CHAPTER 10

ENLIGHTENMENT: the awakening of mind

> Do not say that Huang Po's enlightenment is incomplete. How can someone like Joko tell what level Huang Po has reached or what his words mean? Huang Po is an ancient Buddha and he sacrificed his life for the transmission of the *dharma*.
>
> Dogen[1]

> What is enlightenment?
>
> Immanuel Kant[2]

Following the literary custom adopted in the nineteenth century, John Blofeld drew upon the European word "enlightenment" to translate the highest goal of Zen Buddhism. In actual fact, however, among the most widely employed symbols for the goal of Zen used in the Huang Po literature, none could be translated literally by our word "enlightenment."[3] Why, then, did Blofeld opt for *this* word rather than simply translating the symbols that were to be found in the texts? One reason would clearly be that the precedent for this rendering had already been firmly established. Earlier translators, including D. T. Suzuki, had interpreted both Buddhism and its particular "Zen" form *as* traditions focused on the quest for "enlightenment." This answer, however, simply forestalls our question: why had they chosen the word "enlightenment" as the most general rendering of an array of terms for the goal of spiritual practice in Buddhism? No doubt they would have responded to our question with the simple claim that "accuracy" was the primary criterion of selection,

[1] Dogen, *Shobogenzo*, p. 143.
[2] Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, and What is Enlightenment?* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1959).
[3] The list of symbols for the goal of Zen is extensive, and changes over time. One of these, used in the Huang Po texts, but only seldomly, could be rendered into English literally as "enlightenment." This symbol is *ming*, etymologically composed of the graphs for the sun and moon, which clearly has carried the meaning of "to enlighten" – "to shed light upon, to clarify, and hence, to become aware of."

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not necessarily "literalness" of translation but overall correspondence to the authentic meanings being transmitted. "Correspondence," however, is two-dimensional. It entails an understanding of two vocabularies, two contexts of meaning, and two evolving traditions – one for the tradition out of which a meaning will be taken and one for the tradition into which it will be placed. What matters, therefore, is not just what Buddhist "enlightenment" means, but also the meaning of European "enlightenment" in relation to which the Buddhist version will be understood. Having received this translation, what Buddhist enlightenment would mean to westerners has been dependent upon what "enlightenment" had already come to mean in their own linguistic and historical context.[4]

What had this word come to mean in the west at the time when it was chosen to include within its variety of connotations what Buddhists seek as their goal? The European Enlightenment was the epoch of rationalism, the historical era in which it was thought that the clear light of human reason, scientifically purified, would dispel the darkness of superstition, finally making it possible to verify the truth that in the past could only be taken on authority. For Immanuel Kant, the foremost prophet of "the Enlightenment," the emancipatory aim of enlightenment would be to make possible an "exodus from the condition of self-imposed immaturity," wherein both immature thinking, and its consequent need for authority, are overcome. One rhetorical figure drawn from European rationalism that came to be particularly affixed to the western conception of Buddhist enlightenment was the idea of an unconditioned and unprejudiced perception of "things as they are." Although very distant from its Cartesian roots, this phrase has come to define Zen enlightenment. On this point we can see an interesting connection between the monastic origins of both traditions of "enlightenment." These origins in Europe can perhaps be seen most clearly in the Cartesian *Meditations*. For Descartes, contemplative, meditative purification precedes the capacity to see clearly and without prejudice. "Things as they are" only appear as they are to one whose mind has been cleared of unauthorized assumptions and emotional excess. In both east and west, such clarification has religious and monastic roots, and is traceable in interesting ways to a variety of religious practices and conceptions.

Although the rationalists of the European *Aufklärung* had valorized the

[4] In China this same process had already taken place when words were sought in the Chinese cultural sphere to communicate what translators understood "nirvana" and other analogous terms to mean in the very distant Indian cultural context.

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Chinese Confucians for constructing a non-theistic system of ethics, and, to a lesser extent, the "original" Indian Buddhists for their hard-headed analysis of mind, it is not the rationalist tradition that accounts for our interest in Zen. Instead, Zen "enlightenment" would draw most of its images from the European tradition of thought that had opposed Enlightenment rationalism – romanticism. This tradition, by virtue of its modern opposition to the emerging shape of modernity, would reverse many of the preferences expressed in the Enlightenment. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers typically assumed the progressive triumph of *logos* over *mythos*, romantics would criticize the shallowness of rationality and seek wisdom in ancient myth. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers dismissed the traditional past as immature in contrast to its modern replacement, romantics typically sought ways to find in the past a source of depth otherwise unavailable in the economy of modern calculative thinking. It was this set of images that drew John Blofeld and other romantic thinkers to the mysterious and ancient "orient." Nevertheless, given the power and prestige of Enlightenment thinking even in the midst of modern romanticism, the word "enlightenment" more than any other would come to symbolize what Buddhists like Huang Po could offer.[5]

What did Huang Po's "enlightenment" mean to John Blofeld? Reflections on this topic can be found voluminously throughout Blofeld's long career as an interpreter of Asian religious traditions. Huang Po's enlightenment was simply one very powerful version of a generalized religious state that Blofeld sought through numerous other figures as well. Enlightenment, whether from Huang Po or elsewhere, is what Blofeld sought to understand and to appropriate into his own life through his practice as a Buddhist. How did he conceive and represent it?

The initial characteristic of "enlightenment" for Blofeld is its connection to "reality." Enlightenment is "the experience of standing face to face with Reality."[6] It is one form of experience set in contrast to all others, the form in which what was previously taken to be real is reduced to a subordinate status through its juxtaposition to the sudden and self-evident appearance of "Ultimate Reality."[7] "Reality will flash upon us,"

[5] Paul Ricoeur takes these "two fundamental philosophical attitudes" – rationalism and romanticism – as definitive of the scope of modernity. Although they opposed the Enlightenment in explicit doctrine, romantics would be unable to escape the terms of the discussion defined by its opposition. Thus, even in their opposition to the spirit of modernity, romantics would remain within the sphere of Enlightenment vocabulary, as well as within the range of issues posed by scientific rationalism (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, p. 66).

[6] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 180. [7] Blofeld, *Beyond the Gods*, p. 20.

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Blofeld asserts in the future tense, "the whole universe of phenomena will be seen as it really is."[8] The capacity to see the universe as it really is, although innate as a capacity to human beings, results from an extensive practice of cultivation. Only purified minds will see reality. Drawing upon images that had been controversial throughout the history of Zen, Blofeld figures the mind *as* a "mirror" and cultivation *as* an act of "polishing." "[O]ur minds will become like polished mirrors," he wrote, "reflecting every detail of the passing show and yet remaining unstained, perfectly unaltered by reflections of things, whether beautiful or hideous."[9]

The separation between the Ultimate Reality of Huang Po and the apparent reality in which we live is constructed in Blofeld's doctrine of enlightenment through the metaphor of the "veil." Although right there before us, reality is veiled from our view. Having figured the structure of the human situation in terms of the veil, the human task comes to be understood *as* "striving to pierce the veils of sensory perception and conceptual thought in order to arrive at an intuitive perception of reality."[10] Those few, like Huang Po, who have "pierced the veil" sense a further "duty" "to carry back the secret from beyond the veil."[11] Although the image of "carrying back" implies a substantial separation between realms, Blofeld is quick to qualify the otherworldly implications of this doctrine. While enlightenment appears distant to us now, when it is suddenly manifest, what is shown is the truth of this world.

In spite of these qualifications, however, the otherworldly implications of the doctrine continue to assert themselves. The experience of enlightenment, Blofeld claims, entails an "unqualified liberation from the human state."[12] Enlightenment is "an Ultimate Perfection lying beyond the realm of ever-changing forms,"[13] and "a final escape from the bondage of life's Wheel."[14] That enlightenment requires such an "escape beyond" can be seen in the predicates Blofeld places upon it. Reality, he says, "is spaceless and timeless."[15] "[T]he state of mind of an Illumined man is independent of time-relationships"[16] and "does not discriminate at all."[17] That reality thus constructed is literally unthinkable and unimaginable is clear to Blofeld. In fact, it is an article of faith. Although we cannot currently imagine it, the great masters like Huang

[8] Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 31. [9] Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 22.
[10] Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 11. [11] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 17.
[12] Blofeld, *Beyond the Gods*, p. 17. [13] Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 27.
[14] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 62. [15] Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 16.
[16] Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 131. [17] Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 140.

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Po are read in such a way as to provide assurance that the unimaginable will in fact be revealed.

The footnotes supporting the foregoing description of Blofeld's understanding of enlightenment reveal that some of this doctrine has been gleaned from works that are not explicitly on Huang Po or even on Zen. Zen doctrine, at this highest level at least, is not distinguished from Blofeld's reading of the doctrines of other traditions. This "merging" of traditions is intentional on Blofeld's part, and our account here simply follows his lead. On this dimension of his thinking, Blofeld had identified with an influential English tradition of thought known as the "Perennial Philosophy." Blofeld concurred with this tradition in maintaining that hidden within the various historical traditions, can be found one ahistorical, "perennial," mode of thinking that is unified no matter where or when it is found because it derives, not from culture or from thought, but from direct, mystical contact with "Ultimate Reality." Thus Blofeld would place Huang Po in a cross-cultural context and claim: "The experience of standing face to face with Reality never changes. Mystics of every age and every continent, Plotinus, the Buddha, Lao-tse, Eckhart, Blake, countless Hindu sages and the adepts of Sufi wisdom, though separated by immense distances of time and space, are remarkable for their unanimity."[18] The assumption that "there can be only one form of Supreme Enlightenment"[19] enabled Blofeld to interpret Zen texts like the *Huang Po* through categories supplied by other traditions – Buddhism, Hinduism, and, above all, romanticism. But it would also blind him to the particularity and specificity of Huang Po's Zen. The assumption of underlying unity is a powerful interpretive tool. No matter how different Huang Po's words might be from a Hindu's, for example, they could be understood *as* describing precisely the same experience.[20]

> it is only that, while groping for words in which to clothe the experience, he is apt to choose terms most readily understandable to those around him. Thus the Catholic mystic speaks in terms of Catholic theology, the Sufi in terms of Allah, and so on.[21]

Underwriting Blofeld's claim here is the instrumentalist doctrine of language that we have considered earlier. According to this view, language "clothes" reality in a particular cultural style, but bears no essential relation to that reality. Therefore Blofeld's understanding is that, even

[18] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 180.
[19] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 51.
[20] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 254.
[21] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 180.

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though Huang Po is thought to have seen reality as it is – unclothed – he communicates the meaning of this vision to others through a mediation in the cultural "clothing" most understandable to them.[22] In Blofeld's view, enlightenment is unaffected by the linguistic form of its subsequent communication. Nor would enlightenment have a history, or a form particular to the tradition of Huang Po's Zen. Although it is true that Blofeld's "Perennial Philosophy" has provided a forum for a modern, western transmission of Zen, what the Huang Po texts might say is unconsciously censored in advance by the liberal doctrines of its host.

Beyond differences in language, Blofeld would also maintain that, although different traditions might follow different practices or methods, this would not affect the underlying unity of their goals. Nirvana, therefore, is thought to be just what it is on its own, regardless of what might be done in different traditions to attain it. Consequently, on this view, Theravadins and Mahayanists "differ only as to method and never as to the Goal."[23] Moreover, the unanimity that Blofeld finds among the "mystics" is taken as evidence for the truth of their vision. Citing Aldous Huxley, Blofeld claims that the unanimity of the mystics "makes it impossible to suppose that they were the victims of their own delusions, for how could a thousand men unknown to each other dream the same dream? There *must* be a reality underlying their vision; their unanimity is marred only by their understandable attempts to describe the indescribable in words their respective co-religionists could understand."[24] On this point, Blofeld will not resort to critical doubt: "I do not for one moment doubt that Huang Po was expressing in his own way the same experience of Eternal Truth which Gautama Buddha and others, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, have expressed in theirs . . . Could one suppose otherwise, one would have to accept several forms of absolute truth!"[25] Although the cultural importance of the kind of openness and tolerance expressed in Blofeld's "Perennial Philosophy" should not be forgotten, it is difficult at this historical moment not to be aware of the dogmatic limits that it had placed upon critical thinking. Moreover, if we are to read Huang Po with an eye toward the possibility of learning something new, we must initiate the act of reading without having already subsumed the texts under the "perennial" that we already know.

[22] The Zen master is thought "to clothe invisible Reality in the garments of the religion then and there prevailing" (Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 18).
[23] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 25. [24] Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 205.
[25] Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 9.

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Thus, although we have explicated the primary points of Blofeld's interpretation of Huang Po's doctrine of enlightenment, it is not at all clear what aspects of this interpretation derive from a reading of Huang Po's texts and what derives from elsewhere, since Blofeld's overarching theory explicitly denies the difference.

Blofeld is certainly correct that a sense of unity and wholeness are fundamental to the doctrine of enlightenment in the Huang Po texts. The central concept of "One Mind" unifies the text in the same way that, in Buddhist practice, it unifies experience. But this unity is an abstract, high-level unity and stands as the centerpiece of the text and system only insofar as it is supported by various other dimensions of wholeness, some so rudimentary as to be ignored by the texts as presuppositions for what is said. To clarify this, and to show the importance of concepts of wholeness in Huang Po's Zen, it may be helpful to outline the major structures of wholeness both implicit and explicit in the texts.

An initial role for the idea of unity might be that the decision to enter the monastery and pursue Zen practice is, ideally, a decision to seek a unified meaning for the self, a wholeness for one's life. Although it is true that there is an important sense in which Huang Po's Zen should be understood as attentiveness to the present moment in its vivid particularity, there is another more basic sense in which this same Zen seeks to recall the self out of its absorption in the present so that broader perspectives could develop without the distraction of the current moment. "Leaving home," the monastic call, seeks at its most basic level a withdrawal from the activity and plentitude of the world so that, through contemplative exercise, a deeper, more unified sense of that same world might emerge to guide daily comportment and experience. Huang Po's text laments that "the people of the world do not awaken . . . they are blinded by their own sight, hearing, feeling and knowing."[26] The rich plentitude of the world can be blinding. Meditation in all its forms pursues authentic being in relation to the whole of things. It aims to release the self from its inattentive entanglements in the world; it demands a temporary withdrawal from active preoccupation with everyday affairs. The goal of this contemplative disengagement is to provide a cultural space for the development of an enlarged sense of awareness, an attentiveness to broader dimensions of the whole. For the individual practitioner, the initial task is simply to see each moment of one's life as an expression of the whole of life and its meaning.

[26] T. 48, p. 380b; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 36.

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A second dimension of the cultivation of wholeness sought through the structures of Zen monastic practice, but presupposed rather than discussed in the Huang Po texts, is a textured awareness of the larger social totality of the monastery. Upon entering the monastery, the practitioner begins a process of socialization into a particular way of conceiving and practicing the self's relation both to other selves and to the whole of the community. One's own interests are at first subordinated to, and, later, to some extent, identified with, the interests of the Zen monastic community as a whole. The practitioner relearns in a new and more thoroughly theorized way what was already in most cases learned in his or her earlier upbringing – that the part is subordinate to the whole, the self to the community.

A third dimension of cultivated wholeness, this one more explicit in the texts, extends the communal sense of unity beyond the whole that can be directly experienced in the monastery. This is the historical unity of the lineage, developed in chapter 6. The rhetoric of the Huang Po texts draws extensively upon images that connect current practice to the practice of "patriarchs and buddhas" even though these mythical, genealogical themes rarely become the central focus of discussion. Recitation of lineage and rituals of historical transmission, although not as highly developed in Huang Po's historical era as they are in Zen today, were clearly significant preparatory dimensions of conception and practice. Just as authentic Zen practice required, first, release from the narrowness of current activity, and, second, release from immature focus on one's own self, we find that it requires, third, release from exclusive identification with one's own historical time so that it becomes possible to contextualize one's own era in relation to the larger history of enlightenment. In each case, cultivating a sense of the whole functions to place each individual part in greater and more coherent perspective, and thus to transform one's experience of what is present and at hand.

Fourth, however, the self, the community, and the lineage can be set in a larger context, a greater totality than the human. Although still not the principle theme of the Huang Po texts, this sense of cultivated wholeness does come to frequent articulation. As we have seen, the concept of "emptiness" articulates, and makes available for experience, an awareness of larger relational complexes within which the human can be situated. According to this concept, all sentient beings and all beings of any kind, "co-arise"; each originates conditioned by others and in turn conditions their very possibility. Aside from "air, earth, fire, and water," there is no Zen practice. Although everyone already "knows" this

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in some sense, cultivating this sensibility beyond that initial knowledge gives rise to "wisdom and compassion," a deep understanding of the nature of all things and a corresponding sense of gratitude and responsibility. One dimension of enlightenment is clearly the capacity to experience oneself in relation to being as a whole.[27]

Although the whole of things can be thought in principle, and awareness can be enlarged, finite practitioners can never experience this totality directly. The finitude of enlightenment means that even the Zen master must be here right now, and not in all places at all times. Therefore, fifth and finally, more important as a dimension of cultivation than the whole as totality is the whole as the ground of all things. Although the teaching of Huang Po presupposes the previous four dimensions, this one is the focus of his explicit *dharma* discourse, and the primary content of enlightenment as it is defined there. Generalized terms in Huang Po's vocabulary suggesting something like the "ground" of all things include *pen*, "root"; *yuan*, "source"; and *li*, "principle." Specialized words, each arising out of the context of Buddhist and Chinese myth and philosophy include *k'ung*, "emptiness"; *hsin*, "mind"; *fo*, "Buddha"; and *fo-hsing*, "Buddha nature," among others. Although each of these arise in different contexts and are conceived differently, their identity is proclaimed in the Huang Po texts and in other Buddhist literature. Each names that which is experienced in enlightenment.

A significant proportion of Huang Po's *dharma* talk is concerned with correcting the *conception* of "that which is experienced in enlightenment." This is the conception of "mind" or "Buddha" still conceived dualistically as something to which the practitioner must come to be related. Turning away from ordinary things in the world, the "source" is sought as something extraordinary but still some-thing, one being among the many, even if more mysterious, more powerful, and so on. Taking one rhetorical pose after another, the Huang Po texts assert that the "source" is not anything at all, but rather that within which all things are encountered. The ground is encountered, not in a separate relation, but in the midst of all other relations. Thus the practitioner is not to establish an independent relation to the ground in addition to, and distinct from, all other relations. Instead, practice is to cultivate the understanding and the awareness that every relation to things in the world is simultaneously a relation to the ground of all things which has no "existence" independent of the "worldly things" through which it is manifest.

[27] For a contemporary version of this dimension of wholeness, see Hunt-Badiner, *Dharma Gaia*.

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This ungraspability of "mind," "Buddha," or "emptiness" is a constant theme of Huang Po's sermons:

> You may say that it is near, yet if you follow it from world to world you will never catch it in your hands. Then you may describe it as far away and, lo, you will see it just before your eyes. Follow it and, behold, it escapes you; run from it and it follows you close. You can neither possess it nor have done with it.[28]

Because it is only experienced within other experiences, a subtle form of awareness is cultivated to make possible a manifestation of this "source," one which doesn't turn away from things completely, but at the same time is not compelled by things and thus obstructed. As the mind shifts in succession from one situation and object of awareness to another, the enlightened mind stays attuned to the "one mind" at the "root" of all things. Conceived in terms of the concept of emptiness, we are led to understand that all forms – all appearances – make their appearance in and through "emptiness." Yet conversely, "emptiness" appears only in and through appearances.[29] Whether the Huang Po texts make this point in theoretical language or in concrete images, it is clear that the overall point is to introduce the content of these thoughts into daily living and experience. The concepts and images provide a depth to the surface of awareness that is to be integrated into ordinary experience.

This understanding of the matter leads Huang Po, like other Buddhists, into paradoxical situations. Although they have gathered in the Zen monastery to seek the Buddha, Huang Po announces playfully, yet with great seriousness, that the Buddha cannot be sought. Furthermore, such seeking is unnecessary; the Buddha is always already there in anything ever encountered. If you left the world in search of nirvana, how would you ever find it?[30] This line of religious thinking, as it developed in Chinese Buddhism, led to the idea of "intrinsic enlightenment." The Huang Po texts introduce this idea in various ways, including:

> Even if you go through all the stages of a bodhisattva's progress towards Buddhahood, one by one; when at last, in a single flash, you attain to full

[28] T. 48, p. 387b; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 107.

[29] A corollary point is that emptiness itself is an empty form, which is to say that everything said of all other forms applies to emptiness as well. When the concept or experience of emptiness is the focal point of one's attention, at that moment, its own ground is hidden from view. The ground escapes one's grasp even in the form of high-level concepts and breakthrough experiences.

[30] The *Lin-chi lu* proclaims: "You who come here from every quarter all have the idea of seeking Buddha, seeking Dharma, seeking emancipation, seeking to get out of the three realms. Foolish fellows! When you've left the three realms where would you go?" (Sasaki, *The Recorded Sayings of Lin-chi*, p. 26. T. 47, p. 500c).

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realization, you will only be realizing the Buddha nature which has been with you all the time; and by all the foregoing stages you will have added to it nothing at all.[31]

Your true nature is something never lost to you even in moments of delusion, nor is it gained at the moment of Enlightenment.[32]

Enlightenment, on this account, is a re-establishment of contact with that to which we already belong, and apart from which we could not exist. Nevertheless, it is a conscious "re-establishment." The beginning of Zen practice initiates a process of meditative opening through which the practitioner makes contact with, and begins to retrieve, the depth into which all human beings are born. Aware of this dimension in the experience of enlightenment, the practitioner realizes what was given to awareness all along. Although the task is to be the one we already are, that attunement is indeed a task, a challenge, something which must be developed and brought into conscious realization.

The form that this "conscious realization" takes, however, is not the "closure" of conceptual determination; there is nothing objective that can be grasped or represented to consciousness. This claim in the Huang Po texts is clear: the activity of placing "mind" or "emptiness" before the mind simultaneously excludes the possibility of awareness of mind. As the open space within which all knowing takes place, mind is not anything that can itself be known. Because there is no standpoint that is external to that which is experienced in enlightenment, no position from which "mind," "emptiness," or "Buddha" could be grasped, Huang Po adopts two distinct postures in addressing the question of enlightenment. The first is irony. The inquiry into the content of enlightenment is ironic in that there is "nothing" there to be experienced. It is the experience of absence and finitude. The figure of irony deflates the expectations and the posture of grasping taken by practitioners. Huang Po's favorite line is the Buddha's own disclaimer that in enlightenment he attained nothing.[33] And as Lin-chi would claim, Huang Po's enlightenment is "nothing special."[34] The ironic power of these passages, however, works to open the practitioner to the more subtle, nonobjective sphere within which awareness of mind or emptiness occurs as an event of disclosure or breakthrough.

The other posture taken by Huang Po in addressing enlightenment

[31] T. 48, p. 380a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 35. [32] T. 48, p. 387a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 93.
[33] For example, T. 48, p. 387a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 35. [34] T. 47, p. 504c.

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follows the pattern established in irony. Lacking a way to assert general propositions about enlightenment, the texts work rhetorically toward the possibility of evoking its manifestation directly. They show how the open space of mind is unavailable for thematic articulation and yet so near that nothing is more fundamental to the self. Experiencing enlightenment is like "tasting taste," or "touching touch." Both taste and touch are so near that, paradoxically, nothing could be more remote from conscious awareness. Taking "mind" and "Buddha" as explicit themes of discourse, however, and bringing their "distant proximity" to mind, sets up the possibility that advanced practitioners might enter this extraordinary open dimension and experience the event of its disclosure.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the kind of Zen taught by Huang Po – the "Hung-chou" style – is its sustained interest in converting the Mahayana realization that "nirvana is samsara" into a mode of practical enlightenment. The sayings from Ma-tsu that generated this line of Zen – "everyday mind is the Way" (*p'ing-ch'ang hsin shih tao*), and "this very mind is the Buddha" (*chi hsin chi fo*) – functioned to break the notion of nirvana as a timeless sphere apart from the human context of time and situation.[35] This objectification of enlightenment was a tendency inherent in both monasticism and philosophical Buddhism – the more you talk about nirvana the more it appears to be both something and something beyond this world.[36] Huang Po's version of the doctrinal reversal of this tendency takes several forms. For example: "Wherever your foot may fall, you are still within the sanctuary of enlightenment, though it is nothing perceptible. I assure you that one who comprehends the truth of 'nothing to be attained' is already seated in the sanctuary where he will attain enlightenment."[37] For Huang Po, the solution would be found both in the return to the ordinary, and in a deconstruction of the distinction between the ordinary and enlightenment. "If you would only rid yourselves of the concepts of ordinary and enlightened, you would find that there is no other Buddha than the Buddha in your mind."[38]

Tsung-mi, a contemporary of Huang Po, saw danger for Chinese Buddhism in this development of Hung-chou thought. Although he

[35] The primary doctrinal form that this realization had taken in China was the idea of intrinsic or innate awakening. On the effect of this idea on the dualism of "ordinary" and "enlightened," see LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, p. 21.

[36] As Bernard Faure shows in discussing this doctrinal development, even the Hung-chou insight that nothing is attained in enlightenment is susceptible to "hypostasization." See *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 27.

[37] Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 128.

[38] T. 48, p. 383a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 58.

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could sympathize with the critique of Buddhist otherworldliness that had generated the Hung-chou emphasis on ordinary life, he worried that turning to the opposite form of spirituality would entail too easy a surrender to the way human beings already happen to be.[39] The point of Buddhism was not an exaltation of the way things already are; it was instead their transformation. Although the monastic aspiration to purity was indeed susceptible to denial of life, and to the projection of a goal beyond life, the Hung-chou remedy for this tendency seemed too extreme to Tsung-mi.[40]

For western Zen readers it is important to notice that this is another position upon which the transmission of Zen to the west has been able to make contact with the romantic tradition. Like many of us, Blofeld's early English education would have been steeped in the writings of romantic authors for whom the spiritual significance of the ordinary was a primary theme. The "transfiguration of the ordinary" and its elevation into the "sublime" would motivate several generations of writers and artists in Europe in their opposition both to Enlightenment rationalism and to established Christian institutions.[41] And as Tsung-mi could see in its Zen form, this ideological emphasis carries with it inherent dangers that would no doubt emerge in certain contexts. On the basis of this precedent in romantic literature, we find emerging already in the first generation of American advocates of "Zen," a strong emphasis on the elevation of the "ordinary." "Beat Zen" would, in some contexts at least, appear to require the denunciation of all qualitative distinctions. Although implicitly advocating a particular form of human excellence, this form could be reduced to simple acceptance of what is – the idea that whatever is going on, and whatever we do in response to it, is just fine. Moreover, an emphasis on the *rejection* of an otherworldly quest for purity in "Beat" romanticism would tend toward a form of sensualism in which reflection would be repressed in order that the "immediacy" of impulse could be accommodated. Lacking sufficient internal or communal restraint, this acquiescence to "the present moment" would, in some circumstances, eventuate in distinctly unenlightened forms of life.

Although references to "wild monks" do appear in traditional Zen literature, it appears that the force of the monastic tradition in Buddhism would keep many of the excesses inherent in Hung-chou doctrine in

[39] See Broughton, *Kuei-feng Tsung-mi*, p. 152. [40] See Yanagida, "The *Li-tai fa-pao chi*," p. 35.
[41] On this development in Europe, see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

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check.[42] Opportunities for extreme interpretation of these doctrines, at least by modern standards, were few. Furthermore, we can see clearly that Huang Po's qualifications on the return to the ordinary are of central importance, one of them so significant that Blofeld would present it in capital letters: "DO NOT PERMIT THE EVENTS OF YOUR DAILY LIVES TO BIND YOU, BUT NEVER WITHDRAW YOURSELVES FROM THEM. Only by acting thus can you earn the title of 'A Liberated One.'"[43] Enlightenment entails that one be fully in the world, but never quite of it, never forced along blindly by one attraction after another. Enlightenment includes "freedom" as one of its primary characteristics. Freedom, as we have seen, is not release from the destiny of finding oneself in a situation of constraint. Constraints are always in place, and this placement structures the human situation. Instead, freedom is conceived as an awakening to the particular contours of the given situation, a heightening of the awareness of one's own basic situatedness. Although this awakening requires the practice of defamiliarization in initial stages, such that the ordinary ceases to appear so ordinary, the purpose of this intentional estrangement from the world is an authentic recovery of lived experience. The practitioner of Zen returns to where he or she always was, but now in the spirit of awakened contact.[44]

That this "return" occurs as an event of disclosure, a "sudden" breakthrough that reorients experience in a single moment, is perhaps the best-known facet of Zen. Huang Po was a forceful advocate of the teaching of "sudden awakening." His historical position placed him at the height of persuasiveness of this way of understanding enlightenment. How should we understand the import of this emphasis? If enlightenment is construed as an ongoing state of being, characteristic of the lives of Zen masters, then it makes no sense to say that enlightenment *is* sudden awakening, since that would restrict the time of enlightenment to a single moment. The Huang Po texts would seem to prefer to say that enlightenment first occurs in a sudden breakthrough, or that enlightenment is initiated in one moment of experience. Given the innate

[42] It is important to notice also that the monastic structures of Buddhist life would prevent Hung-chou Zen from returning to "everyday life" in most of its dimensions. Monasteries continued to separate men and women, to prohibit sexual activity, to keep themselves immune from the difficulties of childbirth, nurturance, education, and, to some extent, even the economic exigencies of family life. The monastic "ordinary" was not exactly everyone's "ordinary."

[43] Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 131.

[44] Faure is right that "in a sense, Mazu's Chan marked a return to gradualism, since it no longer advocated seeing one's true nature im-mediately, but mediately, through its function" (*Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 51). But if the only possibility for "seeing one's true nature" is mediation through some "rhetoric of immediacy," then there are no alternatives to "gradualism."

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temporality of human experience, however, all life, whether enlightened or unenlightened, is "gradual," that is, susceptible to change over time. How would this be true of enlightened mind? Unless we conceive of this state of mind as permanent, not subject to change and not amenable to deepening or transformation of any kind, even enlightenment would be understood as gradual, that is, as process. Although no reflection on this question appears in the early Huang Po literature, we can glean an answer to the question from later *koan* practice into which these texts were drawn. The sequence of *koans* and the ongoing character of practice beyond initial "sudden awakenings" both imply that enlightenment entails the unfolding of mind over time. Although Buddhist mythology can imagine an end to this process – the state of Buddhahood wherein non-finite powers have been attained – Zen texts don't always concur. Instead, the openness and bottomlessness of reality sometimes lead Zen reflection toward the conclusion that enlightenment is not something definite at all, but rather the ongoing opening of awareness and the continual perfecting of responsiveness without end. Although Huang Po's sermons don't include reflection on the subsequent unfolding of enlightenment, neither do they imagine an infinite state beyond ordinary life in the world. Huang Po's earliest literature has already demythologized the state of enlightenment. To be enlightened is still to be human, and, therefore, always to be on the way, always immersed in particular circumstances in response to which finite decisions will need to be made.

If we assume this understanding, then what can we make of the suddenness of awakening? The figure of suddenness appears in two forms in these texts. The first invokes the agency of the practitioner. It takes the discursive form: "If you would suddenly let go of your concepts, then you would awaken." Here "sudden awakening" is a leap that "ought" to be made, an act of agency. Secondly, however, sudden breakthrough is presented as that which befalls the practitioner, less something done than something to which one might fall prey. In the first place, this discourse shows the practitioner the goal toward which one must gradually practice, the ability in faith to let go of the forms of subjectivity that secure our present state of being. The second form would appear to describe the experience of awakening subsequent to the act of letting go. In this case, having released the subjectivity of agency or control, awakening is experienced as that which comes upon the practitioner beyond his or her own doing. These dimensions of sudden awakening both require further specification.

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The "leap" is an important image in the Huang Po texts, as it is elsewhere in Zen literature. Huang Po's image of awakening is a decisive "leap off a hundred foot pole." How is this act of suddenness related to gradual practice? Like everyone else, Zen initiates cannot simply set aside their current self-understanding in order to be someone else – suddenly. Self-understanding can, however, be gradually called into question, but only through the postulation of some new form of understanding (even if the new understanding is simply that all understanding must be released). The new understanding, accumulated in both doctrinal and non-doctrinal meditation, gradually dislodges the old. The difference between them, ideally, is that the new one embodies "emptiness"; it contains structures signifying openness and lack of closure, and it illustrates this openness in its own tentativeness about itself and all other doctrinal positions. Emptiness proclaims its own emptiness, and, in so doing, points beyond itself. The process of questioning and self-questioning is inherently gradual; old structures of experience slowly dissolve, first intellectually and then down to the level of practice and daily comportment. This process is implied in the character of the Huang Po texts. The texts say, implicitly, "think these thoughts, and, having done that, think these other thoughts." This is a gradual, disciplined process, as all reflection is. For example, Huang Po chastises the thought of gradual achievement. Instead, he instructs us not to regard ourselves as the cause of sudden transformation because such regard only closes off the posture that will enable breakthrough – openness to what is beyond the self. Nevertheless, this thought does function gradually to condition the possibility of sudden breakthrough.[45]

The final act of agency is pictured as a leap. The leap abandons the secure and familiar dimensions of ordinary subjectivity. In this act, the practitioner releases him or herself into "emptiness," the groundless ground that the texts call the "great mystery." Because what ground there is is groundless, this leap into the abyss is described as frightening, the abandonment of the known self and its secure ground. It is frightening because what lies ahead is unknown, a mystery beyond the practitioner's control and determination. Only the well-cultivated practitioner can and will make this leap; it clearly requires the gradual accumulation of faith. Yet this act appears as a requirement. One version of it, in the *Mumonkan koan* collection, number five, is Hsiang-yen's parable of the Zen practitioner hanging

[45] See Gregory, *Sudden and Gradual*, for a variety of Buddhist interpretations of the meaning of sudden breakthrough and gradual accumulation.

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by his teeth from a branch high up on a tree. The question posed to him as he hangs there – why had Bodhidharma come from the west? – can only be answered in the act of letting go. Until he can let go, he hangs there in agony and anxiety. When the agony and anxiety are finally released, so is the self – sudden breakthrough.

Why is sudden awakening envisioned as release into the void; why not into the graceful arms of the Buddha or into the Pure Land or onto the solid ground of greater security? The image here fits the conception, and, no doubt, the experience. As Huang Po pictures it, the Buddha obtained "nothing" in enlightenment – no knowledge, no secure ground, no assurances, no certainties. In enlightenment, the Buddha did not escape the contingencies and exposures that are inherent to life in the flux. He was not enlightened in the sense of being infused with the light of complete knowledge. Instead, the Huang Po texts pictured enlightenment as a shattering of subjectivity, a de-centering of the self in its exposure to the groundlessness of all beings. The illusion of human mastery is dispelled and the contingency of freedom acknowledged. Therefore, the Huang Po texts have Bodhidharma pose the challenge of "enlightenment" as follows: "When we recognize the nature of mind, all we can say is that it is unthinkable. In understanding, nothing is attained; when we obtain it, we cannot say we 'know.' When I teach you this matter, can you withstand it?"[46] Enlightenment, in this image, is a human comportment in view of the abandonment of all solid grounds, including the search for such grounds. Release into the experience is simultaneous with release of all claims to possess, to grasp, and to know. It follows the concept "emptiness" into its denial of all claims to truth and absoluteness, including its own claim to know something ultimately truthful about all claims.

Even though the practice of seated meditation is rarely a theme in the Huang Po texts, it is clear that we cannot imagine their meaning without reflecting on the conjunction of the text's doctrinal assertions and meditative exercise. After realizing, once again, that the thinking practice prescribed in the texts *is* meditation, we must also imagine the role of non-conceptual meditation in this context. Although the practices differ, both, it seems, serve the same function. The emptying capacity of the doctrine parallels and supports the emptying capacity of mental exercises aimed at stilling the mind. The thoughts prescribed by Huang Po can only be thought in the context of a disciplined and quiet mind; the

[46] T. 48, p. 383ab;

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discipline of quieting the mind can only be performed in the context of thoughts which present and articulate "reasons" for such quieting. Both seek to de-center the ego and to clear the mind, creating in it an opening within which the manifestation of images within the mind, or forms within emptiness, can occur without grasping and securing. This expansive openness is described as difficult and anxiety-provoking. Opening to larger spheres beyond the self discloses the self's groundlessness and mortality – its own emptiness. In this sense, enlightenment is not simply a matter of personal fulfillment, a psychological self-improvement. Instead, abandoning the security of self-understanding, it entails exposure to transpersonal contexts beyond the self.

One image of enlightenment in Huang Po and in other Zen texts from this period was that of a "mind like wood or stone." This image was so much in contrast to Blofeld's understanding of what "enlightenment" was, cross-culturally, that he continued to use these metaphors as images of "unenlightenment," in spite of their obvious use to the contrary in both *Huang Po* and *Hui Hai*. Therefore, while translating the images in the text one way, in his introductions to these translations he continued to write: "Yet this does not mean that we should make our minds blank, for then we should be no better than blocks of wood or lumps of stone; moreover, if we remained in this state, we should not be able to deal with the circumstances of daily life."[47] We can surely sympathize with Blofeld's reluctance to accept a "mind like wood or stone" as an authentic image of awakening. After all, wood and stone are relatively unresponsive, unattuned, and unaware. In what sense are they *like* the mind? In alternative senses, obviously. All metaphors are limited in their analogical capacity. To be a metaphor requires both identity and difference. In the numerous passages where mind is to be understood in terms of the images of wood and stone, some dimension of their identity is explicated. Enlightened mind is like wood or stone in that "they do not discriminate"; in that "they do not seek for anything"; in that "they accept what is as it is and open themselves to be moved by reality." In other respects, clearly, wood and stone are not like the enlightened mind. The sense in which they are, however, is important in Huang Po. This sense corresponds to the negative dimension of practice, the conception of the way as abandonment, letting go, non-grasping and non-seeking. Huang Po instructs his hearers to practice the thought that "in reality, there is nothing to be

[47] Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 20; or see Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 132.

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grasped."[48] Therefore, let go of the search for security, for stable and permanent ground. Place yourself in the open, exposed to the world. Do not grasp for anything because, no matter what image of the goal guides your seeking, it will prove to be inadequate. "Above all, have no longing to become a future Buddha; your sole concern should be, as thought succeeds thought, to avoid clinging to any of them."[49] No doubt, initially, the state of non-seeking must be sought. The Huang Po texts are certainly aware of the fundamental role of effort and discipline. Yet, in the end, effort is to circle back in upon itself, emptying its own activity, until non-effort is indeed effortless. Therefore, Huang Po says: "This is not something which you can accomplish without effort, but when you reach the point of clinging to nothing whatever, you will be acting as the Buddhas act. This will indeed be acting in accordance with the saying: Develop a mind which rests on nothing whatever."[50] This same kind of self-negation in the state of enlightenment appears to apply to Buddhist thought or to doctrine. Although the ideas of Buddhism must be thought, at the highest level the content of this thought is the relinquishment of thought, its emptiness: "Relinquishment of everything is the Dharma, and he who understands this is a Buddha, but the relinquishment of all delusions leaves no Dharma on which to lay hold."[51] Holding to the teachings that teach release was essential to the practice in Huang Po monastery. Consistent releasement, however, requires that, in the end, these teachings also be released. This is the image of Buddhas, the image of enlightenment in Huang Po. The process of Zen practice is thought to lead, not to definitive knowledge or grounding in certainty, but rather to an openness better characterized by "letting go." Therefore, the literature of Huang Po does not propose a conception of the "true self," nor does it conclude in an account of "the way things really are." Instead, it suggests practices of thought and images of masters who let go of thought even while thinking. Although the text is therefore unsystematic and sometimes inconsistent, what it offers instead is a mode of textuality and form of practice that are inventive, ironic, open, and free.

"Letting go" is Huang Po's worldly and practical analogue to the formal Buddhist concept of "no-self." For Huang Po, letting go is "losing oneself in enlightenment." Correlatively, the kind of truth experienced

[48] Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 111. [49] Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 106.
[50] T. 48, p. 383b; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 62. [51] T. 48, p. 381a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 40.

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in enlightenment is ungraspably not a possession of the experiencing subject. Instead, individual subjectivity is lifted up out of itself and transformed, not just on its own initiative but in the event of sudden disclosure. This event incorporates the self into a higher subjectivity that, while including subjectivity, transforms it by opening it to what is other than the self. Given this image, the creativity and inventiveness of the Zen master is not his or her own ingenuity. It is rather an openness of the self beyond itself in listening and attunement.

To be enlightened, then, is to be a willing and open respondent, to have achieved an open reciprocity with the world through certain dimensions of self-negation. Huang Po pictures the enlightened patriarchs in real-life situations effacing themselves so that the true contour of the situation comes to disclosure in them. They encounter the world, not through acts of will and mind primarily, but through relinquishment. Opening their own minds and will, the larger context of the situation comes to manifestation through them.[52] Two Buddhist examples might prove helpful in our attempt to imagine this kind of selflessness. Our first is the character of Zen conversation, often translated as "encounter dialogue," which is chronicled in a great deal of Zen literature. These narratives of dialogical encounter between two Zen practitioners display release of self in practice. Conversations, like games, move back and forth, neither participant controlling or preplanning the movement of words and images. Each, to the extent of their awakening, opens him- or herself to the encounter as a purified respondent, responding freely and without preplanned intention to what has just been said by the other. Neither the conversation nor its resultant disclosure are the subjective accomplishment of either interlocutor. Nor is it, in another sense, their joint construction. Opening themselves to the unexpected, both await disclosure, the moment in the conversation when open minds find themselves in an event of insight that is not their own product. The *Lin-chi lu* is especially interesting as a record of encounter dialogue[53] in that it pictures Lin-chi attuned, more than anything else, to moments of failure in dialogue. These are moments when Lin-chi catches his interlocutor in

[52] To my mind the best model for this overarching form of mental practice is Gadamer's analogy of the game. In playing a game, we are lifted up out of ourselves and put into play. Our actions are not determinations of our own wills and minds primarily; they are determined both by the understanding and rules of the game and by the particular movements of the game. Our actions are responses to the moves of others and to the point of the game. See *Truth and Method*, pp. 91–108.

[53] Many of these dialogues include Huang Po as interlocutor even though they were written several centuries after his life.

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hesitation, planning or thinking out the next response even before the appearance of that to which response is to be made. These are called moments of "faltering" when the exchange fails because one speaker has withdrawn into the self and out of the open space of dialogue.

Our second example is the Mahayana Buddhist teaching that enlightenment necessarily includes compassion. Compassion entails a sensitive awareness of a context larger than the self. Being selfless is being attuned to others. Open to others, the enlightened person is pictured as moved by others, responding to their plight as if it were his own. Compassion is not imagined as a duty for those who have succeeded. Nor is it considered, strictly speaking, an act of will. It is rather the opening of oneself to the possibility of being moved by others, an experienced identity between the self and the social world beyond the self. In this context, moving and being moved are indistinguishable. The Huang Po texts excel in teaching this reciprocity of human life in the world. They maintain that enlightenment is "neither subjective nor objective."[54] Neither activity nor passivity encompasses the simultaneity of grasping and being grasped. Beyond the duality of self and other, active and passive, the enlightened mind encompasses both poles. Active, the mind is resolute; it strives to open itself and to regard the other's welfare as its own. Passive, the mind openly awaits the disclosure of truth: silent composure, no grasping. In Zen and Buddhist thought, this opening is not simply a psychological attitude. It is more importantly an occurrence situated reciprocally within multiple relations to the world. On the basis of this reciprocity, enlightenment is described, from one "Mahayana" perspective, as enacted by forces beyond the individual self. Although the self must strive to open itself, and must adopt certain postures in that effort, it cannot on its own accomplish the event of "awakening." But it can be opened. There is indeed an art of existing being recommended by Huang Po in the texts. It entails taking certain postures, thinking certain thoughts, and comporting oneself in certain ways. All of these entailments, however, stand in service of living life as a temporal process, a movement of multidimensional occurrences that are not fully of our own doing. The texts teach both the practices of opening and the event of being opened.

The active component of enlightenment includes a wide variety of exercises, following Huang Po's principles, practices, and precepts. Enlightenment goes beyond that activity, however, to the kind of

[54] T. 48, p. 380b; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 38.

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spontaneous responsiveness we have described. The archetypical Zen life is described as fully spontaneous. Although spontaneity is constructed, both by oneself and by the tradition upon oneself,[55] the Zen ideal of excellence is that Buddhist cultivation proceed until the construction process has disappeared from view. This relationship between practice and spontaneity is analogous to that between doctrine and realization or thought and feeling. After one gives rise to the other, its presence in the other has been thoroughly transformed. Thus, Huang Po insists that "if one does not actually realize the truth of Zen from one's own experience, but simply learns it verbally and collects words, and claims to understand Zen, how can one solve the riddle of life and death?"[56] Realizing the truth of Zen takes time, practice, and effort. First one has to "learn it verbally" and "collect [some] words." Then, over time, this learning and these words must be internalized, until they are embodied and thus made spontaneous. Spontaneously feeling the truth of Zen occurs not in opposition to thinking this truth, but rather, in part, as a result of this practice of thought. "Feeling is not contrary to thought. It is thought made ours."[57]

The images and conception of enlightenment we have now described were, to some extent at least, unique to the Zen tradition in the era following Huang Po's time. What enlightenment had meant to earlier Chinese Buddhist monks was considerably different. Earlier images of enlightenment included a greater emphasis on a philosophical articulation of Buddhist thought. Earlier enlightened figures were often writers rather than orators like Huang Po. Few earlier images of the ideal feature excellence in the kind of "encounter dialogue" that comes to be stressed in Zen texts from Huang Po's time on. Comparing saintly images of the ideal in the Zen "recorded sayings" and "transmission" texts with the ideal as projected in the earlier "illustrious

[55] Bernard Faure is insightful in showing the ritualization of spontaneity in Zen, the "framing of ultimate truth by conventional truth." He wonders whether spontaneity or immediacy was "affirmed at the very historical moment when it is about to disappear, when mediations come to play an increasing role" (*Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 314). Faure's point is important and can be extended by being reversed. The "disappearance" of spontaneity is really its appearance, the moment when spontaneity is noticed and brought into thought and practice *as* spontaneity, as something desirable and worth cultivating. The mythical spontaneity that existed *in illo tempore*, before anyone knew it *as* spontaneity, was of a fundamentally different kind than that conceived and practiced after the "fall" into awareness of spontaneity. The entire Zen tradition, just because it is a tradition, postdates the kind of unconscious spontaneity that had by then become a theme – something to be valued, practiced, and theorized.

[56] T. 51, p. 266; Chang, *Original Teachings*, p. 105.

[57] Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling."

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monks" (*kao-seng*) literature yields strikingly different ways of imagining what the goal of Buddhism might be. The meaning of enlightenment had changed.

Moreover, Huang Po's image and conception of enlightenment have not continued to be fully persuasive, either in China or elsewhere. Criticisms of that image have, at various times and in various ways, come to be widely known and accepted. Following the height of Zen in China, for example, Neo-Confucians rose to ideological power in China; their image of human excellence came to prevail. Although these practitioners of *Tao-hsueh* had borrowed a great deal from the Zen of Huang Po, they were also very critical. Neither Huang Po nor other Zen masters ever had much to say about ethical and moral issues, about political issues, about artistic and other cultural practices. They seemed to be of little help when it came to economic and social organization; they had no suggestions concerning "right livelihood" for laypeople, and little advice to give concerning education, family life, and so on. Although Zen stories clearly had morals to tell, none of them seem to educate readers about issues of conscience. Neo-Confucians were harsh in their critique of these absences in the ideals and modes of excellence that Zen had to offer. Reformulating the image of human excellence, they added what seemed missing to them and subtracted what seemed irrelevant or unworthy of further valorization. This process has continued. Neo-Confucian images of excellence continued to evolve over centuries and, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were upstaged altogether by modern images, first from scientific rationalism, and then from others, especially Marx. Marxist/Maoist conceptions of the human ideal, even though adopted only recently, are currently under heavy pressure, already yielding to the formation of new ideals. An analogous process constitutes the history of western cultures, and continues today.

This history of human idealization is visible to us today in ways that it never has been to any culture in the past. We have available for our contemplation an unprecedented range of possible human ideals. Each representation of the ideal, precisely because it is an idealization as seen from a certain historical location, claims timeless truth for its image of excellence. When a newly emerging ideal is radically new, that is, when the change is as dramatic as a paradigm shift rather than a revision that stands more clearly within a traditional lineage, claims to finality and certainty tend to be heightened. Yet, in each case, historically conscious spectators can see that each claim to timeless truth is itself time-bound, a function of a specific set of historical convergences. An assumption

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about the timelessness of enlightenment as it is conceived in the texts can also be seen in Huang Po. The authors of these texts, and perhaps Huang Po himself, would not have been able to imagine that "true enlightenment" could possibly be much different than they had represented it. As we have seen, the kind of historical understanding at work in these texts assumed a "transmission" of mind from one enlightened master to another without substantial change. What that meant, in effect, was that the Buddha, from Huang Po's angle of vision, appeared to be a Zen master possessing all the powers and virtues of medieval Chinese life. In spite of the "emptiness" of all forms, enlightenment was conceived as a timeless essence, and thus no "impermanence" was predicated of it.

We have found one intriguing exception to this pattern, however. Although enlightenment was represented in one context as a permanent essence passed on from one master to another, in another context Huang Po was expected to "go beyond" his teacher in the form that his enlightenment would take. The teaching of "going beyond" shows the extent to which the tradition at that particular point was open to the possibility that enlightenment itself might be "impermanent." Clearly, the question had been posed: if all things are empty, what does the application of this concept to enlightenment mean? This is perhaps the most difficult question, more perplexing even than the "emptiness of emptiness." The conceptual elements to begin to answer this question are clearly there in the texts of Huang Po. Enlightenment is empty, and that implies that no thought or experience of enlightenment is final and absolute. What elements might encourage this answer? To a great extent, enlightenment in Huang Po has been defined as openness. Openness comes to be the virtue that it is in Huang Po because, among other reasons, impermanence was basic to the Buddhist world view. All things change; closure unwisely resists the change that is always under way. Openness to change is therefore wisdom itself. That even "openness" could take different forms and continually undergo change is no doubt difficult to see from any point of view. Clearly, however, some version of this principle has been seen, not only in Huang Po and his authors, but elsewhere in the Buddhist tradition as well. How does it occur that enlightenment will always entail some form of "going beyond?"

One impetus to change can be noticed in any sufficiently well-developed tradition of practice. Our understanding of the goal of practice changes as we progress toward it. Our understanding of excellence,

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in any dimension of human culture, is altered by our striving to attain it. We make progress not only in our proximity to the goal, but in our conception of it as well.[58] If a cultural practice is successful, it will lead to a series of reformulations of its own "reason for being."[59] Huang Po's Zen is part of just such a reformulation. As the tradition evolves, each image of the goal ends up serving as a means to some future goal. Although the present form of enlightenment always takes the form of the unsurpassable, its ultimacy is sooner or later undermined by transformations in other dimensions of the context or point of view from which its unsurpassability seemed obvious. Even new ways of speaking about the goal, new means of practicing it, and new ways of expressing it, will eventually lead to the necessity of "going beyond" what was previously sought.

While the Enlightenment rationalism that is still very much our heritage assumes progress or "going beyond" primarily in the form of greater rigor and consistency in current thinking and practice, romanticism attunes us to the possibility that insight might open entire dimensions of thought, practice, and experience not now available to us. Romanticism is the dimension of our selves and culture most open to thoroughgoing transformation in light of some form of otherness. Moreover, these two dimensions of heritage are, and always have been, so thoroughly intertwined that openness to radically new dimensions of human life is also an imperative placed upon us by critical reason. Critical reason, which now recognizes more thoroughly than it ever has the finitude and historicity of all culture, comes to the realization that a conception and practice of "ongoing enlightenment" is superior to "static" conceptions of enlightenment. "Ongoing enlightenment" in this sense is a process without end. Since all forms of excellence give way to new and revised forms, ongoing attentiveness to the process of deepening current conceptions of excellence is perhaps legitimately the most enduring and important dimension of "enlightenment."

In the current world cultural situation, it is clear that the most promising resource for insights that might reshape our ideals is cross-cultural and cross-historical reflection. Just as modernity in Europe derived in part from Europe's encounter with Islamic culture and, through it, Europe's first full-scale appropriation of a legacy from Greece and

[58] "The very process of trying to obtain what one values may change what it is that one values" (MacIntyre, *Whose Justice*, p. 41).

[59] "It is one of the marks of the flourishing of such a developing system of thought and practice that from time to time its telos is reformulated" (MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, p. 149).

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Rome, similarly China and other Buddhist cultures have reshaped their thinking and practice through creative encounter with the west. Openness to previously underdeveloped forms of enlightenment – science, political structures, and so on – although no doubt forced upon Asia by the exigencies of historical pressure, have brought far-reaching transformation to traditional Asian ideals. Chinese enlightenment in the tradition of Huang Po and others has been broadened and expanded by encounter with images of enlightenment provided by Darwin, Mill, and Marx. Since, in view of Kant's definition of enlightenment, the "immaturity" from which we would be liberated turns out to take a surprising range of historical forms, so must enlightenment. The process of such revolutionary reflection continues in China today.

Can those of us in English-language cultures be similarly transformed by our encounter with Asia? We not only can, we already have, although perhaps not to the extent and depth of the East Asian transformation. Although romanticism has shown us ways in which it might be possible to learn from Asian culture, both the range of possibilities and the scope of this learning are so far limited – immature. Nevertheless, it is already the case that "enlightenment" in English has incorporated connotations and nuances from Asia. When the word "enlightenment" is said, Huang Po, via Blofeld and now others, is there, however distant in the background. This inevitable inclusion, which we can still choose either to cultivate or to ignore, expands and deepens the repertoire of possibilities for meaning and practice already inherent in the traditions of western culture. If "enlightenment" is to symbolize excellence of human being, the best form of life currently imaginable, however defined, then the question posed by Kant and Dogen at the beginning of this chapter – what is enlightenment? – is ours as well. We have no choice but to answer the question by filling in its content for use in our lives. Although we may or may not do this in principle, that is, in thought, we will all do it in practice by living one way rather than another, for better or worse. If we do it thoughtfully and with integrity, then our meditations on Zen will simply be part of this questioning process wherein we too ask ourselves – what is the form of enlightenment most worthy of our striving? Moreover, by criteria acceptable to both Huang Po and Kant, the individuals and the cultures that are most authentically open to the possibility of learning something new and valuable from others, and who most creatively and rigorously engage in the process of "application" to their lives, will also be the individuals and cultures that will come to define for us our own future images of enlightenment.

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