

MIND: the “Great Matter” of Zen

It is equally deadly for a mind to have a system or to have none.
Therefore it will have to decide to combine both.

Friedrich Schlegel¹

Question: What is the Buddha?

Answer: Mind is the Buddha and No Mind is the Way?

Huang Po²

Of all the symbols in the Huang Po texts, and all the issues of concern there, “mind” is clearly primary. Mind is the matter of the text – the “Great Matter” (*ta-shih*) to which all other concerns are subordinated. Therefore, in his Preface, P’ei-hsiu wrote that Huang Po “transmitted only ‘One Mind’ (*I-hsin*), aside from which, there is no other *dharma*.”³ Given the frequency of the topic, and the extent to which it encompasses all other concerns in the Huang Po literature, we can easily concur with P’ei-hsiu’s observation. We can also see why some Zen editor rather early in the history of this text named the first collection of these Huang Po materials *The Essential Teachings of Mind Transmission* (*Ch’uan-hsin fa-yao*). If these are indeed the “essential teachings,” our meditations must focus here.

The text begins with the following lines: “The Master said to me [P’ei-hsiu]: All Buddhas and all sentient beings are only ‘One Mind.’ There is nothing else . . . Right before you, that’s it!”⁴ If, as P’ei-hsiu’s Preface claims, Huang Po’s only teaching was the doctrine of the “One Mind,” we can now see why that is the case – “There is nothing else.” The “One Mind” “exceeds all boundaries”⁵ and therefore encompasses everything. This sense of the unity of all things, an awareness of the whole of things symbolized by mind, is represented in the text as requiring long-term

¹ I Quoted from Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 105.

² T. 48, p. 384b. ³ T. 48, pp. 379b-c; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 27.

⁴ T. 48, p. 379c; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 29. ⁵ T. 48, p. 379c.

and exacting cultivation. Overwhelmingly, the texts claim, people experience only the diversity of things, their separateness and distinct identities. Only rarely is this ordinary state of mind intersected by awareness of the interconnectedness and unity of all things. Nevertheless, this “identity” is represented as somehow more fundamental and, therefore, more difficult to appropriate. Moreover, the unity and “sameness” of all things is their “Buddha nature”: “Since Mind is the Buddha, it encompasses all things from the Buddhas to the most insignificant insect – these all share the Buddha nature. Their essence is the same ‘One Mind.’”⁶ Although ordinarily we may see only their separateness, all things are nonetheless united in this “essence.” To make this point, the text maintains that this essence is “like one container of the element mercury. Although it separates and moves in all directions, it will once again reunite into an identical whole.”⁷

The texts’ favored image of “mind” is “space.”⁸ “Mind is like space,” the text says, before going on to specify the sense in which that is so. “Mind is like space, limitless and immeasurable.”⁹ “Mind is like space, lacking even the slightest characteristic or form.”¹⁰ “Mind is like space, undifferentiated and undiminished.”¹¹ The “infinity” of “mind” is figured in both spatial and temporal metaphors, however. Mind not only encompasses that which is far off in space, but also the temporally distant, everything that has ever been and will be.

Elsewhere in the text, the image of the “one” is not identity or wholeness, but the unity of “origins”: the “One Mind” is the “source,” the “well-spring,” the “earth,”¹² the “womb,” that from which all things have come into being. Nevertheless, the unity of “origins” is understood as an identity in essence – all things are one in that they derive from and return to the same “source.” “Mind” is to all things as “earth” is to all earthly entities – their “ground,” their “source,” that from which they originate and of which they are essentially composed. In this way the text brings together the two images of mind as “source” and as “substance.” Thus it says: “In correspondence to ‘conditions,’ mind becomes things.”¹³ “It is pure Mind, which is the source of everything and which, whether appearing as sentient beings or as Buddhas, as the rivers and

⁶ T. 48, p. 386b; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 87. ⁷ T. 48, p. 386a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 84.

⁸ To explore this theme further, see Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, chapter 6.

⁹ T. 48, p. 379c; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 29. ¹⁰ T. 48, p. 380a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 30.

¹¹ T. 48, p. 380a; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 31.

¹² Iriya Yoshitaka traces the symbol of the earth from this text back through the tradition in *Denshin Hoyo*, p. 37. ¹³ T. 48, p. 386b; see Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 87.

mountains of the world, as the world of form or the formless, it is all one identity, without the characteristics of self and other."¹⁴ These cosmological and metaphysical images are not unique to Zen. Indeed, they are borrowed from earlier forms of Chinese Buddhism, particularly from the Hua-yen¹⁵ and T'ien-t'ai schools.¹⁶ The Taoist inspiration behind them is also unmistakable; meditations of this kind had been deeply embedded in Chinese culture for centuries.

It was only in well-developed stages of Chinese Buddhism, however, that "mind" becomes the central element in this cosmology. Yogacara (*Wei-shih*) – "consciousness only" – reflections stand at the origins of this connection. In what sense is "mind" the source of all things? One sense of this is that whatever makes its appearance, that is, becomes perceivable or conceivable, does so within the mind. Therefore, Huang Po's *Wan-ling lu* says: "The ten thousand *dharma*s all derive from the mind. If my mind is 'empty,' then all *dharma*s are empty . . . they are all the same substance of One Mind."¹⁷ The world appears as it does, in complex differentiation, as an effect of the mind. When the mind "regroups" itself, "unity" is its overriding characteristic. Unity, however, does not abolish differentiation. Instead, unity appears everywhere within differentiated things. Therefore the text says: "*Within* seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing, recognize the foundations of mind. Although the basis of mind is not identical with these forms of knowing, it is also not separate from them . . . Do not seek mind apart from these forms of knowing . . . Mind is neither identical to them nor different from them."¹⁸ One implication of these lines is that "One Mind," or the "Buddha," cannot be experienced "objectively." In this particular case, therefore, "experience" occurs without there being an object of experience. Seeking for anything "objectively" will miss the point. Having set out on the quest, however, it is difficult not "to seek" for something; nevertheless, that is the demand of Huang Po's *dharma*. Hence, the text says: "There is only One Mind and nothing to be obtained. This mind is the Buddha. When students of the Way do not awaken to this fundamental mind, they superimpose mind upon mind and seek the Buddha beyond themselves, grasping for form and striving through practices . . . This is false *dharma*, not the way of enlightenment."¹⁹ "Conceptions" of the

¹⁴ T. 48, p. 380b; see Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Iriya Yoshitaka discusses the Hua-yen influence on this text in *Denshin Hoyo*, p. 35.

¹⁶ Biographical narratives about the young monk, Huang Po, as early as the *Chodang chip*, have him journeying to Mount T'ien-t'ai for instruction. ¹⁷ T. 48, p. 384c; see Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 72.

¹⁸ T. 48, p. 380b; see Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 37. ¹⁹ T. 48, p. 380a; see Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 31.

Buddha or of Mind, although clearly required as a prerequisite to the search, may prevent “awakening.” Therefore, Huang Po claims that “If you conceive of a Buddha, you will be obstructed by that Buddha.”²⁰ The “One Mind” is not something to which practitioners could be individually related. On the contrary, the understanding required in this case is that every act of relation to something in the world is at the same time a relation to “mind.” “Mind” or the “Buddha” is encountered in every presence, not independently as one presence among others. Instead, it is always there within the presence of anything at all. This accounts for Huang Po’s rejection of “seeking” in the midst of the “search.” “Seeking” for the Buddha is not possible; nor is it necessary, since the Buddha is always already present within every experience. Mind is not a form within the totality of forms, yet it is there as the “formless” background on the basis of which all forms make their appearance. This “background” is essentially “open,” “empty.” It cannot be conceptually fixed or determined. The effort to place yourself before it necessarily excludes you from it. Therefore, the effort required in Huang Po’s Zen is distinct from other acts of agency because it is “not grasping,” not an act of “knowing” or determination.

If Huang Po’s “One Mind” is not an object of experience, neither is it a subject. Nevertheless, conceiving “mind” as subjectivity itself is clearly a more tempting option. Many Buddhists, including Zen Buddhists, have opted for this conception. “One Mind,” on this view, is the subjectivity behind all individual subjectivities – consciousness itself. Throughout his lengthy career, John Blofeld can be seen to have held various positions on this issue. In his Huang Po translation, his uncertainty on the matter guided him between postures such that no definite stand would be obvious. Later, however, when he was translating Huihai, he followed the text in identifying “Buddha nature” with sentient beings for whom “consciousness” is the defining characteristic. Objects of consciousness, he thought, were “illusory creations of Mind. Whatever is illusory, such as plants and rocks, cannot share the Buddha-Nature or self-nature which pertains only to Mind.”²¹ This position has serious weaknesses, however, and the Huang Po texts show every evidence of avoiding them. Rather than isolating “mind” from objects of mind, the text correlates them. The distinction between “inner” and “outer,” between the “mental” and the “material,” is subjected to repeated critique. No “mind” exists outside the awareness of “objects”;

²⁰ T. 48, p. 384c; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 71. ²¹ Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 139.

and no objects exist other than those in mind. Thus Huang Po claims that in "mind," there is "no subject, no object, no self, no other."²² "Mind and objects of mind are undifferentiated."²³ They are "empty," that is, constituted by their essential relation, and inconceivable independently. Mind and world "co-arise" and depend essentially upon each other. This "essence (*t'i*) is One Mind."²⁴ Early Buddhist meditation theory had conceived of this essential correlation in the theory of the "18 *dhatus*," the senses, their objects, and the relations between them. Huang Po draws upon this well-known doctrine in his effort to say what "mind" is: "The six senses, their objects, and the connections between them are selfless and without a controlling agent – they are all empty. There is only fundamental mind which is all encompassing."²⁵ This fundamental connectedness of "mind" and "world," their essential unity, is a frequent theme in the texts.²⁶ Their "reciprocity" is primordial, that is, it constitutes a limit to conception and experience, and is therefore given the name: "emptiness." Mind is just this emptiness.

On the grounds of their essential reciprocity, one common line in the texts is the claim that "mind cannot see mind" because, if it could, the mind seen would be an object.²⁷ Therefore, the strategy of splitting mind into two parts, subject and object, so that mind can be conceived as grasping itself, fails. Any "mind" thus "seen" is clearly not mind. Therefore, like his student, Lin-chi, Huang Po poses the question: "when we search for mind, who is the one, at that very moment, doing the searching?"

One other theme, communicated in a "saying" basic to all participants in the tradition of "Hung-chou Zen" to the effect that "everyday mind is the Way" (*p'ing ch'ang hsin shih tao*), recapitulates much of the foregoing. This saying brings to mind the paradox of proximity – the truth that the "mind," precisely because it is so close, will elude its seekers. "Dualistic" practices, those that encourage us to turn away from the world in search of religious realization, derive from understandable conceptual mistakes. "Mind" is the open region, the "empty ground" found in and among things, but never as one of them, never an object set over against the one who would experience it. "Everyday mind is the Way" is

²² T. 48, p. 384b; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 67. ²³ T. 48, p. 384c; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 72.

²⁴ T. 48, p. 384c; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 72. ²⁵ T. 48, p. 380c; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, pp. 38–39.

²⁶ It can also be seen clearly in texts just prior to Huang Po. For example, Tsung-mi writes: "Mind and objects are mutually supportive . . . There has never been a mind without objects" (Broughton, *Kuei-feng Tsung-mi*, p. 177).

²⁷ Tsung-mi's writing on this theme is difficult to surpass. See Broughton, *Kuei-feng Tsung-mi*, p. 194. Also, see the work on Tsung-mi by Peter Gregory.

posited as a corrective to monastic otherworldliness.²⁸ The saying works against the tendency to turn “dualistically” away from “samsara” in order to meditate upon its “other,” “nirvana,” as if nirvana were simply another world more splendid than this one. The reversal demanded in Huang Po’s “everyday mind” is significantly more radical a conception than that. It imagines “One Mind” encountering us in all presences, precisely in their relations and not in a relation independent of them. Any rejection of the diverse world of “presences” simultaneously prohibits awareness of mind. Thus the text instructs:

People often desire to escape the world in order to quiet the mind, to abandon activities in order to grasp principles. They fail to realize that this practice uses the mind to obstruct the world; it uses principles to obstruct activities. Just empty your mind and the world will be emptied of itself. Just release your grasp on principles, and activities will themselves be released.²⁹

If “everyday mind is the Way,” then there is nothing to escape except abstraction from the everyday. There is also nothing to seek since “seeking” cannot avoid positing that which is sought. Instead, “mind” is always already there, prior to all “seeking.”

Had Huang Po known that his words on this topic might reach us, however, he might not have been so eager to identify “everyday mind” with the Buddhist Way. After all, “everyday mind” is what people enter the monastery to overcome. Surely, Huang Po does not mean that they should just forget Zen and go back to their villages. Surely he didn’t mean that they were doing just fine before they arrived. A powerful critique of “everyday mind” must be the origin and essential point of “Buddhism.” The point of valorizing “everyday mind” is highly contextual, the appropriate context being the community of those who have already dedicated their entire lives to penetrating beneath the dull conformities of “everyday mind,” to the search for something beyond it. Huang Po’s rhetorical strategy here is *upaya*, “skillful means.” What he says depends on the character of those to whom he speaks as they are contextualized in the highly focused world of monastic seeking.

This “skill” or “strategy” leads the Huang Po literature to criticize and

²⁸ This point leads me to question Bernard Faure’s identification of an “extremism” in Zen with respect to its use of the “two truth” doctrine in Mahayana Buddhism (*The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, p. 58). Faure regards the tradition’s “new emphasis on the phenomenal world” as a nondialectical assertion of one realm or one truth, a “unilateral” reinterpretation of Madhyamika. I see much in these texts as just the opposite: a “worldly” play on the “plurality of planes” staked out by Madhyamika’s multiple truths. ²⁹ T. 48, pp. 381c–382a; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 48.

to undermine its own doctrine of the “One Mind.” Having constructed an elaborate theory of “mind,” the work of “deconstruction” begins at once: “Mind is in itself no-mind, yet neither is it no-mind. Grasping mind as ‘no-mind’ turns it into an existing thing. Simply attune to it in silence and let go of your conceptions. Thus it is said: ‘The way of words is severed and mental activity eliminated.’”³⁰ Almost as quickly as concepts of “mind” are posited, they are taken back. Through these means, the Huang Po texts resist conversion into a system; elaborate theories are difficult to derive from them. The point of the theories when joined to their own intentional subversion appears rather to be “release,” the act of letting go of concepts once formed. One important line from Huang Po reads: “If there is dwelling in ‘views,’ this is heresy [*wai-tao* – literally, “outside the Way”].”³¹ “Heresy,” on this account, is not the error of holding incorrect views; it is rather holding to “views” at all. How could that be? How is it possible not to hold “views?” Surely it isn’t possible, at least not for any form of human life that we might be tempted to valorize. The concern in this case appears to be directed instead to *how* “views” are held. A great deal of the Zen literature from this time adopts a playful and constantly shifting attitude toward particular ways of conceiving the quest. Numerous views are expressed; that is unavoidable. When they are expressed, however, they are soon thereafter withdrawn, or criticized, or in some way placed in alternate light. The standing joke in Hung-chou Zen was that Ma-tsu, the founder of this Buddhist “style,” was forever altering his doctrinal stance such that his followers never knew what to “believe”:

A monk asked: Master, why do you say “mind is the Buddha?”

Ma-tsu said: To stop children from crying.

The monk asked: When they stop, what then?

Ma-tsu replied: Neither mind nor Buddha!³²

As monks set out on the path of Zen, they retrain their minds to focus, not on the world, but on the Buddha and the *dharma*. Within that context of retraining the mind, Huang Po at some point responds with what must have seemed a shocking redefinition: “One who sees that there is no Buddha and no Dharma is called a monk!”³³ And as to his theory of “mind”: “mind is not mind!”³⁴ Holding either the conception of “mind” or “no-mind” “imprisons” the mind “between two iron mountains.”³⁵

³⁰ T. 48, p. 380a; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 34.

³¹ T. 48, p. 385a; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 74.

³² Pas, *The Recorded Sayings of Ma-tsu*, p. 102, translation adapted.

³³ T. 48, p. 385b; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 76.

³⁴ T. 48, p. 383a; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 59.

³⁵ T. 48, p. 385a; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 76.

This stream of negations, however, does not in the end amount to a philosophical affirmation of “groundlessness.” Even that possibility has been revoked. Instead, we are best off considering it a meta-philosophical recommendation about how to hold the views that inevitably occupy our minds. As with many other forms of Buddhism, “no grasping” is the way.

One plausible reading of the Zen teachings on “One Mind” and “no-mind,” one that, as Huang Po demands, doesn’t “objectify” the goal of practice, is that the state of mind sought is simply the “pure presence” of the world as it presents itself to experience, without the distorting lens of concept construction and emotional projection. This way of reading Zen has been immensely attractive, and has several advantages. One of them – the most important – is that it seems to accord with many passages in the Huang Po texts, especially those that recommend the abandonment of conceptual practices and advocate an undivided “openness” of mind. For Huang Po, “no-mind is the absence of various states of mind.”³⁶ Another reason to give this view ample consideration is that it currently represents the “orthodox” view among both Japanese and English-language interpreters of Zen. Enlightened mind is the “pure presence of things as they are in and of themselves without the distortions of language, thought, and human interests.”

John Blofeld was attracted to the simplicity and concreteness of this view. Although hints of it appear in his *Huang Po*, he was able to articulate a clearer version a few years later in his *Hui Hai*. There, for example, he wrote that:

our minds will become like polished mirrors, reflecting every detail of the passing show and yet remaining unstained, perfectly unaltered by reflections of things, whether beautiful or hideous. Gradually we shall achieve utter tranquility; we shall cease responding to appearances with outflows of will, passion, desire or aversion; when things appear before us, we shall reflect them with our mirror-like awareness; when they have passed by, they will leave no stain and elicit from us not the smallest reaction.³⁷

Throughout Blofeld’s writing career, however, another position seemed to dominate his mind. Under the sway of this alternative position, Blofeld considered “enlightened mind” “an Ultimate Perfection lying beyond the realm of ever-changing forms.”³⁸ In this version, “mind” is “the Absolute,” “beyond the world of flux” and requiring of the practitioner a “Transcendental experience of Reality.”³⁹ These two

³⁶ T. 48, p. 380a; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 31. ³⁷ Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 22.

³⁸ Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 27. ³⁹ Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 55.

views remained in contention in Blofeld's mind throughout his writing career, appearing in his later works just as readily as in the early ones. Following Blofeld, however, other interpreters have developed the view of "mind" as "presence," particularly as Zen has come to be guided in the west by "Soto" interpretations more than the "Rinzai" views of Suzuki's initial transmission. In this later account, "Zen mind" is "pure experience," the immediate, direct apprehension of the objective world as it is on its own prior to the subjective mediation of language and thought. Purified mind witnesses "pure presence" and, adopting a meditative posture of "absolute openness," has no mediating effect on the way in which "presence" is manifest to mind.

As attractive as this pattern of understanding "Zen mind" may be, however, it will not withstand the contemporary scrutiny of Zen reading. It too will come to be seen as an illusory goal rather than as an accurate description of Zen mind. The "illusory" character of this position can be shown from a variety of perspectives, but, before going into further detail, let us see it briefly from two of these. The first is "deconstruction," one line of contemporary western thought. One of the primary themes of deconstruction as developed in the writings of Jacques Derrida and others is that "the dream of full presence," in any form, is a function of the desire to transcend finitude itself, a "theological" desire to abandon the human altogether. This desire, as the argument is developed, cannot be fulfilled and is best overcome. "Presence," rather than being a pure manifestation of the world, is "always already a representation," a function of the "system of signs" that will determine it. From this point of view, there is no sense in which the frameworks provided by human language and understanding can be avoided by those who experience in a "human" way.

Secondly, however, we can see how a thorough reading of several forms of Buddhist thought will also stand in the way of understanding "Zen mind" as "un-mediated, direct awareness of things as they are." From various Buddhist points of view, the search for "solid ground" is an illusory one, the result of desires that are best abandoned. Peeling back the layers of experience, we never arrive at the final layer – no pure experience at the foundations of mind. Instead, on Buddhist terms, we find "dependent origination," impermanence," and "no-self." This is to say that all experience, even experience that has been "reduced" through meditative concentration, will not have arrived at the "lowest common denominator." All experience is "empty," and to say this means that, for finite human beings, there is no "bottom" to the "void."

Whatever we find will come to be seen as interdependent and interlinked with something else, and thus, less than “final.” Therefore, when Huang Po claims that “mind is empty,” we are at least within the framework of traditional Buddhist interpretation to understand this as undermining our own desires to have arrived finally at the ultimate resting point of inquiry – something absolute and indubitable upon which “the correct mode of human being” can be established. It seems to me that our own meditation on Zen will falter at the point that we succumb to this desire and read “Zen mind” as the perfectly polished mirror.⁴⁰

One contemporary realization that will help us find our way through this issue is that “presence always includes absence.”⁴¹ This is to say that present within our field of experience (but not in the foreground and therefore “absent” or unknown) are always background factors which shape the experience to be what it is. What factors? First, clearly, all the innumerable elements upon which the objects of experience depend in order to be what they are. Here we mean simple “causal” elements that have brought these things into the world as what they are at precisely this moment of experience. Second, we can specify various background factors that constitute the “horizon” or “context” of any experience. This includes everything within the horizon of the senses of which we are not directly aware when we focus our attention, but which, nevertheless, sets the stage for the objects upon which we do focus. When we see a car moving toward children playing on the street our awareness is focused there. We don’t notice the street itself, the trees, power lines, buildings in the background, the roar of a distant lawnmower, an airplane, a barking dog, or even the children’s playful talk. But all of these non-focal elements “ground” our experience of that scene. Third, in the background of any experience is the “mind” of the experiencer, constituted as it is by specific “structures,” past experiences, memories, predilections, emotions, tendencies, genetic traits, dietary preferences, and on and on, so far removed that specific articulation is impossible. No matter how “pure” the mind of the Zen master, these remain. Indeed,

⁴⁰ For those experienced in reading Zen, the image of Hui-neng’s poem denouncing the doctrinal metaphor of the “polished mirror” will come to mind (and if it does you will be able to see that *your* mind is not a polished mirror but a “storehouse” of memories that you would not want to do without). Many historically contextualized motives for this narrative can be articulated. Nevertheless, it is also true that Hui-neng’s poem does mean that the understanding of the mind as a polished mirror is “empty,” that is, relative to specific contexts and by no means “universally true.” On this account, we would be mistaken to take literally the story that “Zen mind” is “pure presence.”

⁴¹ This statement, which comes to Derrida through Heidegger via other earlier sources, is also an excellent working definition of Buddhist “emptiness.”

in sum, these *are* the Zen master. Awareness always includes these background factors even when, as always, they are not the center of attention and we are not aware of their presence. The human mind is not a "blank slate," the *tabula rasa* sought in philosophy and science.⁴²

Recall that this account of mind is not just applicable to "thinking," but to "perception" as well.⁴³ "Meaning" is not something secondarily attached to what we see and hear. Perception already includes meaning in the moment of its arrival. We see cars and hear children's voices, not just abstract shapes, colors, and tones. Shapes, colors, and tones can be elements of awareness too, but only in abstraction, only when what initially appears has been reduced to something else. Perception always proceeds on the basis of understanding. As we saw in chapter 3, we always experience things "as" what they appear to be. This is true even when we are later determined to be wrong, and when, in confusion or ambiguity, we don't know what to understand them *as* except as "confused," "ambiguous," or "unknown." Can we conceive of any perception that is not grounded in understanding? If it were possible to "purify" our mind of all language, understanding, and past experience, is there any way we could function in the world or even be in the world? Not in any way that we would be inclined to consider a "human" way. The ideal of "pure experience" as it has been conceived by western interpreters of Zen appears now to be neither possible nor desirable.

If we reject the doctrine of mind as "pure experience," or give it extensive qualification as we will continue to do in this chapter, what

⁴² It is important to recognize that one of the reasons that the interpretation of "Zen mind" as "pure presence" has been as attractive as it has been is that it aligns with the western tradition of "epistemology" at the basis of science and modern philosophy. We have all learned that "objectivity" is to be valued, and that both truth and justice depend on our willingness to set aside our own interests and prejudices so that things can be seen as they are on their own. The fact that this same language, as well as specific means of actualization, were mirrored back to us from "Zen" made it naturally attractive. "Post-modern" philosophy of science, however, has qualified the claims of modern epistemology. Science does not require the kinds of "objectivity" once thought necessary in order to proceed with its practices. This is fortunate since it is now widely realized that "objectivity" of this kind is systematically impossible because it conflicts with human finitude. No set of practices leads to the "pure presence of things as they are in themselves," whether scientific or meditative. "Things" are always present to "minds" and minds are always complexly cultivated.

⁴³ Notice, however, that this entire set of questions about how to understand Zen is a matter of thinking, a highly theoretical and conceptual matter. None of us has "direct perception" of these matters. All of us, even the Zen master, has to think them out. Therefore, all of us, even the Zen master, could be wrong. The distinction between "immediate" and "mediated" experience is itself a highly "mediated" abstraction. It is clearly a "doctrine" about which conceptual "errors" can be made, and upon which new light can at any time be cast. For elaboration on the relation between "perception" and "conception," refer back to chapters 3 and 4.

options remain for understanding the element of “enlightenment” in Huang Po’s mind? Plenty! Lacking full presence, the “absence” or “void” can be experienced as “mystery.” Lacking secure and solid ground, the freedom and contingency of finite existence can be experienced. Lacking the closure of certainty, “openness” becomes the primary feature of the cultivated mind. These themes will constitute the “matter” of concern in the next chapter. Before they can be properly contextualized, however, we must ask ourselves what else Huang Po might have had in mind. If we cannot conceive of his mind as devoid of language, understanding, time, and thinking, what roles would each of these mental elements play in Zen experience?

We have already “rethought” the role of language in Zen. Drawing upon that reading, we can now place “language” in the context of “mind.” Language and the particular character of the human mind “co-arise.” While not identical, they are inseparable. If “mind,” for Huang Po and for our meditation on Zen, includes “objects of mind,” then we can extend the correlation: language and our experience of the world are inseparable. Each informs and structures the other.⁴⁴ If this is true, then “we have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around in the world generally.”⁴⁵ From our first socialization into the world to the very end of life, language gives us worldly orientation. This insight directs us to the character of Zen language. If we describe the Zen master as having an exceptional ability to function in the world, this would have a great deal to do with the development of an exceptional relation to language. It is not that the Zen master has access to a greater vocabulary to describe experience, nor that, unlike the rest of us, he or she has experiences that lie beyond the realm of description. These ways of conceiving language and experience are deeply “dualistic.” They assume that language and experience are each separate and distinct realms on their own that combine occasionally and inadequately when language is called upon to “capture” or “describe” experience. The problem here lies in the metaphor of “capture,” and in the assumption that the primary job of language is “description.” Huang Po’s sermons go on page after page without describing anything; they rarely intend to capture anything beyond the discursive context. They instruct, inform, define, command,

⁴⁴ Readers of Derrida will be reminded here of the conclusion in *Of Grammatology* that “the thing itself is a sign” because the “transcendental signified” dissolves into the bottomless network of signifiers (p. 50). This amounts to a decision to treat “signifier and signified,” or word and thing, as a correlated unity. ⁴⁵ Davidson, *Truth and Interpretation*, p. 446.

challenge, ridicule, prod, probe, and inquire, but expend very little energy in "describing."

Moreover, to the extent that we experience something *as* anything at all, it is already deeply enveloped in the mental context of language – it has already been implicitly "described" to us. Language and experience are carefully woven together in understanding. Although it is clear that John Blofeld and other romantics underwent dramatic new experiences in language, both in their travels to foreign lands and in their explorations of unusual experiences, they could only draw upon the discourse of modernity and its corresponding understanding of language to articulate their experience. For Blofeld, language was the "tool" of "representation," useful for description and communication. And this is the understanding through which he would read Huang Po's Zen. Therefore, in his introduction to *Huang Po*, he wrote:

The text indicates that Huang Po was not entirely satisfied with his choice of the word "Mind" to symbolize the inexpressible Reality beyond the reach of conceptual thought, for he more than once explains that the One Mind is not really MIND at all. But he had to use some term or other, and "Mind" had often been used by his predecessors.⁴⁶

This description of the process has it backwards; it places the experience of "mind" first and the language of "mind" second. First, Huang Po experienced "the inexpressible Reality beyond the reach of conceptual thought," and then, subsequently, in the process of deciding what to "name" it, chooses "mind" because his predecessors had "used" that name before. In fact, however, the word "mind" would have symbolized the quest and its goal from the very beginning of his career as a monk. The word "mind" would have led him to the experience of "mind." Huang Po would have heard sermons on mind, read texts on mind, been instructed in how to meditate on mind: "mind" was what he was after, and consequently, "mind" is what he obtained in experience. Although it does symbolize them, it should not surprise us that the word "mind" does not "capture" all of the intricacies of these sermons, texts, meditations, and experiences. It was also clearly in language that Huang Po and John Blofeld came to learn that there was an "inexpressible Reality beyond the realm of conceptual thought." Language suggests, concepts conceive, and experience seeks those very limits. The language of "inconceivability" for Blofeld, and its corresponding language in Chinese for Huang Po,

⁴⁶ Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 18.

were especially significant in the formation of Zen experience. A few other “symbols” in Zen language carry equally powerful effects. The word “silence” is a violation of silence that brings silence into the mind. Without this linguistic form, monks would never have practiced the silent meditation that they did. The word “formlessness” is a specific form that shapes a specific form of experience. The word “emptiness” is both an obstruction and a construction of its referent – “emptiness,” and hence it can be seen to perform both negative and positive linguistic functions. It is far from the case that language tags along behind experience. This can easily be seen where, on Blofeld’s account, it should not be seen: in the language of meditation. Language brings up the topic and the possibility of meditation in the first place. Language directs meditation and provides the necessary instructions. Language encourages meditation, sets the stage for it, inspires it, informs it, gives intentions for it, justifies it, defines it, broadens it, changes it, criticizes it, applauds it, improves it, and provides ways to understand it. Although language occasionally “describes” meditation, it never “captures” it. Given these other tasks, capturing is clearly beside the point. Even in the midst of silence, “Zen mind” is inconceivable apart from the language of Zen.

Closely linked to the presence of language in “mind” is the background of “understanding” that allows experience to take the particular shape that it does. “Understanding” here, as we have developed it, includes, but goes far beyond, our specific “beliefs” and “ideologies.” Understanding is largely preconscious; it is shaped by and contained in long-forgotten memories of past experiences, stories we have been told, and actions we have performed. Our bodily movements show the presence of understanding within them; specific rituals, customs, and forms demonstrate how we have come to be shaped as we are. The early Mahayana conception of a “storehouse consciousness” seems to express this background of understanding very well, beyond other functions that the concept has performed for Buddhists. In reference to Hui-hai’s use of the phrase, “The Great Sutra,” Blofeld writes in a footnote that “The Great Sutra is another term for Mind.”⁴⁷ Mind encompasses everything that can be said in all the sutras, even though, like the library of sutras, we don’t really know exactly what’s there. This enormous background of prior experience, mostly unconscious, structures the framework of our current experience, including “Zen” experience. Although some interpretations of Zen maintain that these specific cultural patterns

⁴⁷ Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, p. 147.

prevent authentic Zen experience, it seems to me that, in another more important sense, they make it possible. They provide vantage points on the world rather than barriers. "Enlightened Zen mind" cannot be thought to lack this understanding. Without understanding, we are left without functional abilities, and without experience.⁴⁸

As we have seen, the individual shape of "understanding" can be interpreted through the figure *as* and its various correlates. We understand this *as* a book and therefore know what to do with it. We understand that *as* meditation and therefore understand why we might want to do it. This figure of understanding can be seen throughout Blofeld's translation of Huang Po, and mine. Blofeld writes that Huang Po recommends that we regard sentient beings *as* shadows, doctrines *as* dreams, all minds *as* One, the world *as* formless, ourselves *as* no-self, and the mind *as* empty. Without this figure to inform our experience and to give it linguistic shape, we don't know what we experience, or that we experience at all.⁴⁹

This claim, however, does not include the further assertion that all experience is "theoretical," a matter of reflection and thought. Most experience is not, including most "Zen" experience. Clearly the Huang Po texts project a form of pretheoretical and prediscursive experience. We can see that, while the Huang Po texts draw us into a great deal of conscious intellectual activity, their goal is a form of experience beyond that activity. However, let us add to this three important points of qualification. First, the purpose of saying that Zen experience is prior to thought – pretheoretical – is to avoid its reduction to intellectual or rational exercise *as*, in Huang Po's opinion, it had been in earlier Chinese Buddhism. "Enlightenment" is not sophisticated thinking and, as Huang Po says, anyone who thinks it is won't get it. This "purpose," however, is specific and contextual. It does not mean, secondly, that "understanding" is not embedded within Zen experience. No human experience is devoid of understanding. Understanding both shapes Zen experience and results from it. Third, it is not true that intellectual thinking is something separate from and altogether uninvolved in enlightened

⁴⁸ It is commonly thought that "intuition" is prior to understanding or even an alternative to it. Learning from Heidegger on this point, however, I think not. Intuition is made possible by the particular shape of the world as it exists in understanding. "By showing how all sight is grounded primarily in understanding," Heidegger writes, "we have deprived pure intuition of its priority, . . . Intuition and thinking are both derivatives of understanding, and already rather remote ones" (*Being and Time*, p. 187).

⁴⁹ The issue of "frameworks" of understanding is one of the primary themes of discussion in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

experience. Huang Po's sermons are exercises in conceptuality, practices of the mind. They implore us to think this way rather than that. They teach us how to conceive of all things as "mind," among other things. These intellectual exercises set the stage for Zen experience and make it a structural possibility. They may even evoke or elicit this experience. We return to the role of intellectual activity shortly.

In addition to the constituent elements of language and understanding, we cannot conceive of "mind" apart from "time." Yet such is the demand made in some Zen doctrine. Although it was not clear to him how it might be so, John Blofeld's reading of Zen would lead him to insist that the Zen master's "mind" transcends time. Entering a "timeless" realm, the Zen master functions by means of access to a mode of understanding that is independent of all temporal considerations. Thus Blofeld would claim that "the state of mind of an Illumined man is independent of time-relationships."⁵⁰ Little reflection on this claim can be found in Blofeld's writing, however, in spite of the existence in the Buddhist canon of an impressively sophisticated "philosophy of time." Although "temporality" is not a central issue in the Huang Po texts, an occasional allusion to earlier Buddhist reflections on time does appear. Reading these from the context of this background literature, it is easy to see how Blofeld might have come to the conclusion that he did. For example, at the very end of the *Wan-ling lu*, Blofeld translates Huang Po as follows: "Avoid the error of thinking in terms of past, present, and future."⁵¹ The next sentence, however, goes on to make that very same "error": "The past has not gone; the present is a fleeting moment; the future is not yet to come."⁵² Huang Po is here thinking "time." Although no doubt these thoughts are intended as reasons why one ought not to think in temporal terms, they also demonstrate the impossibility of doing that.

As an example of the necessity of "time" to "mind," consider the basic Buddhist realization of "impermanence." In his experience of enlightenment, the Buddha realized that all things are impermanent, that is, all things change *over time*. Time is presupposed in the experience of change. You cannot recognize that things change unless you can juxtapose in your mind their present condition with some past state of affairs and project that difference as a principle into the future. Unless his "enlightenment" included the awareness of temporality, the Buddha

⁵⁰ Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai*, n.20, p. 131. ⁵¹ Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 131.

⁵² Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 131.

could not have announced the doctrine of "impermanence," nor any other.

The point here is not simply that "minds" share the characteristic of "impermanence" with all other entities in the world, although that would be true as well. It is rather that minds are "in time" in a way that distinguishes them from entities and objects. Temporality is more than impermanence of mind because human minds temporalize things experienced. Mind functions as it does through the structures of temporality so that experience, all mentality, is eminently temporal. The signs of this temporalizing process, and its structures, are etched into language and, therefore, into all understanding (anyone who has learned a language significantly different from their own, however, will recognize that these structures differ between cultures, although all languages distinguish past, present, and future in some way). Every experience arises out of what came before it and shades off into whatever comes after it, forming the continuum of past, present, and future that shapes the mind's awareness. Aside from relations to "before" and "after," the presence of the present moment would not appear as it does. Each element of time is embedded in the others as their presupposition. Huang Po would have received the transmission of these thoughts and much more from the Hua-yen and T'ien-t'ai literature that had made "time" an abundant theme of discourse.

Yet more basic than the fact that we can find a "theory of time" in the texts is the realization all of Huang Po's discourse, whether "about" time or not, is already temporalized. Temporal distinctions and continuities are etched within it both as assertion and presupposition. Without the presence within it of both recollection and anticipation, past and future, the present would lack the kind of reality required for Huang Po to have taken up the Zen concerns that he did. Given past experience of human inadequacy, Huang Po takes up the present practices of the Bodhisattva, aimed at relieving future suffering and ignorance. The more wisdom of "experience" learned from the past a Zen master has appropriated, the more he or she will be able to adopt "skillful means" in the present. Presupposed throughout Buddhism is that in finite human life there is something unresolved and incomplete. Something remains to be done; something not yet the case is called for by the way past and future work together to construct the present. The Zen master, above all others perhaps, acts out of an understanding of the "pro-spective" contribution that discourse and actions may make on behalf of a transformed present and future.

Although it is certainly true that we can imagine a life beyond this one where “eternity,” rather than “temporality,” reigns, no content for this “life” can be supplied; only that it is “other than what we know,” “out of time.” Theologies of “eternity” share the experience that temporalized life is pain, and that the divine is “wholly other” than this. These motives inspire the effort to conceive of a realm of timelessness beyond all suffering. Yet, although we can without difficulty find these tendencies in Zen texts, what is most distinctive about this tradition is its effort to forgo the “otherworldly” metaphysics that posits any realm beyond this temporal one. An adamant “this worldly” character is clearly definitive of the Zen tradition as a whole, regardless of specific instances to the contrary. It seems to me, in fact, that this feature of Zen is the one most responsible for its following in the west. It is certainly true that one need not turn to Zen or to Buddhism if an otherworldly metaphysics of eternity is of primary interest. It is probably also true that among these theologies, the Zen literature that projects “eternity” is of relatively little value and interest. Zen was founded and constructed on quite different interests. This other interest can be seen in the fact that Zen masters typically ridicule speculation about whatever is “beyond time” because *we* certainly aren’t. The focus is resolutely on the “here and now” that is fundamentally composed of finite temporal-spatial structures. Huang Po’s Zen instructs us concerning how we might live within time rather than how we might get out of it.

The final issue of mind requiring our attention is also the most difficult. We must read Huang Po – and our own minds – in search of an answer to the question of the role of thinking in “Zen mind.” What place, if any, within the mind of Huang Po, or any Zen practitioner, is occupied by reflective thinking? At first glance, this question presents no difficulty. The answer, stated repeatedly in Zen literature, is that “conceptual thought” plays no role, or at least “should” not. In the process of translating and analyzing Huang Po, this was John Blofeld’s conclusion. For the most part, he thought that the intention of Buddhism is to “arrest the karma-forming processes of conceptual thought.”⁵³ “Prajna,” he wrote, “is that intuitive knowledge of Reality which lies far above the level of conceptual thought; indeed it is interrupted and blocked out by conceptual thought.”⁵⁴ On this view, thinking serves only to generate “mental sediment”⁵⁵ which obscures and prevents an

⁵³ Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 131.

⁵⁴ Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 133.

⁵⁵ Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 133.

immediate perception of reality. Because "Intuitive Knowledge" lies "infinitely beyond the highest point ever reached by the human intellect,"⁵⁶ the essential element of Huang Po's Zen practice must be "throwing off the burden of concepts."⁵⁷

Moreover, a dichotomy between "conceptual thinking" and "direct awareness" is an important element in the Huang Po texts. Holding a doctrinal position (*chien*) at all is represented as an "obstruction."⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it would be difficult not to notice that Huang Po's substantial critique of "conceptual thinking" is itself an impressive act of "conceptual thinking." It constitutes a specific "view" about a specific matter of thought. This is inevitable. Any claim that reflection obscures, prevents, or cannot match "experience" is itself already the result of reflection on experience. Even the act of distinguishing between "experience" and "thought" is an act of thought, an abstraction from experience. Thus it is impossible to assert that "One Mind" cannot be an object of thought without, in that very assertion, making it just such an object.⁵⁹ Realizing this, we might improve clarity on this point if we retranslate Huang Po's statement that "the moment in which you realize the nature of mind can be said to be beyond conceptualization"⁶⁰ as follows: "The moment in which you realize the nature of mind *can be conceived* 'as' beyond conceptualization," not to mention *as* "the nature of mind," *as* "sudden breakthrough," and *as* other predicates that the texts encourage us to "conceive." "Beyond conceptualization" is precisely the form of its conceptualization.

Although the critique of thought is one ample area of thought in Huang Po, it is certainly not the only one. Thinking has other roles to play as we see in the example above. One extremely important role for thought is the construction of "ideals," frameworks of thought in relation to which experience of ideals is shaped. Concepts of "mind," "emptiness," "practice," "Buddha," and many more, shape both practice and realization in Zen. Although Huang Po claims that "If you

⁵⁶ Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 51. Elsewhere Blofeld reflects on his own practice of thinking: "I spent some time reasoning discursively about the meaning of life and the place of each individual in the universe according to the understanding I had developed during the last twenty years, particularly my understanding of Buddhist doctrine – but this exercise, though fascinating, is quite unprofitable, as the Lord Buddha was fond of pointing out . . . to ponder such questions is not especially conducive to Enlightenment" (*The Wheel of Life*, p. 250). In spite of this negative judgment about "doctrinal thinking," however, Blofeld's many books consist primarily in such thinking. ⁵⁸ T. 48, p. 384c; Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 71.

⁵⁹ On this question, I am indebted to the thought of Robert Scharlemann. See, for example, *The Reason of Following*, p. 128. ⁶⁰ T. 48, p. 384b; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 70.

conceive of a Buddha you will be obstructed by that Buddha,”⁶¹ the truth of the opposite point is so obvious as hardly to need stating. That is, if you *don't* “conceive of a Buddha,” you not only won't be able to understand what Huang Po has said, you will also be “obstructed by” all the human failures that “Buddhism” was constructed to overcome. For a Buddhist, these conceptions are not optional; they are “essential” to “the way” insofar as they present it to mind. Huang Po's admonition above against “conceiving of a Buddha,” is intended for those who already have that conception well in mind, so far “in mind,” in fact, that it has displaced much else that once occupied that mental space. Huang Po's instructions concern what to do with that concept. The function of Zen concepts, once “in mind,” is to restructure experience; not to leave it “as it is,” but rather to reform it along new lines.

It is important to realize that the “referents” of Zen concepts, that to which they refer, differ from most in that they come into being (in the mind) only through conception and not additionally through being perceived as objects in the world. While they can be experienced in relation to objects in the world, they are nonetheless of a different order than the objective. Concepts of this “order,” such as “One Mind,” “emptiness,” “Buddha nature,” lacking perceivable referents, have their origins in the imagination. They require the person thinking them to begin by imagining, not some special object or entity, but the ordinary world around them now seen in some special light. These conceptions show the ordinary world “differently,” and thus open up modes of experience other than those with which we are already familiar. This difference in the appearance of the ordinary is at first fictional and abstract, a provisional projection of an imagined possibility. But as the concept is “used” or “practiced,” it becomes more “natural,” not a projection onto the world so much as the actual appearance of the world itself. This, I believe, is what Blofeld had in mind when he wrote:

My months in the Zen monastery were not wasted. I believe I may claim to have made some progress in converting from theoretical knowledge to partial realization two supremely important truths . . . When a Zen Master declared that “Nirvana is here and now,” or that “the Present is the only reality,” I think I really did understand the truth at which those teachings point.⁶²

“[T]heoretical knowledge,” Blofeld suggests, needs conversion to “realization,” and, I would add, it needs this conversion in order to be

⁶¹ T. 48, p. 384c; See Blofeld, *Huang Po*, p. 71. ⁶² Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life*, p. 170.

actualized as successful "knowledge." Just like playing the piano, swinging a tennis racket, and sitting in *zazen*, the practice of theoretical thinking comes to fruition when it becomes second nature, when its abstract and awkward character has been converted into intuitive instinct. So long as "One Mind" or "emptiness" remains in the mind as a definition or a set of rules for thinking, it will be experienced apart from the world rather than within it. When the practice of these definitions has matured, "One Mind" or "emptiness" will be experienced on or in the world rather than (or in addition to) as a concept in the mind.

Blofeld writes that, through his months of Zen practice, he came to understand the truth of the saying "Nirvana is here and now." What this simple conceptual phrase demands is that the "here and now" (and nirvana) be reconceived, and that this conception be practiced in contemplation until the "experience" of the "here and now" has been transformed in its light. Practicing this concept, Blofeld underwent estrangement from the ordinary "here and now" that he had experienced prior to Zen. Through the practice of thinking the idea that "Nirvana is here and now," of looking through the concept at what is now here, the "here and now" takes on a different character. The "present moment" and "this place" become ever-present signs of "nirvana." Following the movement of the concept in the act of thinking it, experience is restructured. Although it requires considerable reflection to see it, this is no less true of the concepts "here and now" or "things as they are" than it is of "otherworldly" religious thoughts. Religious concepts function to show the world in some new light. Their relation to "practice" is not one of opposition, but rather of essential correlation. Concepts provide what it is that we practice; apart from these concepts, there is nothing to practice.

In Huang Po's system of conceptual practice, "One Mind" occupies a primary position. Particular moments of experience fill in the content of the concept, but no experience can exhaust it. No matter what we might experience personally, the "One Mind" exceeds that as the concept that encompasses all experience.⁶³ In addition to its conceptual status, however, the "One Mind" names the experience that defines the point of Huang Po's practice. As experience, "One Mind" can never be grasped in a concept. "One Mind" names, for Huang Po, that which is

⁶³ In this section, I work from a Kantian distinction between a concept that cannot be exhausted by any intuition, and an intuition that cannot be exhausted by any concept. I inherit this scheme from Robert Scharlemann, "The One of the Many, and the Many of the One," in *Inscriptions and Reflections*.

systematically and in principle “inconceivable.” This is so because in the act of thinking the concept “One Mind,” we violate it by breaking the unity that we seek to conceive. “I,” the subject self, think “One Mind” as the object of my thought, and, in the process, disrupt its oneness and immediacy. This, for Huang Po, is the one destination to which thinking can never fully arrive, yet, at the same time, the only destination worth seeking. Nevertheless, this limit to thinking is itself limited precisely because it is a limit that we think. We can articulate, as we have above, and understand that thinking is systematically excluded from “One Mind,” and we can think why or how this is so. Put succinctly, “We can understand the inconceivability of the one which we conceive *as* the one.”⁶⁴

In addition to its role in generating Zen experience in the first place, Zen thinking brings prereflective, pretheoretical experience⁶⁵ into the light of reflection and articulation. Thinking does this retrospectively, looking back over what has emerged in experience, evaluating it, criticizing it, reshaping and refining it. Why is this important? Without rigorous conceptual practices to accompany other modes of practice, Huang Po would not have known whether the “Zen mind” that was transmitted to him, and that he was passing on to others, was anything worth inheriting. He would have no way to evaluate it, or even to know what it was. Lacking reflective capability and a critical mind, Huang Po would not have been able to take responsibility for, or give any account of, the ideals that he was so vociferously advocating. In the absence of critical thought, only dogmatism remains – assertions grounded in desire but lacking justification.

That no Zen master was ever completely without the capacity to give justification to Zen shows the inevitability of “thinking” as a component of “Zen mind.” On the other hand, given a literal reading of Zen “no-mind” (*wu-hsin*) and “no-thought” (*wu-nien*), relatively “unreflective” Zen is a real possibility, one that has also been actualized on historical occasion throughout the tradition. There is indeed a “fundamentalist” urge

⁶⁴ Scharlemann, “The One of the Many,” in *Inscriptions and Reflections*, p. 221.

⁶⁵ Because it goes so heavily against the grain of “Zen thinking,” let me clarify here once again that although this experience is neither “reflective” nor “theoretical,” it is not on that account either “preconceptual” or “prelinguistic.” Embedded within all experience are the concepts and the linguistic structures that make that experience possible as experience. In “immediate experience,” however, they stand in the background and are not explicit or thematic to the experience. No exercise in thinking need be performed for the linguistic, cultural shaping of the world to have effect. Without the language of Zen, we could not experience “things as they are,” *as* they are for Zen.

written into the basic tenets of the Zen tradition that has emerged full-force from time to time. "Fundamentalism," in this case, can be defined loosely as the tendency to select a limited set of basic doctrines – "sudden enlightenment," "no dependence of language and text," "everyday mind is the Way," and so on – that are literally and narrowly interpreted, and taken to be a timeless essence of the tradition. To the extent that "no-thought" is included in this list and interpreted literally, the abilities of Zen Buddhists to understand their practice and their achievement will be limited.

One problem that the tradition has not faced is a pronounced tendency not to recognize Zen doctrine *as* doctrine. Perhaps due to the influence of the "no dependence" slogan, Zen Buddhists have tended to assume that traditional pronouncements about "the Way" are something other than doctrine, and therefore not susceptible to critical thought. As long as ideas are naively thought to "flow directly from experience" (or, in other traditions, directly from God), they will be held dogmatically. Although unreflective Zen is certainly possible, it is not desirable, and constitutes a self-imposed limitation that has, on occasion, weakened the tradition. In much of the tradition, of course, this has not occurred. Creative minds, deeply immersed in both "One Mind" and "everyday mind," have transmitted a tradition to us that is in some senses unparalleled in its reflective and conceptual capacities. The sophistication of both the Zen literary tradition and Zen practice demonstrate those capacities.

A dialectical relationship between the practice of thought and Zen experience is essential to the tradition. Thought pushes experience further, opens up new dimensions for it, and refines what comes to experience. Experience pushes thought further, opens up new dimensions for thinking, and sets limits to its excursions. The brilliance of Zen thinking is its tentative and provisional character, the "non-abiding," non-grasping" mind. Knowing, through thought, that all thought is "empty," Zen masters have explored worlds of reflection unavailable to other traditions. Trained to experience the "void" of finitude, they face it without fear, playfully "thinking" what lies beneath "common sense."

Although essential to Zen, "conceptual thinking" is only one of its practices, and only a fragment of "One Mind." Thinking is to the whole of "Mind" as the tip is to the iceberg. Yet the "tip" that protrudes into the light is the element of mind that communicates to the unconscious totality both what it is and how it ought to practice its identity. Huang

Po's capacity to say what "Zen" is, in riveting and persuasive style, set him up as the master of reflective understanding among the many Zen minds in the monastery. From his mind they learned both how they were to conceive of themselves and how to practice that identity. To what did these monks attribute Huang Po's superior capacity? To the awakening of his mind – enlightenment!