted as due to the import of the scientific-technological credo foreign to a culture known as being in "harmony with nature" (White 1967; Callicot 1997), which, in turn, points to the import of the West's underlying concept of nature.

Indeed, since Japan does not share the religious historical development of Europe, it could provide a fertile ground for comparative studies aimed at detailing how science and technology are not neutral endeavors, but rather carry their own worldviews by which Being is interpreted as an objective representation (Heidegger 2010, 12). This is especially relevant given the late Japanese reception of science and technology in the 19th century and the ensuing process of paced industrialization that followed. One is prompted to explain how the Japanese syncretic and multifarious religious ethos coped with the massive and accelerated introduction of science and technology. Japanese Modernity, in this sense, exemplifies the distinctive role that technology acquires in every culture – one that clearly goes beyond the much-feared determinist and instrumental critiques about its alienating or liberating effects. Resorting to Heidegger's essays and Albert Borgmann's reading in such regard will prove fruitful.

Other scholars, however, have been critical of the idea of a pre-established harmony between nature and culture in Japan as either problematic or incomplete. The image of a Far East that was corrupted by Western science and technology does not hold on closer inspection, as it tends to crystalize a civilization and its relationships with nature and technology along invariant essences that are not subjected to social, material and class history and its competing discourses for transformation. Morris-Suzuki (1991, 1998) and more recently Regina Bichler (2023), for instance, present a more realistic and nuanced framework of Japanese history. They build a case that the start of industrialization in Meiji Japan could quickly adopt and absorb Western scientific, technological and economic ideas precisely because human beings, although a part of nature, were already, in Edo Japan (1605–1868), envisioned as ensuring nature's survival and growth. Discourse on the Japanese cultural identity being linked to nature is also tantamount. A key term is *kaibutsu*, the "opening of things" or as "developing or making use of the natural world". Art, or technology, is the means by which the perfection of nature can flourish. For Morris-Suzuki, *kaibutsu* "proved to be a concept which could offer a bridge between familiar Japanese notions of morality and the new ethos of Western science and technology" (1991, 94). Euro-American influence in the archipelago continued an already blooming trend of resource exploitation during the previous seclusion period. This would explain the utter indifference of the Meiji government to environmental destruction, as the only criterion used to judge the effects of the exploitation of nature were the outcomes of negative effects on human well-being and not the loss of unspoiled nature.

The need for examining how nature and technology is framed in Japan as well as its role in damaging nature and human beings is also justified by stressing how common background assumptions condition contemporary hopes and fears about the role of technology. Technology is regarded as a human designer's creation, so as soon as it starts revealing hazardous effects, one easily

concedes to the expectations about how technological development ought to be controlled, directed and nudged towards social and well-being goals. Today, this theme is even more relevant due to the unstoppable acceleration of technological progress, which is growing more and more palpable. The transversal digitalization of infrastructures and other household appliances, the possibility of the appearance of autonomous cars, the conversion of common appliances and machines into intelligent devices, the recent emergence of artificial intelligence through the use of *ChatGPT*, are all recent phenomena that promise new productivity gains, but also the transformation of the very structure of consciousness and social organization. The information age and the fourth industrial revolution are looming and apparently everything is happening as if it were an inevitable fatality (Martins 2011). All these issues combined with recent technological developments raise several questions of collective concern.

Finally, the general overview of how nature and technology are conceived in Japan vis-à-vis human beings allows one to question the legitimacy of modern Western assumptions. Showing their contingency, however, does not mean they can be changed or that one can choose another by a sheer act of will. An assumption is not something one can get rid of, since its transcendental conditions the very trajectory of reflection, though it provides more self-awareness. The task of thought is, therefore, to go deeper and assess the reasons why Western culture has been wavering between a technophobic image, associated with the fear of being enslaved by machines, and a technophile approach that uncritically sees, in technological progress, a necessary step towards (or even a replacement) for moral progress. Thus, the purpose is also to provide a ground for a dialogue between cultures concerning the place of human beings and nature and the looming impacts of the rise of the scientific worldview.

Japan stands out from the West because it excels in an apparent harmonious fusion between tradition and state-of-the-art technology. The Japanese world already possesses some exceptionalism, as is not characterized by the anthropological *a priori* opposition between nature and culture that we previously thought was global (Berque 1995). In Japan, cities were not defined by the urbanity that was “inside” the walls and by the rusticity of the rural, villainous “outside”. Japanese culture also privileged nature as a locus of educational and moral refinement. The syncretic Japanese spirituality lent itself to seeing in each natural being the very manifestation of the body of Buddha, or a *kami*, with each being having intrinsic value. Like an *avant-la-lettre* post-modern society, within Japan the human republic is thus fully linked and intersected with “a parliament of things”, an expression with which the late Bruno Latour (1991, 142) summarized his symmetrical actor-network theory, in which not only the natural, but also technologies inhabit the same level of reality. Inanimate material things are considered as though they are alive (Heikkerö 2005, 256). Things and robots, like humans, can “be born” or “die” and they can also compose the affective and

memorial atmosphere or the social heritage of a social group or family. The human does not seem to have a dominant position or centrality by which other inanimate beings are sidestepped to a marginal position. The hierarchy between creator and creature is more blurred in Japan so that the question of a dystopian "invasion", "enslavement" or the "surpassing" of the human condition does not arise.

In this context, robots and their use deserve special reference, because not only do they connect with all the above-mentioned aspects, but they are surfacing in areas previously considered alien to their introduction, such as public relations, commerce or domestic areas such as informal child and elderly care. Faced with such developments, one is immediately taken to consider robots as a replacement – a threat to one's own humanity. However, given its specific historical relationship to technology, in Japan, an understanding of the presence of artificial beings does not lend itself to be captured by the standard usual categories of an invasion or usurpation. Indeed, the increased presence of robots, humanoid or otherwise, and electronic devices is not hampered by traditional metaphysical assumptions about an inherent core that comes together to constitute what is essential about human beings, such as subjectivity, legal personality, or moral agency. Frankenstein's syndrome (Coeckelberg 2013, 56) is defined as the fear that technology will get out of control, that is, that "our" creatures will rebel against their creators, to whom, by definition, obedience is owed. The usual rhetoric about the dangers of "invasion" makes use of a "preservation" discourse about the sanctity of what is inside oneself and the evils of an ontic fusion. According to this common discourse, borders must be guarded because, if they are crossed, they would threaten human integrity. The moral agency of human beings is defined precisely by being beyond the determinations of nature and matter, and autonomy as something that manages, beyond those determinations, to give a law unto itself.

In the West, these assumptions of safeguarding human subjectivity are common and go back to its religious and philosophical heritage. This belief also shapes the grammars of creation (Steiner 2002) that run through its art, literature, nature and technology. A strict division between God and his creatures runs through the imagination of Western folklore. Since human beings still possess a divine spark through their rational faculties, other creatures do not partake in this connection with the godhead. Even in a secularized culture, the natural and material world are disenchanted and are mere facts alien to and removed from human subjectivity. In Japan, on the other hand, the idea that the inner is connected to the outer and commands it, the idea that every expression is preceded by an intentional impression, seems to be more tenuous. Similarly, another common assumption evaluates technological artifacts according to whether they fulfill the purposes for which they were made, although it has been carefully examined how that is a very hardwired design fallacy (Ihde 2008). In other

words, our technological creations should not stray from their intended function precisely because they do not have a soul, a spirit or agency that escapes the determination of the laws governing matter. However, Japanese culture suggests that such assumptions might be mere playful and helpful fictions around which Western culture established itself as a civilization. Such a comparative analysis would allow for a much-needed understanding of how the "intrusion" of technologies in the daily life of vast populations is usually accounted for by using a cost-benefit analysis or other methodologies that hinge on metaphysical assumptions about human nature and the tameable nature of technology. Perhaps in this way, one can begin to face the challenges presented by a swarming everyday presence of artificial beings with whom one will progressively interact with in the future.

Only recently have philosophers like Heidegger started a philosophical current that, notwithstanding all the dangers posed by technology, recognizes how it is leveling the separation between subject and object, between mind and matter and promoting the loss of old metaphysical masks (Heidegger 1991, 145) by which human beings realize that the very planetary threat to our planet exposes an interdependence between natural, social, and technological entities. Such a philosophical turn seems to be very appropriate to what is the case in Japan. In relation to technology, therefore, I suggest that one should not see or take it as something strange, something that is outside, but rather something that has always accompanied humanity, which does not necessarily make it something tameable.

It must also be added that "Overcoming Modernity" (*Kindai no chōkoku*) was already an expression used by the Japanese philosophical current of the Kyōto school (Stevenson 1997). Integrating the insights of Japanese Buddhism into a conceptual framework has also been a way of presenting Japan's alternative to Western metaphysics – expressed in their poetry, painting, architecture and religion – according to which personhood and nature are in a continuous contextual field of experience, known as the logic of place (*basho no ronri*), as opposed to the logic of the subject of Aristotle that grounds all modern subjectivity and science.

A critique of Modernity by Kyōto School philosophers like Nishida and Watsuji thus draws heavily on both the Japanese ethos and Buddhist concepts and resonates with the critique made by Heidegger. Modernity is conceived as the late historical development of Western civilization whereby being is understood according to 1) the emphasis put on abstract categories of human reasoning and not through the concreteness of particular beings and 2) being is then reduced to an object, not only observable in its lawfulness but subjected to being manipulable. Modernity is thus a way of conceiving beings according to their possibility of being known and objectified based on the self-positing of the I (Stevens 1997, 18) whilst not allowing beings to manifest themselves in their proper

essences. The concepts underpinning the development of Western technology are then a result of a particular way of conceiving reality.

2 Heidegger and Borgmann on Going beyond Technology

Although published in 1954 in the dawn of the new atomic era, the questions raised in *Die Frage nach der Technik* are still our own. In *The Question concerning Technology*, Heidegger (1977) attempts to go beyond the instrumental and anthropological understanding of technology by stressing both the continuity with techniques of old and the alliance between science and modern-day technology. For Heidegger, the essence of technology aims at bending and making reality more and more transparent and available. Constraints like space, time and all sorts of traditions that assign limits to communities are being progressively obliterated. To stress how such a process is directed at surpassing the very body and flesh with all its limitations and vulnerabilities, Martins (2011) uses the term “technological Gnosticism”.² Technology enframing (*Ge-stell*) imposes an objectification that allegedly aims at denying death itself. Contemporary culture thrives on waging several battles against aging, disease and sickness through medical and genetic technologies. As boundaries are pushed, such attempts further call into question what defines humanity. Already in this essay Heidegger attempts a new understanding in order to assert the possibility of establishing a relationship with technology that is neither one of contrived obedience nor one that leads to resistance.

Heidegger's stance is both original and resonates with how technology is broadly considered in Japan. Unfortunately, it has frequently been pushed out of a middle path and bent towards either a call for a conservative appraisal of things past or as providing reasons for the political regulation and taming of technology. For instance, Hans Jonas's call for the imperative of responsibility and the preservation of the traditional image of man vis-à-vis the viability of life on Earth is tantamount to such an effort of finding a third order power over the second out-of-control power of technology that has pushed civilization into a new fragility (Jonas 1979, 253). Heidegger however was clear from the outset:

... no individual, no group of men, no committee, even of statesmen, researchers and technicians, however important, no conference of leading figures of economy and industry can halt or direct the historical course of the atomic age. No merely human organization is in a position to achieve the mastery of the age. (Heidegger 2000, 22)

2 “... to signify the marriage of technological achievements, projects and aspirations with the characteristically Gnostic dreams of radically transcending the human condition ... Overcoming the basic parameters of the human condition - its finitude, contingency, mortality, corporality, animality, existential limitation - appears as a motive and even as one of the legitimations of contemporary technoscience, at least in some areas” (Martins 2011, 18, my translation).

As technology is acknowledged as posing a problem for other beings and even for the viability of the planet itself, human beings can lose grasp on how their thoughts and plans are already framed by technological thinking and how every solution appears itself as framed by such an imposition. For Heidegger every attempt to tame technology “with spirit” nevertheless reinforces its grip on the taking of reality. Heidegger turns contemporary awareness on itself and shows how the will to power that is made manifest in the technological enframing is still present when one expects that it ought to be controlled as a means of serving the noble ends of preserving wildlife, community, education or, more generally, of safekeeping the future of the planet for generations to come. By considering technology as an instrument (Heidegger 2010, 12) that should obey intentionally designed goals and solve specific problems, the capacity to acknowledge that there are issues that are not amenable to a technological solution is lost (Martins 2011, 308). One of the usual approaches and the most obvious is the very assumption that in the contemporary world technological development itself can be controlled and mastered through several methodologies linked to Technology Assessment and Responsible Research and Innovation (Lente and Swierstra 2017). Yet, technological development and innovation has been more recently acknowledged by various authors, organizations and institutions as being causally unpredictable for its nefarious effects on labor, the environment and in altering the very nature of user perceptions and expectations (Marchant 2011).

According to Heidegger, such an instrumental approach is doomed to fail. As one of his most prominent students has stated, using the notion of the Promethean gap, the gap between the power of technology to unleash forces and the agent’s faculties to imagine and predict its consequences unavoidably widens (Anders 1962). There is no appropriate action whatsoever to bring it back into one’s control. Technology is humanity’s self-extension unleashed in the course of history fueled by exploring and expanding the boundaries of knowledge. Anders paradoxically states that “man is smaller than himself”. Being a featherless, harmless and defenseless creature, artifice is continuously developed as the only way of taming the environment (Gehlen 1973). Technology is thus a hallmark of human beings, but it brings them under its yoke by its so-called solutions.

What can an approach that is neither a call for salvaging what still has not been lost and that is radically critical of the alienating effects of technological consumption add to the contemporary world? And can such an approach speak to, or draw resources from, the status of nature in Japan? Today both human beings and nature seem to be in jeopardy by way of the very same process that, albeit originally growing out of their mutual separation, has gradually been responsible for a totalizing understanding of human beings and society according to the terminology of science (MacIntyre 1981, 82).

More than death or loss, such a process of technological enframing is dangerous because it reveals human beings as solely dependable on their purposefulness and objectifying representations as paving the way not only to a more bearable condition, but to happiness itself. Such enframing, however, is outside of one's choosing, even if it seems to be built on the sum of individual wills. According to Heidegger, this is an age that Being was destined for and that cannot be surpassed but understood and accepted. Heidegger seems to expand the Aristotelian admonition that one's action starts by recognizing those things that are in one's power from those things that are not. Although technology, and history as well, are a collective human creation, contingency has a bearing on many levels. There is no way to direct them or push them both into a desired outcome. This goes against the usual way of approaching the future as an abstract, empty place prone to be filled with projects fueled by the prowess of humanity's calculating powers (Adam and Groves 2011, 17). In Ivan Illich's parlance, there are issues that can only be coped with as a condition and not as a problem to be surpassed. Accepting one's powerlessness to bring about the redemption of oneself and planetary life in such troubling times is paradoxically the only way to circumvent technological behavior (Cayley 1992, 270-276.).

This is the core of the true danger for Heidegger. More than the plundering of the Earth's resources or the arms race towards new heights of destruction, the real threat is the "technological understanding of being" (Dreyfus 1997, 54), that is, the idea that calculative thinking, the way of rational understanding brought about by the natural sciences and excelled by technology, is the only way of thinking and relating available to human beings. The real danger lies in the fact that by consummating itself, by taking the imaginary of what is desirable, calculative thinking exhausts the possibilities of meditative thought, that is, it extinguishes the hypothesis of another understanding of Being in which the human condition is not taken as something that lends itself to maximal optimization. Meditative thought is, however, of one's choosing and nurturing.

Accordingly, while Heidegger stresses that the tide for the technological ordering of reality has been forming since the dawn of Western civilization towards its acme, it nevertheless does not determine all one's relations and worldviews. As Dreyfus states (1997, 57), Western culture today provides a *cultural clearing* that, despite its regional variants, has been spreading in the last centuries and is becoming more and more global. Within such a clearing, an understanding of beings as driven by the search for optimal efficiency has become the standard. But there are other marginal clearings, even inside Western culture, but perhaps especially outside it. More importantly, if it were not for the dominant technological revealing of beings, other cultural clearings would not be valued. Although one cannot choose the cultural clearing within which one is born, one can, potentially, begin to understand its limits and step outside it towards others.

For this task I now turn to one of the interpreters of Heidegger's work in general and meditative thinking in particular, Albert Borgmann. His specific approach will be of assistance in understanding the role of technology in Japan and help us to grasp how a contemporary technological society can still live side by side with tradition. Through his "device paradigm", Borgmann (1984) agrees that, irrespective of its origin, technology is usually cast as an alienating force that deviates human beings from their proper flourishing while eroding social bonds. By making everything easily available, one's life becomes dull as skills are not developed and lasting commitments are not sought. Accordingly, lifestyles in advanced industrial societies everywhere are more prone to being disburdened through devices (1984, 44): work becomes more monotonous and duller while leisure is equated with various forms of consumption.

For Borgmann, focal things and practices can nevertheless refocus one's life amidst technological forces and provide them a much-needed center, as they are "matters of ultimate concern that are other and greater than ourselves" (1984, 169). The commanding presence of things balances the fragmentation induced by technological devices by creating a practical focus where attention, exertion and self-development can make individual lives more meaningful and give them depth and unity. Practices like running, a home meal prepared for family and friends or taking care of one's garden all have the gift of holding and caring about something precious through the development of skills and discipline. It would be a mistake, says Borgmann, to see such practices as an endeavour aimed at realizing more efficient outcomes. Instead, they heal the split between means and ends (*ibid*, 208).

Just like Heidegger, Borgmann is thus not making an appraisal of focal things and practices as a political program aimed at an upheaval of the liberal democratic society where technological innovation thrives, but attempting at a reform that pushes the technological understanding of Being as a marginal clearing that coexists with a more central one, provided by focal things and practices. According to Borgmann, it's a matter not of overthrowing the technological order, but of setting it aside for the things that matter the most.³ For example, in Japan, several arts and practices co-exist with the pervading technological environment without any contradiction. The goal is not to fight calculative thinking, but to bypass it by allowing such arts, crafts and practices to acquire a prominence unknown in pre-technological environments. Such coexisting is grounded on pragmatic reasons:

³ "Borgmann ... claims that focal things and practices, however 'pretechnological' they might prove to be, have force and depth within a technological context, which for this reason should not be dismantled. In fact, it cannot be dismantled, not so much because it is already so well entrenched as because it affords the opportunities, the affluence and free time, to engage with and in these things and practices" (Brittan 2000, 11).

... the device paradigm requires neither intrinsic reform nor global replacement. Only local replacements of devices ... are desirable and possible. The general infrastructure, e.g., of communication, transportation and health should provide the instantaneity, ubiquity, safety and ease that only advanced technological devices can provide. We cannot responsibly ... risk human health or life in order to save a medical skill from obsolescence. (Borgmann 2000, 365)

Only in this way can one be free to engage with devices and put them aside without being ensnared by them, even if they are recognized as designed for and directed at efficiency. According to Heidegger's reading of Rilke's poetry, there are things that touch a human being's essence and set it in motion. Those things that, by belonging to a wider circle, can move oneself. Additionally, and this is remarkable, by way of the technological enframing, they acquire a special fragility and radiance. For example, death shines as something that resists such enframing, as it cannot be made an object. The close connection between life and death is underscored by looking at death as the other side of life. Only then can death itself cast a radiance to the wider circle where the future, one's ancestors, and one's infancy acquire their meaning as that what really matters.

Once one understands that one is bound to this technological clearing but not forced into it, one can engage in other ways of self-cultivation, potentially opening reality beyond the paradigm of efficiency. This ability to shift and refocus one's life even in a technological world while being nevertheless constrained by it, is what Heidegger calls *Gelassenheit* or serenity towards technology. This is how one can loosen the spell that technology has by making reality flat, vaporous and ever available. For Heidegger, this consists in a serenity towards devices and apparatuses, in establishing a daily relationship with them that is short-lived: one can use them and discard them from one's existence because they do not command one's life, but are made subordinate to something that is superior to them and submits to them. It is only through serenity that reality and individuals are seen from a different perspective by which calculative thinking is put at the outskirts of one's life and acquires its proper domain. This is accomplished not only mentally, but, as Borgmann points out, by embodying such understanding in a way of life, in practices in which neither others nor things are taken as resources, in which the presence of others, things or nature speaks eloquently and invokes a watchfulness. In sum, technology can be reframed if only one learns to keep it at bay according to what mostly matters in one's life.

Regarding the particular point of focal things and practices developed by Borgmann out of Heidegger's work and its affinities with Japanese culture, it could also be argued, with Sharr (2006) that Heidegger understood too well the urgency of allowing himself to be in contact with another alternative setting in the background of urban Modernity through the experience provided by a regular retreat to his rustic hut in Todtnauberg. Its daily activities, rituals and the

bluntness of mountain life provided a focus against the more aloof concepts in which philosophy wordplay abounds. A hut, its setting and the everyday life it promotes, frame both one's thinking and one's being. By abstaining from urban home comforts through a voluntary and focused withdrawal can one notice how philosophy itself, as an embodied and lived process, is subject to the surrounding assumptions and arrangement of a place and its landscape. The appeal of the hut for Heidegger grounds the relationship not only between his philosophy but of every form of thought and place and the importance of the materiality of common things.

Sharr also notes how Heidegger's retreat belongs to a three thousand year "canonical 'tradition' of huts as situations for poetic or philosophical reflection" (Sharr 2006, 76). Heidegger was apparently also aware of how the haiku poet Matsuo Basho involved the hut as a theme. The symbolism of the hut is more-over recurrent in Buddhist literature, especially Chinese and Japanese. Its frugality and rustic appearance point to the austerity of the hermit who, avoiding connections with civilization, seeks to contrive a shelter to protect himself from the weather and which testifies to a solitude that is still entirely human. It is through the hut that the hermit intends to begin an authentic recreation of his connection to the world. Heidegger too "felt that its basic comforts put him in unusually exacting contact with the weather and the forest's flora and fauna, with whose perceived motions he sought to demarcate existence. Heidegger attributed philosophical authority to the order he found in these things and phenomena" (2006, 103). This is where arts and crafts can play a definite role and where we can start uncovering its role in Japan. In the next section, albeit only briefly, some concepts around the syncretic Japanese religion will be presented in order that this task can be furthered.

3 The Roots of Japanese Buddhism

To each historical era belongs different sensibilities, which combine the stand-points of physics, morality and religion, about the current representation of nature (Lenoble 1990, 203). In this way, the idea of nature can receive its definition from man's idea of himself (atomism was primarily a consequence of the awareness of individual independence in the *polis*) or man's idea of himself can be defined through the idea of nature (materialism took hold in nature before being today applied to man). Today nature is mechanized and stripped of an internal creative principle, *and to effectively handle and manipulate nature is to know it*,

an analogy inherited from the action of the divine watchmaker.⁴ This scheme of nature as a mechanical system, however, does not need the belief in God to be maintained, and is still present today despite the relevance of contemporary scientific updates.⁵

With this commonsense materialistic view in mind, I now turn firstly to the *Dao de Jing* in order to understand how Japanese approaches frame technology in its relationship with nature and human beings. The role of *de* in the *Daode-jing* has often been overlooked in its relevance to aesthetics and an art of living. Ames points out that it describes the power that something has to act naturally (1989, 125). The order of the *Dao* is therefore not a predetermined pattern obeyed by all things but an order that emerges due to each one expressing its *de* as a particularization of the *Dao*. The relation *Dao-de* can be seen as the thing enclosing the whole while expressing itself in openness to other *de*. As nature works according to the relation between *Dao* and *de*, human beings can also act according to their respective *de* if they allow themselves a self-cultivation in the way that, although using their reasoning faculties to depict reality, they do not confuse it with what they intend to describe. This would then be a return to their true nature. To act like the *Dao* individuates itself in a *de* is then to go back to the root of what *deliberately acts by not acting* (*wu-wei*). The term *wu-wei* is composed of the negative particle *wu*, and *wei*, meaning "to act", "to build", "to make", "effort", "strain" or "task". It can be understood as non-assertive action (Hall 1989, 109), as an action that combines one's own individuality with the one in which one acts through the appreciation of the respective *de*.

The most notable difference with Confucianism is that in Daoism this capacity expands beyond the moral sphere and ranges across other fields of application. Many of the examples Zhuangzi employs use artisans, animals, newborn babies and vagabonds, in the sense that the latter, having released themselves from social ties, are more free. Therein the loss of self-consciousness means a total harmonization of activity. The discriminating, representative mind withdraws, while the mind, still being present, does not henceforth interfere with activity. It is in this sense that the *Dao* can be expressed, through a particular *de*. Unfettered by a mind which insists on projecting its own schemas on reality and sensibility, the human being Daoism wants to develop is the man who can express his primordial nature through his *de*, just as the natural elements perform

4 "I can only understand what I can build Among the philosophical principles ... that have implicitly or explicitly legitimized and certainly even defined the modern technological adventure, there is the principle or axiom of Vico, the famous *verum ipsum factum, verum factum convertuntur* (the interconvertibility between the true, on the one hand, and the made or produced, on the other) ..." (Martins 2011, 83).

5 "The environmental crisis may at least in part be diagnosed as a symptom and a measure of the mismatch between the atomistic-mechanistic image of nature inherited from the Greeks, institutionalized in modern classical science and expressed in modern technology, on the one hand, and the holistic-organic reality disclosed by contemporary ecology (and in a sense by the environmental crisis itself), on the other" (Callicott 1987, 116).

without calculation or obeying a lawful plan. To recover it, Zhuangzi alludes to the “fasting of the mind”.

Daoism thus proposes that the intimate knowledge of nature and the sense of self are interconnected and their harmonization does not lie in the articulate knowledge of representational facts given by abstraction into conceptual systems. The way towards gaining such intimate knowledge is a suspension of all the unnecessary mental projections that one tends to “read” and impose onto reality. Or, as Heidegger would say, one’s representations have an unnecessary authority in objectifying reality. In the case of human beings, the experience of harmonization may be a skill or an aesthetic experience, in the sense that one can expand the details of each singular being through the attention to how its particulars connect with other *de*. The case of the potter who molds the shapeless clay following its inherent and concrete particularity results in a piece that expresses both the nature of the clay and the potter’s manual skills.

It was perhaps this character of Daoism and, later, of Neo-Confucianism, which, while still integrating influences from Buddhism, ended up limiting the genesis of the modern theoretical sciences in the prosperous Chinese civilization.⁶ There was no storable principle according to which forms are constituted or reducible to one or several substances, but only that they perform in a similar way and are grounded by the same unfathomable source. The *Dao* is not only an unnamable genesis, but the way by which nature transforms itself and how the human being, expressing his *de*, may harmonize with it. Perhaps by way of something that inconspicuously tied human beings and nature, the way to conceptually distance man and nature through dualism was blocked. The knowing subject had no possibilities to conceive an object as something abstract that stands to be measured and apprehended in the language of mathematics as the real language of nature.

Fast forward to the migration of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Japan and there we find several theoretical aspects that need to be highlighted. One pertains to the Huayan school of Buddhism and its own unique doctrine of the infinitely repeated mutual identity and intercausality of all phenomena. At the same time, this school was subject to the natural influence of Chinese sensibility, particularly Daoism, with the Buddhist aim of awakening equated as a return to naturalness and it has thoroughly influenced Buddhist schools in Japan (Lusthaus 1998a).

In the Huayan view, the cosmos acquires a both comprehensive and organic sense. The form of each experience of this reality, in turn, is called a *dharmadhatu*. In the fourth and final form of *dharmadhatu*, the experience is of mutual interpenetration between all events: *shi shi wu wai*. It is the realization of the free intercausality of all things and the conclusion of the impossibility of there being anything that is not a reflection of something else (Cook 1977, 36). Each

6 Cf. Joseph Needham’s *opus magnum*, *Science and Civilization in China*.

thing in the universe acts spontaneously because it does not act divorced from its conditions. It is not a monism, but a non-dual perspective, since by *shi shi wu wai* what is meant is not a perspective that does not distinguish between various particulars, as if subsumed in a whole, but rather an experience in which the interconnectedness between all things is the guarantee of their distinction. Identity and difference are only two aspects of a common reality. There is no universal or absolute without its manifestation in relative and concrete particulars. This is an outcome of Nāgārjuna's view, in that absolute truth does not exceed or transcend conventional truth, because it needs it to be expressed.⁷ The understanding of absolute truth is derived from and maintained through realizing the experience of emptiness (Borges 2010, 52). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, emptiness is not something that is observed in phenomena but a new vision, a way of knowing reality as it is and which subsists after the elimination of all perspectives that aspire to describe it correctly by resorting to conceptual thought. The refutation of all conceptual perspectives is not in turn replaced by belief in another perspective, but rather by the pragmatic assumption that reality is ineffable (Burton 2000, 57).

Taking on these developments, Japanese Buddhist thought extended the idea of a universal Buddhahood, namely the idea of an inherent enlightenment of all non-sentient beings that is often referred to in medieval Japanese literature (Maraldo 1998). Only humans had to realize their own Buddha-nature. A variety of ways became available for reaching Buddhahood through a synergy between aesthetic expressivity and a religious path. A *dō* gradually embodies in the practitioner both the understanding of an artistic demand and the experience of a spiritual path:

The *dō* in the field of art is a way of leading to spiritual enlightenment through art; the *dō* consists here in making an art a means by which to achieve enlightenment as its ultimate goal. In the artistic *dō* ... particular emphasis is laid on the process, the way, by which one goes forward the goal. To every stage the artist tries to get into commitment with the quintessence of art through the corresponding spiritual state and make himself bloom in the art. (Pilgrim 1977, 286)

That is why some of the artistic expressions of Japanese Buddhism exempt themselves from the *representational* function of revealing something beyond their own appearance (Pilgrim 1998, 23). It is not the case that they cannot be

7 "All Buddhas rely on two types of truth/ In order to teach the Dharma to living beings/ One is conventional wordly truth/ The other is the truth of ultimate meaning. If a person is unable to perceive the distinction between these two truths/ Then he will not know the real meaning/ Of the profound buddha-dharma. Unless you rely on the conventional truth/ You will not attain the ultimate meaning/ Unless you attain the ultimate meaning/ You will not attain nirvāna" (Bocking 1995, 342-343: 24 – The Four Noble Truths, 8-10).

conceptually included within a frame of reference that explains their structure. It is rather that the hermeneutic exercise that unveils the meaning is not necessary for the religious function of the art. The Buddhist view of reality, at this level, becomes similar to what d'Angelo (2009, 153), writing about Schelling, means by a culling of the difference between the signifier and the signified. Pilgrim speaks of these art forms of Japanese Buddhism as *presentational*, in the sense that they manifest the transformative power upon their encounter with the practitioner.⁸ This is why the dissemination of many arts associated with Japanese aesthetics such as calligraphy, poetry, painting, gardening, and tea ceremonies reveal the variety of aesthetic and spiritual paths that bracket intellectual understanding in favor of sudden truthful intuitions and technical expertise in a given artistic field. All these cultivation methods indicated that Buddhahood was no longer a goal attainable after innumerable efforts and reincarnations, but something achievable in a single lifetime and in the practitioner's own mind and body. There is therefore a metaphysical collapse which singularizes the absolute with the mundane.⁹ It is particularly the mark of Zen that the full affirmation of worldly life and of the complete concreteness that each small action or event contains.

4 Gardens as a Focal Practice and the Overcoming of Modernity

Gardens are models by which a culture illustrates its metaphysical attitude towards nature and place, but also towards what it understands to be a human act of creation in line with the very creative principles of nature or the divine will. The garden allows itself to be apprehended according to a hermeneutics of place (Nys 1997, 135) where the attitudes of a culture concerning space, places and the management of territories are manifested. Any reflection on the garden will have to recognize its dual nature, as it works on the limit of what art amounts to be. Given the organic and pulsating nature of its matter, a garden nevertheless possesses a remarkable difference in relation to other arts. The intervention and systematic refining of its forms is essential to its appearance throughout the changing and recurring seasons. A garden is thus seldomly finished as the gardener joins in its elaboration alongside nature. It hence reveals a

8 "The vehicular power of Buddhist Art lies not only in its ability to reveal or representationally point to Buddhist meanings, but also in its ability to presentationally embody the very sacrality that forms the religious nature of Buddhism itself ... we can think of its presentational function ... as a function whereby sacrality is manifested in the experiential power of the moment. This function features the artwork as religious-aesthetic Presence, an immediate manifestation of Buddhist Truth, rather than as a symbol "pointing" beyond itself" (Pilgrim 1998, 23-25).

9 "The idea of becoming a Buddha in this very body or life involved a temporal and a metaphysical reduction. First, it collapsed the various stages of the path to enlightenment that were so important in various Buddhist traditions, and reduced the 'three immeasurable eons' to one lifetime. Second, it collapsed any remnant of a difference between the physical reality of life on earth and a transcendent realm, between the transient human body and the transcendent dharma-body" (Kasulis 1998c).

visible and normative connection between two central themes that run through the history of thought: first, human being's nature and second how nature is conceived. It declares human beings' position as an active agent in the natural environment that surrounds him, enacting the conceivable image of both man and nature through the form of their relationship. Conceiving a garden is at the same time a refusal of nature as a realm unscathed by humanization and its design according to an idea (Nitschke 1999, 9-11). The garden is thus already a detailed affirmation of human beings' inevitable technical action on nature, either of an intimate proximity or one of instrumental separation.

We have seen how both Heidegger and Borgmann point to how a work of art may provide another clearing, i.e., a focus around which technological enframing is put aside. By observing more closely the art of Japanese gardening, one can see how it both reveals a focal thing and practice that can co-exist with a highly technological background. I thus wish to examine what the uninterrupted presence of gardens also says about how nature in Japan is unveiled vis-à-vis the relationship with man and technology. For that I will briefly examine the principles that have guided and oriented the design of Japanese gardens. Notwithstanding the usual and already mentioned comparative approaches to Japan as a culture where another, harmonious relation with nature and technology is conceivable, such readings fail, on a closer and critical inspection, to have a relevant bearing on environmental behavior. This is not a rejection of the Japanese vision of nature and technology per se, but a call for not reading it as having a determinist influence on personal behaviors that are foremostly enmeshed with social and work practices. There is, however, still valuable room for cross-cultural comparisons. My take is that Japanese culture already manages to accommodate tradition with state-of-the-art technology by granting opportunities to focal things and practices like arts and crafts to flourish and reveal another way of disclosing nature. Heikkerö (2005, 255) has already outlined resemblances between this proximity of Japanese culture with focal things and practices, while highlighting that Zen allows also for accruing self-knowledge and self-development.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that several Japanese cultural traditions attest to how nature was sometimes either a friend and companion – a place of refuge from worldly turbulence – or a demonstration of the impermanence of human life with soteriological power, or even, as in Zen's vision, a locus of harmony (Saitō 1997). Where Zen stands out is in the way that this unity was not an abstract, learned concept or an object of knowledge, but often experienced through an aesthetic appreciation of simple, mundane things through the mastering of a skill. The noumenal is not hidden behind appearances, but consists in the manifestation of things themselves, in their thusness or suchness (*Tathātā*) and which a perception, analogous to direct aesthetic appreciation, can intuit through experience without any systematization, classification or dependence of concepts. We have chosen the garden as an example of a focal practice, but

many arts, such as *ikebana*, painting or poetry with an affinity to Zen thinking hint at this prior contact of the artist with the ultimate reality of things.

And yet, as Saitō points out, it is striking that Zen does not constitute itself as a cultural force to hold the exploitation of nature in Japan. By becoming an element of Japanese aesthetics and culture, Zen may have had insidious effects precisely because of its emphasis on non-conceptual and qualitative access to reality. For if everything can be the very manifestation of Buddha nature due to its impermanence, "strip-mined mountains, and polluted rivers must be considered as manifesting Buddha nature as much as uncultivated mountains and unspoiled rivers ... the notion of a responsive rapport theoretically makes it impossible for any intervention in nature to be disharmonious with it" (Saitō 1992). This helps explain why Japanese culture has both a history of environmental destruction and exploitation while preserving traditions where a cultural nexus of the "love of nature" is expressed, such as in gardening, landscape painting or the cherry blossom festivals. Nature is undoubtedly connected to Japanese identity, but that does not necessarily result in a care for the environment or an awareness of the ecological footprint.

This section will also feature some of the observations of Hisamatsu, a Japanese philosopher and monk who met Heidegger (2017) in 1958. This can benefit the grounding of the posthumous dialog between a German philosopher and a whole culture by stating how Eastern cultures were not as foreign and exotic to Heidegger as previously believed. During their brief conversation, Heidegger's acquaintance with Japanese culture is all the more noted. In particular, mention is made of Klee's paintings and one short poem that show affinities with Japanese culture (May 2005, 99) along with a hopeful statement that East and West can meet in a "deeper place" than politics and economics. This points to how familiar Heidegger was with both civilizational roots.

Gardening as a focal thing and practice undoubtedly resembles Heidegger's releasement towards technology (*Gelassenheit*) of letting things be. Additionally, as May (2005) has argued, this notion may have been directly influenced by Eastern thinking. According to this author, textual comparison affords the view that Heidegger's suggestion of a new beginning for the path of thinking beyond Western metaphysics can be traced from non-Western sources, namely Chinese Daoist and Japanese Zen traditions. Hence, I may add, it's no coincidence that the new beginning towards the background of technology as the most prominent offspring of Western metaphysics resembles Eastern ideas. In his book *Zen Action, Zen Person* (1981, 48-51), T.P. Kasulis notices the affinities between meditative thinking and the Taoist "fasting of the mind" going beyond reifying *vorstellen* (to re-present). Releasement or "letting things be" has blatant affini-

ties with *wu-shin*, no-mind¹⁰ by which one deals with forms encountered in daily life by not clinging or taking them as the only reality. Suzuki adds (1959, 94):

In Japan, perhaps as in other countries too, mere technical knowledge of an art is not enough to make a man really its master; he ought to have delved deeply into the inner spirit of it. The spirit is grasped only when his mind is in complete harmony with the principle of life itself, that is, when he attains to a certain state of mind known as *wu-shin* no mind. This is where all arts merge into Zen.

And yet, as Kasulis (1981, 50) remarks, the dominance of calculative thinking for Japanese Buddhism is not due to recent technological endeavors. An intellectualized mode of consciousness “is a fundamental characteristic of human experience in any time or place”.

It should be noted however that Japanese gardens are not only a univocal expression of Zen or any other Buddhist school. The fondness for the natural world was already omnipresent since ancient times. The Japanese word for garden, *shima*, appeared with Shintoism to designate the notion of a sacred, purified space of land, with a view to communion with the *kami* imbued in the natural elements.¹¹ Over the centuries, Japanese gardens continued to be linked to religious expression, both through their association with Buddhist temples or the secularized enjoyment of their aesthetic qualities by patrons, feudal lords and scholars. The tea ceremony, taking place in a rustic cottage in several gardens – the *roji* –, constitutes a precise case of the contemplative and refined exercises and rituals that worship the mundane. In a nearby humble hut of the tearoom, subjected to the subtle events outside, guests were free to observe, comment or share the bubbling silence of impressions that came from the garden. Spring and Autumn were especially abundant in meanings attributed to natural phenomena. Hisamatsu (1971, 26) has noted that

Thus, the Way of Tea includes religion, philosophy, ethics, art, manners, clothing, food and architecture; and, what is more, all of these are chosen according to a Zen standard. In other words, Tea is an expression of laymen’s Zen. This cultural expression in its genesis is quite natural, and in its result can be said, without overstatement, to be the creative completion of the totality of Zen culture into a systematic and integrated whole.

10 “Without-thinking is, therefore, a not-yet-conceptualized immediacy” (Kasulis 1998). *Shin* is *kokoro*, mind and heart, intellect and affect simultaneously.

11 “*Shima* literally means a ‘bound artefact’, which in turn signifies occupation. The word *shima*, derived from *shime*, means land, or, more specifically, land which has been taken possession of. It later acquired the meaning of garden” (Nitschke 1999, 18). Other common words for garden are *niwa* as the master-gardener is known as *niwa-shi*.

Although many of the most popular Japanese gardens are attached to Zen Buddhism temples and Zen master gardeners have been appointed to design many others, their influence is perhaps more in structuring, not motivating.¹² Buddhist concepts help in explaining but do not exhaust or justify what is primarily a fact of Japanese civilization and which draws on other historical and religious influences. All these influences coexist, making the visitor's experience both richer and more varied. In a similar matter, Hisamatsu has suggested that the way of tea, for example, which is typically Japanese, is not something that belongs solely to Zen monasteries or Zen monks, but can be practiced by lay, or common people. It provides "fundamental, universal suggestions concerning the ideals of culture" (1971, 27).

In Japanese gardens in general, the constitutive arrangement of their elements, the specific combination of tree species and the sense of space that they instill in the viewer show the details of an inconspicuous care, an imposition or a respectful collaboration.¹³ Gardens and landscapes in Japan are related with literary, geographical references and collective meanings of natural heritage through metaphorical elements. The past lingers in them. Their elements are possessed by the charge of successive cultural representations and historical facts, some underlined and others hidden by the process that in China and Japan over the centuries has attributed a specific, soteriological or aesthetic-religious value to nature (Berque 1995, 46). This is not surprising, given that the domain of the experiential presentation of nature, the domain of its phenomenology, as it has surfaced for several artists and monks, was subsequently acculturated and elevated into a virtuous practice, religious fact or historical or artistic reference for the elites.

It is however the perceptual dimension that gives rise to the principles of design and projection of the Japanese gardens.¹⁴ Though any garden reveals a relationship to nature, Japanese gardens feature a meticulous manipulation of natural constituents that is not, however, rooted in a concept of nature detached from the way its empirical manifestation is coupled with human sensibility. In other words, Japanese gardening remains rooted in the relationship of sensuous qualities that nature affords, in the way it appears naked to human experience, eschewing the imposition of a prior ideation based on concepts or categories that frame it as a resource, either it is energetic, commodity or aesthetic. Nature

12 "Japanese garden design is firmly rooted in the observation of empirical reality. This gives rise to the design principle of following the request. However, by far the most important philosophical basis which sustained and further developed this principle of 'following the request' was Zen Buddhism ..." (Saitō 1996, 56).

13 "... both Japanese gardens and Western formal gardens give expression to idealized nature by distilling nature's essential features. The difference between them lies in the fact that the idealized form of nature in the Western formal garden is conceived in the intellect irrespective of nature's empirical manifestation, while the idealized form of nature in the Japanese gardens derived from the perceived features of empirical nature" (Saitō 1996, 59).

14 "The central message at the heart of Japanese garden aesthetics is that the designer should not copy existing gardens, but rather gardens should reflect selected qualities of the natural environment" (Slawson 1987, 16).

should be experienced directly. Japanese gardens allow one to say that their design principles are based on a non-conceptual experiential concept of nature.¹⁵ Like many other Japanese arts, the art of gardening is based on a process of embodied skill in which the conceptual principles of design and projection are intimated until they become an automatic expression of the disciple. This involves a purely sensorial receptivity, *bon'yari shite* supported by excursions to the various landscapes of the Japanese archipelago, such as the plains, the coastline or the mountains.¹⁶ A kind of sensitive, kinesthetic memory becomes embodied through the impressions and responses that nature incites in the master gardener. Such principles can be learned by the West.

Nature is then also an author of the garden, in the sense that the gardener does not copy it, but carefully learns how to exhibit those traits that condense the most beautiful, atmospheric or soothing stretches found in these excursions. In other words, the working methodology is selective, not creative, in the sense that the gardener does not compose gardens by attaching something that is foreign to nature. Rather, it stimulates its maximum expressiveness, creating a space in which the presence of art is so subtle that one would think it almost absent. This notion is already familiar to us: the artistic *wu-wei*, spontaneous and non-imposing creativity, is revealed by an absence of contrived forms, signaling a mastery so comprehensive that the work appears almost as necessary, appearing to have arisen from the absence of any conscious effort and conscious striving, just like natural forms proceed without intention. Hisamatsu (1971, 28) recalls this feature of *naturalness* as one of the seven characteristics of Zen aesthetics:

The fourth characteristic—being natural—obviously means not being artificial. While this permits of many interpretations, what is meant here is not simply naivete or instinct. The Naturalness referred to here is equivalent to such terms as unstrained,” having “no mind” or “no intent.

Two of the best-known gardening manuals, the *Sakuteiki* of the aristocrat Tachibana no Toshitsuna (1028-1094) and the fifteenth-century manuscript of the monk Zōen might be considered treatises about the science of composing spaces in accordance with human perception, even if both had arisen in the absence of nowadays natural sciences.¹⁷ In the *Sakuteiki* one can find the following admonition:

¹⁵ “... Japanese gardens were never intended to be literal and indiscriminate copies or miniaturizations of nature ... the representational function of a Japanese garden ... is meant to be neither literal or conceptual, but rather emotive and atmospheric” (Saitō 1996, 46-47).

¹⁶ “Abstract painting and other ‘non-representational’ art forms are useful because their impact is often purely sensory, and so by observing them we learn to see *bon'yari shite*, without the usual impulse to identify or conceptualize what we are looking at” (Slawson 1987, 193).

¹⁷ *Sakuteiki* literally means *Notes on Garden Making*. The other manuscript is *Senzui narabi yagyō no zu*, or *Illustrations for Designing Mountain, Water and Hillside Field Landscapes*.

You should design each part of the garden tastefully, recalling your memories of how nature presented itself for each feature ... Think over, the famous places of scenic beauty throughout the land, and ... design your garden with the mood of harmony, modeling after the general air of such places. (Saitō 1996, 52)

This approach is translated into various methods that reveal a careful sensitivity of “following the request”, i.e., what are the materials asking for in respect to their inherent qualities and the dynamics that they imprint to the space in accordance with the place where they naturally arise. Shrubs, trees and rocks are used as they were found and combined in a specific manner, so as to suggest, for instance, a coastal environment of a windy cliff, in which case the trees would be twisted, or the calm of the spring surrounded by the reeds of a river.¹⁸ Hisamatsu observes (1971, 84):

Not any tree will do; they must be well chosen: this tree is not interesting here, that tree is just right, and so on. Some varieties of trees are chosen especially for particular uses. And among similar varieties of trees, specific ones are chosen for their particular shape or height and planted in an asymmetrical manner.

This principle of *natural habitat* prevents garden arrangements that would challenge its credibility: an orchard natural to certain agricultural landscapes cannot belong to an environment emulating the air of a mountain foothill, where the respective trees would invoke a more charged, collected and solitary atmosphere.¹⁹ Concerning rocks, both manuals discuss in detail how their different combinations entice different experiential effects. Their functions are also different depending on whether the garden demands a tour or promotes a more down-to-earth approach, like in the *kare-sansui* sand-gardens. Lithic sensitivity is sometimes greatly exaggerated, but it is through the example of such attention to detail that the specific character of Japanese gardens can be shown. It also exemplifies an import of what each rock calls for as well as an intimate understanding of the arrangements of those various demands.²⁰

The master gardeners, knowing that the arrangement of space shapes human experience, have developed successful methodologies aimed at promoting the different dimensions of space and time that immovable objects afford. The relevance of the garden parts as they unfold to the viewer is the standard. For instance, one can hint at a wider space that does not exist. This is achieved through a tacit knowledge of human perception, using techniques also present in painting. A sense of distance may be experienced through acoustic effects,

¹⁸ One can compare this method of intervention with the topiary, a feature of many European gardens.

¹⁹ This is what we call the principle of *natural habitat*. It corresponds to what *Sakuteiki* calls *yō*, meaning a “type” or “style” of landscape (Slawson 1987, 62).

²⁰ “Such manipulations meant that the designer had to devote as much attention to the geological formation of the landscape ... and their respective habitats” (Slawson 1987, 67).

such as the sound of a not visible waterfall. Such tacit knowledge of the master gardeners understood that spatial perception is not given by the simple measure of the actual, objective distances between things, but operates through the relationships that vision establishes between the elements. The atmospheric effect of a given site is created through the relationships between different components, their differences in hue, color or size. A zigzagging stream, for instance, will seem to extend indefinitely, all the way to the sea, as if the garden were in fact built on its bed, if its course is presented to the visitor in a few stretches at various levels and at different flows, leading the imagination to suppose a continuity beyond the enclosure of the vegetation or the horizon. This is a demonstration of what Hisamatsu calls natural asymmetry (1971, 83). This effect would be impossible if the stream were presented in an open section, visible throughout its length, and not embedded in the orography of the land, that is to say, re-eded in some places and appearing in others.²¹

Even in the *kare sansui* dry gardens, not so rich from the point of view of multi-sensoriality, this perceptual effect is present. Its minimalist composition reveals its association with the austerity of Zen Buddhism. Its frugality and the parsimony of materials were also a result of warring battles and the unavailability of resources to maintain more vegetation and water elements. Nitschkhe (1999, 233) says that the carved rock garden is typical of the industrialization and parallel destruction of nature that took place in Japan. On the other hand, it is difficult not to establish a linkage of both the famous Ryōan-ji garden or the Daisen-in and their monochrome aspect to the minimalism of the landscape painting in the Muromachi period. The placement of their stones allows a representational reading like in the Japanese gardens of the past and their mythological associations with figures from Daoism and Buddhism. In either of them, however, the master-gardener's attunement to the materials is profound and has enabled them to foster the imaginations of visitors. It is then feasible to find an explanation for these arrangements along these representative lines: water is present through its absence, invoked by the thousands of white pebbles, carefully crimped by a ploughshare and recalling the seabed and its sediments slowly polished by the tides. Some of the more massive rocks may resemble islands or boats as the concentric configurations of the pebbles around them indicate a focal point of the swell or its putative roar. At the Daisen-in, some of the upright rocks may be abrupt crags overlooking a small lake from which light threads of water run down.

One is thus finally drawn to a speculative exercise about the meaning of each garden. It seems that such meaning is prevented from being fully realized in a final interpretation. It seems that there will always be something left out, something unattainable that prevents a complete translation. Indeed, the spec-

²¹One can compare the presence of the water element in Japanese gardens, in ponds, small lakes or with the presence of water in some European gardens, where it is expelled in jets, as if trying to try to overcome gravity through sudden bursts (Saitō 1996, 49).

tator is encouraged to dwell in the courageous refusal of a stable classification: at times she is led to the attribution of meanings, sometimes reassessing them as inadequate. Through their own language, gardens end up suggesting what they cannot reveal. Regarding the *Daisen-in* but with scope for the other gardens, Slawson comments:

What is the meaning of this garden? Of course, the way it is asked already begs the question. It almost sounds like the work of art was a traffic sign, for which there is a specific meaning beyond the symbol which is of greater importance than the sign itself. And yet, as we have been seeing, the finest gardens don't resort to indexes to express its desired meaning. Its meaning is translated in a totally experiential sensory form ... The meaning of a garden thus conceived is its sensory effect, its beauty. The meaning is what comes, as the fragrance of a flower, in the intersection of the garden and the viewer. (Slawson 1987, 140)

5 Conclusion

The environmental crisis seems to involve a possibility of manipulation of nature that is based on the reduction of the natural world to an elaborate system of symbolic mathematical representation. Everything that surrounds man is amenable to being codified and human experience is eminently the capture of such representational contents. The deep-rooted equivalence between concrete nature and nature as a system, a set of postulates and formulations that can be algorithmically encoded, prevents the rediscovery of nature prior to its mathematical representation and technological enframing. It is at this point that Japanese culture seems to meet Heidegger and Borgmann in criticism of this metaphysical and cultural stand on Being and offer an alternative.

To go beyond meaning regarding nature or technology may also mean avoiding a strictly representational, calculative form of thought²² by establishing a new clearing, where focal things and practices can reveal beings in another way beyond the technological enframing. This implies establishing a relationship with technology through meditative thinking and around focal things and practices that circumvents the idea that one can "escape" from it or that one can even control it, preserving only its "advantages" and eliminating its "disadvantages". Only by accepting that the present age is highly conditioned by technology can one learn to deal with it beyond the dualism of reverential acceptance or reckless condemnation. Heidegger and Borgmann thus seem to provide an *outside* view on how Japan succeeded in combining tradition and Modernity,

22 "The West moistens everything with meaning" (Barthes 1982, 70).

while a brief overview over the religious and artistic roots of Japanese worldview provided an *inside* view on how technology, nature and human beings cannot really be separated.

This paper also aimed to take a stand against ideas of deterministic pre-established harmonies by which individual and institutional behavior of a given culture towards the surrounding environment can be presumed from a generic metaphysical and moral schema about how nature is framed in such a culture. In particular, it questions if we can derive the relation between environment and human beings from the relation of separation or union between human beings and nature that is implicit in the philosophical and religious matrix of a culture and expand it to the behavior of all members of a complex social whole.

To conclude, I would like to finish with some critical remarks about the Japanese reply to the question concerning technology. Otherwise, it could be easily claimed that such a view has some troubling issues. For instance, it is commonly taken for granted that human subjectivity and rationality is the ground for a separation from both other life forms and artifacts. This grants the enshrinement of human rights and dignity and boils down to not making human beings the means to any end. In a “parliament of things” akin to the Jewelled Net of Indra of the Huayan school, human beings, nature and artifacts are part of a complexity continuum. If the exceptionality of human beings is suppressed and is extended to other beings, what will prevent one from considering humans themselves as objects subject to potential improvements that makes them more efficient or productive? And what can one say about a technological catastrophe like Minamata disease or the Fukushima nuclear disaster in which a natural disaster has combined with human error to multiply the deleterious effects of both? There is then one aspect that is often overlooked. The fact that human beings and nature have been historically separated in the West since Modernity allowed the development of the scientific and technological revolution through a previous subject-object and fact-value division. Notwithstanding, such epochal shift has also later allowed that nature can be assigned an intrinsic value by a valuing subject that recognizes its status. It does not seem true to hold that a culture that is grounded by a non-dual or monist ontology is better placed to curb environmental destruction that emerges with the onset of industrialization. If the background assumption of any given culture is a holist one where human beings are an integral part of nature, the rationalization of the means of production and interventions in nature that ensue will not find any conceptual barrier that prevents exploitation of any sort. In fact, in such an environment technology likely becomes itself a natural way of perfecting nature.

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Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonian Approaches to the Skeptical Way of Life

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ABSTRACT | This essay develops an intercultural approach to the skeptical way of life through an interpretation of two classical traditions: the Pyrrhonian tradition of ancient Greece and the Madhyamaka Buddhist tradition of classical India. The skeptical way of life is characterized by several important features, including a goal of tranquility or of freedom from disturbance and suffering, a philosophical strategy of dialectical argument that terminates in the suspension of judgment or the abandonment of views, a purgative philosophic therapy, and life without belief. A constellation of practical questions that emerge from the skeptical way of life are also considered, including the skeptic's character, conformity, and care. One of the principal aims of the essay will be to develop this intercultural account of the skeptical way of life and to show by way of this illustrative example how our understanding of skepticism and ancient philosophy is enhanced through an intercultural approach.

KEYWORDS | Madhyamaka; Pyrrhonism; Skepticism; Philosophy as a Way of Life; Intercultural Philosophy

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1 Introduction

Considerable scholarly engagement has been devoted to the juxtaposition of the philosophic approaches of the Mādhyamika Buddhists of classical India and the Pyrrhonian skeptics of ancient Greece.¹ Comparisons are pursued to demonstrate both congruities among the arguments deployed by these philosophical traditions and the coherence of each approach as a philosophical system.² Scholarship comparing these traditions is further supported by the intriguing report found in the doxography of Diogenes Laërtius. In this report, Pyrrho of Elis (365–275 B.C.E.), the early Greek skeptic and namesake of one of two ancient Greek skeptical philosophies, is said to have associated with Indian philosophers while journeying in the entourage of Alexander the Great (Diog. Laert. 9.61–62; LS 1A; IG III-22).³ Even more intriguing is a many-layered doxographical report that Pyrrho's style of argumentation included a tetralemma argument similar to the *catuṣkoṭi* of Nāgārjuna (second or third century C.E.), who wrote the foundational texts of Madhyamaka Buddhism (Aristocles in Euseb. *Praep. evang.* 14.18.758c–d; LS 1F; IG III-24).⁴ Accordingly, some scholars have endeavored to suggest an historical encounter and mutual influence among these two philosophical traditions.⁵ Indeed, the two approaches share certain philosophic features, including for example, under at least one interpretation, a dialectical form of argumentation and a skeptical way of life without beliefs. Hence, a skeptical interpretation of Madhyamaka is strengthened by a comparison with Pyrrhonism as a way of seeing Madhyamaka skepticism as a coherent philosophic approach. Such comparative strategies are compelling but reflect a certain prejudice that takes the Hellenic tradition as paradigmatic. These strategies are at least partly a result of the efforts of scholars to show repeatedly the philosophical interest of Indian traditions to a profession largely attentive solely to the ancient Greeks and their modern European philosophical descendants. Thanks to the success of this work developing this comparison, this essay is afforded a running start in its efforts to establish a dynamic, intercultural approach to the skeptical way of life.

1 This essay adopts the following modern naming conventions: Madhyamaka and Pyrrhonism are philosophies or schools of thought; adherents of these respective schools, Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists, respectively.

2 See the comparative work of Matilal (1986), Garfield ([1990], 2002), Burton (2017), Dreyfus (2011), Dreyfus and Garfield (2011, 2022), Mills (2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2020), and Brons (2018).

3 Diog. Laert. = Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*. LS = Long and Sedley (1987). IG = Inwood and Gerson (1997).

4 Euseb. *Praep. evang.* = Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel (Praeparatio evangelica)*.

5 For accounts of a common philosophic heritage among Indian and Greek skeptics, see Flinchoff (1980), McEvilley (1982, 2002), Kuzminski (2007, 2008, 2021), Halkias (2014), and Beckwith (2015). I am sympathetic to these arguments, but I suspend judgment if there is yet sufficient evidence to establish a persuasive account of an historical encounter or shared Indo-Hellenic skeptical lineage. However, I am persuaded that we enhance our understanding when we read these two traditions together. On Pyrrho's use of the tetralemma see especially Bett (2000, 123–140) and Beckwith (2015, 40, 202–203).

The philosophical interest animating this essay is a constellation of questions raised by the skeptical way of life. These questions are connected to the practical aspects of the skeptic's way: they include how skeptics, like the Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists, can recommend their way of life as one worth going in for, that is, how can anyone see their radical style of skepticism as a desirable way to live, as well as certain ethical questions concerning the skeptic's moral character and whether skeptics merely complacently conform to the moral conventions of their societies. Contrary to some common comparative directions in professional philosophy, the resources to address these questions, this essay will suggest, travel not solely from Greece to India but from India to Greece as well.⁶ While Pyrrhonism was reaching its final developments in the writings of Sextus Empiricus around the second or third century C.E., at that same time Madhyamaka's seminal philosophy was first articulated in the writings of Nāgārjuna. But whereas Pyrrhonism after Sextus lay dormant until its rediscovery in early modern Europe, Madhyamaka continued its development as Buddhism migrated from India to Central and East Asia, where it especially flourished as the principal philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism. Consequently, understanding Madhyamaka as a philosophical way of life puts one in a better position to understand how Pyrrhonists, and philosophic skeptics more generally, may have addressed this constellation of practical questions concerning their skeptical way of life.

In the following sections, I first distinguish between two kinds of skepticism: epistemological skepticism, a theoretical and narrow view typically developed as an objection to be rejected rather than accepted and endorsed, and way-of-life skepticism, a practical and global approach to living a philosophic life without beliefs (section 2). Then, this approach to skepticism as the skeptical way of life is characterized within the two traditions of interest for this essay, the Pyrrhonian tradition of ancient Greece and the Madhyamaka Buddhist tradition of classical India (section 3). Finally, the constellation of practical questions that emerge from the skeptical way of life, including the skeptic's character, conformity, and care are developed and addressed, primarily by discovering philosophical resources within Madhyamaka to support Pyrrhonism (section 4). One of the principal aims of the essay will be to develop this intercultural account of the skeptical way of life and to show by way of this illustrative example how our understanding of skepticism and ancient philosophy is enhanced through an intercultural approach.

6 The works of Garfield ([1990] 2002) and of Brons (2018) are two examples of the kind of intercultural analyses I am undertaking here.

2 Whetting Stone or Way of Life

Skepticism, as a philosophical view, is rather narrowly conceived. Contemporary professional philosophers have tended to understand skepticism as an epistemological view about the possibility or impossibility of the knowledge of objects in certain domains, such as knowledge of the external world. Likewise, students of philosophy, especially at universities in the United States, are often first introduced to philosophical skepticism through reading Descartes' *Meditations*. Consequently, skepticism is understood not as a serious competitor in philosophical debates but rather a challenge to be overcome, principally as a way of testing the philosophic mettle of an apparently more serious epistemological theory under consideration. After all, don't we all perfectly well *know* that God is not an evil manipulator and that we are neither brains in vats nor consciousnesses trapped in a computer simulation? The point is to rule out these hypotheses as objections while our everyday knowledge of the ordinary world remains insulated from any challenges from theoretical exercises in epistemology (Burnyeat [1984] 1997; Bett 1993; Bett 2010). Hence, such skeptical hypotheses are, as it were, intellectual whetting stones: they are developed to sharpen the arguments that philosophers really intend to endorse.

This modern, whetting-stone conception of skepticism is the more recent understanding. In contrast, ancient philosophers, not only in ancient Greece and Rome but also in classical India and ancient China, conceived of skepticism as a way of life (Kjellberg 1994; Hadot 1995, 2002, 2011; Cooper 2012; Ganeri 2013; Mills 2018b; Moore 2020). According to Pierre Hadot (2002, 55; 2011, 87–88), whose scholarship on ancient Greek and Roman philosophy has recently reinvigorated the way-of-life approach, each ancient philosophical school selected an ideal of wisdom and prescribed a regimen of spiritual exercises—"spiritual" because such exercises are concerned with the transformation of the whole self, not only the reason, intellect, or soul. These exercises are analogous to the athlete's training or the physician's cure: they serve as a therapeutic discourse, the aim of which is "to form more than inform" (Hadot 2011, 88). On this reading, philosophy itself, then, is principally a *practical* choice of a way of life and a regimen of exercises in service of the student's progress toward the ideal of wisdom articulated by the school. Philosophy is not merely about transforming how one thinks but transforming how one lives. The ideal of wisdom of the skeptical way of life is peace, tranquility, or freedom from disturbance or suffering, and its regimen of exercises include a dialectical form of argumentation and a life without belief, as we shall consider further below. This ideal is exemplified by the philosophical

models of Pyrrho and the Buddha, both of whom wrote nothing.⁷ Indeed, it was how they lived their lives that served as philosophical inspirations.

3 Two Skeptical Ways

The skeptical ways of life of interest for this essay are the Pyrrhonian tradition of ancient Greece and the Madhyamaka Buddhist tradition of classical India (sections 3.1 and 3.2, respectively). Both traditions share several philosophic features. On whether such features suggest a common philosophic heritage I will suspend judgment, but others have endeavored to suggest such an account (Flinthoff 1980; McEvilley 1982, 2002; Kuzminski 2007, 2008, 2021; Halkias 2014; Beckwith 2015). For this essay's purposes, once again, I wish to show how reading these two traditions together help not only to aid in addressing a certain constellation of practical questions raised by their approach but also further develop an intercultural understanding of skepticism as a way of life. This development, I believe, strengthens the case for an intercultural approach to both skepticism and ancient philosophy. The common philosophic features, which I shall emphasize below, are as follows:

1. a goal of tranquility or of freedom from disturbance and suffering
2. a philosophical strategy of dialectical argument that terminates in the suspension of judgment or the abandonment of views,
3. a purgative philosophic therapy, and
4. an activity guided by how things appear without asserting how things are really or ultimately, that is, living without beliefs.⁸

In the following two sections, I develop an interpretation of the skeptical way of life in Pyrrhonism and Madhyamaka independently. I do so intentionally to avoid scaffolding one interpretation to the other. Each way of life is a skeptical approach in its own right. Once this matter is clearly revealed, the two are joined in an intercultural analysis of the practical questions raised by the skeptical way of life.

3.1 A Pyrrhonian Approach to the Skeptical Way of Life

Sextus Empiricus offers our fullest, extant description of the Pyrrhonian approach to the skeptical way of life in the first book of his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (*Pyrrhōneiai Hypotyposesis* = *PH*). Unfortunately, a probably more detailed parallel description in his *Skeptical Treatises* (*Skeptika Hypomnēmata* = *M* 7–11), which

7 To describe the Buddha as a sort of skeptical sage is perhaps controversial, but such an understanding is not without support in the early Buddhist tradition. For example, in response to certain speculative metaphysical questions, the Buddha says he holds no views (*Majjhima Nikāya* 1.426–432, 483–489, trans. Holder 2006, 95–100, 117–122). Mills (2018a, 98–99; 2018b, 13–19; 2020, 70–72) describes this understanding as the “quietist strand” in Buddhism.

8 For a different organization of parallels see McEvilley (2002) and Brons (2018).

are collected under the names *Against the Logicians* (M 7–8), *Against the Physicists* (M 9–10), and *Against the Ethicists* (M 11), is now lost.⁹ In the *Outlines*, Sextus describes skepticism as an ability, not a doctrine or theory. He describes the ability in relation to three other important skeptical terms—equality of strength, suspension of judgment, and tranquility:

The skeptical ability (*skeptikē dunamis*) is one that produces oppositions among things that appear and things that are thought in any way whatsoever, from which, because of the equal strength (*isostheneia*) in the opposing objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgment (*epochē*) and after that to tranquility (*ataraxia*). (PH 1.8, trans. Bett 2021)

What skeptics are able to do, according to Sextus, is to place appearances and thoughts of any kind against one another so that each is equally opposed to the other. Sextus clarifies that when skeptics create such oppositions, they merely place them against each other; they neither assert nor deny anything (PH 1.9). The result of the opposition is that neither side is any more convincing or unconvincing than the other (PH 1.10). Hence, skeptics suspend judgment and their “thought comes to a stop” (PH 1.10, trans. Bett 2021). With suspension of judgment skeptics discover tranquility, which Sextus describes as freedom from disturbance and calmness of the soul (*psuchēs aochlēsia kai galēnotēs*).

To be free from trouble is the goal of the skeptical way of life, a goal shared with the atomist traditions of Democritus and the Epicureans (PH 1.25; Warren 2002). Finding themselves trouble-free comes unexpectedly (*tuchikōs*) to the skeptics, although, Sextus tells us, tranquility was their original motivation to begin their investigations—indeed, investigating (*skeptesthai*) is from where they draw their name (PH 1.25–6, 1.7). For they had hoped that by investigating they would resolve the inconsistency in things and would learn which arguments were sound and to which they should give their assent and, accordingly, find peace (PH 1.12; M 1.6). However, every argument, as it turns out, has at least one other of equal strength opposing it, and the skeptics, instead, suspend judgment on everything and, consequently, have no beliefs of their own (PH 1.12).¹⁰ According to Sextus, it is this suspension of judgment and lack of beliefs that tranquility follows, as a shadow follows a body (PH 1.29). So, although the skeptics’ original motivations of resolving inconsistency and discovering true accounts are left unresolved and undiscovered, the skeptics nevertheless find the tranquility, for which they were searching, because of their suspension of judgment

9 The conventional abbreviation *M* derives from the title of a separate work *Against Those in the Disciplines* (*Pros Mathēmatikous* = M 1–6), to which the incomplete *Skeptical Treatises* were attached and transmitted as its final five books.

10 Skeptics suspend judgment as a result of the appearance of equal strength of convincingness, or lack thereof, of the opposing arguments; they do not assert that the arguments really are equal (PH 1.196). On the skeptics lack of belief, see the papers collected in Burnyeat and Frede (1997), as well as Fine (1996) and Thorsrud (2009, 173–182).

on matters of belief (*PH* 1.25–6). When it comes to those feelings that are forced upon skeptics, such as being cold or thirsty, they will have moderate reactions (*metriopatheia*) (*PH* 1.25, 29–30).

Sextus vividly illustrates the skeptic's unexpected arrival at tranquility through the story of Apelles the painter (*PH* 1.28–29). Apelles was trying to paint a horse, but he was struggling to capture the likeness of froth on the horse's mouth. Finally, when Apelles gives up and throws his cleaning sponge at the painting, he fortuitously creates the image of the froth and so produces unintentionally by another means the very effect he was intentionally hoping to create. Sextus tells us skeptics arrive at tranquility in the same way. Unable to resolve the inconsistency among competing appearances and arguments, they suspend judgment, and by suspending judgment find themselves at peace, that is, producing unintentionally by another means the very effect they were intentionally hoping to create.

The skeptic's tranquility follows suspension of judgment (*epochē*), but this suspension is regarding any appearances or arguments, that is, it is a global suspension of judgment. Skeptics, then, must be equipped with effective techniques for producing the oppositions that lead to suspension of judgment. According to Sextus, the Pyrrhonian approach has developed several modes (*tropoi*), the most important of which are the Five Modes of Agrippa (*PH* 1.164–77, 2.19–20; Diog. Laert. 9.88–90; IG III-22; Barnes 1990; Thorsrud 2009, 147–160; Woodruff 2010). These modes are general and, hence, may be deployed dialectically against any number of arguments that seek to rationally justify the truth of a belief. Skeptics regard the modes merely as tools in the skeptical toolbox; they do not assert or deny anything in deploying them but only use their interlocutors' own standards of rational argumentation to undermine their beliefs, reveal their rashness, and because those beliefs in question cannot be decided due to the equal strength of opposing arguments, bring about suspension of judgment (*PH* 1.14–5, 20).

Two of the Agrippan Modes, Dispute and Relativity, allow skeptics to maneuver their dogmatic opponents—dogmatists, such as the Stoics or Epicureans, who believe things really are a certain way—into a position where they must offer reasons in favor of supporting their beliefs. The point of these modes is to show that there are unresolved disagreements about the beliefs in question such that they stand in need of considerations in their favor. Some, for example, may disagree with the dogmatists and hold a contrary opinion (Dispute) (*PH* 1.165). Others may be differently situated such that things appear differently from their perspectives (Relativity) (*PH* 1.167). Once the dogmatists attempt to justify their beliefs by offering reasons, skeptics can deploy the three other Agrippan Modes, sometimes described as Agrippa's Trilemma—Infinite Regress, Hypothesis, and Reciprocity—to bring opposing arguments of equal strength against them.

Skeptics deploy the Mode of Infinite Regress when dogmatists offer a consideration in favor of their belief (*PH* 1.166). The skeptics will respond that this consideration too is under dispute and, hence, demand another in favor of accepting it, and so on infinitely because every consideration in favor will need its own established consideration. The skeptics, however, say that it is impossible to judge infinitely many considerations, and so the dogmatists' beliefs will be left unjustified (*PH* 2.78). Skeptics use the Mode of Hypothesis when the dogmatists attempt to terminate the regress in a self-evident consideration (*PH* 1.168). Skeptics will in turn respond that this attempt is mere assertion: if this were acceptable, it would allow anyone, even those who hold beliefs contrary to the dogmatists, to justify their own beliefs on the basis of their feelings of apparent self-evidence (*M* 8.436; Thorsrud 2009, 153–156; Woodruff 2010, 225). Finally, skeptics apply the Mode of Reciprocity when the dogmatists claim that the consideration in favor of their belief and the belief itself mutually establish one another. The skeptics will reply that the belief is what is precisely in question, and it cannot itself serve as a justification for the consideration intended to establish it (*PH* 1.169). Through use of the modes, skeptical practice brings one into a state in which a belief in question is not able to be decided and suspension of judgment occurs. The skeptics themselves, of course, do not say one should suspend judgment but that this is what happens when skeptical practice brings them to this state. Indeed, it is rather the dogmatists' own standards of rationality that requires suspension of judgment.

The skeptics' dialectical arguments, such as Agrippa's Five Modes among others, are a powerful antidote against dogmatic reasoning. Indeed, Sextus compares skeptical argument to a sort of medicine, a purgative drug, which in curing the body by evacuating certain harmful substances also evacuates itself (*PH* 1.206, 2.188; *M* 8.480–281; Nussbaum [1994] 2009, 309–311; Thorsrud 2009, 136–141). This seemingly unusual metaphor responds to the dogmatists' charge of inconsistency. If dogmatists object that skeptics are inconsistent because in offering such arguments the skeptics surely must believe their own arguments really are rationally persuasive, the skeptics will reply once again that they neither assert nor deny anything; their arguments are part of practice which has a certain effect, namely, the purging of dogmatic beliefs and arguments intended to establish them. In turn, the skeptical arguments themselves are also canceled and "thought comes to a stop" (*PH* 1.10, trans. Bett 2021). As Sextus puts it, skeptical arguments are like many things that put themselves in the same condition as what they put other things: besides the metaphor of the purgative drug, he also describes them as a fire which burns wood and then burns itself out or a ladder that once climbed is kicked away (*M* 8.480–481). "At the end of the Skeptical process," according to Nussbaum, "Skepticism itself has vanished" (Nussbaum [1994] 2009, 311). What remains are the habits that skeptical practice institutes

and the way of life without belief, which they support (Nussbaum [1994] 2009, 312).

Skeptical practice will eventually bring about the complete dissolution of the mature skeptic's beliefs, but such a way of life may seem implausible. The skeptics' dogmatic opponents certainly thought so. Indeed, the skeptics were repeatedly charged with inaction (*apraxia*), that is, that skeptics cannot even get started taking some actions but not others if they have no beliefs (Vogt 2010). According to Sextus, however, skeptics are not at all inactive but rather are guided by how things appear (*PH* 1.21). After all, skeptics do not deny that things appear to them the way they appear (*PH* 1.13). Rather, they suspend judgment on whether how things *appear* is how they really *are*—the latter is what skeptical investigation is for (*PH* 1.22). Indeed, Sextus describes four sorts of guiding appearances: everyday appearances from one's nature, from one's involuntary feelings, from laws and customs, and from technical expertise (*PH* 1.23–24). These fourfold observances seem best understood as related to the skeptic's dispositions (Thorsrud 2009, 183–196). In other words, skeptics respond to certain appearances and are guided by them because they are acting in accordance with the dispositions they have developed. Hence, they act according to the guidance of nature when they perceive and think, they act according to necessary feelings when they eat and drink after feeling hungry or thirsty, they act according to law and custom when they conform to certain societal practices, and they act according to technical expertise when they engage in certain trades they have learned (*PH* 1.23–24). Sextus says that skeptics live this way without having any beliefs: their activity is just the response of their dispositions to certain appearances happening to them. That is why Sextus describes these observances in particular: they emerge from a skeptic's individual nature or from the received habits and practices from their upbringing. The skeptical way of life, hence, proceeds not from beliefs and reasoning but from the mature skeptic's dispositions in response to certain appearances, and it is this way of life that is trouble-free. Indeed, it is fitting that Sextus was a physician: by applying the skeptical therapy he cures us of our dogmatic rashness and frees us from the anxieties caused by the conceit of reason.

3.2 A Madhyamaka Approach to the Skeptical Way of Life

The principal goal of Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy is the realization that all things are empty (*śūnya*) because they lack an intrinsic nature, or essence (*svabhāva*). Nāgārjuna's philosophy arrives at this universal emptiness in what is regarded as the root text of Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy, his *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* = *MMK*). Each of the twenty-seven verse chapters of *MMK* analyze certain conceptions, most of which belong to the Abhidharma schools of Buddhist philosophy. Through these analyses Nāgārjuna dissolves the very concepts in question, leaving his readers and op-

ponents empty-handed, as it were. The concepts, which his Ābhidharmika opponents intend to use to establish certain metaphysical theories underlying the Buddha's teachings, are shown not to be false or nothing, but rather the very activity of conceptual creation and designation, even philosophizing itself, is overcome. Put another way, Mādhyamikas neither assert nor deny anything is really or ultimately real. When we analyze any phenomena whatsoever to discover what they really are, "we find nothing; we come up empty" (Dreyfus and Garfield 2022, 5). Another way of understanding this realization of emptiness is the Madhyamaka approach to the Buddhist teaching of two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth (MMK 24.8).¹¹ Conventional truth, on the one hand, means the commonsense beliefs useful for living in the world as it is ordinarily conceived of and talked about in everyday life. Ultimate truth, on the other hand, means "what is left standing (if anything) after conventional truth is subjected to rigorous philosophic analysis," but according to the Mādhyamikas, nothing stands up to this analysis (Cowherds 2016a, 618): when we look for what is ultimately real, we come up empty. For mature Mādhyamikas all conceptualizing thus stands still. This end to "conceptual proliferation" or "hypostatization" (*prapañca*) lies at the heart of Nāgārjuna's approach: this activity, because it takes certain things to be really real, and thus attaches significance to them, stands in the way of the Buddhist goal of liberation and freedom from suffering (*nirvāṇa*) (MMK "Dedictory Verses," 18.6–7, 25.24).¹² This is why Madhyamaka can be interpreted as a skeptical way of life: it analyzes certain accounts of reality, dissolves their conceit, and clears the way to a trouble-free life.

The philosophical strategy of conceptual analysis and dissolution is not unusual within Buddhist philosophy: all Buddhist traditions regard the person as merely conventional, an aggregate of psychophysical constituents (*skandhas*) without an underlying independently existing self (Williams [1989] 2009, 16). Indeed, Buddhist devotional practice is intended to loosen the attachments to the "I" as the crucial step on the path to liberation from suffering and from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (Siderits 2021, 35–36, 43–88). The Madhyamaka development is to turn this strategy not only to the dissolution of the conception of the self, among other complex entities like chariots for example, but to everything, even the concepts of the Buddhist's philosophical toolkit. The strategy aims to bring all grasping and attachment to an end. These new targets of Madhyamaka philosophical investigation and conceptual analysis are, however, not out of sync with early Buddhist teaching: the parables of the water snake and raft show the dangers, and subsequent suffering, of attachment to Buddhist

¹¹ On the two truths, see Jayatilleke (1963, 363–364), Huntington (2007, 111–116), and the Cowherds (2011, 2016a, 2016b).

¹² Mills (2018b, 36–39) translates *prapañca* as "conceptual proliferation," Siderits and Katsura (2013) as "hypostatization." Other translations include "metaphysical fabrication" and "conceptual construction" (Berger 2010, 40 and Garfield 1995 by way of the Tibetan translation, respectively). According to Siderits and Katsura (2013, 15), hypostatization in the context of MMK is "the process of reification or 'thing-ifying': taking what is actually just a useful form of speech to refer to some real entity."

teaching itself (*Majjhima Nikāya* 1.130–142, trans. Holder 2006, 101–116; Mills 2020, 71–72). In these famous parables, the Buddha tells his students that if his teachings are mistakenly understood, they are like taking hold of a snake by its tail, for it will turn back and bite, or like one who uses a raft to make a dangerous crossing and then picks up the raft and carries it around on one's back. Indeed, Nāgārjuna explicitly connects emptiness to the parable of the water snake: "Emptiness misunderstood destroys the slow-witted, / like a serpent wrongly held" (*MMK* 24.11). To misuse and become attached to the teachings causes the very suffering from which the teachings are intended to free us. This is why the concluding verses of *MMK* describe the Buddha's true teaching as "the abandonment of all views" (*sarvadṛṣṭiprahāṇāya*) (*MMK* 27.30, trans. Siderits and Katsura 2013).

To arrive at the realization that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic nature Nāgārjuna deploys dialectical arguments. In *MMK* these arguments analyze the concepts of his fellow Buddhists, the Ābhidharmikas, and in the *Dispeller of Disputes* (*Vigrahavyāvartanī* = *VV*), he employs dialectical arguments in response to the objections and views of the Brāhminical philosophers of the Nyāya school, the Naiyāyikas. These dialectical arguments begin with the claims and concepts of his opponents, explicate each of their logical possibilities, and show that each possibility is absurd: when we look for what is ultimately real, we come up empty. The realization of emptiness, however, is not an assertion or denial. Emptiness is the skeptical overcoming of our "instinctive commitment to the idea that there must be a way that things really are" (Dreyfus and Garfield 2022, 6). Nāgārjuna's opponents' views lead to absurd results not because they are false but because they make a fundamental cognitive mistake in their approach to phenomena. Hence, without Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka medicine, we will persist in the misleading philosophic project of arguing some view is true and others false. Indeed, even emptiness itself, as we shall see, is to be relinquished. This is why Nāgārjuna tells us: "Emptiness is taught by the conquerors as the expedient to get rid of all views. / But those for whom emptiness is a view have been called incurable" (*MMK* 13.8, trans. Siderits and Katsura 2013).¹³ Why incurable? Because they persist in the project from which the Madhyamaka skeptical practice is intended to free them. The important Prāsaṅgika commentator Candrakīrti (ca. seventh century C.E.) describes this incurable person who asserts that emptiness ultimately underlies all things as "someone who when told that the shopkeeper has nothing to sell, asks to buy some of that nothing" (Dreyfus and Garfield 2022, 7).

¹³ Siderits and Katsura (2013, 145) insert "metaphysical" in brackets before both instances of "view" (*dṛṣṭi*), which is not present in the Sanskrit. Garfield (1995, 212) does not include it in the translation from the Tibetan, but his commentary clarifies that "view in this sense is a view about what does or does not exist when existence is taken to mean inherent existence." In Buddhist thought, the holding of a view (*dṛṣṭi*) usually has the sense of holding a wrong view because holding any view is a mistake. See Gethin ([1997] 2004).

The general form of Nāgārjuna's dialectical arguments is the *prasaṅga*, or an argument to unwanted consequences. This style of argument, similar to a *reductio ad absurdum*, develops the possible consequences as a result of accepting an opponent's position. Each consequence is shown to be contradictory or inconsistent with other views the opponent also wishes to hold. The opponent, thus, in rejecting the unwanted consequences is forced to reject the position in question. Crucially, the argument is dialectical, Mādhyamikas move strictly from their opponents' own positions to the unwanted consequences and, ultimately, to their rejection without making any claims or commitments of their own or implying that a contradictory position is true (Williams [1989] 2009, 67; Mills 2018b, 52–53).

One example of Nāgārjuna's dialectical method is his analysis and critique of the epistemology of the Naiyāyikas (VV 30–51; Westerhoff 2010, 65–94; Mills 2016; 2018b, 54; Dreyfus and Garfield 2022, 10). They claimed that our knowledge of the world is established by certain *pramāṇas*, variously translated as “reliable cognitions,” “means of knowledge,” or “epistemic instruments.” According to the Naiyāyikas, *pramāṇas* are cognitive processes that consistently generate true beliefs. We are said to know some object, for example, a mug of coffee, because we perceive it and perception is one such reliable cognition. But Nāgārjuna asks what establishes the *pramāṇas*. They cannot be established by another *pramāṇa* because that *pramāṇa* must in turn be established and so on in an infinite regress (VV 31–32). They cannot be self-established because they would then be independent of the objects the knowledge of which they are intended to secure; we only know insofar as we know something, and there would not be a way to distinguish the success of a *pramāṇa* without reference to the object the knowledge of which it is supposed to secure (VV 40–41). The *pramāṇas* also cannot be established by their objects because if the objects were already established, there would be no need for *pramāṇas*, or if they are supposed to be mutually establishing, this is circular and, as a result, nothing is established (VV 44–46). Finally, *pramāṇas* cannot be established without any reason, for this just leaves unfinished the task of explaining how a secure means to knowledge is to be established (VV 51). Thus, Nāgārjuna maneuvers his opponents into failing to adhere to their own standards of rational justification: their position is left with the unwanted consequences of infinite regress, circularity, or arbitrary assertion. In rejecting these, they must also abandon the view in question.

Opponents of Mādhyamaka, of course, do not relinquish their views so readily. They charge the Mādhyamikas with inconsistency, a common objection to skepticism. This inconsistency objection can be formulated against both universal emptiness and the *prasaṅga* argument against *pramāṇas*: If emptiness characterizes everything, the argument establishing emptiness must be empty and, hence, is defective and can be ignored or, if it is not empty, it contradicts itself. Similarly, the argument against the establishment of reliable cognitions must ei-

ther have its own established reliable cognition to secure it, which is a contradiction, or if it has none, it is unwarranted and can be ignored. To this inconsistency objection, Nāgārjuna replies that he has no thesis: “If I had any thesis, that fault would apply to me. But I do not have any thesis, so there is indeed no fault for me” (VV 29, trans. Westerhoff 2010; Ruegg 2000, 115–133). Similarly, in *MMK*, Nāgārjuna tells us one does not assert or deny emptiness but that it “is said only for sake of instruction” (*MMK* 22.11, trans. Siderits and Katsura 2013). As Dreyfus and Garfield (2011, 116) put it, for Nāgārjuna philosophy is “in the business of providing therapy for those suffering from extreme views—views about the fundamental nature of reality.” Nāgārjuna’s approach, then, is best understood as a skeptical therapy that empties all views and, subsequently, empties itself along with them. Mills (2020, 35–39) describes this as a two-phase approach: In phase one, Nāgārjuna’s arguments seemingly establish the philosophical concepts necessary for the dismantling of the opponent’s views. In phase two, the Madhyamaka therapy is applied to itself, bringing an end to *prapañca*, that conceptual proliferation, which plagues us (Mills 2020, 58–63). Hence, Madhyamaka skeptical practice eventually cancels itself out, leaving behind in mature Mādhyamikas those habits that its skeptical practice cultivates and the resultant tranquility when all believing that things *really* are a certain way comes to a stop. In other words, the Madhyamaka approach brings about a peaceful life without beliefs.

4 Why Live the Skeptical Way?

This essay has emphasized several important features that characterize the skeptical way of life: tranquility, dialectical argumentation terminating in suspension of judgment or abandonment of views, purgative philosophic therapy, and life without belief. The goal of Madhyamaka skeptical practice is to free us from conceiving of phenomena as *really* existing a certain way (*prapañca*, “conceptual proliferation,” “hypostatization”). For the Mādhyamikas, this kind of conceptualizing tends towards grasping and attachment that stand in the way of liberation and freedom from suffering and from birth, death, and rebirth (*MMK* 18.5, 9). Similarly, for Pyrrhonists, skeptical practice leads to suspension of judgment and freedom from disturbance follows fortuitously. Believing that certain things in the world really are good or bad by nature puts us in a miserable state of fear and anxiety: if we have what we believe to be really good, we will be constantly worried about losing it; if we get what we believe to be really bad, we will be far more troubled by its presence (*PH* 1.29–30, 3.235–238; *M* 11.110–167). This is why for both Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists a life without belief is the medicine that cures this misery.

To arrive at this condition of freedom from suffering, both Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists employ dialectical argumentation that terminates in the skeptic

holding no beliefs or views. Here we can observe a difference in technique. Pyrrhonists, on the one hand, motivate suspension of judgment by bringing opposing appearances or arguments of equal strength (*isostheneia*), that is, they create oppositions in which neither side is any more convincing or unconvincing than the other (*PH* 1.10). The Mādhyamikas' analyses, on the other hand, do not create equal oppositions but rather reveal the contradictions, inconsistencies, and emptiness of all views (Brons 2018, 335–336; Dreyfus and Garfield 2022, 11–12).¹⁴ Such argumentation, however, does not demonstrate a negative thesis: that the truth is that nothing is true or that the real nature of all things is that they lack a nature. In other words, neither Mādhyamikas nor Pyrrhonists are negative dogmatists. Indeed, their arguments are a kind of medicine, a purgative therapy, that expels not only dogmatic beliefs and views but the skeptical arguments as well (*PH* 1.206; *MMK* 13.8; Thorsrud 2009, 136–141; Mills 2020, 25–50). Accordingly, the skeptic's way of life is one without beliefs, guided by appearances and convention (*PH* 1.21–24; *MMK* 24; Thorsrud 2009, 183–196; Dreyfus and Garfield 2022, 12–16; Cowherds 2011).

Living the skeptical way of life raises several practical questions. These questions may be regarded as related to the ethical aspect of the skeptical way. The practical questions relate to the skeptic's character, conformity, and care. If skeptics live without beliefs and take appearance or convention as their guide, can they act ethically or possess virtuous characters? As Bett (2019, 158) puts it, “to what extent can the skeptic be an ethically engaged agent?” Moreover, if convention plays an important causal role in shaping the dispositions according to which skeptics live, do skeptics merely acquiesce and conform to prevailing moral conventions, even if seemingly morally repugnant? Finally, how should the skeptics other-regarding care be understood? These problems are raised especially for the Pyrrhonian skeptics because they explicitly offer as their special criteria of action the fourfold observances of nature, feelings, custom, and skill. Mādhyamikas, perhaps because of their longer-lived tradition and the broader soteriological interests of Buddhism, are less troubled.

Skeptics live without beliefs, including beliefs about what is really good and bad. Pyrrhonists, according to Sextus, follow appearances (*PH* 1.21–24). Bett (2019, 158–159) characterizes these reactions to appearances as natural and cultural. On the one hand, skeptics react passively from their individual natures and their involuntary feelings. On the other hand, they also react from culturally inculcated habits as well as technical training. Skeptics, however, neither assert nor deny anything about the moral quality of their reactions—indeed, they just happen. The activities of skeptics are the functions of dispositions shaped by their

¹⁴ This essay's approach to Nāgārjuna emphasizes his philosophical techniques as part of a skeptical way of life. This interpretation takes him seriously when he says he does not have any thesis (*VV* 29; *MMK* 13.8, 22.11). However, some have argued that Nāgārjuna engages in a kind of logical sleight of hand, that he indeed has a thesis. See, for example, Robinson (1972) and Hayes (1994). For a critique of these arguments, see Huntington (2007) along with Mills' (2020) skeptical interpretation and Nāgārjuna's two-phase approach discussed in section 3.2 above.

upbringing and practice. From the non-skeptic's perspective, this account saps skeptics of their moral agency because they lack the requisite moral commitments to respond in a praiseworthy way in difficult situations. Indeed, because skeptics neither choose nor avoid, it seems they are no better than non-rational animals, morally speaking.

Sextus raises this very objection in *Against the Ethicists* (M 11.164–166). He imagines a skeptic confronted by a powerful tyrant, who demands the skeptic commit an unspeakable deed or otherwise be tortured and executed. The non-skeptical opponent thinks this situation forces the skeptic into making a real, principled moral choice. Sextus, however, replies that skeptics simply will do what they do based upon the dispositions formed by “ancestral laws and customs” (M 11.166, trans. Bett 1997). Sextus thinks skeptics fare better here than those who hold dogmatic beliefs about what is really good and bad because the skeptics merely react from their dispositions, whereas the non-skeptics not only choose and act but also have further troubling beliefs about those very choices and actions—whether they *really* did the right thing, and so on (M 11.166). Bett (2019, 160–161) argues that Sextus' reply is dissatisfying because his answer too easily emphasizes skeptical detachment from the self. He suggests that if habit does cause the skeptic's reaction, then the skeptic will choose the path of least resistance, that is, do the tyrant's unspeakable deed. After all, whether the deed is really bad, the skeptic has no opinion. For the skeptic, acquiescing simply preserves tranquility and avoids more difficulties.

If Bett is right about the skeptical way of life, indeed it does appear dissatisfying, especially if skeptics are likely to bow to threats and coercion. While the role of disposition, which Bett highlights in his account, I think is right, he underplays the role that skeptical practice itself plays in the shaping of the skeptic's dispositions. Put another way, the skeptical way of life has its own skeptical cultural, as it were, which places the student on a path for developing the kinds of dispositions that realize the tranquility that is its goal. This is why an intercultural approach enhances our understanding of way-of-life skepticism because Madhyamaka elaborates just such a path, or paths, that develops the dispositions of the student making progress (Garfield 2015, 294–317; 2016, 80–81). These paths are the “outwardly” directed Eightfold Path of early Buddhism and the “inwardly” directed Bodhisattva Path of Mahāyāna Buddhism. They provide the student with the regimen of exercises for the transformation of vision characteristic of way-of-life philosophies. This is why Madhyamaka emphasizes not only virtuous conduct but also meditation, and where Madhyamaka is deeply embedded in education, such as Tibetan Buddhism, live philosophical debate plays a crucial role in the formation of such dispositions (Brons 2018, 340–342). The formation of these dispositions are the virtuous practices of skepticism. But can skeptics really call anything a virtue? Aren't skeptics supposed to suspend judgment on such matters as what is *really* virtuous or vicious? The skeptics can

speak of virtues by using the phrases of skeptical shorthand (such as the skeptical phrases in *PH* 1.187–205). For example, skeptics might say that when they talk about virtues, they are saying “those practices that shape the skeptics’ dispositions so that they are habitually inclined to react in ways that make progress toward freedom from suffering.” What’s more, skeptics are always working toward a mature skeptical way of life; what characterizes their practice in contrast to dogmatists’ is skeptics keep on investigating. After all, as Sextus tells us, skeptics begin their first inquiry as non-skeptics in search of tranquility and true beliefs, and only convert to skepticism as a result of the peace of mind they discover upon suspending judgment (*PH* 1.12; *M* 1.6).

Realizing the important formative role of skeptical practice itself in shaping the skeptic’s dispositions also addresses the questions of moral conformism and care (Bett 2019, 161–162). The skeptical way of life has its own culture and virtues. Indeed, this is why skeptics are philanthropic, applying their therapy to those who suffer from dogmatic belief (*PH* 3.280–281). But why a compassionate culture and not a cruel culture? Is there any intrinsic link between the skeptic’s philanthropic care and skeptical practice? Couldn’t the skeptical way have been otherwise? The Pyrrhonists, on the one hand, have nothing to say on this matter: they encounter suffering and react to remove it, like a dog that removes a thorn stuck in its paw (*PH* 1.70, 1.283). This practice has developed over time based on experience. Searching for intrinsic links is the mistaken worrying of one suffering from dogmatic philosophizing, like Candrakīrti’s shopper who wants to buy some of that nothing. The Mādhyamikas, on the other hand, do describe a relationship between the realization of emptiness and care (*karuṇā*). In the famous verses of his *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra* = *BCA*), the Mādhyamika ethicist Śāntideva (ca. eighth century C.E.) shows that the realization of emptiness cancels out the conceptualizing of suffering as belonging to a self (*BCA* 8.90–103).¹⁵ According to Śāntideva, suffering has no owner due to the emptiness of all things. What’s more, the realization of this emptiness is cognitively incompatible with selfish action, that is, if one has realized emptiness it is impossible to engage in selfish acts. Hence, just as we should remove our own suffering, so too should we remove others’. Suffering, after all, belongs to no one. But is not suffering itself empty, not bad? Skeptics suspend judgment whether suffering is indeed really bad, but that suffering is empty makes no difference to their dispositions to remove it. Indeed, whether it goes by *karuṇā* or *philanthrōpia*, whether the ailment is of body or mind, skeptics are disposed to be compassionate.

¹⁵ These famous verses, *BCA* 8.90–103, “have been the center of debate in the study of Buddhist ethics” (Cowherds 2016b, 55). See the translation along with traditional commentary in the Cowherds (2016b, 59–60, 241–248). The objections of Williams ([1998] 2009) have stimulated considerable scholarship. Again, the Cowherds (2016b) is a good starting point, especially the three interpretations they outline (Cowherds 2016b, 60–74).

Finally, let us address one more practical question: how do skeptics, like the Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists, recommend their way of life as one worth going in for? The answer to this question should now be clearer. In contrast to dogmatic thinkers who advocate for their way of life as best, neither Mādhyamikas nor Pyrrhonists can directly recommend their skeptical way of life. Indeed, according to the skeptics, it is precisely the dogmatists' own frame of thought—that there really are justifications based on rational standards for a best way of life—which is mistaken and leads to a life of anxiety and troubles. Pyrrhonists, acting as philosophic physicians, address their arguments to these dogmatic beliefs as a treatment for the suffering that those dogmatic beliefs cause (*PH* 3.280–281). Mādhyamikas, perhaps, have a larger skeptical toolbox in this respect: they can engage with non-skeptics at the conventional level. In other words, they can speak in a way that non-skeptics take to be commonsense even if mature Mādhyamikas realize this conventional speech is part of a fiction that causes attachment and suffering. So, just as a psychiatrist may tentatively accept some of the delusions of an ill patient to better address the necessary therapies to them, so too Mādhyamikas may speak conventionally in order to turn their patients toward relinquishing the dogmatic views that cause their suffering (Cowherds 2016b, 218–219). These skeptical techniques, then, loosen the grip on the beliefs that cause suffering and reveal the peace and tranquility at the heart of the skeptical approach. Non-skeptics, then, may first encounter this skeptical way of life in the philanthropic care and compassion which is addressed to them and animates the skeptics' activity. Indeed, while skeptics suspend judgment on the moral quality of their dispositions or the practical activity that emerges from them, non-skeptics observing the skeptical way from the outside may very well recognize these as virtues and morally praiseworthy. But are they *really* or *ultimately* morally praiseworthy? Mature skeptics, both Mādhyamikas and Pyrrhonists, have nothing to say on this matter, but if their actions appear morally attractive and their tranquil way of life appears desirable, then these initial encounters with the skeptical way may provide those first impulses to the non-skeptic to adopt the skeptical way of life.

5 Conclusion

This essay has developed an intercultural approach to the skeptical way of life. This approach to skepticism was illustrated through an interpretation of two classical traditions, the Pyrrhonian tradition of ancient Greece and the Madhyamaka Buddhist tradition of classical India. It emphasized several important features that characterize both traditions' skeptical ways of life: a goal of tranquility or of freedom from disturbance and suffering, a philosophical strategy of dialectical argument that terminates in the suspension of judgment or the abandon-

ment of views, a purgative philosophic therapy, and life without belief. Finally, the constellation of practical questions that emerge from the skeptical way of life, including the skeptic's character, conformity, and care are developed and addressed through appreciating the role skeptical practice itself plays in developing the dispositions of the skeptic. The essay, I hope, has satisfied one last aim, namely, to show by way of this essay's example how our understanding of skepticism and ancient philosophy is enhanced through an intercultural approach.

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Two Paths

A Critique of Husserl's view of the Buddha

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ABSTRACT | In “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” (1925) and “Socrates-Buddha” (1926), Edmund Husserl claims that the Buddha achieves a transcendental view of consciousness by performing the epoché. Yet, states Husserl, the Buddha fails to develop a purely theoretical and universal science of consciousness, i.e., phenomenology, because his purely practical goal of *Nibbāna* limits knowledge of consciousness. I evaluate Husserl’s claims by examining the Buddha’s *Majjhima Nikāya*. I argue that Husserl correctly identifies an epoché and transcendental viewpoint in the Buddha’s teachings. However, I contend that Husserl’s distinction between pure theory and pure praxis leads him to misconstrue the function of the Buddha’s epoché, the extent of knowledge that the Buddha gains from the transcendental viewpoint, and the nature of *Nibbāna*. I finally suggest that the Buddha presents a way of studying consciousness that is a way of life, meaning that any distinction between pure theory and pure praxis is dissolved.

KEYWORDS | Husserl; Buddha; Phenomenology; Buddhism; Comparative Philosophy

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1 Introduction

In “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” (1925) and “Socrates-Buddha” (1926), Edmund Husserl made several remarkable claims about the teachings of the Buddha (c. 563–483 BCE). In the *Majjhima Nikāya* primarily—the Buddha’s middle length discourses—Husserl recognised a way of investigating human experience of the world that intersects, at the following two points, with the phenomenological way that he established. First, Husserl identified a similar beginning: a suspension of everyday belief in the existence of the world along with the interests, values and habits according to which it is usually experienced (Husserl 2017, 403, 410, 414). He further understood the performance of this epoché to have led the Buddha, like himself, to achieve a transcendental view of the world, that is, to discover that the world is only as it is subjectively experienced as being (414).

Despite thereby aligning the Buddha with transcendental phenomenology, Husserl never again engaged with the Buddha’s teachings. For he concluded that the Buddha, unlike himself, was unable to develop a scientific approach to consciousness—subjective experience—from this transcendental viewpoint. A scientific approach, Husserl argued, can only be developed with a purely theoretical interest in gaining scientific knowledge to no other end. But the Buddha, he claimed, has a purely practical and finite interest in achieving *Nibbāna*, thus limiting his knowledge of consciousness (Husserl 2017, 407, 410, 414).

Husserl presented no evidence from the *Majjhima Nikāya* to support his claims. This has not been remedied in secondary literature. Several publications compare Husserlian phenomenology and Buddhism but entirely fail to address the texts that Husserl actually wrote on the Buddha (Larrabee 1981; Hanna 1993; Patrik 1994; Lusthaus 2002; Depraz and Varela 2003; Nizamis 2012; Prosser 2013; Li 2016; Sharf 2016; Varela et al. 2016; Hanna et al. 2017; Gokhale 2018; Depraz 2019; Bitbol 2019; Stone and Zahavi 2021; Čopelj 2022). In the few publications that do address Husserl’s texts on the Buddha, Husserl’s claims are not evaluated against the Buddha’s discourses that he read (Sinha 1971; Hanna 1995; Schuhmann 2005; Ni 2011; Lau 2016).

Husserl is known to have read K.E. Neumann’s German translation of the *Sutta Piṭaka* (the Pāli collection of the Buddha’s discourses), since “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” is a short review of this. Unfortunately, Husserl did not indicate exactly which of Neumann’s translated volumes he read. According to Karl Schuhmann’s archival work, however, Husserl read the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Therīgāthā* and *Theragāthā* (poems by nuns and monks, respectively), and perhaps the *Dhammapada* (collected sayings of the Buddha) (Schuhmann 2005, 144 n29, 148).

Given the identified gap in research, I critique Husserl’s view of the Buddha through a close examination of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, being the primary source

of the Buddha's teachings read by Husserl. My task here is philosophical rather than historical or philological: to evaluate Husserl's claims on his own terms, as he applied them to the Buddha's teachings. I first reconstruct Husserl's texts on the Buddha, identifying Husserl's idea of a purely theoretical and universal science of being as the ultimate measure against which he judges the Buddha's teachings.¹ However, as Husserl's definition of this science is vague in these texts, I draw on *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913) and *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1929) for clarification. These are Husserl's two major works establishing phenomenology as a science, and are also those closest in date of publication to his Buddha texts.

Having defined the terms of Husserl's reading of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, I evaluate his four major claims in relation to his distinction between pure theory and pure praxis. For I identify this distinction as being central to each claim. I argue that (1) Husserl correctly identifies the performance of an epoché in the Buddha's teachings. However, Husserl misconstrues it as a renunciation of the world and misunderstands the Buddha's emphasis on bodily techniques and ethical conduct as a purely practical interest. I then confirm that (2) Husserl's characterisation of the Buddha's teachings as transcendental is feasible. Against Husserl, I contend that the Buddha's knowledge of consciousness is not limited to knowledge of its transcendental nature. I subsequently show that (3) the goal of *Nibbāna* does not limit but motivates knowledge of consciousness. I further argue that the distinction between pure praxis and pure theory is inapplicable to the Buddha's teachings, and thereby indicate that (4) the goal of *Nibbāna* is not incompatible with a scientific approach to consciousness.

In conclusion, I suggest that Husserl may have abandoned his distinction between pure theory and pure praxis in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (1936) when briefly considering how phenomenological investigation can transform one's way of life. This opens up the possibility for Husserlian phenomenologists to re-engage with the Buddha's teachings in which the rigorous investigation of consciousness is already developed as a way of life.

2 Husserl's Texts on The Buddha

In "On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha," Husserl first characterises the Buddha's teachings as "a religious and ethical method" for "spiritual purification and pacification" (Husserl 2005, 145). This constitutes a way of looking at and "overcoming the world" that is "transcendental" as it "looks purely inward in vision and deed" (145). However, Husserl states that the Buddha's way of looking

¹ Husserl refers in "Socrates-Buddha" to a "universal science" (*universale Wissenschaft*) and "science of being" (*Seinswissenschaft*) (Husserl 2017, 403, 410, 411n28, 414). I summarily refer to a 'universal science of being.'

at the world remains “the complete opposite of our European one” (145). Husserl provides no explanation for these statements. He simply gives unsubstantiated praise for the Buddha’s teachings, stating that they “can be paralleled only with the highest formations of the philosophical and religious spirit of our European culture” (145).

In “Socrates-Buddha,” however, Husserl further understands the Buddha to have forged a path to “emancipation” (*Erlösung*) and “bliss” (*Seligkeit*) upon recognising that human life is one of general “unhappiness” (*Unseligkeit*). Humans continually strive for satisfaction. But since life in the world is one of unforeseeable change, and because the irrational motives, values and interests of humans are temporary and inconsistent, they are generally dissatisfied (Husserl 2017, 402-403, 412).

On Husserl’s account, the Buddha’s approach to emancipation from dissatisfaction entails performing the epoché: suspending any pre-established world-view, dissociating from daily praxis and habits, and excluding all the interests, values and goals of ordinary life (Husserl 2017, 403, 410, 414). Furthermore, the Buddha inhibits the “absolute positing of the being of the world” (414)—suspending any belief about whether the world exists independently of how it is experienced. The Buddha, thus freed of prejudice, next disinterestedly directs “a pure, knowing and universal view towards the factual world in general” (409). He then imaginatively modifies the experienced world in “fantasy” (*Phantasie*) to contemplate all its practical possibilities. The Buddha also contemplates “the most general essence of the universal life of the will” along with its interests, goals and values. He thereby determines that it is the essence of both the subject’s will and the world to be constantly changing, and that this together renders any lasting or final satisfaction impossible (405-414).

However, according to Husserl, the Buddha sees a “way out in transcendentalism” because he realises that “the world is a mere phenomenon in subjectivity” (Husserl 2017, 414). In other words, by looking inwards to the nature of his own experience, he sees that the world is only as it appears in experience and only has the sense of constant and independent existence that the experiencing subject gives to it. Consequently, one can cease believing in the independent existence of the world and, neutralising this belief, lose all interest in it. Thus, states Husserl, the Buddha realises that bliss—emancipation from striving for satisfaction—requires a categorical “renunciation” (*Entsagung*) of the world and all theoretical and practical interests therein. He consequently “averts [his] gaze away from [the world]” and “lives, turned into [himself], in the state of a volitional loss of will” (415, 414).

Husserl now clarifies why he stated in “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” that the Buddha’s transcendentalism is the opposite of European transcendentalism, including phenomenology. The reason lies in Husserl’s answer to these

two questions, wherein he conflates the Buddha's teachings with all Indian thought:

What is the status of knowledge in Indian thought? (Husserl 2017, 402)

Has *Indian thought* produced a science of being or did it ever have the possibility of such a science in view? Did it deem it to be irrelevant and therefore not develop it? Was it aware of a science of being as something fundamentally new although grounded in experience just like the science that leads to bliss? (403)

For Husserl, the science of being must be developed with “a pure and authentic so-called theoretical interest” (Husserl 2017, 411) in “scientific knowledge” (403). This means that it cannot be motivated by any finite practical purposes (407). By performing the epoché, this science establishes its purely theoretical interest in consciousness, which it investigates by a specific logical form and method: the use of fantasy and the seeing or “contemplation of ideas” (*Ideenschau*) as the basis for scientific knowledge (403, 405).

Husserl argues that although the Buddha performs the epoché, is grounded in experience, achieves a transcendental view of the world, and identifies essences in fantasy, he fails to develop a universal science of being with its logical form and method (Husserl 2017, 410, 414). For the Buddha lacks the purely theoretical interest that this science first requires. Instead, he has a purely practical interest in emancipation and bliss—*Nibbāna*—and thereby remains in “the universal practical attitude” (411). Husserl further claims that the Buddha’s “knowledge of the world has significance only as a knowledge directed towards proving the transcendental standpoint” (414) and that this is proved “for the sake only of what is best in practice ... for the sake of one’s own ‘bliss’” (410). Husserl accordingly concludes that “praxis limits” knowledge and “to want to solve the tasks of knowledge that have a finite practical purpose will never amount to a science” (407).

Following this conclusion, Husserl never again engaged with the Buddha’s teachings. Throughout his oeuvre, Husserl asserted that philosophy is a scientific way of thinking that is unique to Europe, and that Indian thought is not philosophy (Husserl 1970, 16, 280-285; 2017, 403). It is therefore clear that Husserl’s main criteria for evaluating the Buddha’s teachings are the (1) distinction between purely theoretical interest and purely practical interest, and (2) idea of a universal science of being. Yet Husserl’s idea of science requires further explanation before the *Majjhima Nikāya* can be examined accordingly.

2 Husserl's Idea of a Universal Science of Being

2.1 The Phenomenological Reductions

In *Ideas 1* and *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl establishes transcendental phenomenology as a universal science of “essential being” (Husserl 2012, 3). Its aim is to gain “knowledge of essences” (*Wesenserkenntnisse*); of “transcendental subjectivity” (Husserl 1960, 18), its everyday “consciousness” (*Bewusstsein*) of the world and all phenomena that can possibly appear therein (Husserl 2012, 3).

Husserl describes the phenomenologist as a “scientific traveller” (Husserl 2012, 203) to this end, with their journey beginning from their position in everyday life. Husserl terms this position “the natural attitude” (*die natürliche Einstellung*) (51). Here, the spatio-temporal world is experienced as certainly existing throughout all changes in the experienced things of which it is the totality. The world is furthermore experienced as having its being “out there” (Husserl 2012, 56). This presupposition that the world exists independently of experience is “the general thesis of the natural attitude” (56). The subject is always directed towards the world without being aware of their fundamental belief in its existence and without reflecting on their consciousness of it (Husserl 1960, 17). The phenomenologist therefore cannot reflect on their own consciousness of the world if they remain within the natural attitude. What is required is a radical change of attitude.

A new “phenomenological attitude” (Husserl 2012, 97) is achieved through a series of “phenomenological reductions” consisting of different steps of “bracketing” (*Einklammerung*) (63). The first is the “phenomenological epoché” (59)—the beginning of phenomenology as a science (Husserl 1960, 7). The phenomenologist thereby abstains from using any methods and judgements from the natural sciences, previous philosophy, tradition and culture. For this all remains within the natural attitude that is next put out of play by the “universal epoché” (Husserl 2012, 34, 56-59, 110). This means suspending the general thesis—the implicit belief in the independent existence of the world. But this does not mean denying or doubting its existence (57-59). Instead, the phenomenologist ceases to accept or make any judgement concerning the being or non-being of the world and themselves (127). All the values, beliefs and interests of everyday life are thereby also put out of action. This involves setting aside all previous habits of thought and the “mental barriers” or “psychological resistances” set by them (Husserl 1960, 20; 2012, 2, 134).

At this point, neither the natural attitude nor the world have been lost. The world appears to the phenomenologist just as it did before, with all its usual belief-characters, meanings, values and interests. In this sense, the phenomenologist remains where they were before performing the epoché, but now sees all that is there in a radically new way. For their consciousness of the world and the sense that it has for them is opened up to view for the first time. The world is

now also seen within brackets as a “mere phenomenon” (Husserl 1960, 20), i.e., strictly as it appears in consciousness.

According to Husserl, performing the epoché creates “a universe of absolute freedom from prejudice” wherein the phenomenologist becomes a neutral, “disinterested onlooker” of their consciousness (Husserl 1960, 35). By next performing a “transcendental reduction” (Husserl 2012, 63), they direct their gaze towards their everyday consciousness of the world. This becomes the exclusive field of scientific research, where acts of consciousness and directly experienced phenomena are the only permissible data (Husserl 1960, 12-13; 2012, 43, 61-63).

2.2 Transcendentalism and the Eidetic Method

The phenomenologist’s sole and purely theoretical interest is now “to see and to describe adequately what he sees purely as seen, as what is seen and seen in such and such a manner” (Husserl 1960, 35). But the problem stands that consciousness is “the realm of Heraclitean flux” (49). There are too many experiences and phenomena to individually describe, which change while being described (Husserl 2012, 143-144). However, Husserl argues that acts and objects of consciousness—phenomena—conform to general types and ordered ways of appearing. These can be fixed in strict concepts so that they can be accurately described, that is, “essences” or “ideas” that should not be understood as metaphysical entities existing behind appearances. Rather, an essence describes the necessary and invariant features that any possible phenomenon in concrete experience must exhibit in order to appear as such (Husserl 1960, 49; 2012, 40, 65, 316).

“Eidetic intuition” (*Wesensschau*) (Husserl 1960, 72)—seeing essences—is made possible by performing the “eidetic reduction” within the “free play of fancy [fantasy]” (Husserl 2012, 4, 64). The phenomenologist imagines situations based on everyday life or rehearses recollected experiences “just as they are in their natural setting as real facts of human life” (64). By, on the one hand, altering their perspectives on and modes of consciousness of something and, on the other hand, varying the characteristics of that something, the phenomenologist identifies the respective features of the act and object of consciousness that remain unchanged throughout the imagined variations. They describe these invariant features as the respective essences of the act and object of consciousness. (Husserl 1960, 70; 2012, 63-65).

These eidetic descriptions are made according to the “doctrine of categories” (Husserl 2012, 146). This is a logical framework wherein essences are categorised into species, genera, and regions. At each level, a more general and invariant way of appearing is ascribed to particular corresponding phenomena in experience (25, 32). This doctrine of categories can be viewed as a map of consciousness that allows the phenomenologist to systematically study phenomena (de Warren 2015, 227; Martin 2015, 329). Husserl provides the following map,

which I present only in broad strokes relevant to his characterisation of the Buddha's teachings as transcendental.

The most general delineation is between the regions of consciousness and reality (*Wirklichkeit*) or "Being as experience" and "Being as thing" (Husserl 2012, 78-79). As follows, these regions are discovered upon performing the epoché. Although the reality of the world is suspended, it appears just as before except now within brackets. This means two things. First, since the reality of the world can be suspended, the sense of the world being real is dependent on consciousness. Second, although the existence of the world can be suspended, the phenomenologist's own existence cannot be, for they remain conscious of the world after suspending its reality. Husserl hence argues that consciousness is the original region of being on which all other regions depend for their essential being (146). This does not mean that the material world exists only in consciousness, but that it is only in consciousness that it appears and has the sense of being real.

There is a further correlation between the regions of consciousness and reality in that the essence of consciousness is intentionality: consciousness is always consciousness of something (Husserl 2012, 170-171). The realisation of this essential correlation—the dependence of the world on consciousness and the intentionality of consciousness—defines phenomenology as "transcendental idealism" (Husserl 1960, 86). The meaning of "transcendental" pertains to the insight that it is the essence of anything that appears in consciousness to appear partially. One is only ever conscious of something from a certain perspective revealing only certain aspects of it. In this sense, things in the world are essentially transcendent to consciousness. But they only appear at all in consciousness. Consciousness is thus transcendental—it is the condition of possibility for anything to appear (Husserl 2012, 76-80, 83).

Consciousness is subcategorised into two genera: the *cogito* (the act of consciousness) and the *cogitatum* (the object of consciousness) (Husserl 1960, 36-39). *Noesis* designates the different species of the *cogito*—perception, imagination, recollection and judgement—that give meaningful form to sensory and sensuous content (*hyle*) (Husserl 2012, 174-178). It is the essence of the *cogito* to have an intentional object. This is the *cogitatum*, and its species are *noema*—what appears in an act of consciousness in a certain way, e.g., a perceived visual thing as visually perceived (184-186).

Husserl further categorises the "pure Ego" (Husserl 2012, 62), the subject, in distinction from its continually changing acts and objects of consciousness (164). Yet the pure Ego is not a real part to be found in consciousness and it is not an object in the world. It is instead a stream of temporally ordered and intentionally structured conscious processes, abilities and dispositions (Husserl 1960, 26-29, 36, 54, 65; 2012, 111, 163). The pure Ego's essence is to constitute the being of the world by experiencing it in a certain way and believing certain things about

it (Husserl 2012, 221). Moreover, every belief, act of consciousness and decision of the pure Ego in relation to the world gives its conscious life a persistent habitual style, personal character and sense of the world (Husserl 1960, 66-75, 136).

Since all acts and objects of consciousness that can possibly occur and appear in the life of the pure Ego are categorised, Husserl thereby establishes phenomenology as a *universal* science of essential being. In summary, the criteria for this science are as follows. Performance of the epoché and transcendental reduction establishes a neutral attitude towards, purely theoretical interest in, and transcendental view of consciousness as the exclusive field of research. Through the eidetic reduction in fantasy, consciousness is then described according to the doctrine of categories. I will now examine the *Majjhima Nikāya* on these criteria, as Husserl did, and accordingly evaluate the validity of his claims about the Buddha's teachings.

3 An Examination of the *Majjhima Nikāya*²

Husserl correctly states that the Buddha is motivated by the unhappiness of human life to forge a path leading to emancipation and bliss (Husserl 2017, 412). The Buddha's path begins with the problem of *dukkha*—the dissatisfaction experienced by all human beings. The Buddha identifies the origin of *dukkha* as craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*). This is argued to be rooted in a fundamental ignorance (*avijjā*) regarding the nature of experience and a corresponding set of false beliefs about the experiencing subject (MN 38.17). An ordinary person conceives of some aspect of experience as being their self (*atta*), their self as being part of it, their self as being apart from it, or it as being part of their self (MN 1.3-26). However identified, the self is conceived as permanent, unchanging and existing independently of all else (MN 2.8). But the Buddha contrarily asserts that all aspects of experience are impermanent (*anicca*), subject to change, and dependently arisen (*paṭiccasamuppannā*). He thus argues that all that comprises experience is therefore not-self (*anattā*) and yet that there is no self that exists apart from this (MN 22.26).

Dukkha arises as follows. I crave and cling to whatever I believe can give me lasting satisfaction, but I am continually frustrated because all things are impermanent and changing. I am also attached to an aspect of experience that I believe to be the self. But this is likewise impermanent and changing, and so I am continually distressed by this changing aspect and crave eternal existence (MN 138.20). I am also averse to—in the sense of hating, being fearful of, irritated or repulsed by, etc.—whatever I believe cannot satisfy me or whatever I find un-

² I henceforth refer to the *Majjhima Nikāya* as MN. Citations indicate the discourse and paragraph numbers. Standard transliterations are found in the Pali Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary (2008).

pleasant. I despair at its presence despite my aversion to it, and may crave self-annihilation (MN 9.16).

However, the Buddha claims that the cessation of *dukkha* is possible. Since *dukkha* arises from craving and clinging, and since this is rooted in ignorance, liberation from *dukkha* follows from the cessation of ignorance (MN 38.20). This is achieved through direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) of the impermanence, *dukkha* and not-self of all aspects of experience. This knowledge is acquired through gradual training, practice and progress on the Buddha's path, consisting of these stages: "the abandoning of greed and hate, giving vision, giving knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*" (MN 3.8, 139.5). Husserl's claim regarding the Buddha's epoché concerns the first of these.

3.1 Abandoning Hindrances and Giving Vision: The Buddha's Epoché

The first step on the Buddha's path is developing a state of mind (*citta*) and body (*kāya*) that is "well-disposed for awakening to the truths" (MN 48.8). This requires the *bhikkhu*—someone following the Buddha's path—to abandon all that obstructs them from "see[ing] things as they actually are [*yathābhūtaṃ*]" (MN 48.8), that is, as impermanent, *dukkha* and not-self. They first abandon all daily activities, interests and commitments that arouse desire. They also restrain their mind and senses from habitual craving for and clinging or aversion to all that they experience, and abandon all theoretical speculation about the world (MN 39.8, 48.8). The *bhikkhu* instead devotes themselves to daily acting in full awareness (*sampajānakārī*) of their states of mind, body and whatever they experience. They furthermore practice formal meditation daily, cultivating the ability to maintain a tranquil body as the basis for developing awareness (*satī*) and concentration (*samādhi*) (MN 39).

With repeated effort, the *bhikkhu* attains sequential states of extreme concentration called the four *jhānas*. By the fourth, *upekkhā* (equanimity) is achieved: a neutral attitude towards everything of which they are aware (MN 4. 22-26; Conze 1983, 89-90). They now abide "unattracted, unrepelled, independent, free, dissociated, with a mind free of barriers" and feel "neither-pleasure-nor-pain" (MN 111.4, 4.27). As the *bhikkhu* progresses in meditative practice, they eradicate the fetters of identity view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), and adherence to rules and observances (*sīlabbataparāmāso*) (MN 2.11). They increasingly do not "form any condition or generate any volition towards either being or non-being" and cease "favouring and opposing" (MN 140.22, 38.40). This is the Buddha's Middle Way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*), culminating in the extinguishment of all attachment and aversion, i.e., *Nibbāna*.

This stepwise process is what Husserl correctly recognises, in his terms, as the performance of an epoché. The Buddha recognises in human life a natural attitude—of attachment and aversion—characterised by ignorance of the nature

of experience and implicit beliefs in the existence of the world and the self. Like Husserl, the Buddha sees that this attitude must be neutralised along with all its beliefs, interests, and habits if direct knowledge of experience is to become possible (Depraz and Varela 2003, 215; Schuhmann 2005, 147; Lau 2016, 62; Gokhale 2018, 452).³

Husserl recognises in the Buddha's teachings that one can "exercise the epoché 'theoretically' as well as practically" (Husserl 2017, 414). However, there is a key difference between Husserl's epoché and the Buddha's analogous epoché. Husserl states that all previous habits of thought as well as mental barriers or psychological resistances must be overcome by the epoché (Husserl 2012, 2, 134). Yet Husserl provides no instructions as to bodily techniques, ethical conduct and way of life for doing so (Depraz and Varela 2003, 228; Varela et al. 2016, 19, 27-28; Bitbol 2019, 138-140), that is, for performing the epoché "practically." This neglect arguably marks a weaker formulation of the epoché. A phenomenologist who follows Husserl's instructions alone would conceivably fail to suspend many interests, habits and prejudices bound up with the practicalities of daily life and bodily conduct. These would obstruct a phenomenologist's purely theoretical investigation of consciousness. Indeed, the idea that pure theory is possible apart from bodily and ethical praxis may be one of these unsuspended prejudices.

Unlike Husserl, the Buddha details techniques for increasing the scope and consistency of the epoché by transforming one's daily way of life and embodied way of habitually seeing and acting in the world. The Buddha details the bodily conduct to be observed in everyday life—instructing a life of homelessness in community with other *bhikkhus*, moderation in eating, and constant awareness of bodily movements and sensations (MN 39.3-7). He teaches bodily techniques for meditation—e.g., correct posture and control of breathing (MN 10.4)—as the foundation for developing sustained mental awareness and concentration.

Husserl misunderstands the Buddha's focus on bodily techniques and way of life as a purely practical interest. It is instead the case that careful attention to these practicalities is necessary for being mentally and physically capable of gaining direct knowledge of experience. The Buddha is concerned with the development of what the phenomenologist Diego D'Angelo calls "embodied attention" (2019, 961). D'Angelo argues that "those activities usually regarded as 'purely mental' or at least 'purely theoretical' are possible only because the body is in play," and that there are "bodily conditions that need to be met in order to be attentive: a certain posture of the body; the satisfaction of primary needs; and habitualised movements" (965, 974). This is why the Buddha instructs a certain bodily posture in meditation, observances regarding daily needs of the body, and transforming bodily habits. This is the foundation for the sustained

³ Odysseus Stone and Dan Zahavi (2021) correctly argue that mindfulness practice itself does not constitute performing the epoché. I argue it is analogously constituted by all of the Buddha's instructions detailed here.

mental awareness and concentration that allow a *bhikkhu* to study experience (MN 20.8, 32.9, 119.29).

Finally, Husserl claims that the Buddha's performance of the epoché amounts to averting his gaze away from the world and that his categorical imperative is a complete theoretical and practical renunciation thereof (Husserl 2017, 414-415). But just as the Husserlian epoché is not a denial of or negative position towards the world, the purpose of relinquishing attachment and aversion to the world is not to turn away from or renounce it (Iyer 2017, 402). Like the phenomenologist, the *bhikkhu* instead aims to achieve a neutral attitude towards the experienced world in order to gain knowledge of it.

3.2 Giving Knowledge: The Buddha's Transcendentalism

I will now evaluate Husserl's claim that the Buddha—via the epoché—achieves a transcendental view of the world but gains no further knowledge because he is limited by his purely practical interest in *Nibbāna* (Husserl 2017, 407, 414). Husserl consequently asserts that the Buddha could not develop a universal science of being. Yet Husserl, without explanation, ascribes the seeing of essences in fantasy to the Buddha (409, 414)—two crucial aspects of this science. It is outside this article's scope to provide a detailed analysis of these aspects needed to evaluate Husserl's ascription of them to the Buddha. However, while henceforth evaluating Husserl's aforesaid claim concerning the Buddha's transcendentalism, knowledge, and goal of *Nibbāna*, I suggest related points in the *Majjhima Nikāya* that are comparable to seeing and categorising essences in fantasy.

I shall first assess whether the Buddha achieves a transcendental standpoint. The Buddha “teaches the *Dhamma* through direct knowledge, not without direct knowledge ... with a sound basis, not without a sound basis” (MN 77.12). The *Dhamma* refers to the Buddha's teachings, and its sound basis is a theoretical framework: a system of conceptual classifications of consciousness (experience in general). Direct knowledge is strictly of the nature of the *bhikkhu*'s own direct experience (Anālayo 2003, 46)—“only of what [they] have known, seen, and understood for [themselves]” and “is visible here and now” (MN 38.24-25). As is the case for Husserl's science, the Buddha thereby delimits consciousness as the exclusive field of investigation and what is directly experienced as his only evidence. This feasibly constitutes a transcendental reduction (see Nizamis 2012, 195, 225).⁴

The Buddha teaches several classificatory schemes that account for the totality of *dhammas* (phenomena) that constitute experience (Gethin 1986, 48).⁵ The most general classifications are *nāmarūpa* and *viññāṇa* (MN 9.54). *Nā-*

⁴ Eugen Fink, assistant to Husserl, remarked that “the various phases of Buddhist self-discipline were essentially phases of phenomenological reduction” (Cairns 1976, 50).

⁵ The five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) and seven enlightenment factors (*bojjhaṅgas*) classify states of mind. The five aggregates (*khandhas*) and twelve spheres (*āyatanas*) classify aspects of experience. The twelve links (*nidānas*) and Four Noble Truths (*ariyasaccāni*) detail the fact of *dukkha*, its origin, cessation, and how it ceases.

marūpa is divided into *nāma* (mentality)—sub-classified into *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (perception), *cetanā* (volition), *phassa* (contact) and *manaskāra* (attention)—and *rūpa* (materiality) which is the physical world as experienced by the conscious subject (Gethin 1986, 36). *Viññāṇa* designates the consciousness of the subject in distinction from the object of consciousness (Somaratne 2005, 169).

Here, I find further reason for Husserl to state that the Buddha achieves a transcendental view of consciousness (Husserl 2005, 145; 2017, 414). The Buddha states that “with the arising of consciousness there is arising of mentality-materiality” (MN 9.54). This is comparable to Husserl’s assertion that the world is a mere phenomenon in subjectivity, i.e., that it only arises with consciousness. In this sense, consciousness is transcendental. The Buddha continues: “have I not stated in many ways consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is not origination of consciousness? ... consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises” (MN 38.5). This is comparable to Husserl’s assertion that the essence of consciousness is intentionality, i.e., that consciousness is only consciousness of something or only arises on the condition that it is of or about something (see Depraz and Varela 2003, 225; Prosser 2013, 153; Nizamis 2012, 226).

Within the Husserlian framework, the intentional ‘something’ need not be a perceptual object but may otherwise be a non-perceptual phenomenon such as a feeling, wish, judgement, concept, etc. (see, e.g., Husserl 2012, 170-172). There may otherwise be consciousness of non-objectual aspects of experience such as the temporal flow of consciousness and the kinaesthetic sensations of the body (see, e.g., Husserl 1960, 41-43, 97-98; 2012, 164-168).⁶ In *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, Husserl also develops the idea that while the Ego is actively directed towards objects of consciousness, as its foregrounded themes of attention, it is also passively conscious of or ‘receptive’ to a field of backgrounded *pre-constitutive* and *objectlike formations*. These are not objects proper, but rather units of hyletic, i.e., sensuous data—such as a patch of colour or loud bang—that are more or less prominent in relation to one another (Husserl 2001, 210-11, 215, 312, 288).⁷

It has occasionally and controversially been claimed in Buddhist scholarship that there can be states of “pure consciousness” (see Griffiths 1990, 71-97; Collins 1982, 246-247; Smith 2011, 480-482; Sharf 2016, 779-788). In short, this is claimed to be consciousness of nothing except consciousness itself, that is, in absence of

⁶ Rudolf Bernet argues that cases such as these, as developed in Husserl’s work, can be construed as “intentionality without objects.” Bernet includes “the non-objectifying intentionality of the relation to the world” – consciousness of the pre-given world in general – and “the impressional intentionality of self-relation” – the Ego’s pre-reflexive consciousness of itself – as instances of ‘intentionality without objects’ (Bernet 1994, 244-51).

⁷ *Analyses* are published notes from lectures given by Husserl between 1920 and 1926. They are thus near in his intellectual history to the publication of his two Buddha texts in 1925 and 1926.

any phenomena. This would mean that it *lacks intentionality*.⁸ Buddhist scholars who hold pure consciousness to be possible may thus take issue with my characterisation of the Buddha as holding a transcendental view of consciousness akin to that of Husserl, even after I have detailed above that intentionality does not have to be of perceptual objects or objects as such in the Husserlian framework.

I cannot here extensively critique claims of pure consciousness defined as lacking all intentionality. But I can say that the Buddha does not claim in the *Middle Length Discourses* that there can be pure consciousness (see Gombrich 2006, 43-45). Moreover, the Buddha holds an arguably antithetical position. In the *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* (MN 121), the Buddha describes how a *bhikkhu* may progress through the *arūpa jhānas*. These are ever deeper stages of concentration (*samādhi*) that thereby entail progressively more minimal states of consciousness in terms of ever fewer phenomena present, while what is present as the focus of the next *jhāna* are increasingly non-objectual and formless spheres of experience (*arūpa-āyatanas*).⁹ However, the *bhikkhu* ultimately finds upon reaching the final stage of “signless concentration of mind” that then “there is present only this amount of disturbance, namely, that connected with the six bases [sense-spheres] that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life” (121.10). Thus, this state is in fact “conditioned and volitionally produced” (121.11). The *bhikkhu* accordingly finds that even their most supremely ‘pure’ state of consciousness still depends upon the presence of phenomena to arise, however radically few and formless they may be. This can be read as a realisation of the transcendental nature of consciousness that is also antithetical to claims that there is any such state as pure consciousness.¹⁰

I thus find strong reason to posit that the Buddha’s view of consciousness is comparable to Husserl’s transcendental position that consciousness is essentially always consciousness of something, i.e., defined by intentionality not restricted to perceptual or objectual phenomena. This is so if one considers both

⁸ See Metzinger (2020) for a recent philosophical study of pure consciousness that is not specific to the Buddhist context.

⁹ The *arūpa-āyatanas* are as follows: perception of the base of infinite space, perception of the base of infinite consciousness, perception of the base of nothingness, perception of the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, and finally attention to the signless concentration of mind (MN 121.6-10).

¹⁰ Progressing through the *arūpa jhānas* may, however, also be practiced to attain “the cessation of perception and feeling” (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) rather than signless concentration of mind (MN 25.20, 44.16-21, 111.19-20). Then, the *bhikkhu*’s “bodily formations have ceased and subsided, his verbal formations have ceased and subsided, his mental formations have ceased and subsided, but his vitality is not exhausted, his heat has not been dissipated, and his faculties become exceptionally clear” (43.25). This may seem like a candidate for pure consciousness. However, this would be a highly questionable characterisation since it is a state that in lacking all, perception, feeling, as well as all bodily, verbal and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) can hardly be identified as a conscious state in the sense of the *bhikkhu* actually being aware of being in it (see Griffiths 1990, 78-85; Somaratne 2022, 214). I cannot debate this here, but at least suggest that it may be more apt to describe the cessation of perception and feeling as a temporary absence of consciousness, though the *bhikkhu* remains physically alive during it. It seems that the *bhikkhu* can only recollect a “gap” in consciousness, so to speak, once they have “emerged mindful” from it with exceptionally clear faculties (MN 44.16-21, 111.19-20). That is, upon the arising once more of perceptions, feelings, and the bodily, verbal and mental formations.

the Buddha's assertions concerning that consciousness is dependently co-arisen with mentality-materiality and his descriptions of how the most phenomenally minimal state of consciousness that can be achieved is nonetheless dependently co-arisen with mentality-materiality—for, as I will clarify below, this includes the six sense-spheres.

Beyond identifying the fundamental correlation of consciousness and materiality-mentality, a central scheme by which the Buddha *further* classifies all possible aspects of experience is that of the five aggregates (*khandhas*). Belonging to materiality, this includes *rūpa* (material form) and, belonging to mentality, this includes *vedanā* (feelings), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (volitional formations) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness) (MN 10.38). These are sub-classified according to the six sense-spheres (*saḷāyatanas*) in which any phenomenon can arise. Here, phenomena are determined according to their condition for arising, e.g., there are six classes of *viññāṇa* determined according to the contact between the specific sense-faculty and sense-object that they arise from (MN 38.8). Furthermore, each aggregate is defined as dependently arisen with every other.¹¹

This short description of the five aggregates demonstrates that Husserl is wrong to assert that the Buddha's knowledge of experience extends no further than proving the transcendental standpoint. The knowledge that consciousness and the world are dependently arisen is not sufficient for achieving *Nibbāna*. Rather, all possible aspects of experience must be further classified and investigated so that direct knowledge can be gained of their impermanence, *dukkha* and not-self. The Buddha presents himself as a guide on the path to *Nibbāna* (MN 51.14) and provides a classificatory map of experience, the sound basis of the *Dhamma*, for reaching this end (Shulman 2014, 124). This serves a similar function to Husserl's doctrine of categories; providing conceptual classifications for identifying and investigating all possible aspects of experience. I will now describe how the *bhikkhu* can thereby achieve *Nibbāna*.

3.3 Direct Knowledge, Peace and Enlightenment: The Investigation-of-dhammas (*dharmavicaya*)

The *bhikkhu* first surveys their experience in daily life and formal meditation. As the Buddha details in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), the *bhikkhu* in formal meditation initially operates in the mode of *sati*. This denotes a heightened awareness of the body (*kāya*), feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*) and *dhammas* (phenomena). In this mode, the *bhikkhu* does not interfere with or react to whatever they experience. They begin with mindfulness of breathing and then contemplate the body as body, feelings as feelings, mind as mind, and *dhammas* as *dhammas*. This means identifying them just as they appear, and noting their aspects and variations as they arise and vanish to view (MN 10.1-35). In Husserlian terms, the *bhikkhu* operates within the epoché, remaining neutral towards

¹¹ All the above classifications are detailed in MN 9, 18, 28, 38, 43, 59, 78 and 148.

whatever they experience, and the transcendental reduction, taking what they directly experience as their only evidence.

The *bhikkhu* next shifts their awareness from the individual characteristics of a particular phenomenon to its general features as a certain type of phenomenon (Anālayo 2003, 93). While *dhammas* can generally mean directly experienced phenomena, at this stage of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation, *dhammas* means “ideas” or “mind-objects” contemplated in meditation (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009, 54).¹² They are mental representations of directly experienced phenomena. The *bhikkhu* classifies these *dhammas* according to what is seen to be their general nature or characteristic quality (MN 10.36-45; Anālayo 2003, 182-186). This procedure is comparable to the phenomenologist categorising the essences of ideal phenomena in fantasy.

Having surveyed and classified the *dhammas*, the *bhikkhu* “investigates and examines” *dhammas* “with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into” them (MN 118.31). The aim is now to attain direct knowledge of the impermanence, *dukkha* and not-self of all *dhammas* constituting all possible experience. The *bhikkhu* thereby sees that all *dhammas* classified into the five aggregates are impermanent and subject to change, and are thus *dukkha* because they cannot satisfy craving and clinging (Vetter 1988, 40). The *bhikkhu* tests the thesis that the self is permanent, eternal and not subject to change, finding that there is nothing in experience that has this nature. They thus see that all five aggregates are not-self because they lack the permanence, independent existence and unchangeability that a self should have. Since the *bhikkhu* discovers that they can experience nothing other than the five aggregates, they find that the self is nowhere to be seen (MN 22.16-29).¹³

The *bhikkhu* furthermore sees that they cannot grasp their meditative states of mind as the self. For they see that even the most concentrated and neutral state of mind “is connected with the six bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life” and that it is “conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation” (MN 121.10-11). In other words, the *bhikkhu* sees that all that constitutes experience is impermanent, that their mind is conditioned by experience, and thus that any possible state of mind is impermanent and cannot be grasped as the self.

¹² The Buddha uses the term *dhamma* in many distinct ways (see Gethin 2004).

¹³ An open question is whether Husserl's notion of the pure Ego is compatible with the Buddha's assertion of not-self. I suggest that Husserl's statements that the pure Ego cannot be found as a part of experience, that consciousness is co-constituted by experience of the world, and that every act of consciousness shapes the character of the pure Ego, could be interpreted as meaning that the pure Ego has no independent, permanent or unchanging existence (Husserl 1960, 26–29, 36, 54, 65; 2012, 111, 163). Thus, it might not be construed as the self that the Buddha rejects. However, Husserl's egological conception of consciousness has been strongly critiqued within the phenomenological tradition. Aron Gurwitsch (1941) notably argues that Husserl is wrong to conceive of the ego as the necessary centre of the field of consciousness, and of the latter as being structured by egoic acts of consciousness performed from the ego's privileged place therein.

It is with the final knowledge that everything constituting experience is impermanent, *dukkha* and not-self that the *bhikkhu* achieves enlightenment (*bodhi*). Upon eradicating all ignorance of the nature of experience, they are liberated from all false beliefs about it (MN 121.11). No longer believing that there is anything permanent, independently existing, not subject to change and the self, they do not cling to and crave any aspect of experience as if it were. All craving and clinging is thus extinguished and, the former being its cause, all *dukkha* ceases. This is *Nibbāna* here and now.

3.4 *Nibbāna* and Knowledge

Husserl is right to say that the Buddha's interest in investigating consciousness is not purely theoretical. The goal is to achieve *Nibbāna* and not simply to develop a theory of consciousness. But the question can now be raised as to whether, as Husserl claims, *Nibbāna* is a purely practical goal that limits knowledge of consciousness. The Buddha states that "destruction of the taints is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see" (MN 2.3), and his classificatory schemes, which structure this knowing and seeing (Shulman 2014, 124), cover all possible aspects of experience. Achieving the so-called purely practical goal of *Nibbāna* thus requires universal knowledge of consciousness on the basis of knowing the Buddha's theoretical framework. The goal of *Nibbāna* therefore does not limit but motivates and requires theoretical knowledge of consciousness (Sinha 1971, 259).

In any case, Husserl's distinction between the purely theoretical and purely practical is inapplicable to the Buddha's soteriology. *Nibbāna* means being "completely liberated through final knowledge" (MN 107.11) that is gained by dedicating one's life to knowing the *Dhamma* and applying it to investigating consciousness. Here, there is no distinction between pure theory and pure praxis. The *bhikkhu* transforms their bodily and ethical conduct and way of life in order to investigate consciousness. In turn, this investigation transforms their bodily and ethical conduct and way of life as they gradually cease their attachment and aversion to all aspects of experience through directly knowing their impermanence, *dukkha*, and not-self.

Nonetheless, Husserl's claim that the Buddha cannot develop a universal science of being still stands. But, as I have shown, the Buddha performs the epoché and transcendental reduction, and thereby establishes consciousness as his exclusive field of investigation. He may identify essences in fantasy, and his classificatory schemes may function similarly to Husserl's doctrine of categories. The only criterion for a universal science of being not met by the Buddha is to have a purely theoretical interest in consciousness. Since all the above criteria have been met or at least indicated, it becomes questionable whether a purely theoretical interest is a necessary criterion for this science and whether the goal of *Nibbāna* is incompatible with it.

Moreover, *Nibbāna* refers to two distinct moments in the life of a *bhikkhu*, which Husserl does not recognise. *Nibbāna* here and now—during life—concerns liberation from *dukkha*. This is when a *bhikkhu* becomes an *arahant* (liberated person). This is the end of the path, the point at which a *bhikkhu* does “not ... still have work to do with diligence” (MN 70.12). But the attainment of *Nibbāna* is not the end of their life, which is *parinibbāna*. In the context of rebirth—perpetuated by craving and clinging—this denotes the final cessation of the five aggregates upon the death of the *arahant* and their consequent liberation from rebirth (Collins 1998, 143; Brahmāli 2009, 33).

Arahantship refers to a new way of life that begins with *Nibbāna*. An *arahant* experiences the very same world that they did before (MN 1.51-171). But they now abide in a radically heightened awareness of and neutral attitude towards it that is free of *dukkha*. Although *arahants* have completed the path, the Buddha states that they continue living a secluded life and practicing meditation because they “see a pleasant abiding for [themselves] here and now, and [they] have compassion for future generations” (MN 36.34). Meditative practice in itself gives them bliss and satisfaction (Anālayo 2003, 272). Having done what has to be done concerning liberation from *dukkha*, an *arahant* is not only able to continue developing their knowledge of consciousness along with their capacity for awareness and concentration (Engelmayer 2003, 33, 49; Anālayo 2003, 273), but to do so freely of any ulterior interests—the very thing that Husserl claims that the Buddha’s path does not allow. It is thus the case that even post-*Nibbāna* there is no limitation of knowledge.

Husserl states that the Buddha’s teachings are “certainly not a science that ensues from a theoretical interest, a ‘free’ science, a ‘purposeless’ science, a ‘play’ of leisure in opposition to the ‘seriousness of life’” (Husserl 2017, 410). Yet this could describe the meditative practice of an *arahant*—bar the question of scientific method—who leisurely delights therein, no longer has any other purpose for doing so, and does so freely of the seriousness of life that is *dukkha*. An *arahant* is also free to continue living within a community of *bhikkhus* in order to guide others to *Nibbāna*. Thus, contrary to Husserl’s view, the Buddha’s path does not lead to a categorical renunciation of the world, but rather to a transformed way of living therein.

4 Conclusion

Although Husserl’s ascriptions of the performance of an epoché and transcendentalism to the Buddha are supported by evidence from the *Majjhima Nikāya*, Husserl’s distinction between pure theory and pure praxis leads him to misconstrue the purpose of the Buddha’s epoché, the extent of knowledge that the Buddha gains from the transcendental viewpoint, and the nature of *Nibbāna*. It

finally seems that Husserl and the Buddha's approaches to consciousness diverge in their respective scientific and soteriological goals, and that Husserl's distinction between pure theory and pure praxis renders them incommensurable. By way of conclusion, I suggest that this is not necessarily the case.

In the *Kaizo* articles (1922-1924), Husserl states that the continual dissatisfaction of human life can be rationally overcome. This requires the phenomenologist, as also indicated in "Socrates-Buddha," to ground all their goals, values and interests on the scientific knowledge gained by phenomenological investigation, such as that the irrational striving for what is falsely expected to satisfy is ceased (Husserl 1989, 1-13, 30-31; 2017, 411-413). Hence, phenomenology has a soteriological character (Lau 2016, 150). Husserl even states in the *Crisis* that "the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché are destined to effect, a complete personal transformation, comparable at the beginning to a religious conversion," and that "a thoroughly new way of life" is attained (Husserl 1970, 137, 150). Similarly, to overcome *dukkha*, a *bhikkhu's* entire life must become grounded, via the Buddha's epoché, on knowledge of consciousness. This brings about a complete personal transformation and new way of life culminating in *Nibbāna* and further developing in *arahantship*.

Furthermore, Husserl arguably abandons his distinction between pure theory and pure praxis in the *Crisis*, for here the scientific investigation of consciousness is understood as simultaneously bringing about a complete transformation of life. Husserl can be seen to thereby approach the view of the Buddha who extensively developed the transformative potential of investigating consciousness. However, Husserl still neglects the development of bodily and ethical conduct for performing the epoché, and so the feasibility of thereby beginning a completely transformed and satisfactory way of life is questionable. For, as I have argued, this neglect leaves in place misguided interests, habits and prejudices that are bound up with bodily attachments and aversions of daily life and that cause *dukkha*.

I propose that by engaging with the Buddha's teachings from where Husserl, due to his misunderstandings, left off, phenomenologists can explore whether phenomenology can feasibly become a way of life—especially by incorporating the bodily techniques and way of life taught by the Buddha into their performance of the epoché. Granted, Husserl never wavered in his view that the scientific character of European philosophy, epitomised by phenomenology, is superior to Indian thought. But I have shown that this view is based on misunderstandings of the Buddha's teachings. If, as Husserl states in "Socrates-Buddha," "science is the supra-national, common good of all peoples, who want to raise themselves to an autonomous knowledge" (Husserl 2017, 408), then this should not mean a hegemonic domination of European philosophy. Rather, as Husserl proclaimed upon first encountering the Buddha's teachings, "from now on it will be our destiny to blend that Indian way of thinking which is completely

new to us, with the one which for us is old, but which in this confrontation becomes alive again and strengthened" (Husserl 2005, 145).

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