

The Buddhist Parallax and the Nominalism of Freedom

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ABSTRACT: This essay aims to critically position the modern theory of the parallax within some of Buddhism's familiar principles and the conceptual landscape they provoke. By putting to work the simple analytic force of the parallax in the background of this essay, we think we are able to locate in Buddhism a parallaxic coherence such as would establish a critical reading of some of its principles. We can refer here to Buddhism's radical ethicality, neither metaphysics (or ontology) nor a philosophy in the sense it is conceived in the West.

KEYWORDS: Origination, nirvana, nominalism, parallax, void

Introduction

In the following discussions, we will try to present a critique of some of the familiar concepts and principles in Buddhism. These include dependent origination (*Pattica-sammupāda*),¹ especially its relation to the concept of nirvana² to which we may assign a more generic function of moksa,³ and the principle of interdependence or nominalism.⁴ They will be analyzed from the vantage point of contemporary materialist theory of the parallax.⁵

The parallax, roughly stated, refers to our perceptual inclusion in the very reality we perceive, thereby producing a notion of reality that will always be incomplete (Žižek 2006, 17). We are always part of that reality. Reality is never whole vis-à-vis the fragmentary and situated nature of human perception. Human knowledge, therefore, cannot arrive at a universal

or absolute account of the whole of reality; its conclusion will always be provisional, although this does not prohibit the human will to breach an otherwise conscious limitation. To break through the ontological barrier, knowledge must perform a conscious ignorance of the finitude of knowing which curiously makes knowledge a conscious activity possible. As it were, knowledge is the 'difference' that we subtract from the void, the emptiness of being (*śūnyatā*).

This essay is divided into three sections. The first section will discuss the critical import of objectification concerning how in this state the Buddhist achieves a certain kind of transcendence. It is subdivided into three subsections which in general are devoted to a brief explication of how this objectification internally mobilizes the arguments of dependent origination. The second section will show how the Buddha remains open to the world that he shuns in his wish to attain nirvana. The third section will take up the thorny difference between two exemplars of Buddhist enlightenment, the Bodhisattva and Arahant. The section reinforces our discussion on the Buddhist notion of nominal freedom vis-à-vis the over-arching theme of dependent origination which to us properly situates the problematic of the void in Buddhism demanding a pure ethical approach to reality which unfortunately never allows for change.

The Objectification of Nirvana

In Buddhism, the attainment of Nirvana is supposed to end one's individual *samsara*. This is achieved by extracting oneself from the full complement of dependent origination, or the "conditionality of all physical and psychical phenomena" (Nyanatiloka 1988, 241). Nirvana frees the individual from his dependence on the wheel of birth and rebirth, from the most common objectified form of existence. The goal of enlightenment is to overcome this objectified form of life. What we obtain here is rather a very sophisticated form of transmission: From an intricately entangled form of objectified life held hostage in karma to an idealized objectification of one's mode of existence. 'Objectified' means that life is entangled in a predominant

mode of existence, such as attachment to objects) in order to reach its most idealized form, that is to say, in consciousness.

The key here is idealization, the goal of which is to subtract something from existence: An idealized existence becomes lesser than existence. One gets closer to the possibility of stepping outside of the wheel of birth and rebirth overcoded by objectifications which sustain the efficacy of *samsara*. Yet, after achieving nirvana, no matter how its emancipatory complement in consciousness becomes impoverished of objectification, the world remains constant (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 341). In the *Treatise of the middle doctrine of Mahayana (Madhyamika-sastra)*, it is said:

There absolutely are no things/Nowhere and none, that arise [anew]/Neither out of themselves, nor out of non-self/Nor out of both, nor at random/.

Only consciousness of the world which varies from person to person infuses difference in the world. Consciousness is the prime element of difference from which a habit is reproduced. This serializes a karmic flow of psychic tensions from which a person is further reproduced, which in turn, seals an individual's fate as it were. All of which occur in an ever recurring cycle, a pre-assigned correlation, a closed economy, to say the least, between craving (*tanhā*) and suffering (*dukkha*) which keeps the engine of life turning until it is supposed to cease in nirvana.

Outside the wheel of *samsara* is the possibility of nirvana, in which a certain notion of transcendence is obtained. The enlightened elects the place of enlightenment as a pre-assigned goal serving as an exemplary causality, only to be retroactively presupposed. That is to say, it can be presupposed only after going through the crucible of immanence. The enlightened achieves nirvana not by denying the originary efficacy of immanence. Its crucible would always be the challenge of desisting from cravings. Rather, he does so by radicalizing it in and through his aspiration to transcend the burden of absorbing its tensions.

Hence, a Buddhist can experience transcendence not by defeating craving but by radicalizing it. That is, transcendence is attained through a highly disengaged form of indulgence akin to the creation of a work of art. The latter

involves throwing an aesthetic mix into the manifold of karmic sense. By creatively sublating craving into an objectified form—aestheticized as such—transcendence is achieved. As Nietzsche (1967, 53), a serious student of the orient, puts it: only as an aesthetic phenomenon can existence be justified. But there is more. We may contend here that aesthetic objectification in fact allows the enlightened to claim, without incurring unnecessary contradiction, that he is neither reborn nor not reborn. This is not only the mark of the parallax but more particularly the Buddhist version of the parallax.

The role of object exchangeability

The key point here is awareness of *anicca* (impermanence) which obtains itself the moment becoming is entrapped in being, in something that 'is.' The primary goal of birth is to *entrap becoming in being* so that becoming becomes representable either as an object or event, predicated or coded *in retrospect*.⁶ Without this entrapment the recollection of karma in terms of correlating a past event to an objectified form of identity formation in the present would be impossible.

We can argue, however, that for the Buddha (well before Kant), being is not a real predicate (Kant 1998, 567). Within the logic of substitution that impermanence necessitates, being is not everything. Being necessitates the elasticity of exchange. Something is exchanged for something, yet, 'something that is' does not fully signify 'what is.' Impermanence itself encourages such substitution. The substitution even extends to the macro-causation of cosmic reality within the full complement of dependent origination. As shown in the *Pali Suttas* (S. XII.23), a critical scholar of Buddhism sums up the larger complement of this temporal causality:

'[1] When this is, that is; [2] from the arising of this comes the arising of that; [3] when this isn't, that isn't; [4] from the cessation of this comes the cessation of that.' As a theory of causation, this formula resembles modern chaos theory in that it is both linear and synchronistic. The linear pattern (taking [2] and [4] as a pair) connects events, rather than objects, over time; the synchronistic pattern ([1] and [3]) connects objects and events in the present moment....

Even though the past may exert influence over the present, the possibility of modifying those influences through one's present actions means that there is an opening for free will (Robinson and Johnson 1997, 28).

The possibility of attaining nirvana in the present lies in connecting objects and events, not events and other events. Events are already predefined by past influences. This causal pattern is crucial as it brings to the fore the importance of objectification that is tied to an event. *Event reflects time; object reflects space*.⁷ The combination of the two engenders spatio-temporal intuition, or *a priori* forms of thought in the Kantian language which would serve as the individual's practical moral purpose.

What is striking though here in the correlation between objectification and event is that the latter is considered as passive vis-à-vis the act of objectifying existence locked in the karmic conditions of craving. By virtue of karma, a past event is irreversible. Yet that to which it is made to cling offers a release of the present from the past made possible by objectification. The release is an essential stage in performing deliverance or moksa. Without objectification no such release can ever begin to take place. One has to reconstruct the past by correlating it (as an event) to an object. The past is irreversible because it has no object; its irreversibility is in default of objectification. In contrast, objectification disrupts time as it forces a past event to cling to an object in the present.⁸

We speak of objectification here within a nirvanic state in which it is performed without incurring self-contradiction vis-à-vis the Buddha's admonition against attachment to objects and material things. Conscious of the injunction against attachment which discourages asserting anything that might suggest of positive causal determination, even Nāgārjuna, a revered disciple of the Buddha, speaks of four conditions of the *Middle Doctrine*: "Four can be the conditions/[Of everything produced]/Its cause, its object, its foregoing moment/Its most decisive factor." Notwithstanding the positive connotation, the disciple goes on to elaborate: "In these conditions we can find/No self-existence of the entities/Where self-existence is deficient/Relational existence also lacks" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 338).

Ultimately, objectification enacts a kind of recollective enlightenment. The assumption is that the Buddhist has done the right kind of objectification in attaining nirvana by correlating objects to nodal events in the past which is practically relived in the present. Here, the present is an active retrospection. An aesthetic sense to this objectification may be assigned as it undergoes a plastic exchange in which 'what is' becomes exchangeable for its prospective human utility.⁹ In other words, an object that is assigned to an event has no founding ontological connection, as best expressed in the principle of impermanence or *anicca*. The correlation of an object to an event makes the latter real in the sense that it, too, becomes an object that must be further objectified by subjecting its objectivity to the law of karma. Logically, an event cannot be governed by the law of karma if it has no object to cling to.¹⁰ In this context, the Buddhist finally locates the answer to the problem of the efficacy of karma, namely, a type of proto-objectification.

However, this originary objectification is already a subversion of primordial karma. It acts as a natural law by objectifying the law into a moral requirement. By objectifying nature into an objective habitat of man, nirvana, as in Kant, becomes entirely a moral gesture, a proto-objectification of the will.¹¹ As such, it acts something from the void, thereby, *voiding the void*. Voiding the void is already an objectification, an act of *correlating an object to an event*. It is in this sense that Žižek also speaks of a primordial guilt. Relying on Masao Abe's (1985) *Zen and Western Thought*, Žižek (2012, 304) summarizes the implication of this guilt:

The ethical implication of this notion of Void is that 'good has no priority over evil. The priority of good over evil is an ethical imperative but not an actual human condition'.... When we realize this (not only notionally, but also existentially), we reach 'the point where there is neither good nor evil, neither life nor death, neither nothingness or somethingness This is freedom.'

Such primordial guilt is a complement of the founding heresy that the Buddha would associate with the nihilistic denial of existence. This is precisely the denial of existence as suffering which involves the affirmation

of self-determined existence, altogether, a defiance of the law of karma and dependent origination). Such denial of existence, however, is ironically retained in the moral gesture itself as a proto-negative imprint.

The nominalism of freedom

We can initially assert here that nirvana is not a cessation of craving (*tanhā*) and its mutual complement in suffering (*dukkha*) as in the dissolution of the tension of psychic spirit. Rather, it is the 'traversing' of craving itself, a coming to terms with the permanent staple of existence.¹² Žižek (2012, 130) puts this idea more succinctly: "[We] embrace the process of going to pieces without falling apart."¹³ In nirvana, one confronts the void, the truth of all truths—that there is none. Yet, in standard Buddhism, this proto-negative imprint is lost in notional and existential translation in which the founding correlation of object and event is overshadowed by a more visible correlation between and among events, such as past, present and future (the temporal syntheses). Objects bring materiality, extension, distinction and solidity to events. This makes time perceptible and necessarily situated in that a predication becomes possible.¹⁴

Consequently, an event (*the arising of this and that*) can be correlated to an object demarcating an event from others in the sense that an event is given action (the act of correlating), hence, its objectivity. But the correlating act, a founding act, becomes lost in time by depriving it of its own object. Such is what nirvana aims, that is, to deprive an event of an object so that craving loses something to cling to, the precise condition in which karma is supposed to grind to a halt. What is obtained after achieving nirvana is the absolute inefficacy of time. Time no longer reckons. It is the pure empty form of time, the void. Yet, a question arises: Is not the void a perfect example of "uncaused existence," which according to the Buddha also constitutes a heresy? (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 279).

The heresy of freedom

The Buddha spoke of such heresy when arguing for dependent origination. Apropos of the word 'dependent,' the Buddha asks: "For what have persistent existences, uncaused existences, etc., to do with a full complement of dependence?" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 279). Here, the Buddha is putting down the relevance of freedom upon which one is dependent on, as if tethered onto something. Concerning the word 'origination,' the Buddha emphasizes that heresy, above all, is a kind of nihilism denying karma its existential originating efficacy. In contrast to the nihilistic denial of existence as suffering, the Buddha advances the 'full complement of dependence.' The denial of karma which reflects ignorance of life as dukkha is nihilism in its most common form. In place of common nihilism, the Buddha proposes an ethic that transcends good and evil, precisely the enlightened's experience of freedom. Yet, even as coming from the enlightened, freedom at best can only be presupposed. The Buddha asserts:

This rejects the heresy that he who experiences the fruit of the deed is the same as the one who performed the deed, and also rejects the converse one that he who experiences the fruit of a deed is different from the one who performed the deed, and leaning not to either of these popular hypotheses, holds fast by nominalism (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 280).

What we can allow ourselves to suspect here is that nominalism is the very ethical imperative against committing a rather notorious kind of correlation, or the anthropogenic correlation between being (object) and thought (event). In the West, this correlation produced the familiar Parmenidean subjectivist correlation of being and thought. In direct opposition to the Western anthropogenic paradigm, Buddhism suppresses the correlation of being and thought in favor of the complementariness of "pure thought" and the priority of the good over evil. Thus, the Buddha says: "Happiness follows him [who has pure thought] like a shadow that never leaves him" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 292).¹⁵ Complementariness is the opposite of the first-order form of correlation, the anthropogenic correlation we mentioned, which also

qualifies as evil. If evil is the result of ignorance, the correlation of being and thought must be a form of ignorance yet of a higher type. The anthropogenic correlation denies the complementariness of pure thought and happiness its pure ethical gesture.

In contrast, the Buddha insists that complementariness must be "free from the memory (of the distinction of good and evil) but not from ignorance" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 334). The memory of ignorance that the Buddha speaks of here is one that should rather occasion in oneself to "[follow] objects in their emergence and dependence" in order to "discriminate objects" where the very act of discriminating itself is "neither good nor evil" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 335). This is what pure ethical gesture means. Complementariness must not be free from the memory of ignorance. Rather, it speaks of an exhortation not to forget the fact that the ontological and epistemic distinction between good and evil does not refer to actual human condition.

Hence, the precondition of ignorance is crucial to the complementariness of pure thought and the priority of the good, which effectively denies any ontological or metaphysical distinction between good and evil. As we have argued previously, ethics can only be made possible by a kind of imperative issuing from beyond good and evil in the sense of the proto-objectification of the will. This is the founding act of correlating an object to an event (the correlation between pure thought and happiness) which alone can defy karma.

Notwithstanding the precondition of ignorance, or its relation to the ethical gesture, ignorance is still impressionable to heresies. Among such heresies, the Buddha also mentions the theory of "self-determining existences" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 279), a close approximation of the correlation between being (object) and thought (event). If it was the correlation of object and event as an exercise of morally free will that makes possible the awareness of karma, it would be the same free will that must deny to itself its own object after attaining moksa. The Buddhist monk must, therefore, shun objectivity. Even so, there must be at least a minimum threshold of objectivity for the 'less' to be functional in an objectified form.¹⁶ Here, the enlightened is forced to carry the moral burden of free will—the

will itself must be saved, *a la* Nietzsche's ascetic (1996, 128,) despite the fact that *willing* is always an objectification, a founding heresy.

Thus, no actual escape from the cycle of karma that the enlightened himself can inaugurate in consciousness. Consequently, he feels the need to make another kind of objectification, a new karma, although it does not proceed in its own course. Such is the ethical injunction that commands the enlightened to conceal his free act of willing, his own heresy. This condition precisely demonstrates the assertion of nominalism that freedom must hold fast. As such, nominalism, which the Buddha defines as the proper way to relate to *anicca* and the manifold of objectifications which sustain the karmic cycle, assumes a form of ethical transcendence, or transcendence in immanence.

Here, the parallax is revealed, but only to the enlightened, that he is part of the reality he perceives. His enlightenment rests in the unhappy awareness that he cannot be fully enlightened.

The World Will Not Frustrate the Buddha

Of relevance in this section is how a noted Kantian scholar, Dietrich Henrich, in his phenomenal book *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German idealism*, points to Kant's similar dilemma. Recall that Kant starts with the theory of an active self from which the theory of the two worlds phenomenon and noumenon is posited. But as Heinrich (2003, 52) remarks:

Once the theory of the two worlds is posited... there can be no return to the self. There is no plausible interpretation of the self as a member of one of the two worlds. There is also no idea of a self as a relation between the two worlds available, as long as we restrict ourselves to the idea of the self as the one who combines what is given to it.

For his part, Žižek (2012, 266) focuses on the active self's strategic relocation of the problem of freedom: "This is where practical reason comes in: [T]he only way to return from ontology to the Self is via freedom: [F]reedom unites the two worlds and provides for the unity or coherence of the Self – this is why Kant repeated the motto again and again, 'subordinate

everything to freedom." This assertion is of course different from the Buddhist affirmation of nominal freedom; in Žižek as in Kant, freedom acquires rather an apodictic (practical) character. Yet another crucial difference comes to mind. For Kant, the ontological character of reality must dissolve with the self as it returns to the sphere of public life.

However, the Buddha is different as he shuns freedom, knowing that he is no longer a member of any of the two worlds he had traversed by attaining nirvana. He is not certain that the public sphere, impressionable to various forms of heresies, would accept him. These heresies take the form of beliefs in 'self-determining existences.' Yet, the Buddha also knows that devoid of any world his freedom is a zero-sum game. In direct defiance of these heresies, the Buddha proclaims that the self is an illusion.¹⁷

Nonetheless, by remaining worldless, he is able to keep his freedom. His only difference with the rest is that his heresy does not occur in any world. It is in this context where the Buddha can speak of enlightenment as both a rebirth and not a rebirth (recall here the principle of nominalism). Devoid of a world, these rebirths lack any definitive expression. The key idea is to ultimately deny the world, and with no world to judge it, heresy is beyond good and evil.

We can wonder here what happens if the Buddha takes up the heresy of the parallax. In the parallax, the world is acknowledged as a paradoxical limit to freedom, to desire or craving. The world can force desire to negotiate by substituting its aim of worldless heresy for another aim, in order to protect the heresy from being pulled to the side of the world itself which also entices one to cling to the object of one's craving. Suffice it to say here that the desire for worldless heresy is impossible to satisfy. But the very substitution itself transforms desire into a drive. Žižek (2012, 640) summarises this point when he describes the nature of the drives in contrast to desire:

[The] drive is literally a counter-movement to desire, it does not strive toward impossible fullness and, being forced to renounce it, get stuck onto a partial object as its remainder.... [The] difference between desire and drive is precisely that, in desire, this cut, this fixation onto a partial object is, as it were, transcendentalized.

But isn't this precisely what the Buddha undergoes after achieving nirvana? The Buddha who has reached nirvana must also be understood to have reached the full complement of desire, that is, to desire another desire. This is the very logic of substitution that allows the Buddha to deny the world without incurring self-contradiction.

Take note that it is the world itself that teaches the Buddha to stand in opposition to it. If the Buddha does not incur self-contradiction by denying the world that allows his very denial of it, the same applies to the world itself. This world does not incur self-contradiction by denying the Buddha. We can even argue that it is not in the interest of the world to frustrate him.

To the extent that the world is indifferent to human concerns, the world gives itself away indifferently to how we appropriate this opening for human purposes. Nonetheless, human appropriations do not change anything in reality which is also another default orientation on the part of the world. The very indifference of the world awards the default of origin to human objectification. Only the world can teach the Buddha to desire another desire. In summation, the world reveals to him the true interdependence of being and nothing, much more, his co-arising with the world itself.

Postscript to the Buddha

As a way of concluding, it is worth exploring how the discussions above applies to Bodhisattva and the Arahāt who follow the teachings of the Buddha in different ways.¹⁸ The Arahāt restricts enlightenment to his own self-undoing or the undoing of his participation in karma (nirvana never reaches closure until one dies). In contrast, the Bodhisattva, after attaining nirvana, reaches out to others to help them achieve their own enlightenment (Epstein 1995, 38).

For the Arahāt, the heresies that the Buddha identifies are a permanent threat to nirvana and that these heresies will stay as long as the world exists. By remaining indifferent to others, unlike the Bodhisattva, the Arahāt is isolating himself not only from heresies, but from the world itself. His struggle is aimed against the world. But, isn't it that no amount of nirvana

can change the world? The Arahāt confuses the ontological absolute (that the world cannot change) with an ethical (*Dependent*) absolute (heresies will stay). The Buddha says: "The difference between the Absolute (perfect wisdom) and the dependent is that the former is eternally free from what is grasped by false discrimination" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 336). We take this ontological freedom of Absolute as already indicating that the world is indifferent to any form of non-ontological (or ethical) discrimination which will nonetheless always be ontologically false. Even an ethical gesture, taken from beyond good and evil, remains a false discrimination vis-à-vis the world itself. As such, it ultimately reinforces the ontological freedom of the Absolute simply by keeping this Absolute untouched.

Thus, the Arahāt's conflation of the *absolute* absolute (ontological freedom) and *dependent* absolute (the permanent ethical or human condition that is prone to heresies) is absurd from the point of view of dependent origination. The latter applies only to the human condition, and which insofar as it is a human condition, is untouched by the Absolute, precisely the reason why the human condition is dependent on objectification which will always remain false. Yet the ontological freedom of the absolute does not discriminate against discriminations. It is consciousness that discriminates. For purposes of determining which form of consciousness can discriminate better than others, the Buddha finally discriminates all forms of discrimination (heresies) which have established a false connection between the absolute and the dependent. Hence, the Buddha performs a pure ethical gesture (beyond good and evil, outside of the false connection between absolute and dependent) when he declares: "The supreme truth of all dharmas/Is nothing other than the True Norm (suchness)" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 337).

The 'True Norm' is the product of the proto-objectification of the will (neither good nor evil). In this light, only by leaving the absolute to its own absolute indifference that ethics becomes possible. But this is already a different order of ethics vis-à-vis the ethical absolute that heresies will stay as long as the world exist. The latter ethics is a false objectification of the absolute. It assumes that the absolute can, in fact, be objectified beyond the option of leaving it to its own indifference, through individual enlightenment

in facing up the heresies of the mundane world, and, ultimately, through defiance of the world that allows for such heresies.

We note here that the Arahāt's defiance of the world is carried out through an epistemic voiding of the Void; his enlightenment unbinds the world's epistemological privileges such that the liberation of thought from the Void makes thought the absolute locus of emancipatory knowledge (or the Right View of the Eightfold Path). Thought voids the Void by electing private thought as absolute objectivity. However, with its characteristic indifference toward the enlightenment of others, objectification of this kind constitutes a self-determining heresy. In other words, the Arahāt's enlightenment will eventually reinforce self-determining existences. In a parallax, enlightenment practically allows the absolute to become voided by a pure ethical gesture whose social intention must not be overlooked. This ultimately sets apart the Bodhisattva from the Arahāt. The absolute can be objectified only by way of the ethical that is neither good nor evil—a kind of objectification that leaves the absolute untouched. Unlike the Arahāt, the Bodhisattva has no illusion of overcoming the absolute by private epistemic means. Its heresy is ethical rather than epistemic.

The overall teaching of the Buddha rests on his *Dhammapada* (The Path of Virtue), generally the ethical injunction against common ethical heresies that we mentioned. This roughly suggests that there is still an opening for free will which, in the history of human thought, is always correlated to ethics (*śīla*). Yet, as was argued, 'the good has no priority over evil' (Žižek 2012, 304). In a quasi-Kantian sense, we can do nothing except "subordinate everything to freedom" (Žižek 2012, 206). Freedom, for the Buddha as for Kant, is a morally founding act.¹⁹ But, as the Buddha also asserts, freedom is nominal. It does not assert something positive as to warrant a true definition of freedom. It is the freedom (of the enlightened) that teaches us the awareness of the impermanence of the world. It is a morally free act of the Buddha who knows that even his freedom is nominal, relative to the primordial law of dependent origination that speaks of an undifferentiated whole. Here, we may refer to the indifference of the cosmos, the freedom or intentionality of the Void.

Suffice it to say that Buddhism is neither metaphysics nor ontology. It is, pure and simple, an ethic which asserts that the priority of good over evil, indeed, is not an actual human condition. Yet, it is a condition for human freedom that, in whatever mystery it can be expressed, allows for a tiny infraction of the indifference of the cosmos. Perhaps, that which allows for freedom is that which gives, and even indifferently, a gift that gives. The Buddha knows that even nirvana, in the final analysis, could not reverse the order of the cosmos (even if all human persons achieve enlightenment). If at all, what we can obtain from the Void is a negative form of affirming its unilateral indifference to human ends. From the side of the Void, whatever induction is obtained, reality never changes.

Notes

- ¹ Or, the doctrine of the "conditionality of all physical and psychical phenomena, a doctrine which... forms the indispensable condition for the real understanding and realization of the teaching of the Buddha. It shows the conditionality and dependent nature of that uninterrupted flux of manifold physical or psychical phenomena of existence" (Nyanatiloka 1988, 241).
- ² Most important key to nirvana is the "elimination of ignorance and selfishness" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 272).
- ³ In Hinduism, moksa means 'liberation;' in Buddhism, liberation or emancipation is often referred to as 'nirvana.' The subtle differences in meaning are captured in the following observations by noted Indian scholars: "The precise meaning of liberation vary among the schools, even those within the framework of Hinduism and Buddhism, but the essential meaning of both *moksa* and *nirvana* is emancipation or liberation from turmoil and suffering and freedom from rebirth" ((Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, xxvi).
- ⁴ Known as the Treatise of the middle doctrine (*Madhyamika-sastra*) which means that "the condition of interdependence (or principle of relativity) does not allow for something in the universe to disappear, or for something new to appear" (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 340).
- ⁵ Otherwise propounded by the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek (Žižek 2006).
- ⁶ Viewed retrospectively: "[A] realization that personal experience and the entire conditioned universe all boil down to [a] single pattern, whose factors work over time but can also be directly experienced at the mind in the present" (Robinson and Johnson 1997, 25).
- ⁷ This is what Owen Flanagan (2011, 97) misses out in his declaration that "Buddhist metaphysics privileges processes and events." The absence of objectification in Flanagan's *The Bodhisattva's brain: Buddhism naturalized* (the title of his book) is glaring that one can suspect that his notion of processes and events have to be devoid of objects in order

to correctly advance the view that Buddhism is thoroughly metaphysical which makes it “cognitivist” in Flanagan’s view.

- ⁸ In a famous statement on objects, real or not, Buddhism has this to say: “[As] in dream, although objects are unreal, they yet have function such as loss of a semen, etc. (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 329). This is, of course, an example made in Buddhism in order to show that objects are powerful in the negative sense. We are rather taking a different view. Objects are really powerful in the positive sense. In the concluding section, we will see how this power can be taken in the positive light in view of the world that teaches the Buddha how to deny it, ironically speaking, but that is to say without incurring self-contradiction.
- ⁹ This logic of exchangeability and/or interchangeability does not only apply to Eastern mysticism but to Western metaphysics as well. Catherine Malabou (2008) has recently introduced this concept to refer to a new materialist ontology in which “essences and accidents are exchangeable in a metamorphic economy of material existence” [in James 2012, 107; see also Johnson and Malabou 2013]. In fact, we can argue here that this logic basically informs all metaphysics, regardless of their geographical orientations. In the ancient West, the process required that the object exchange with subject in the sense Nature, for instance, was made to mimic human attributes (Simondon 2011, 38-40). In the medieval, the process of exchangeability/interchangeability concerning subject-object relations could be directly deduced from St. Anselm’s words in *Cur Deus Homo* on the theory of Incarnation: “[The] assumption of a human nature into unity of a divine person will be done only wisely by Supreme Wisdom. And so Supreme Wisdom will not assume into its human nature what is not useful” (Hopkins and Richardson 1976, 135). In the modern period, interchangeability becomes more plastic and obvious such that instrumentation is called for (fixed by scientific instrumentation regulating the process) which guarantees that the subject can interchange with object only in precise locations and appropriations.
- ¹⁰ As the Buddha says, “[that which] exists [must have] its own antecedent” (Radhakrishnan and Moore 1967, 285).
- ¹¹ What Nietzsche sees in Kant’s project—faced with irreversible nihilism, “the will itself must be saved” (Nietzsche 1996, 136). Suffice it to say that it is a moral ought.
- ¹² In *The Trauma of everyday life* (2013), Mark Epstein takes the view that this is already the case with the Buddha’s state of enlightenment: “The freedom the Buddha envisioned does not come from jettisoning imprisoning thoughts and feelings or from abandoning the suffering self; it comes from learning how to hold it all differently, juggling them rather than cleaving to their ultimate realities” (Epstein 2013, 22).
- ¹³ Žižek actually borrowed Mark Epstein’s title of his work *Going to pieces without falling apart: A Buddhist perspective on wholeness* (1999). In another of his important work, Epstein argues for an alternative approach to desire in Buddhism, which is familiarly associated with *samsara*. In this alternative approach desire actually leads to the cessation of clinging: “Desire, which starts out with wanting to control (...) an object, eventually finds that an object is not object enough for its liking (Epstein 2005, 181).

- ¹⁴ What, for instance, Otto Rank spoke about object relations essential to unravelling the structure of the ego (Rank 1991, 173). For our purposes, the unravelling of the ego through object relations encapsulates our view regarding the importance of objectification in Buddhism.
- ¹⁵ From the Twin-Verses in *The Dhammapada*.
- ¹⁶ Žižek captures this avoidance of objectivity in terms of the politics of hope in the exercise of meditation: “Monks who fully meditate serve as a kind of ‘subject supposed to meditate’, a guarantee (to ordinary people) that Enlightenment is possible” (Žižek 2014, 299-300, n. 47). In other words, it is alright if ordinary Buddhists do not meditate.
- ¹⁷ The no-self theory of Buddhism finds its modern defense in Hume’s theory of person. We can compare Hume’s insistence that the ‘I’ is only a particular perception and not a universal category with Buddhism’s defense of nominalism. For a highly informed comparative account of the two positions see Giles 1993.
- ¹⁸ We are building on Žižek differentiation between the two exemplars of Buddhism (Žižek 2012, 108-10). Yet, we are introducing here quite a different set of lenses to identify what we deem as the ultimate difference between the Arahāt and Bodhisattva.
- ¹⁹ Speaking along the same line, Laclau refers to the ethical as a “decision which is not predetermined by any existing framework (Laclau 2011, 82).

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