Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age

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# Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age

*Charles Taylor and Zen Buddhism in the West*

*By*

André van der Braak

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*This book is dedicated to my Zen teacher Ton Lathouwers.*

# Contents


**Acknowledgements** XI

**Introduction** 1
1 Beyond Buddhist Modernism 2
2 Reimagining Zen in the West 7
3 Cross-cultural Hermeneutics 10
4 A Secular Age 13
5 Outline of This Book 16

**PART 1**
***Zen and the Immanent Frame***

**1 Zen Transmissions and Reimaginings** 25
1 Reimagining Indian Buddhism as Chinese Chan 26
1.1 *Sudden Enlightenment versus Gradual Cultivation* 30
1.2 *Beyond Language versus within Language* 32
1.3 *Koan Practice versus Silent Illumination* 36
2 Reimagining Chinese Chan as Japanese Zen 37
3 Zen Imaginings in the West 38
4 Discussion 42

**2 A Secular Age** 46
1 Introduction 46
2 Fullness 49
3 Beyond Subtraction Stories 52
4 Disenchantment 54
5 The Buffered Self 56
6 The Immanent Frame 57
7 A Three-Cornered Battle 60
8 Discussion 64

**3 Cross Pressures in the Immanent Frame** 73
1 The General Malaise of Immanence 73
2 Enlightenment as a New Form of Fullness 75
3 Disenchantment versus Re-enchantment 78
4 Beyond Transcendence and Immanence 82

5 Open versus Closed Zen Practice 84
6 Discussion 87

PART 2
*Zen Modernism*

4 **Universalization: Zen as Universal Mysticism** 95
1 The Birth of Buddhism as a World Religion 96
2 Universal Zen 99
3 Pure Experience 102
4 Criticizing the Universality of Pure Experience 104
5 Against Perennialism: Criticism of Universal Mysticism 107
6 Zen as Non-mysticism 108
7 Back to Language: Dōgen's Mystical Hermeneutics 110
8 Zen Meditation as Universal Dharma Practice 112
9 Discussion 114

5 **Psychologization: The Zen Experience** 120
1 Psychologization 120
2 Disenchanting the Bodhisattvas 123
3 Questioning the Zen Experience 125
4 Beyond Religious Experience 128
5 Going Beyond Excarnation and the Buffered Self 130
6 Dōgen's Embodied Realization 131
7 Discussion 136

6 **The Therapeutic Turn: Zen as Therapy** 139
1 From Conversion to Healing 140
2 The Reaffirmation of Ordinary Life 142
2.1 *Zen and the Affirmation of Ordinary Life* 144
2.2 *Dōgen on the Affirmation of Ordinary Life* 147
3 The Medicalization of the Moral 148
4 Instrumentalization versus No Gain 151
5 Discussion 153

7 **The Rise of Expressive Individualism: Zen as Global Spirituality** 158
1 The Rise of Expressive Individualism 158
2 Personal Spirituality versus Communal Religious Practice 162

3 Religious Belonging 164
4 Zen Belonging in the West 166
5 Pure Zen versus Buddhist Zen 168
6 Zen Ritual as Communal Practice 170
7 Discussion 173

**PART 3**
*Beyond Zen Modernism*

**8 Batchelor's Secular Buddhism** 181
1 The Search for the Human Buddha 183
2 Beyond Karma 187
3 Reimagining Enlightenment 189
4 Discussion 192

**9 Reimagining Emptiness: Toward a Subtler Language of Fullness** 197
1 The Kyoto School 197
2 Śūnyatā as Zen Fullness 198
3 Nishitani and Śūnyatā 201
4 Hisamatsu and Oriental Nothingness 203
5 Masao Abe 205
6 David Loy's New Buddhist Path 206
6.1 *Deconstructing Enlightenment: Beyond Transcendence and Immanence* 209
6.2 *Evolution: A New Enchanted Buddhist Worldview* 212
6.3 *Ethics: Reimagining the Bodhisattva Path* 214
7 Discussion 216

**10 Engaging Dōgen's Zen** 220
1 Back to Buddhist Scriptures 221
2 An Enchanted Zen 223
3 Zen Fullness as Ongoing Practice-Realization 224
4 From Individual Pure Zen to Communal Bodhisattva Zen 225
5 Dōgen's *Shushōgi* 227
5.1 *Repenting and Eliminating Bad Karma* 227
5.2 *Receiving Precepts and Joining the Ranks* 231
5.3 *Making the Vow to Benefit Beings* 233

6 Discussion 236
7 The Future of Zen 237

**Literature** 241
**Index** 258

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- "Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age II." *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009): 227–247. Republished in *Transforming Spirituality,* edited by R. Zas Fris de Col, 659–680. Leuven: Peeters, 2016.
- "Nietzsche and Japanese Buddhism on the Cultivation of the Body: To What Extent does Truth Bear Incorporation?," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy,* Vol. 1.2 (2009): 223–251.
- "Towards a Philosophy of Chan Enlightenment: Linji's Anti-enlightenment Rhetoric." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37/2 (2010): 231–247.

– *Nietzsche and Zen: Self-overcoming without a Self* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011), parts of Chapters 6, 7 and 10.
– “The Mystical Hermeneutics of Eckhart and Dōgen: The Continuous Self-Revelation of Buddha Nature.” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 21/2 (2011): 151–169.
– “Zen-Christian Dual Belonging and the Practice of Apophasis: Strategies of Meeting Rose Drew’s Theological Challenge.” *Open Theology* 3 (2017): 434–446.
– “Hisamatsu Shin’ichi: Oriental Nothingness.” In *The Dao Companion to Japanese Buddhist Philosophy*, edited by Gereon Kopf, 635–647. Dordrecht: Springer, 2019.

# Introduction

Buddhism is everywhere in the contemporary Western world. Buddha statues can be bought at garden centers and interior design stores. Everyone knows the Dalai Lama. Meditation is no longer an exotic activity, but is practiced in hospitals and businesses. Buddhism's contact with the West is leading to cutting-edge advances in brain-science research, medicine and psychology, and leads to new developments in medicine based on laboratory studies of meditators.

Scholars have stressed, however, that there is also a very real tension, a palpable discord between Buddhism as it has been traditionally practiced in Asia, and Buddhism as it is often presented in the West today. In Asian Buddhist countries it is clear what Buddhism is, it is a religion. But the more Buddhism permeates our Western culture, the less clear it seems to become what it actually is or should be in the West. A religion? A philosophy? A form of therapy? A cool way of life? Perhaps people will respond that Buddhism is about enlightenment. But is enlightenment a kind of salvation? A form of mental health? A spiritual experience?

Buddhism originated in India and has since been transmitted to many other cultures. However, there is something fundamentally different and unprecedented in the current transmission of Buddhism to the West. Buddhism is not only crossing between cultures, in entering secular modernity it is also crossing epochs. As religion scholar and Buddhist practitioner Linda Heuman notes:

> The experience of being a modern Western Buddhist is different from the experience of all previous Buddhists in one crucial respect: we are contending with a radically different environment of faith. In discussions about Buddhism's transmission to the West, most of the discussion about belief has focused on particular beliefs. What has been off our radar for the most part is an appreciation of the very different background of assumptions within which belief itself—both ours and that of traditional Buddhists—is construed.[1]

Today, the very notion of what it means to be religious is changing. In today's secular age, many view religious belief and practice with suspicion. Although the secularization thesis, that predicted that religion would inevitably

1 Linda Heuman, "What's at Stake as the Dharma Goes Modern?" *Tricycle Magazine Fall 2012*. Accessed March 5, 2020. http://tricycle.org/magazine/whats-stake-dharma-goes-modern/.

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disappear with the ongoing advance of modernity, has been abandoned by many scholars,[2] in much academic and intellectual discourse, religious believers have to defend themselves. This offers great challenges as to how to understand the central project of Buddhism (the radical transformation traditionally conceived as "enlightenment"), fundamental Buddhist notions such as karma, rebirth and selflessness, and the purpose and possibilities of Buddhist practice. In some Buddhist circles today, as Heuman notes, to suggest that the purpose of Buddhism is *exactly what the traditional texts tell us it is*, can be met with condescension. Transcendent goals such as "enlightenment" and "awakening" have traditionally been conceived as a solution for the fundamental human problems of ignorance and suffering. Although many interpretations of enlightenment exist, it has in most traditions been imagined as transcending *samsāra*—the cycle of birth, suffering, rebirth and death. While Buddhist practice may also bring some comfort, enjoyment and happiness in this life, Heuman argues, the seeking of these states has often been the very definition of what is not Buddhist practice.[3]

In modern Western Buddhism, however, such transcendent goals have become for the most part, optional, and even the harder option to embrace. Those Westerners who practice Buddhism as a religion (studying Buddhist texts, participating in Buddhist ritual, and adopting Buddhist doctrines such as karma and rebirth), are sometimes regarded as anachronistic and naïve.[4]

The reason for this, according to Heuman, is not just that Asian Buddhism is being transplanted to a new culture or a new geography and needs to adapt to its new environment. In engaging with our modern secular age, Heuman argues, Buddhism is not just entering new soil, but a whole new ecosystem.[5]

## 1 Beyond Buddhist Modernism

The spread of Buddhism to the West is inevitably connected with modernism. The birth of "modern Buddhism" in the West coincides with the birth of a

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2 See Peter L. Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 1–18. However, for an opposing view, see Steve Bruce, *Secular Beats Spiritual. The Westernization of the Easternization of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

3 Heuman's statement that Buddhist practice is opposed to earthly comfort and benefits needs to be read alongside studies which look at this-worldly practices as a key part of Buddhism, especially lay and devotional practices.

4 Heuman, *What's at Stake*.

5 Ibid.

reformed modern Buddhism' in Asia in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan and China. Both suffer from the contradictory demands of modernity: Buddhist ancient wisdom must be authentic, i.e. been passed on to the present since the time of the historical Buddha through direct transmission via reliable lineages, and must at the same time be modern, compatible with science, and free from superstition.[6]

Buddhist scholar Martin Baumann has proposed to use as Weberian ideal types the terms "traditionalist Buddhism" (with an emphasis on devotion, ritual, and specific cosmological concepts) and "modernist Buddhism" or "Buddhist modernism" (with an emphasis on meditation, text reading, and rationalist understanding). [7] The encounters of premodern Asian Buddhist frameworks with secular Western frameworks have led to many forms of such a Buddhist modernism, forms that often consist of tenuous and problematic compromises between traditional Buddhist notions of transcendence and Western secular modernity. This is the hermeneutical paradigm that Buddhist historians who have studied the meeting of Asian Buddhism with Western modernity have used in their various publications.[8]

Buddhist scholar Heinz Bechert has identified a number of characteristics of Buddhist modernism, including an emphasis on one's personal understanding of the canonical texts, a demythologization of cosmology, a stress on Buddhism's accord with science, a belief in Buddhism as a philosophy rather than a religion, and a promotion of meditation.[9] Donald Lopez describes four broad features that "modern Buddhism" shares with other projects of modernity: identification of the present as a standpoint from which to view the past, a rejection of ritual and magical elements in Buddhism, a stress on equality over

6 Jay L. Garfield, "Buddhism in the West," Lecture at Tibetischer Zentrum Hamburg, June 30, 2010. Accessed March 5, 2020. http://www.info-buddhism.com/Buddhism_in_the_West.pdf.

7 Martin Baumann, "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West," in: Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51–65.

8 See e.g. David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Donald S. Lopez (ed.) *A Modern Buddhist Bible: Essential Readings from East and West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

9 Heinz Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern Theravāda-Buddhismus* (Göttingen: Seminars fűr Indologie und Buddhismuskunde der Universität Göttingen, 1966); Heinz Bechert, "Buddhist Revival in East and West," in: Heinz Bechert, Richard Gombrich (eds.), *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 273–285; Heinz Bechert, "Buddhist Modernism," in: *Buddhism in the Year 2000* (Bangkok: The Dhammakaya Foundation, 1994), 251–260.

hierarchy, and a promotion of the individual over the community.[10] Philosopher David McMahan has chronicled how such a Buddhist modernism has arisen in dialogue with the Western discourses of Protestantism, Enlightenment and Romanticism, whereas Donald Lopez has focused on the dialogue between Buddhism and science.[11]

However, recently the hermeneutical paradigm of Buddhist modernism has come under attack, both academically and in practitioner circles. First of all, as has been noted by various authors, the opposition between traditional and modern is a problematic one. McMahan has addressed the problems that arise when distinguishing "modern Buddhists" from "traditional Buddhists":

> The line demarcating a modernist from a traditionalist is often blurry and uneven. Modernists may openly refute certain elements of tradition or claim to be going back to the true, original tradition. Modernist movements often do not set out to establish something new but on the contrary may claim to be casting off the new and reviving the old. Such revival, however, is deeply and inevitably conditioned by the language, social forms, practices, and worldviews of the present.[12]

Traditionalism is not always conservative, and modernism is not always progressive. Many modernists do not want to refute traditions, but merely claim to be good traditionalists, who want to go back to the roots of the tradition, liberate it from impurities that have accrued over the ages. Often, such a reform of tradition comes down to an invention of tradition, the invention of an originally pure tradition. However, this is not to be seen as a negative thing.

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10 Lopez, *A Modern Buddhist Bible,* ix.

11 McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism.* Donald S. Lopez, *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

12 McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 27. McMahan presents five ideal cases of Buddhists in our age: (1) Sara is a Western Buddhist sympathizer. She is not embedded in a Buddhist Sangha, and engages in the practice of Buddhist meditation. (2) Yaniza is a Thai laywoman. She is very embedded in Buddhist organizations, and practices Buddhist ritual rather than Buddhist meditation. (3) Rachel is an American dharma teacher, a Buddhist modernist who combines traditional Buddhist teachings with Western notions and ethical values. (4) Lobsang is a traditional Buddhist monk. (5) Ananda is an Asian modernizer of Buddhism. The fifth ideal case shows, that "modern" is not equal to "Western," and "traditional" is not equal to "Asian." Asia is home to a number of "indigenous modernities" that have eloquent spokespeople in the West: the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa.

Traditions must always reconfigure themselves, in order to remain relevant in changing times.[13]

Recent Western Buddhist scholarship has criticized the various Asian Buddhist modernizers for appropriating Western ideas, cloaking them with the veil of Buddhist tradition (partly for nationalistic ends), and contributing to the rise of the various hybrid forms of Buddhist modernism. Buddhist scholar Nathalie Quli has pointed out that within Buddhist Studies, there is a tendency to discount such hybrid identities and reject them as inauthentic.[14] Quli argues, however, that such a tendency to reject the hybrid as inauthentic can be seen as an extension of the search for purity.[15] Somehow, contemporary reimaginings of Buddhism are seen as being "distortions" of Asian transhistorical essences now contaminated by Western ideas.[16]

The assumption that there is such a thing as "modern Buddhism," as a single entity that transcends particular boundaries (cultural, national, ethnic, economic), is increasingly being questioned in the research literature.[17] In the

13 Dutch Buddhist scholar Henk Blezer has usefully distinguished between a "transplantation model" and a "reinvention model" as two possible methodological approaches to the study of the spread of Buddhism. Henk Blezer, "Buddhism in the Netherlands—A Brief Resume & Call for Further Research," in: *2600 years of Sambuddhatva—Global Journey of Awakening*, edited by Oliver Abenayake and Asanga Tilakaratne (Colombo: Ministry of Buddhasasana and Religious Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka, 2011–2012), 423–442.

14 See Natalie E. Fisk. Quli, "Western Self: Asian Other: Modernity, Authenticity, and Nostalgia for 'Tradition' in Buddhist Studies," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 16 (2009): 1–39.

15 Ibid.

16 Quli argues that this rhetoric of decline and corruption can be seen in Robert H. Sharf's well-known article "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience" (*Numen* 42/3 (1995): 228–283). For a helpful critique of this narrative, see Francisca Cho, "Imagining Nothing and Imaging Otherness in Buddhist Film," in: *Imag(in)ing the Other: Filmic Visions of Community*, ed. David Jaspers and S. Brent Plate (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1999), 169–195 and Francisca Cho, "Religious Identity and the Study of Buddhism," in: *Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion*, ed. Jose Cabezon and Sheila Davaney (London: Routledge, 2004), 61–76.

17 See e.g. Erik Braun, "Local and Translocal in the Study of Theravada Buddhism and Modernity," *Religion Compass* 3/6 (2009): 935–950; Mitchell & Quli, *Buddhism Beyond Borders*; Ann Gleig, "Buddhism Beyond Borders: New Perspectives on Buddhism in the United States (Book Review)," *Journal of Global Buddhism* Vol. 16 (2015): 195–201. As Buddhist scholar Erik Braun argues, there is a tension between local forms of Buddhism (Buddhist ideas and practices rooted in specific peoples and places) and translocal Buddhisms (ideas and practices that link different people and places). Such a simplistic division between a supposed translocal and authentic core of Buddhist practice, as opposed to local corruptions (what Anne Hansen has called a "core-periphery model of Buddhist history"), has now been left behind by Buddhist scholars (Braun, *Local and Translocal*). As Buddhist scholar Anne Blackburn notes, there is a structural tension between the self-representation

collection of essays *Buddhism beyond Borders*, the hermeneutical paradigm that distinguishes between traditional Buddhism and modern Buddhism is questioned by several authors. The editors of this collection, Nathalie Quli and Scott Mitchell, argue that the category "Buddhist modernism" obscures the diversity of Buddhist traditions, and the degree to which they appropriate various modernist narratives selectively and produce different modernities.[18]

Buddhist scholar Erik Braun sketches two approaches to explaining the encounter of Buddhist traditions with modernity. The first approach looks at the effects of modernity on Buddhist beliefs and practices and claims that this leads to various forms of Buddhist modernism (or modern Buddhism). The second approach considers modernity as an inescapable fact of contemporary Buddhism. There is no such entity as "Buddhist modernism" that can be opposed to something like "traditional Buddhism." Therefore, all Buddhism in the modern era is "modern Buddhism."[19]

Both approaches to Buddhism and modernity, however, use what Buddhist scholar Richard Payne has called "a rhetoric of rupture," segmenting off contemporary expressions of Buddhism as somehow distinctly different from traditional (more authentic?) expressions of Buddhism. Such a rhetoric of rupture stresses difference and opposition rather than similarity and continuity. It can serve various ends: to argue that modern Buddhism is less authentic than traditional Buddhism, or to argue that modern Buddhism is superior to premodern expressions of Buddhism. Payne suggests that "Buddhism in the West is better understood as part of a continuity of ongoing adaptations and transgressions—adaptations to new environments and transgressions against expectations."[20] In this way, a static binary framework of traditional Asian Buddhism versus modern Western Buddhism is replaced with a model that stresses fluidity, hybridity and multiplicity.[21]

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of Buddhist traditions as possessing a tradition preserving a coherent body of work throughout the fluctuations of history (characterized through a trope of decline and revival) and the variable Buddhist reality on the ground (Anne M. Blackburn, *Buddhist Learning and Textual Practice in Eighteenth-Century Lankan Monastic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 6).

18 Natalie E.F. Quli and Scott A. Mitchell, "Buddhist Modernism as Narrative: A Comparative Study of Jodo Shinshu and Zen," in *Buddhism Beyond Borders*, ed. Mitchell & Quli, 197–215; Also McMahan points to the importance of distinguishing multiple modernities: David L. McMahan, "Buddhism and Multiple Modernities," in: *Buddhism Beyond Borders,* ed. Mitchell & Quli, 181–195.

19 Braun, *Local and Translocal*, 941f.

20 Richard K. Payne, "Afterword: Buddhism beyond Borders: Beyond the Rhetorics of Rupture," in *Buddhism Beyond Borders,* ed. Mitchell & Quli, 217–239, citation on 217.

21 Thomas Tweed has attempted to elucidate such a model: Thomas A. Tweed, "Theory and Method in the Study of Buddhism: Toward a 'Translocative' Analysis," *Journal of Global*

## 2 Reimagining Zen in the West

In the transmission of Buddhism to the West, three main "ecologies of enlightenment"[22] can be distinguished: Theravāda Buddhist traditions from Thailand, Sri Lanka and Myanmar that trace their lineage back to the early Indian Buddhism of the Pali Canon; Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist traditions, and the various Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese schools that go by the name of Zen Buddhism.[23] Since I am a Zen scholar by profession, this book focuses on the Zen tradition in the larger sense.[24] I consider this project philosophically quite promising, as the Zen tradition itself seems to contain many resources to deconstruct its own tenets, such as meditation, wisdom, enlightenment, and even Buddhism itself.

The conflict between the hermeneutical paradigm of Buddhist modernism and its critics has also extended to the Zen tradition. Scholarly research into Zen and deconstruction of all kind of "Zen myths" that characterize "Zen modernism" seems to have advanced even further than research into other Buddhist traditions such as Theravāda or Tibetan Buddhism. I will give a short overview here.

"Zen" has exercised a fascination over Western philosophers, theologians, psychologists and spiritual seekers. Since it made its entry in Western culture around 1920, in the writings of the Japanese religious scholar D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966), it has captured the imagination of many. It has been hailed as a universal religion, founded on individual experience rather than conformity to church structures, meditation rather than ritual, critical investigation leading up to "the Great Doubt" rather than belief in religious dogma's. For many

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*Buddhism* 12 (2011): 17–32; Thomas A. Tweed, "Theory and Method in the Study of Buddhism: Toward 'Translocative' Analysis," in: *Buddhism Beyond Borders,* ed. Mitchell & Quli, 3–19.

22 The phrase is from Peter Hershock. Peter D. Hershock, *Public Zen, Personal Zen: A Buddhist Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 20.

23 Since the term "Zen" has become commonplace in the West, it is used here to refer to the Chinese tradition of Chan Buddhism, the Japanese tradition of Zen (a Japanese transliteration of "Chan"), the Korean tradition of Son, and the Vietnamese tradition of Thièn.

24 This study will also include some aspects of the mindfulness movement. Although mindfulness has strong connections to Theravāda Buddhism, it also has some roots in the Western Zen movement. The Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh wrote *The Miracle of Mindfulness* in 1975 (Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975)), and Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program, was a student of both Thich Nhat Hanh and Korean Zen master Seung Sahn (see Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR, Skillful Means, and the Trouble with Maps," in J. Mark G. Williams and Jon Kabat-Zinn (eds.), *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on Its Meaning, Origins and* Applications (New York: Routledge, 2013), 281–306, especially 286f).

intellectuals, Zen served as a perfect replacement for a Western Christianity that was perceived as outmoded. It was viewed as an exponent of the mystical East, as epitomized for example in Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery*.[25] A Zen modernism arose that was very attractive to many with a Romantic bent.

But Zen was also approached very critically. Arthur Koestler criticized the deliberate obscurity of the Zen texts in his book *The Lotus and the Robot*.[26] The Japanese novelist Yukio Mishima portrayed the Zen monastery in his novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* as a power-infested, authoritarian community.[27] In line with this critical approach, the Chinese historian Hu Shih approached Zen as merely one religious sect among others, and attempted to describe the Zen tradition within the context of larger political and social developments in the Chinese historical tradition.[28]

The American Zen scholar Steven Heine has attempted to clarify the conflict between these two competing approaches to Zen: the various forms of Zen modernism focus on the "traditional Zen narrative" (TZN), and the critical, academic approach to such Zen modernism focuses on "historical and cultural criticism" (HCC). The traditional Zen narrative views enlightenment as "a direct, unmediated experience of reality beyond the realm of conditioning, which does not require intercession through the conventional use of objects of worship, such as images, symbols, or representations of deities."[29] Such a notion of a "pure" Zen, which privileges enlightenment as an unmediated experience of reality, has been contested by modern scholarship. Historical and cultural criticism points out the importance of speech and mediation throughout the historical Zen tradition, which "makes traditional claims for the priority of iconoclasm seem like little more than idle rhetorical flourishes."[30]

Heine describes the "culture wars" between Zen practitioners and Zen scholars at conferences, where these fundamentally different imaginings of Zen clashed with each other.[31] As Heine points out, these days nearly everyone

25 Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (London: Routledge, 1953).

26 Arthur Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot* (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

27 Yukio Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (New York: Knopf, 1959).

28 Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China; Its History and Method," *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 3 No. 1 (1953): 1–24.

29 Steven Heine, *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow. Will the Real Zen Buddhism Please Stand Up?* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

30 Ibid., 9.

31 McMahan has reported a similar clash at a conference between a scholar of Buddhism (who himself was a practitioner in the Tibetan tradition) and two Tibetan Buddhist teachers, who chastised him for tossing off uninformed comments and misrepresenting Buddhism to people. The teachers felt like "second-class citizens" at such conferences,

agrees that Zen is generally sorely misunderstood, and in need of clarification.[32] Discussion has arisen as to what constitutes the "real" Zen. Heine notes that currently, Zen studies is at a crossroads, looking for a new paradigm and a new hermeneutics. He stresses the need for a reimagining of Zen beyond TZN or HCC.[33]

Heine argues that part of the solution to this problem is a more balanced academic study of Zen. The academic study of Zen Buddhism has all too often been a reflection of the preoccupations of Western modernity. The critical approach to Zen has been part of a reaction to the wider phenomenon of colonial Orientalism, the stereotypical approach of Western scholars to Oriental culture based on thinly disguised, hegemonic agendas.[34] Whereas the colonial West has tended to portray the East as generally inferior and degenerate compared to Western civilization, the field of religious studies (more dominated by the temperament and outlook of Romanticism) has often shown a seemingly opposite pattern of thought. The spirituality of the East is considered superior to Western varieties (reverse Orientalism). Heine notes that those two opposed perspectives are both a gross distortion: "Buddhism is seen either as a sublime and quaint form of meditative mysticism, based on mind-purification and self-transformation, or as the hollow shell of a sequestered ancient cult that broods on death and decay yet thrives on monastic political intrigue."[35]

Since 2008, such a more balanced historical approach is well under way in what Heine calls "the fourth wave of Zen studies."[36] However, the solution to the problem is not just getting a more accurate picture of the historical and cultural background of Zen. Zen scholar Dale Wright has argued that the conflict between TZN and HCC could be fruitfully approached from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective.[37]

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since they were not invited to speak but just to lead meditations. This altercation "hinted at deep underlying differences in epistemologies, models of authority, perhaps even ontologies." (David L. McMahan, "Intersections of Buddhism and Secularity," in: Catherine Cornille & Stephanie Corigliano (eds.), *Interreligious Dialogue and Cultural Change* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 136–157, here at 136).

32 Heine, *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow*, 3.

33 His book *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow* therefore carries the ironical subtitle "Will the real Zen Buddhism please stand up?"

34 See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

35 Heine, *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow*, 4.

36 Steven Heine, *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen. A Remarkable Century of Transmission and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 26.

37 Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

## 3 Cross-cultural Hermeneutics

In this study, I will adopt such a cross-cultural hermeneutical approach.[38] Philosophical hermeneutics, as described in the writings of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), does not aim to reach objective meanings, but strives after making preconceptions explicit, and making use of them in order to come to a constructive dialogue. Philosophical hermeneutics stresses that every interpretation is contextually and historically determined, and therefore open to change. There is no such thing as a final interpretation of Zen, of enlightenment. What is given to us, is always mediated through language, culture and history, and is interpreted by us according to the contextual clues we manage to gather.

Doing philosophical hermeneutics implies an approach to truth and understanding that rejects a correspondence theory of truth (*adequatio intellectus et rei*) that assumes the existence of a transparent world outside the human mind, waiting to be discovered. There are no "things" out there, no "facts" to be discovered. As Nietzsche famously remarked, "there are no facts, only interpretations."[39] Understanding, in the hermeneutic sense of the word, does not refer to being able to grasp facts or concepts, but to an ongoing, preconscious activity. As Wright notes:

> Understanding, in this sense, is our most practical attunement to the world, the way we are embedded in the world, oriented to it, and engaged with it. Although the particular shape of understanding differs from person to person and from culture to culture, it is always there as the essential background out of which we live and work.[40]

We understand Zen through its various relations to other traditions and worldviews, through countless interconnections and juxtapositions. This process is as much a social practice as it is an individual, subjective activity. We are socialized into a vast store of understanding that is culturally established. In a way we don't produce understanding, we are immersed in it. No matter how isolated we are, we belong to traditions of understanding and engage in them socially.

38 An earlier version of this section has appeared in van der Braak, *Enlightenment Revisited*.

39 Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 12,7[60] (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967).

40 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 41.

Philosophical hermeneutics reverses the relationship between understanding and interpretation. It is not so much that our interpretations lead to understanding, as is usually thought, but that our interpretations are based on the pre-conscious forms of understanding that constitute our world. As Heidegger puts it in section 32 of *Being and Time*: "interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding: the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding."[41]

Unless the object of interpretation is understood in some sense already (pre-understanding), there neither would, nor could, be any interpretation of it. In interpretation we come to consciously know what we have understood preconsciously. Interpretation makes our implicit understanding explicit. Wright puts it as follows:

> When we understand something, we understand it "in terms of" something else already familiar and available within our world.[…] Interpretations are exercises in connecting one thing to another, a phenomenon to an image in our minds, and that connection to the totality of our understanding.[42]

This means that when we try to understand Zen, we always imagine it *as* something: *as* a form of Buddhism, *as* a philosophy, *as* a kind of mysticism, or *as* a meditation tradition. There is no way around this: we never arrive at Zen "as it really is." Gadamer stresses that the scientific focus on eliminating preconceptions, although commendable, will never be completed. Without preconceptions, we would never be able to understand something foreign. Only by connecting it to something already known can it become meaningful to us. Therefore, truthful interpretation consists not in the avoidance of projection and prejudice, but rather in their critical appraisal. In order to come to a reimagining of Zen, we have to locate the inappropriate projections inherent in earlier imaginings of Zen, so that they can be revised or replaced by more appropriate ones (in a pragmatic sense).

A cross-cultural hermeneutical approach to Zen would therefore not so much look for the "real Zen" (whether conceived as a Romantic ineffable truth, or an objective historical narrative) as for what Zen has been and can be to

41 Heidegger, M., *Being and Time* (translated from German by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson) (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 188.

42 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 50.

the citizens of secular modernity in the twenty-first century. Contemporary interpretations of Zen cannot but be shaped by contemporary pre-verbal understandings of what religion means, and the contexts and conditions within which it is possible for contemporary Zen practitioners to have religious experiences.

From a cross-cultural hermeneutical point of view, it is interesting that both the TZN and the HCC attempt to gain access to "the way things really are" to arrive at some final soteriological or historical truth about Zen. Any Zen orthodoxy is unavoidably committed to defining "the true message" of Zen. The Zen scholar in his search for true Zen, in his interpretation of its texts tries to capture the authentic voice of their author. As a historian, he tries to find out "what really happened," what it was really like to be, for example, Zen master Linji (d. 860) in ninth century China. He aims at a more true and accurate picture of the Zen tradition as a historical, sociological and political phenomenon.

And although both TZN and HCC look for "true Zen," either as a form of universal spirituality ("what is the essence of Zen?") or as a historical religious tradition ("what really happened in the Zen tradition?"), from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective both answers would not be all that interesting. Simply assuming that the great masters of the Zen tradition have passed on "the essence of Zen" without any grounding in history or culture will ensure that Zen will be severed from its Buddhist roots. And simply focusing on "what really happened" in ancient China and Japan, without any sense of how this relates to soteriological goals that are still relevant to Buddhists today, will lead to a meaningless collection of historiographical data.

The risk of a purely internal philosophical approach, unsupported by external historiographical research is that one uncritically interprets Zen in terms of one's own horizon, thereby reducing the foreign to one's own. One of the important aspects of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is exactly to make room for the *Anstoss* of the other, by becoming familiar with one's own "pre-understandings" and "pre-judgments" that inevitably shape our own historical, cultural and linguistic frameworks, but that are also the precondition for comprehension.

For example, the modern approach to Zen has tended to portray it as a movement of radical individualism. To modern minds, a Zen text must be the product of an individual mind, arising out of a personal inner subjectivity. But this might tell us more about Romantic preoccupations with inner depths of subjectivity than about Zen. It is necessary to leave behind the iconoclastic image of the enlightened Zen master, and become initiated into the particular

forms of understanding, the social, religious, philosophical and cultural contexts that gave rise to the Zen texts.[43]

Heine and others have contributed to such a cross-cultural hermeneutical approach by providing more information about the actual social and political context within which Zen functioned as a religion in China and Japan. By investigating the actual practice of Zen, "Zen on the ground," rather than relying only on published accounts of doctrine and soteriology, they attempt to elucidate the common self-understanding of the Chinese and Japanese culture that surrounded Zen. This is surely an important step to a less biased current understanding of Zen, because it helps to identify inappropriate projections.

The other half of such a hermeneutical investigation would be to bring to light the common self-understanding of Western modernity out of which people attempt to make sense of Zen. That is the task that this study wants to undertake. It aims to investigate how various current imaginings of Zen (*as* a religious Buddhist tradition, *as* a form of mysticism, *as* a kind of therapy, *as* a form of radical individualism) have been shaped by our contemporary self-understanding, not taken as a theory of what the human is and what religion is, but as the lived and sensed pre-understanding that precedes conscious interpretations. What is the unspoken context within which thinking and speaking about Zen in the West today usually takes place?

## 4 A Secular Age

As a gateway into such an investigation, I will use the analyses of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in his influential book *A Secular Age.* Taylor describes the various manifestations of religion in our current secular age and investigates their complicated roots. Taylor's book has been extensively discussed but rarely with respect to Buddhism, or even non-Western religions in general.[44] I first conceived of this project in 2008, when I published two articles on Taylor and Zen that appeared in the journal *Studies in Spirituality*.[45] It was

43 For a further elaboration of the philosophical implications of Wright's hermeneutical approach to Chan/Zen studies, see André van der Braak, "Enlightenment Revisited. Romantic, Historicist, Hermeneutic and Comparative Perspectives on Zen," *Acta Comparanda* XIX (2008): 87–97.

44 See the website *The Immanent Frame*, https://tif.ssrc.org/. Heuman's article in *Tricycle* is one of the exceptions.

45 André van der Braak, "Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age I," *Studies in Spirituality* 18 (2008), 39–60 (republished in R. Zas Friz de Col (ed.), *Transforming Spirituality,* 637–658 (Leuven:

further developed in the fall of 2015, when I served as the Numata Visiting Professor of Buddhist Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, where Taylor is still teaching.

Although secularity is mostly conceived of as the separation between church and state (Taylor calls this $\text{secularity}_1$), or as a decrease in religious belief and practice ($\text{secularity}_2$), Taylor points out that there is a more fundamental sense of secularity: not only a shift from belief to unbelief, but a fundamental shift in the very preconditions of belief, the background within which both belief and unbelief are construed ($\text{secularity}_3$).[46] $\text{Secularity}_3$ refers to a shift in the plausibility conditions that make something believable or unbelievable, "a situation of fundamental contestability when it comes to belief, a sense that rival stories are always at the door offering a very different account of the world."[47]

Taylor disagrees with common "subtraction stories" that account for secularization as follows: once upon a time, we believed in gods and demons (and karma and rebirth), but as we became rational, and especially as science provided us with naturalist explanations for what we used to attribute to spirits and forces (or karma and bodhisattvas), the world became progressively disenchanted. Religion and belief withered with the scientific exorcism of superstition.

Taylor does not merely criticize such subtraction stories: he presents a counternarrative about how we got to where we are now, with regard to our sense of who we are and our place in the world. He contends that the secular world is not just the neutral, rational, areligious world that is left over once we throw off superstition, ritual, and belief in the gods.[48] The secular world, in his view, came about due to the arising of a new viable option: the possibility of reimagining ultimate meaning and significance without any reference to the divine or transcendence.

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Peeters, 2016)); "Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age II," *Studies in Spirituality* 19 (2009), 227–247 (republished in: R. Zas Friz de Col (ed.), *Transforming Spirituality,* 659–680 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016)).

46 As Heuman notes, "Secularism in this sense sets the parameters, the limit conditions, for what kind of crops can thrive in modernity's field of spiritual possibilities. It sets zone conditions: first frost, temperature lows, rainfall highs." (Heuman, *What's At Stake*).

47 James K.A. Smith, *How* (*Not*) *To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 10. For Taylor, the secular in this sense is not a threat to religion, but offers new possibilities for its reimagining. And whereas Taylor explores such possibilities with regard to Christianity, this study will explore them with regard to Zen.

48 Ibid., 26.

Taylor argues that today most Westerners are captivated by a story that he describes as "the immanent frame": a seemingly self-evident background picture of a self-sufficient immanent natural order, against which our thinking about religion takes place. The transcendent domain that comes with religious belief is optional but not mandatory. Taylor stresses that such an immanent frame is not a consciously held conviction, but the self-evident background against which we form our opinions.

In his book, Taylor describes how we moderns are subject to what he calls "cross pressures within the immanent frame": we are pulled to and fro by the forces of belief and unbelief, faith and doubt, dependence and autonomy, inspiration and indifference. Now that Zen is no longer merely an exotic Asian tradition but is taking hold firmly in the West, it starts to fully experience such cross pressures within the immanent frame. This has resulted in many contradictory images of Zen in the Western mind, ranging from oriental mysticism to secular skepticism.

Increasing religious and cultural diversity means that the available options on the religious menu have exploded, with hardly any authorities to guide us. Taylor provides a map of the existential terrain in contemporary Western modernity. He investigates what it means to be religious and to be a spiritual seeker in today's secular Western world, and how the conditions for religious belief have changed: religious belief has for many become a matter of personal choice, one of the options on the menu.

In this book, I will generally follow Taylor in his reading of the fate of religion in the West. However, I am sympathetic to some claims that in recent decades the West has become more "Easternized" with regard to religion than Taylor seems to be aware of or give credit to. I will therefore also review and critically discuss sociologist Colin Campbell's "Easternization of the West"-thesis as a helpful corrective to Taylor's sometimes one-sided portrayal of religion in the West.[49] Throughout the book, I will sometimes refer to critical debates within the academic study of religion, especially with regard to their potential meaning in Asian contexts.[50]

49 Colin Campbell, *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era* (Boulder/London: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).

50 See e.g. Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), especially the chapter that deals with Japan, and Paul Hedges, "Multiple Religious Belonging after Religion: Theorising Strategic Religious Participation in a Shared Religious Landscape as a Chinese Model," *Open Theology* 3.1 (2017): 48–72, which takes on these debates in relation to China. Some key recent texts include: Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013) and

The project of this book is both philosophical and "theological"—or put otherwise: it aims to be an instance of "Buddhist critical-constructive reflection," as the unit at the American Academy of Religion is called in order to avoid the term "Buddhist theology." The philosophical question of the book is as follows: with regard to the encounter of Asian Zen Buddhist traditions with Western modernity, how can Taylor's notion of the "immanent frame" help us to better understand the current cross pressures between on the one hand the popular imaginings of Zen modernism (as an individualist, iconoclastic form of global spirituality aimed at a mystical ineffable enlightenment experience), and on the other hand academic and critical imaginings of Zen (as a collection of linguistically and culturally mediated social practices)? The "theological" purpose of the book is to develop, already throughout the chapters of Part 2 and especially later in Chapter 10, a particular reading of Zen inspired by the Japanese Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253). It will investigate how the resources of Dōgen's thought can be used in order to come to new, more fruitful imaginings of Zen that can respond to some of the cross pressures within the immanent frame.

## 5 Outline of This Book

In Part 1, the first three chapters of the book, the stage is set for the discussion. I will argue that Taylor's notion of the "immanent frame" can help us to understand the current standoff between the traditional Zen narrative and historical-critical criticism as various Zen cross pressures within the immanent frame. Chapter 1 offers a brief introduction to the Zen tradition. It provides a brief overview of the various ways in which the Zen tradition has been reimagined throughout its history, culminating in its encounter with Western modernity. The construction of Buddhism as one of the world religions in the early nineteenth century was followed by various transmissions of Zen to the West, leading to several varieties of what is usually called "Zen modernism." However, the current situation has become more complicated than that, in line with the general explosion of options and positions that Taylor has dubbed "the nova-effect."

In the second chapter, the reader is introduced to Taylor's *A Secular Age*. What does he think it means to say we live in a secular age? The three different

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Christian Smith, *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

meanings of the term "secular" are elaborated, as well as Taylor's new term "fullness," that he uses to indicate a sense of ultimate human flourishing.[51] The chapter follows Taylor's account of the process of disenchantment, which he claims was connected with the change from a self-experience as a "porous self" (a self with permeable boundaries in permanent connection with the surrounding cosmos) to a self-experience as a "buffered self" (a self with firm and fixed boundaries, clearly separated from other things and organisms in the universe). Taylor describes our contemporary time as an "age of authenticity," characterized by the rise of an expressive individualism. Religion has become a matter of personal choice, a private decision regarding one's life style, which defines us as who we are or who we want to be.

Chapter 3 uses Taylor's notion of "cross pressures in the immanent frame" to describe the various contradictions, tensions and contestations in contemporary Western Zen. These cross pressures will be investigated with regard to the following four questions: (1) Is Zen enlightenment, conceived of as a Buddhist conception of fullness beyond ordinary flourishing, still feasible? Or is the goal of Zen best expressed in terms of ordinary human flourishing? (2) Is a religious Zen still possible in a disenchanted secular world or should we settle for a secular Zen? (3) Can we still use terms such as immanence and transcendence or should we go beyond them? (4) Should Zen practices be seen from a religious context (as part of the bodhisattva work of liberating all sentient beings) or from a secular context (as a toolkit for contemplative fitness)?

Part 2 of this study (chapters 4 through 7) follows on from Part 1 by examining how such cross pressures have led to various forms of Zen modernism. Each chapter addresses an important trend in Taylor's account that has contributed to shaping our thinking about religion. Specifically, the four chapters of Part 2 will discuss four areas of contestation within current imaginings of Zen. These chapters will also explore what resources are available within the wider Zen tradition (specifically, the Dōgen Zen tradition) to come to a productive reimagining of Zen that can offer a useful contribution to the current impasse. Throughout Part 2, I will also comment on shifting pre-understandings of religion in general that have influenced Zen imaginings, using the roadmaps of theologian George Lindbeck and religious scholar Stephen Bush.

Chapter 4 describes and criticizes imaginings of Zen that have been influenced by the trend of *universalization*, and specifically the notion that religion

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51 Taylor uses this term in order to avoid getting bogged down in discussions about ontological transcendence and immanence.

is a universal human impulse that manifests itself differently in various cultures, as exemplified in the discourse of the various "world religions." A particular instance of this trend has been the philosophy of perennialism: all religions, including Zen, point to the same ineffable truth, that can only be realized through direct personal experience. The notion of Zen enlightenment as a universal "pure experience" fits within this trend. In the academic study of religion, the universality of religious experience has been questioned. However, recently the universalist approach has resurfaced in scientific approaches that claim that Zen and mindfulness practices are universally effective. The cross pressures around universality and particularity remain very present.

Chapter 5 focuses on imaginings of Zen influenced by the trend of *psychologization*: the tendency to locate all religious meaning as residing "in the mind," rather than "out there" in an enchanted cosmos. Taylor notes that, whereas religion used to be an embedded and embodied phenomenon, today it is assumed to be "excarnated" and taking place "in the mind." William James (1842–1910) argued in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that true religion is not about giving assent to various doctrines about the nature of God or reality, but rather about the individual having religious, mystical, or spiritual experiences.[52] For James, organized, "churchy" religion consists of crusted dogma, dead ritual, and blind conventionalism. This view has further contributed to the emphasis on Zen meditation experiences that was already discussed in Chapter 4. However, such an imagining of Zen as a kind of individual mysticism has been strongly criticized by Zen philosophers such as Dale Wright, who emphasize the social and communal origin of the language games in which our experiences are embedded. The emphasis has recently shifted to a more particularist approach to religion that views religions as collections of social practices with no common core, only with family resemblances. Robert Sharf has undertaken a more radical critique by arguing that subjective religious experience has historically been less important in the Zen tradition than embodiment and ritual performance. Faced with this cross-pressure, I turn to Dōgen to find resources for a "re-incarnated" reimagining of Zen that stresses such embodiment and ritual performance.

Chapter 6 discusses the Zen cross pressures around a trend that is related to psychologization, that of *the therapeutic turn*: the tendency to discuss religious matters in terms of a therapeutic rather than a religious discourse. Many phenomena that formerly used to be interpreted in terms of sin are now interpreted

52 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Longmans Green, 1902).

as illness. And rather than a radical conversion towards the transcendent, the patient needs medicine and healing. The "medicalization" of mindfulness is an important phenomenon that fits within this trend.

Chapter 7 discusses the rise of an *expressive individualism* in an age of authenticity. When religious adherence is viewed as an individual choice that requires authenticity, what are the consequences for the nature of religious belonging in general and Zen belonging in particular? In his historical analysis, Taylor describes a development from a medieval form of belonging, that sees religious belonging as self-evident and connected with one's national identity, to a modern approach to religious belonging as membership of a religious denomination out of personal choice that constitutes one's religious identity, to a postmodern approach that sees belonging not as membership but as shifting affinities. For the postmodern "liquid self," a stable religious identity has given way to a continuous process of religious identification. What does this mean for Zen belonging? And is there still a place for Zen ritual as a communal religious practice?

After having described the various process that have led to the formation of various forms of Zen modernism, I will turn in Part 3 to a few attempted solutions to go beyond Zen modernism. Taylor has suggested a new roadmap of today's religious landscape. Rather than the opposition between believers and unbelievers, he describes a three-cornered battle between the secular and the sacred: (1) exclusive humanists, who deny all transcendence, (2) anti-humanists, who criticize the naïve optimism of exclusive humanism, but also criticize naïve belief in transcendence, and (3) believers in transcendence. Chapters 8 through 10 use Taylor's three-way roadmap to describe some of the varieties of Zen in the West today, in order to evaluate various attempts at solving the current impasse with regard to the cross pressures described in Part 2.

Chapter 8 critically discusses Stephen Batchelor's attempt to come to a secular Buddhism in his recent work *After Buddhism.*[53] This is a Buddhism in the immanent frame that rejects the modernist compromise: no karma and rebirth, no transcendent domain of *nirvāna*, no mystical experience. The secular Buddhist theology that Batchelor attempts to develop fits very well with the contemporary mindfulness movement. Batchelor denies any Buddhist notion of fullness as ontological transcendence, but does he also deny any form of epistemological or ethical transcendence?

53 Stephen Batchelor, *After Buddhism: Rethinking the Dharma for a Secular Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

Chapter 9 gives an overview of the search for subtler languages of fullness in the Zen tradition. The encounter of Zen horizons with Western philosophy and theology took place through the thinkers of the Japanese Kyoto School, who brought the Zen tradition in dialogue with Western anti-humanist thinkers such as Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, and with process thinkers and death of God-theologians. They reject exclusive humanism as ultimately leading to nihilism, but they also reject notions of ontological transcendence. Especially Kyoto school member Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) has attempted to rethink Buddhist emptiness as a form of trans-descendence, which could be categorized as "transcendence as alterity (radical otherness)."[54] His student Ueda Shizuteru (b. 1926) has argued that Zen should not be conceived of as a form of mysticism, but as a form of non-mysticism.[55] A contemporary voice in this approach to Zen is that of the American philosopher and Zen teacher David Loy, who uses Buddhist emptiness to go beyond transcendence and immanence, and attempts to come to a new imagining of the Buddhist path.

In Chapter 10 I give my own view with regard to reimagining Zen in a secular age. Drawing on the earlier discussions in chapters 4 through 7 I present several possibilities for a contemporary Western Dōgen Zen as an "inclusive" form of Zen spirituality, that takes the enchanted Mahāyāna Buddhist world view seriously, and also takes into account language, embodiment, and communal practice. In an article after the publication of *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor attempts to sketch "the future of the religious past."[56] At the end of this book, I will also reflect on the future of the Zen past.

I write this book both as a Western comparative philosopher and Zen scholar, and as a Zen practitioner and teacher. On one hand, as the holder of the Chair in Buddhist Philosophy in Dialogue with other World Views at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, I have encountered and researched many aspects of the meeting of the Buddhist Zen tradition with Western modernity. The

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54 From Nishitani's Nietzsche interpretation it becomes clear that such a notion can also already be discerned in Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche was not only a precursor to postmodernism, he was also looking for a subtler language of fullness. The dialogue between Nietzsche and Nishitani can be fruitful for the development of radically nontranscendent forms of Buddhism that stay clear of exclusive humanism.

55 Bret W. Davis, "Letting Go of God for Nothing: Ueda Shizuteru's Non-Mysticism and the Question of Ethics in Zen," in: Victor Sōgen Hori and Melissa Anne-Marie Curley (eds.), *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 2: Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations* (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2008), 221–250.

56 Charles Taylor, "The Future of the Religious Past," in: Hent de Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 178–244.

postacademic training program for Buddhist Chaplains, that I helped to start at our university in 2012, actively struggles with questions around reimagining Buddhism for a Dutch society that has a decidedly secular bent. How to educate new bodhisattvas that also speak the language of secular modernity? On the other hand, as a Zen teacher, I see my students struggle with "enchanted" aspects of the Zen tradition.

This book is an exercise in the comparative philosophy of religion. I have written this book in the spirit of the manifesto that the American philosopher of religion Kevin Schilbrack has recently published.[57] In this manifesto, Schilbrack argues that "philosophy of religion ought to evolve from its primary present focus on the rationality of traditional theism to become a fully global form of critical reflection on religions in all their variety and dimensions."[58] Philosophy of religion ought to grow so that it (1) excludes no religious traditions, (2) takes full account of religious practices rather than only focusing on religious belief, and (3) becomes self-reflective by seeing the study of religions as itself a practice that deserves philosophical reflection.[59]

Schilbrack views the task of religious studies as threefold: descriptive work, explanatory questions about the causes of religious phenomena, and evaluative questions. In this book I will attempt all three tasks. In Part 1 of this book I will describe the various imaginings of Zen as it has come to the West, in Part 2 I will seek explanations for the interpretative choices that have been made in presenting Zen to the West, and in Part 3 I will evaluate several approaches to the way forward with regard to Zen in the West.

My approach to this book is that of the scholar-practitioner. Therefore, the hermeneutical discussions in this book are as much aimed at contemporary Zen practitioners as they are at Zen academics. With regard to my practitioner background, having practiced and taught for fifteen years in the Zen Center Amsterdam in the White Plum tradition that is sympathetic to Dōgen Zen, I am partial to this approach to Zen, and my attempts in this book at critical-constructive reflection on Zen in the West will bear this out. I am currently active as a Zen teacher in the Chinese Linji Chan lineage of the Dutch Zen teacher Ton Lathouwers and his Chinese-Indonesian teacher Teh Ching (also

57 Kevin Schilbrack, *Philosophy and the Study of Religions, A Manifesto* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014).

58 Ibid., xi.

59 Ibid.

known as Jinarakkhita).[60] Ton has always been very involved in the effort to come to a uniquely Western expression of the Asian Zen traditions,[61] and with this book I join him in these efforts.

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60 Ton Lathouwers received dharma transmission from the Chinese Chan teacher Teh Ching (Ti Zheng) Lau He Shang (1923–2002), in Indonesia also known under his Theravāda Buddhist name Ashin Jinarakkhita. Ti Zheng was the first ordained monk in Indonesia, and was responsible for the revival of Buddhism there. Later in his life he was asked to become abbot of the Guanghua Monastery in Fujian Province. The current abbot of Guanghua Monastery, Xuecheng, has been abbot of the well-known Longquan Monastery in Beijing.

61 See e.g. Ton Lathouwers, "Great Doubt and Koan in Western and Russian literature," in Henrik Karlsson (ed.), *Towards a European Zen?* (Uppsala: Zenvägen, 1993), 53–70; Ton Lathouwers, *More Than Anyone Can Do. Zentalks* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2013); Ton Lathouwers, "'The Language of Fullness and the Language of Emptiness'. Dialogue Between the Russian Orthodox Church and Buddhism? A Paradox," in Katya Tolstaya (ed.), *Orthodox Paradoxes. Heterogeneities and Complexities in Contemporary Russian Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 368–387.

# PART 1

## *Zen and the Immanent Frame*

CHAPTER 1

# Zen Transmissions and Reimaginings

As Nathalie Quli has argued, it is tempting to view the Buddhist traditions as having roots in the past from which they have emerged partially or fully intact, as a faithful continuation of an original artifact. However, as all traditions, Zen has been constantly invented and negotiated, all the while maintaining the stamp of authoritative tradition. As Quli notes, "we repeat what we take to be original or authentic and dream of a line of unbroken continuity extending into the past."[1] However, such a past is always already continually reconstructed and reimagined: "as an invention of the present projecting itself into the past, tradition is always in movement, being contested, forgotten, remembered, reinvented, augmented, abandoned, revived, and above all, *lived*."[2] There is no such thing as an "authentic" original tradition.

In his historical overview of Zen, the American Buddhist philosopher Peter Hershock has described Zen as the result of various reimaginings of Indian Buddhism on Chinese, Korean and Japanese soil, and the complex negotiations and renegotiations that took place as Indian Buddhist theories and practices merged with the Chinese horizon of Confucianism and Daoism. Zen has continually reimagined itself through the making and remaking of its lineage, the crafting of suitable hagiographies for its ancestors, and the creation of distinctive styles of teaching and practice.[3]

In this chapter, I want to give a very brief historical overview of how Zen has been reimagined throughout its history, and the contestations that have played a role in such reimaginings. With this overview, I aim to show that contemporary contested imaginings of Zen do not spring from "misrepresentations" of some authentic original Zen. Such contestations have been inherent in the Zen tradition itself from its very beginning. Let us therefore first take a brief look at how Indian Buddhism was reimagined as Chan in China.[4]

1 Quli, *Western Self: Asian Other*, 10.
2 Ibid.
3 Hershock, *Public Zen, Personal Zen.*
4 Although I generally use the term "Zen" to refer to a collection of Asian Buddhist traditions, in this chapter I will sometimes use the term "Chan" to refer to Zen in a specific Chinese historical context.

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## 1 Reimagining Indian Buddhism as Chinese Chan

After the death of the historical Buddha,[5] his message was spread by several schools, each with their own philosophical systematization of the Buddhist teachings, the *Abhidharma*. This early Buddhism comprised as many as eighteen different schools according to some sources, but only survives today as the Theravāda school, the Buddhism of the Pali Canon, in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar.

In the first centuries C.E., Mahāyāna Buddhism arose, most likely as a reform movement against a scholasticism that had set in. Its *Prajñāpāramitā Sutras* (sutras of the wisdom beyond wisdom) claimed that all views, including Buddhist views, were "empty" (*śūnyatā*). This was the philosophical climate in which Nāgārjuna was born, one of the most important figures in the early development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. He is the founder of the Mādhyamaka school, a rich skeptical tradition, startlingly similar to the Western skeptical tradition, in respect of its aims, methodology, and philosophical problematic. Nāgārjuna's radical ontological and epistemological skepticism deconstructed the dogmatic philosophical systems of some early Buddhist Abhidharma schools.[6]

In early Buddhist soteriology, the way to liberation is conceived as a path (*marga*) from bondage (*samsāra*) to liberation (*nirvāna*). The aim of spiritual practice is for the individual practitioner to dispel ignorance, greed and aversion. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, liberation is realized through the ultimate insight (*prajñāpāramitā*) that *nirvāna* is not a goal to be attained. As Nāgārjuna expressed it: there is not the slightest difference between *samsāra* and *nirvāna*.[7]

The Mahāyāna teachings were transmitted to China by Indian Buddhist monks. One of them was the legendary Bodhidharma (d. 532?),[8] who is revered

5 Traditionally placed at 480 B.C.E, but according to recent research perhaps as late as 400 B.C.E.

6 In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the term *Hīnayāna* is used pejoratively to refer to those early Buddhist traditions that developed a systematic soteriology (in particular the Sarvāstivādin school). Hīnayāna therefore does not refer to the contemporary Buddhist schools that base themselves on the early Buddhist Theravāda school. Their positions are much more nuanced than the (caricaturized) Hīnayāna views.

7 Jay L. Garfield (transl. & comm.), *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 331 (section 25.19).

8 Very little contemporary biographical information on Bodhidharma is available, and subsequent accounts became layered with legend, but most accounts agree that he was a South Indian Tamilian and was a Pallava prince from the kingdom of Kanchipuram, the third son of

as the founder and first patriarch of the Chan school. Bodhidharma's successors combined Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism with indigenous Chinese Daoist elements. In combining Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness with the Daoist thought of Zhuangzi, they opened up the possibility of a thoroughly this-worldly affirmation of life that replaces early Buddhist moralities of renunciation. In the Song dynasty, Chan became the established form of Buddhism in China.

A central concept in the transmission of Buddhism to China is that of Buddha nature (*foxing*), based on the Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine of tathāgathagarbha (*rulaizang*: womb or embryo of Buddhahood): all beings possess the Buddha nature. Hershock argues that this notion of Buddha nature was, in spite of its Indian roots, distinctively Chinese:

> Buddha nature is deeply rooted in Chinese conceptions of the dynamic and relational nature of all things. If all things are interdependent with all other things, and if the nature of all things is relational and dispositional, then the appearance of one Buddha is the (at least potential) appearance of all buddhas. It is also the transformation of the entire world in which this appearance takes place.[9]

Hershock notes that the concept of Buddha nature was used to give a life-affirming interpretation of the Indian Buddhist notions of emptiness and interdependent existence. Because the interdependence of all things was linked with their mutual nonobstruction, enlightenment was a possibility here and now for everyone. As Hershock puts it, "the limitless positive and liberating qualities of a Buddha do not transcend our familiar world but are always and everywhere present within it."[10]

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King Sugandha. Bodhidharma left the kingdom after becoming a Buddhist monk and traveled to Southern China and subsequently relocated northwards. The accounts differ on the date of his arrival, with one early account claiming that he arrived during the Liu Song Dynasty (420–479) and later accounts dating his arrival to the Liang Dynasty (502–557). Bodhidharma was primarily active in the lands of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534). Modern scholarship dates him to about the early sixth century. See Bernard Faure, "Bodhidharma as Textual and Religious Paradigm," *History of Religions* 25/3 (1986): 187–198; John R. McRae, *Seeing Through Zen. Encounter, Transformation and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 26f.

9 Peter D. Hershock, *Chan Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 58. For a more detailed survey see Jungnok Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China* (London, Equinox, 2011).

10 Ibid.

The soteriological consequence of this view is that, since all beings possess the Buddha nature, they are already originally and fully enlightened. This changed the very nature of Buddhist practice, Hershock argues: "As it would come to be understood in Chan, Buddhist practice does not consist of a method for arriving at the end of liberation but a method for its actualization and demonstration."[11]

The reimagining of Indian Buddhism (focused on textual study) as Chan Buddhism (focused on meditation practice) did not originate in the Chinese appropriation of Indian Buddhist texts, as was the case in the reimagining of Indian Buddhism in the other three major schools of Chinese Buddhism.[12] Rather, Chan adopted and adapted Indian Buddhist meditation practices to the needs of Chinese Buddhists. Bodhidharma, who allegedly sat in meditation for nine years in front of a wall, is the focal point of this reimagining.[13]

Whenever Buddhist traditions are being transmitted to a new culture, they not only change that culture in the process of being assimilated, they are also changed by that culture. Hershock has described two phases (often occurring simultaneously) in this assimilation: accommodation and advocacy. During the first phase of accommodation, "Buddhist concepts and practices are incorporated into the indigenous cultural framework, and the original system of these concepts and practices is opened in such a way as to accommodate some important local concepts and practices."[14] With regard to the meeting of Buddhism with Western secular modernity, this would refer to "translating" Buddhist concepts in order to accommodate the modern secular outlook, and the Western preconditions for being religious in our secular age.

The second phase of advocacy refers to assessing indigenous resources for responding to the problem of suffering, and open them up and enhance them in new directions. Ideally, this would not mean comprehensively supplanting indigenous value systems and rituals, but rather selectively supplementing them. The way to do this would be to create new imaginings of Buddhism and the Buddhist path, new personal and cultural narratives that are recognized by the indigenous population as complementing, and not conflicting, with their own.[15]

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11 Ibid.

12 Tiantai, focused on the *Lotus Sutra*; Huayan, focused on the *Avatamsaka Sutra*; and Jingtu, Pure Land Buddhism.

13 See Faure, *Bodhidharma as Textual and Religious Paradigm* for the argument that Bodhidharma should be interpreted as a textual and religious paradigm, rather than as a historical person.

14 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 27.

15 Ibid., 28.

Hershock gives an overview of how the processes of accommodation and advocacy were successfully negotiated in the transmission of various Buddhist traditions to China. When Buddhism was transmitted to China, "the absence of a shared literary language led first to an emphasis on translation and interpretative works that attempted to accommodate or make a "place" for completely foreign teachings and practices within the frameworks of "local" knowledge systems."[16]

In the process of accommodation, Indian Buddhist teachings were explained and translated in terms of the existing Chinese teachings of Daoism and Confucanism, in order to build conceptual bridges that allowed Buddhism to enter into a meaningful dialogue with those Chinese native traditions. This involved redefining Confucian and Daoist narratives of self-cultivation, reinterpreting Indian Buddhist notions such as karma in order to accord with a Chinese cosmology dominated by the notions of incessant change and sympathetic resonance, and embracing Chinese forms of correlative rationality (A, B and C are part of an interconnected network and mutually influence each other) rather than Indian forms of causative rationality (A leads to B leads to C).[17]

Hershock describes how in the process of advocacy, Buddhist thought and practice opened new spaces into which Confucianist and Daoist teachings could be selectively extended. In this way, Buddhism was able to stress its differences from those traditions, and present its own *dao* as more advanced and complete than the Chinese ones. The Buddhist *dao* went beyond both Confucian self-cultivation that emphasized clear and formal goals for exemplary conduct (from a Buddhist point of view these were too rigid to take the fluid interdependence of all things into account), and Daoist no-cultivation that emphasized undirected spontaneity[18] (for Buddhists, simply following what comes naturally ignored the need to address ignorance and delusion). This process of advocacy, Hershock claims, resulted in the flourishing of fully home-grown Buddhas on native soul—enlightened Chinese Chan masters whose teachings and social virtuosity outstripped those fostered by Confucianism and Daoism.[19]

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16 Hershock, *Public Zen, Personal Zen,* xiv.

17 For a more extensive description of this process, see André van der Braak, "Meditation and Ritual in Zen Buddhism," *Acta Comparanda* XXI (2010): 109–124.

18 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 55. It would, however, be stereotyped and incorrect to only represent Daoism as focusing on a no-cultivation that emphasizes undirected spontaneity. Daoism has very disciplined notions of cultivation and does not suggest that spontaneity itself is enough. See e.g. Kristofer Schipper, *The Daoist Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

19 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 55.

In order to illustrate these processes of accommodation and advocacy, I will now briefly discuss three critical moments in the reimagining of Indian Buddhism as Chinese Chan that reveal contested imaginings within the Zen tradition itself. These three contestations revolve around the nature of enlightenment, the way to teach, and the way to practice meditation.

### 1.1 *Sudden Enlightenment versus Gradual Cultivation*

The first contested imagining of Chan was connected to the notion of enlightenment and its relation to practice. Is enlightenment the result of gradual and incremental practice, or do such gradual approaches actually obstruct liberating immediate insight?

The Chinese *Platform Sutra*, dated around 780, tells the compelling story of how the Fifth Patriarch of the Chan school recognizes an underdog figure named Huineng (638–713), portrayed as an illiterate "barbarian," as his true successor, and secretly designates him as the Sixth Patriarch, instead of the head monk Shenxiu (606–706). In the sutra, Huineng challenges traditional ideas about meditation and enlightenment: the practice of meditation does not lead to enlightenment (this is a gradual approach to enlightenment); it is constantly illuminating the enlightenment that is already ongoing (the sudden approach to enlightenment).[20]

These approaches to enlightenment are portrayed in the famous story of the verses of Shenxiu and Huineng. Whereas Shenxiu speaks about the need for continuously cleansing the mirror of dust, Huineng stresses the emptiness of the mirror, and therefore the impossibility for dust to accumulate.[21]

Two imaginings of Chan were at stake here: is Chan practice about achieving purity of the mind (a position attributed to Shenxiu) or about realizing the

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20 See also Morten Schlűtter and Stephen F. Teiser (eds.), *Readings of the Platform Sūtra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

21 For an extended discussion see Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism. The Other Way of Speaking* (London: Routledge, 2003). According to Wang, Shenxiu portrayed enlightenment as *linian* (being free from thoughts). Enlightenment is consequently conceived as entering into a pure and quiet state, possibly leading to a dangerous Zen escapism. Wang calls this a "quasi-reifying interpretation" that leaves room for a logocentric hierarchy that privileges pure over impure, the true mind over the ordinary mind (Wang, *Linguistic Strategies,* 67). According to Wang, Huineng corrected Shenxiu's interpretation. Huineng speaks of *wunian* (no-thought or no-thinking), referring not so much to an empty mind as to an apophatic emptiness of deluded thought. As Huineng puts it, "no-thought means not to be carried away by thought in the process of thought." (Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 138). *Wunian* refers to an attitude of flowing together with thoughts and things.

ever-present original purity of the mind (a position attributed to Huineng)? Although the *Platform Sutra* was initially a provocative document, Huineng's status and teachings were eventually accepted.[22] From then on, Chan constructed its own identity in opposition to other Buddhist schools, even to Buddhism itself, as the school of "sudden enlightenment" (*dunwu*) rather than "gradual cultivation" (*jianwu*).

With regard to the translation of the critical term *dunwu*, there are various opinions. Peter Gregory notes the following:

> *Wu* [...] denotes a certain kind of cognitive act that might best be translated as "to realize" or "to understand," as when one realizes, understands, or "gets" the point of something; there is a shift in perspective in which what was formerly unclear suddenly becomes clear. [...] It is the mode in which that realizing or seeing takes place—directly, immediately, or nondiscursively—that is "sudden." It is not mediated by any other process (such as thinking, reasoning, deliberation, etc.).[23]

Urs App suggests to translate *dunwu* as "immediately seeing the nature": the unmediated, direct insight into one's own nature, one's Buddha nature.[24] Hershock suggests that *dunwu* might be translated as "readiness to awaken" or "readiness for awakening," which guards against setting up awakening as a goal to be sought.[25]

For Huineng, meditation is not a method for arriving at the goal of wisdom, meditation and wisdom form a single whole. Huineng speaks about meditation as the constant practice of straightforward mind (*zhixin*) in all circumstances. The word translated as "straightforward," *zhi*, means "direct" or "unmediated." Therefore, meditation refers more to an attitude of mind than to any specific mental or physical activity. The sudden teaching is nondual because it discards

22 The earliest surviving Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sutra* dates from around 780, suggesting that the sutra was composed long after the events that it supposedly documents took place. McRae argues that it was composed by the Oxhead School, in order to arbitrate between a debate between the Northern School (going back to Shenxiu (606–706)) and the Southern School advocated by Shenhui (going back to Huineng). The details need not concern us here. See McRae, *Seeing Through Zen*.

23 Peter N. Gregory, "The *Platform Sūtra* as the Sudden Teaching," in *Readings of the Platform Sutra*, 77–108, citation on 94.

24 Urs App, "'DUN 頓': A Chinese concept as a Key to 'Mysticism' in East and West," *The Eastern Buddhist* 26/2 (1993): 31–72.

25 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 103.

all skillful means and directly addresses the ultimate nature of reality without any mediation.[26]

A new step in this ongoing discussion was taken by the later Hongzhou school, founded by Daoyi Mazu (709–788). With its motto "let the mind be free" (*renxin*), it emphasized flowing together with ever-changing reality and being free (*renyun zizai*). Enlightenment is not about realizing a fixed and unchanging essence within; it refers to being harmonious with change and flux. Mazu stressed that Buddha nature manifests itself in action. The essence of the mind is seen through its external functioning. The ultimate realm of enlightenment manifests itself everywhere in human life. Mazu ultimately denied any kind of awakening, even the awakening of the ordinary mind to itself, since the ordinary mind is already Buddha nature. No cultivation is therefore necessary; Mazu advocated to simply let the mind be free, and to follow along with the movements of all things or circumstances (*renyun*). Hershock has discussed this in terms of improvisational virtuosity: the capacity to freely and spontaneously respond appropriately to a wide variety of situations, perfectly in tune with all persons and circumstances involved.[27]

All later Zen schools adopted the rhetoric of sudden enlightenment, and considered themselves superior to other Buddhist schools that taught gradual cultivation.

## 1.2 *Beyond Language versus within Language*

The second contested imagining concerned the role of language in Chan. According to legend, Bodhidharma's name is associated with a classic summary of Chan teachings:

> A special transmission outside the scriptures
> Not founded upon words and letters
> By pointing directly to [one's] mind
> It lets one see into [one's own true] nature and [thus] attain Buddhahood[28]

26 Gregory, *The* Platform Sūtra *as the Sudden Teaching*, 87. According to Wang, Huineng's self-professed disciple Shenhui (684–758), a well-known Zen popularizer and speaker, gave an interpretation of Huineng's notion of *wunian* that is problematic. He privileged intuitive knowledge over ordinary, discriminative cognition. He taught "establishing awareness and cognition" (*li zhijian*). Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*.

27 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 45.

28 Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism, A History: India & China Volume 1,* translated by James W. Heisig and Paul F. Knitter (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2005), 85.

With this slogan, Chan defined itself in opposition to other Buddhist schools that were engaged in learned scholastic disputations about Buddhist sutras. It also positioned itself vis à vis Confucianism, that stressed the importance of learning and textual study. Chan presented itself as anti-scholastic and did not depend on "words and letters." It claimed independence of the vast canon of Buddhist scriptures. It aligned itself in this way with Daoist discourses that stressed the importance of going beyond language.[29]

The Japanese Zen scholar Yoshizu Yoshihide has argued that the famous image of Chan as "a special transmission outside the scriptures" originated in a historical and cultural context. When Buddhism came to China, it was very important that it was recognized as a "teaching" (*jiao*). It had to meet three criteria: the founder of a teaching had to be an exceptional human being, its doctrines had to be worthy of belief and trust, and it had to benefit society in important ways. Many classifications of Buddhist doctrine (*panjiao*) were constructed, in order to strengthen the conceptual basis for Buddhism as a teaching. Eventually, Buddhism came to be recognized as "the teaching of the Buddha" (*fojiao*) by many Chinese.[30]The Chan movement arose in part against such a system of teachings. It objected to the political implications of the concept of "teaching":

> Buddhism's acceptance as a teaching required that the opinions and views of those above be conveyed to those below. This model applied to both the political realm, in which the emperor's commands were conveyed to the masses, and to the religious realm, in which the beliefs of the teacher were studied by his pupils.[31]

This violated the Buddha's instructions to his disciples to be a lamp unto themselves and be self-reliant. Therefore in Chan, relying on one's personal interpretation of Buddhism (*zong*) was more important than external authorities such as systems or teachings. Therefore, whereas Shenxiu was scholarly, Huineng had a personal sense of his religious mission. Chan's direct and simple personal transmission of the Buddhist teachings differed radically from the indirect transmission of the Buddhist teachings based on hierarchical distinctions between teachers and students.

29 See Wang, *Linguistic Strategies.*

30 Yoshizu Yoshihide, "The Relation between Chinese Buddhist History and Soteriology," in: Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello (eds.), *Paths to Liberation: The Marga and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 309–338.

31 Yoshizu, *The Relation between Chinese Buddhist History and Soteriology*, 325.

The slogan of Chan being a direct transmission outside the scriptures appeared only in 1108. It was used in the conflict between two types of Chan: the Chan that called itself *wenzi chan* (Chan within words and letters), in opposition to the illiterate or anti-intellectual Chan "outside words and letters" (*wuzi chan*). This controversy was reminiscent of the controversy between Shenxiu and Huineng three centuries before, but Chan historian Albert Welter argues that this controversy can even be considered more important for deciding crucial issues pertaining to Chan orthodoxy.[32] In the eleventh and early twelfth century in Song China, extreme or literalist interpretations of Chan's self-image as "a special transmission outside the scriptures" were rejected. The integration of traditional Buddhist doctrine and practice into Chan was stressed. This conservative impulse in Chan had a deep concern with the continuity of lineage.

The Chan movement that was originally ascending in the early Song was instigated by descendants of Fayan Wenyi (885–958). The Fayan faction accepted the validity of the many Buddhist approaches. It emphasized the Mahāyāna Buddhist hermeneutical device of *upaya* (skillful means):

> Each master has numerous methods for converting students; none are by definition superior and none should be excluded, except those that defy orthodox Buddhist teaching and practice. All methods may be effective as enticements for benefiting living beings; their goal is the same. Chan masters who have no experience with Buddhist teachings and doctrines (*jiaolun*) are ineffective. By rushing students through orthodox views while employing unorthodox methods, they mix heresies with important doctrines and impede the progress of their students. Instead of rejecting words (*wuyan*), Fayan insists on verbal explanations. Instead of rejecting Buddhist teaching (*wufa*), Fayan insists on relying on it.[33]

This Fayan faction was embattled by the descendants of Linji who regarded the Fayan emphasis on upaya as a compromise of Chan truth, which condoned rationalized explanations of truth, doctrinal formulations, liturgical practices, etc. The Linji faction claimed that Chan, in all its teachings and methods, should be exclusively aimed at enlightenment, defined as a special transmission outside the scriptures, unmediated by words and phrases. This secretly transmitted esoteric Chan dharma was considered superior to the exoteric

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32 Albert Welter, *The* Linji lu *and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy. The Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.

33 Ibid., 33.

dharma of the Buddhist sutras. According to the Fayan faction, however, the exoteric expression of the *Lotus Sutra* and other scriptures was a legitimate expression of Buddhist teaching.[34] The Linji faction eventually won out in this political struggle. In this way, Chan claimed separation from the text-oriented modes of authority fixed by Chinese tradition, and downplayed the authority of text-based Buddhist teachings. It placed this authority in the spontaneous improvisational virtuosity exhibited by living teachers such as Huineng, in their direct encounters with their disciples.

Robert Gimello has described how these two approaches to Chan (the "Buddhist" approach of Fayan, and the "beyond Buddhism" approach of Linji) led to fundamental cross pressures within the Chan tradition:

> The tension between Chan as an utterly singular spirituality quite divorced from conventional Buddhist notions of the path and Chan as a vehicle for that path's concentration, amplification, and perfection—between, as it were, the revolutionary and conservative, or the "Protestant" and "Catholic" impulses in Chan—was irrepressible. In whatever guise and at whichever level it operated, it continued to enliven the Chan tradition and propel it through history.[35]

As we will see later, only one of these two contrasting Chan imaginings, the Protestant one, has been transmitted to the West in the 20th century. As Gimello points out:

> Today, we know one side of this story, one vector of this tension, far better than we know the other. The romanticized version of Chan as a renegade school of Buddhism [...] is quite familiar to us. But Chan as the conscientious husbander of a commodious Buddhist orthodoxy, as the reverent guardian of learned tradition [...] this we find strange and tend to doubt.[36]

This contested imagining of Chan has consequences for its religious identity. Is Chan a form of Buddhism, or does it go beyond Buddhism as a tradition? The notion of Chan as somehow beyond the religion of Buddhism has played an important role in the transmission of Japanese Zen to the West. I will return to this in Chapter 7.

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34 Ibid., 42.

35 Robert M. Gimello, "Mārga and Culture: Learning, Letters, and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch'an," in: Buswell & Gimello, *Paths to Liberation,* 371–437, citation on 377.

36 Ibid.

### 1.3 *Koan Practice versus Silent Illumination*

A third defining controversy occurred in the twelfth century, when Chan became the dominant form of elite monastic Buddhism in the Song. True to the implications of Mahāyāna's distinctive acceptance of the secular world, as emphasized for example in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, Chan ventured out of the monastery and took its public place in the larger world. Leading Chan figures enjoyed eminence among the secular elite. They spoke not only to monks but also to educated laymen and their issues. Morten Schlűtter describes a sectarian dispute that occurred between the Linji and Caodong traditions of Chan. The Linji tradition advocated *kanhua* Chan ("Chan of observing the word," emphasizing the experiential realization of enlightenment through working with koans), whereas the Caodong tradition advocated *mozhao* Chan ("silent illumination Chan," emphasizing the practice of just sitting, letting original enlightenment manifest naturally).[37]

This contested imagining of the Chan tradition was connected to Chan soteriology. After one has rejected the Indian soteriological model (practice meditation in order to purify the mind of greed, hatred and ignorance, and attain the liberated state of enlightenment), how does one go about becoming enlightened when we are already originally enlightened? The problem was (and is) that most people have great difficulty in truly seeing that this is so, due to their deluded minds. However, it is only the deluded mind that dualistically differentiates between enlightenment and delusion. Therefore, is any effort toward gaining enlightenment dualistic, and only furthering delusion? Schlűtter expresses it with forceful clarity:

> Silent illumination emphasized the wonderful world of inherent enlightenment that is present as soon as we sit down in nondualistic meditation and become aware of it, while kanhua Chan insisted that until we have *seen* our own enlightened nature in a shattering breakthrough event, all talk of enlightenment is just empty words.[38]

This turning point was responsible for the fact that, when Chan went to Japan and became Zen, it led to a Japanese sectarianism which has had a very large

37 Morten Schlűtter, *How Zen Became Zen: the Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

38 Ibid., 4.

impact on the way that Zen was reimagined in the West, as will be elaborated in the next section.[39]

## 2 Reimagining Chinese Chan as Japanese Zen

Steven Heine has described in detail how the Chinese Chan school (*chanzong*) changed character in its spread from China to Japan during the thirteenth century. In China, he argues, Buddhist factions were loosely bound networks of lineages without a fixed organizational chart. Chan was seen as a path or gateway to spiritual truth that was open to various approaches and techniques cutting across lines of pedigree. In Japan, however, the Chan school gave way to the Zen sect (*zenshu*), since Buddhism was officially divided into discrete sects as a formal designation decreed by the government.[40]

The two most important denominations within the Japanese Zen sect were the Rinzai, based on the teachings of the Linji tradition, and the Sōtō, founded by Dōgen, that was based on the Chinese Caodong tradition. They have heavily influenced the transmission of Zen to the West. Both Rinzai and Sōtō took over the "sudden enlightenment" perspective, but they differed on the other two contestations. Rinzai saw Zen teaching as beyond language and Zen practice as involving koan study, whereas Dōgen emphasized Zen within language, and silent illumination practice (*shikan taza*, just sitting).

The transmission of Zen from Japan to the West has been heavily influenced by political developments. During the Meiji period in Japan (1868–1912), the *Shin Bukkyō* (New Buddhism) movement reimagined Japanese Buddhism as a thoroughly modern religion that was compatible with science and Western philosophy.[41] Zen was reimagined as part of a nonsectarian "Eastern Buddhism." At the *World's Parliament of Religions* in Chicago in 1893, the Japanese Zen master Shaku Sōen (1860–1919) presented such a New Buddhism as a world religion that can hold its own against Christianity, downplaying Zen's sectarian identity.

39 See Heine's recent work on the important koan collection, the Blue Cliff Records: Steven Heine, *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty in the Blue Cliff Record. Sharpening a Sword at the Dragon Gate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

40 Heine, *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen,* xi f.

41 See for example Hoshino Seiji, "Reconfiguring Buddhism as a Religion: Nakanishi Ushirō and His Shin Bukkyō," *Japanese Religions* Vol. 34/2 (2009): 133–154.

## 3 Zen Imaginings in the West

In the transmission of Japanese Zen to the West, we can distinguish various Zen imaginings. Initially, what was transmitted to the West was *traditional Zen*, directed at Japanese ethnic communities in the West. The duties of the Japanese missionaries were to conduct funerals and other services for their parishioners. D.T. Suzuki was one of the first to introduce Zen philosophy to the West. In his writings, Zen was framed as an anti-philosophical mysticism, and a panacea for an ailing Western culture. Such a *romantic Zen* was presented to the West as a universal mysticism that contained the core of all religions without cultural baggage, especially through D.T. Suzuki and the members of the so-called Kyoto School, a collection of Japanese thinkers who attempted to engage Zen with Western philosophical thought in order to arrive at a world philosophy for our times.[42] Zen was seen as an anti-ritualistic tradition that focused on the experience of enlightenment (*satori* or *kenshō*; see chapters 4 and 5).

The philosophers of the Kyoto School presented Zen in dialogue with Western thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, as a philosophy of emptiness that would be able to overcome nihilism. These Japanese thinkers were interested in a dialogue with the West, and a dialogue with modernity (due to the historical circumstances of the Meiji period). This meeting was focused on comparative philosophy, comparative mysticism, comparative theology, but also psychoanalysis and Zen. In Chapter 9 I will discuss their attempts to come to a *philosophical* Zen.

In the Fifties, Zen was embraced by artists and intellectuals like Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Alan Watts, who formed the Beat Zen Generation. They embraced Suzuki's *romantic* Zen beyond good and evil, a radical iconoclasm that went beyond all conventions. In the Sixties, Western counterculture claimed Zen in its protest against rationalistic Western culture. Zen was one of the non-Western philosophies that was invoked as a way of criticizing Western culture.

Starting in the Sixties, the practice of meditation came to the forefront. Charismatic Japanese Zen masters, from both the Japanese Sōtō and Rinzai schools, addressed earnest spiritual seekers looking for alternatives or supplements to institutionalized religion. Such a *meditation Zen* came to the West through teachers such as Shunryu Suzuki, Sasaki and Taizan Maezumi. Some

42 E.g., Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1934). See van der Braak, *Enlightenment Revisited*; Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*.

of the Western Zen students became roshi's as well (Richard Baker, Dennis Merzel, Bernie Glassman, Daido Loori).

The most influential Zen tradition in the West has been the Sanbōkyōdan organization,[43] a Japanese reform movement that de-emphasized lineage and tradition, and stressed lay practice and the experience of enlightenment. This Zen movement, that has no formal connection to the Japanese Rinzai and Sōtō Zen schools, was founded by Yasutani Hakuun (1885–1973) in 1954. Zen teachers in America who originate from this movement include Philip Kapleau, Robert Aitken, Ruben Habito and Tai Shimano. In Europe, the Jesuit Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle has been very influential.[44]

D.T. Suzuki's initial presentation of Zen to the West focused on the Rinzai school, and had tended to leave the Sōtō Zen school, founded by Dōgen, out of the picture, due to various reasons.[45] Since the 1970s, however, Dōgen's writings have become more well known in the West, leading to a Western tradition of Dōgen Zen.[46]

The academic study of Zen has known various phases. In the seventies and eighties, the Japanese Zen scholar Yanagida Seizan introduced a new philological approach to Zen. Together with Western students, many of whom were Zen practitioners themselves, he researched many Zen texts that had been discovered in the early twentieth century in a cave in Dunhuang. Their results led to a questioning of many established Zen myths, and to critical considerations about the nature of the spirituality of Zen. A 1995 publication, *Rude Awakenings*,

43 The Sanbōkyōdan organization was renamed as Sanbō Zen International in 2014. In this book I will consistently use the Sanbōkyōdan name, since this is the one used in the publications that I am discussing.

44 Robert Sharf has argued that it is technically more accurate to label Sanbōkyōdan as one of the many post-war Japanese New Religious Movements. Despite claims of orthodoxy by Yasutani, Sanbōkyōdan is marginal in Japan, and does not have the backing from the orthodox Zen schools. Therefore, Sanbōkyōdan can also be linked under Buddhist modernism, rather than under traditional Zen. See Robert H. Sharf, "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22 nos. 3–4 (1995): 417–458.

45 Thomas Kasulis notes that Suzuki boldly asserted at several public occasions in America, when asked about Dōgen, that Dōgen was not enlightened; therefore, there was no need to study his writings seriously. (Thomas P. Kasulis, "Masao Abe as D.T. Suzuki's philosophical successor," in: Donald W. Mitchell (ed.), *Masao Abe: A Zen Life of Dialogue* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1998), 251–259, citation on 252.)

46 Dōgen is a complex thinker, not to be approached as one would approach a Western philosopher, looking only for his "philosophical positions," but as a soteriological thinker. See Hee-Jin Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004 [1975], xvi–xix) for an overview of early Dōgen research in the West.

stressed the need for a self-understanding of the Zen tradition itself.[47] Western Zen priest Brian Victoria published in 1997 *Zen at War*, documenting nationalism and war crimes by Japanese Zen masters, throwing doubt on the universality of Zen spirituality.[48] Robert Sharf has summarized the situation as follows:

> The irony … is that the "Zen" that so captured the mind of the West was in fact a product of the New Buddhism of the Meiji. Moreover, those aspects of Zen most attractive to the Occident—the emphasis on spiritual experience and the devaluation of institutional forms—were derived in large part from Occidental sources. Like Narcissus, Western enthusiasts failed to recognize their own reflection in the mirror being held out to them.[49]

Over the past decades, historians of the Zen tradition have stressed the role of embodiment, practice and ritual in Zen, deconstructing the idea of Zen as a spiritual tradition aimed at a mystical experience of enlightenment. Contemporary hermeneutical and postmodern interpretations of Zen use theories of language and interpretation in order to de-mystify Zen, and disclose its significance as a philosophical tradition (see Chapter 6).[50]

Part of the attraction of Zen for Westerners has always been that it offers the individual a way to enlightenment through the practice of zazen (seated meditation). The "spiritual technology" of Zen meditation seems to bypass any need for ritual or institutional structures. The Chinese Chan masters from the Tang Dynasty are portrayed as radical iconoclasts, rebelling against any form of collective ritual or other "churchy" distractions. As paradigmatic religious individualists, they were committed to breaking up the religious status quo wherever they encountered it. They were the new spiritual heroes of a modern Western audience that had grown dissatisfied with Christian saints. The present day mindfulness movement continues this discourse.

Although mindfulness has strong connections to Theravāda Buddhism, it could in some respects also be viewed as an offspring of the Western Zen

47 James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (eds.), *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

48 Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen At War* (New York: Weatherhill, 1997).

49 Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," *History of Religions* 33/1 (1993): 1–43, citation on 39.

50 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*; Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

movement.[51] The Canadian scholar of religion Jeff Wilson describes how mindfulness teaching appeared in the West during the 1970s from three sources.[52] The first was Western teachers who had trained in Asia in the vipassana movements. The second was the modernist Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh. The third was Jon Kabat-Zinn, a doctor and scientist who was a student of the Korean Zen master Seung Sahn. He developed a new technique that he named Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR): an eight-week course of training for patients who wish to apply mindfulness to their stress and pain. During the 1980s and 1990s, Kabat-Zinn and his colleagues developed models for teaching meditation to non-Buddhists in secular, usually medical, environments. Mindfulness was increasingly being applied to everyday life.

As the American Zen teacher and psychoanalyst Barry Magid observes, half a century ago, Zen was the magic elixir that would save Westerners from themselves. Today, it is mindfulness.[53] In this move, Zen is reimagined as not a religious tradition concerned with ritual and lineage, but as a form of global spirituality, a reservoir of therapeutic and spiritual practices that lead to personal freedom, a quintessentially Western value.[54] By some adherents, this new imagination of Zen (*mindfulness* Zen) is even defended as a return to "what the Buddha really taught," as we will see in Chapter 8.[55]

Today, "Zen" can mean many things. For Buddhist practitioners, Zen is about realizing enlightenment. For business people, Zen and mindfulness are about living in the present moment. For avant-garde creative types, Zen embodies creativity, spontaneity and iconoclasm. For consumers all around the world, Zen exudes an aura of class, cosmopolitanism and sophistication. All these

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51 Mindfulness is an English translation of the Pali term *sati*, which originally means "memory" or "remembrance," but also implies awareness, attention or alertness. Some authors use "mindfulness" to refer to *vipassana* (insight) meditation. Others use "mindfulness" to describe *zazen*. And some have used "mindfulness" to refer to *samatha* (calming) meditation.

52 Jeff Wilson, *Mindful America. The Mutual Transformation of Buddhist Meditation and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 31–36.

53 Robert Meikyo Rosenbaum and Barry Magid, "Introduction," in: R.M. Rosenbaum and B. Magid (eds.), *What's Wrong with Mindfulness (And What Isn't): Zen Perspectives* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2016), 1–10, here 1.

54 Wilson, *Mindful America*, 62.

55 Jane Naomi Iwamura argues that this amounts to "a modernized cultural patriarchy in which Anglo-Americans reimagine themselves as protectors, innovators, and guardians of Asian religions and culture and wrest the authority to define these traditions from others" (Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21).

different images of Zen continue to intermingle and reverberate throughout popular culture, and permeate everyday language.

Zen has gained a place in contemporary culture, for example in Jon Stewart's "moment of Zen" in the Daily Show, Zen aftershave and perfume, and so on. Zen has become a strong brand.[56] Compared to other Asian Buddhist traditions, Zen has been one of the most successful in gathering attention in the West. The word "Zen" has even become a household name, a popular brand in the lexicon of global popular culture.

Irizarry argues that due to its evolution over the past hundred years, the term "Zen" has become what anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss has called a "floating signifier"[57], defined by Faubion as "a meaning-bearing unit that nevertheless has no distinct meaning, and so is capable of bearing any meaning, operating within any given linguistic system as the very possibility of signification."[58]

## 4 Discussion

In this chapter, I have explored the hermeneutic horizon of the Zen tradition, through its various incarnations of Chinese Chan, Japanese Zen and Western Zen. We have seen that there is no such unitary thing as "Zen": there have always been many controversies within the Zen tradition itself: regarding sudden and gradual awakening, Zen being outside or inside language, Zen being Buddhist or "pure," *kanhua* Chan versus *mozhao* Chan, Rinzai Zen versus Sōtō Zen, and "New Buddhism" versus old Japanese Zen. All throughout, both the place of Zen vis à vis the larger Buddhist religious tradition and the identity of the Zen movement itself have been contested.[59] The proliferation of Zen imaginings has continued as Zen entered the Western secular age since the beginning of the twentieth century, as evidenced by the ideal types of traditional Zen, romantic Zen, philosophical Zen, meditation Zen, and mindfulness Zen.

Comparative philosopher Jay Garfield has compared the current spread of Buddhism to the West to the spread of Indian Buddhism to China.[60] He mentions a number of similarities. First, in both cases the transmission is into a

56 Joshua A. Irizarry, "Putting a Price on Zen: The Business of Redefining Religion for Global Consumption," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 16 (2015): 51–69.

57 Ibid.

58 James D. Faubion, "From the Ethical to the Themitical (and Back): Groundwork for an Anthropology of Ethics," in: *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*, ed. Michael Lambek (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 84–101, citation on 93.

59 A good overview of this process is Hershock, *Public Zen, Personal Zen.*

60 Garfield, *Buddhism in the West.*

highly literate civilization with already well established philosophical and religious traditions, a written language, a well-organized government system and educational system. Second, the penetration of Buddhism is slow and deliberate. Buddhism is first adopted by scholars who are attracted to the unusual language and are interested in the philology, in the texts. Only later, an interest in Buddhist practice is developed. Third, the penetration of Buddhism is gradual and partial. China never became entirely Buddhist. Buddhism always lived alongside the Confucian and Daoist traditions and it proliferated in a number of different schools.[61]

In spite of such similarities however, there is also something unique about the transmission of Zen to the West. Garfield mentions an important difference between the current spread of Asian Buddhism to the West, and previous spreads of Buddhism within Asia. Due to the fact that the current transmission of Buddhism to the West takes place in the context of globalization, it is a two-way transmission, with feedback from the West to Asia and vice versa.[62] I want to mention three examples of the various East-West reconfigurations of Zen that arise out of this two-way transmission.

The first example is the Zen version of the "pizza effect," a term coined by Agehananda Bharati.[63] The original Italian pizza is fairly basic. However, Italian immigrants in New York invented the New York pizza, with all kinds of toppings. This is the kind of pizza that became popular around the world. So much so, that tourists in Italy, looking for an authentic Italian pizza, were not satisfied with the basic Italian pizza, but wanted the New York pizza. This is what an authentic Italian pizza meant to them. So now, pizzerias in Italy are making New York pizzas, and branding them as authentically Italian. A similar thing has happened to Zen. The New York Pizza corresponds to Zen modernism,

61 Morten Schlűtter also describes this partial penetration of Buddhism into Chinese society: "Even though few Chinese, aside from monks and nuns, would define themselves exclusively as 'Buddhists,' many people felt that Buddhism provided special access to powerful forces in the universe [...] Many in the educated elite found Buddhism philosophically satisfying, while those of an ascetic mindset, sought in it powerful means to achieve purity and transcendence." Morten Schlűtter, "Introduction: The *Platform Sūtra,* Buddhism, and Chinese Religion," in: *Readings of the Platform Sūtra* 1–24, citation on 9. See also Erik Braun on the popularity of Jhana meditation in the West: Erik Braun, "The United States of *Jhana*: Varieties of Modern Buddhism in America," in: Mitchell & Quli, *Buddhism Beyond Borders,* 163–180.

62 See Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield and Abraham Zablocki (eds.), *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, Transformation* (Amherst, MA: Massachusetts University Press, 2009).

63 Agehananda Bharati, "The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29/2 (1970): 267–287.

a modern invention that inspired Asian reformers (often inspired by Western publications) to upgrade their traditional Zen, and brand it as authentic Zen.[64]

A second example of the complex East-West configurations around Zen is that Zen, including the classical Chinese Chan tradition, has been presented to the West already reimagined through the mediation of Japanese Zen orthodoxy (especially Rinzai), as embodied for example in the famous Japanese researcher Yanagida.[65] This effective history [*Wirkungsgeschichte*] of the Chinese Chan writings in the Japanese Rinzai tradition has co-determined the establishment of a modern Zen orthodoxy in the West. As various researchers have stressed, it is time now to differentiate between the modern orthodox interpretation of Chan (through the filter of the Japanese Rinzai school of Zen) and the historical orthodox forms of Chan (as embodied in the original writings of the Chan masters and their effective history in Tang and Song China).[66] Such a differentiation between these two orthodoxies is made possible by a host of new research in China on Chan.[67]

A third example is connected to the (post) colonial aspects of the transmission of Zen to the West. As Buddhist scholar Carl Bielefeldt has noted, the Western study of Buddhism in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries followed a colonial model: the East provided the raw material, which was processed and packaged in the West until the end product was assembled: "Indian Buddhism." But, other than in India, in Japan there were many living Buddhists around. They managed to acquire Western academic technology, reprocessed and "repackaged" their own Zen Buddhist tradition, and sold it back to the West as genuinely Asian but universally valid.[68] As Bielefeldt puts it, on behalf of the Western Zen scholars,

64 See for example, Ryan Bongseok Joo, "Countercurrents from the West: 'Blue-eyed' Zen Masters, Vipassanā Meditation, and Buddhist Psychotherapy in Contemporary Korea," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79/3 (2011): 614–638.

65 As an example of such a distortion, Mario Poceski gives a critical overview of Yanagida's interpretation of the Hongzhou school of Chan as iconoclastic, arguing that Yanagida "often accepts normative readings of Song era texts and the ideological stances of the later Zen traditions (especially Rinzai) in Japan." Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 238.

66 Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*, 53.

67 Since 1976, Chinese research has blossomed on Huineng (638–713) and the Hongzhou school.

68 David L. McMahan, "Repackaging Zen for the West," in: Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 218–229.

> we alone in Buddhist studies have found ourselves to be at least as much the colonized as the colonizer. [...] (at least until very recently, with the rise of Vipassana and the stardom of the Dalai Lama) we alone have been forced into competition with a living form of Buddhism that has learned to speak for itself in modern philosophical and psychological terms to a modern Western audience.[69]

As a hermeneutical tool to better understand the transmission of Zen to the West, I have introduced in this chapter two processes that are involved in the transmission of Buddhist traditions to a new culture: accommodation and advocacy. In order for Zen to make sense within our Western horizon, it needs to be interpreted in terms of something already established within our horizon. In order to make sense of Zen, we need to interpret it *as* something. As Dan Leighton notes, to truly engage Zen, we need to find analogues from which to interpret it in our Western cultural matrix.[70] So far, these analogues have been the fields of mysticism (Chapter 4), psychology (Chapter 5), psychotherapy (Chapter 6), and global spirituality (Chapter 7). However, we have to find new analogues, using different elements of our Western cultural matrix. In Chapter 4, I will introduce the notion of mystical hermeneutics and the importance of language. In Chapter 5, I will stress embodiment and the importance of the body. In Chapter 6, I will highlight the resources within self psychology for reimagining Zen. In Chapter 7, I will use the approach to religions as social practices in order to highlight communal aspects of Zen.

A central tool in the reimagining of Indian Buddhism on Chinese soil was the application of the Mahāyāna Buddhist hermeneutical device of upaya. The Buddha was able to attune his way of relating and teaching to the particular and differing needs of his various Indian audiences. But what could be said of the needs of the Chinese audiences? It was necessary to improvise new vocabularies and rhetorical strategies for a Chinese audience. Similarly, now that Zen is coming to the secular modernities of the West and Asia, it is necessary to discern the needs of secular audiences, and improvise new vocabularies and rhetorical strategies. This is why in Chapter 2 of this book, we will immerse ourselves in the horizon of our own Western secular age.

69 Bielefeldt, *Zen Wars III*. Quoted in: André van der Braak, "Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age I," *Studies in Spirituality* 18 (2008), 39–60.

70 Taigen Dan Leighton, "Updating Dōgen: *Shushōgi* and Today," in: Tetsuzen Jason Wirth, Shūdō Brian Schroeder and Kanpū Bret W. Davis (eds.), *Engaging Dōgen's Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2016), 29–33.

CHAPTER 2

# A Secular Age

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor undertakes a historical analysis of today's secular society, in order to elucidate what it means to be religious in a secular age.[1] Taylor traces the development of Western secular modernity from its roots in Latin Christendom. He gives a historical account of the secularization of Western cultural and social orders. He attempts to identify what it means to inhabit a secularized society, and clarify the conditions of the experience of and the search for the spiritual in our current age.

In this chapter I will give an overview of Taylor's *A Secular Age*, with special attention to four key concepts: the immanent frame, fullness, disenchantment, and the buffered self. I will use these four concepts as a lens through which to look at Zen's engagement with Western modernity.[2]

## 1 Introduction

Although many today seem to agree that we live in a secular age, it is unclear what this secularity exactly entails. What does it mean to call our age a "secular" age? Most people would answer that it means that in our age, religious belief decreases. However, for Taylor the point is not about the rate of religious belief but about the changing *conditions* of belief—a shift in the plausibility structures that make something believable or unbelievable. The question that Taylor attempts to answer in *A Secular Age* is:

> How did we move from a condition where, in Christendom, people lived naively within a theistic construal, to one in which we all shunt between two stances, in which everyone's construal shows up as such; and in

1 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Boston: Belknap Press, 2007) (From here on cited as SA). This topic was also covered by Taylor in his earlier publications *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1991); *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992); and *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002).

2 Some of the material in this chapter has been published as van der Braak, *Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age I*.

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which moreover, unbelief has become for many the major default option?[3]

Taylor is not interested in what people believe, but in what has become beli*ev-able,* and for which reasons, in our current age. In order to clarify this point, Taylor differentiates between three understandings of secularity.

(1) The first understanding of secularity is in terms of the retreat of religion from public spaces. Taylor calls this secularity$_1$.The political organization of the state is no longer connected with religious belief. The various spheres of activity in Western states—economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational—are no longer dominated by the authoritative prescriptions of Christianity. However, as Taylor remarks, "this emptying of religion from autonomous social spheres is, of course, compatible with the vast majority of people still believing in God, and practising their religion vigorously. The case of Communist Poland springs to mind."[4] From a Buddhist point of view, we might add the cases of India and China as other contemporary examples. The Dalai Lama has noted that "Modern India has a secular constitution and prides itself on being a secular country. In Indian usage, "secular," far from implying antagonism toward religion or toward people of faith, actually implies a profound respect for and tolerance toward all religions."[5] With regard to China, although the country is officially secular, there is much religious activity.[6]

(2) For others, perhaps most people, secularity refers to the decrease in the rate of religious belief and practice, especially in Western Europe. In modernity, "secular" begins to refer to a nonsectarian, neutral, and areligious space or standpoint. The public square is considered "secular" insofar as it is nonreligious. When people describe themselves as "secular," they mean that they have no religious affiliation and hold no "religious" beliefs. Taylor calls this

3 SA, 14. Some readers stumble on Taylor's remark that "we all shunt between two stances," because they are surrounded by communities where theism is not only quite believable, but remains the "default" for many. For example, historian Brad Gregory questions Taylor's use of the "we" (Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Belknap, Boston: 2012), 10f). It is important to qualify that Taylor refers here to those environs in the West where unbelief is the rule, the globalized secular elite that Peter Berger has described (Peter Berger, "The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview," in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. P. Berger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 10).

4 Ibid., 2.

5 Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2012), 6.

6 See André van der Braak, "Introduction," in: André van der Braak, Dedong Wei & Caifang Zhu (eds.), *Religion and Social Cohesion: Western, Chinese and Intercultural Perspectives* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2015), 9–17.

"secularity$_2$." This is the understanding of secularity that is assumed by secularization theorists and by normative secular*ism*: the view that political spaces should carve out a realm purified of the contingency, particularity and irrationality of religious belief and instead be governed by universal, neutral rationality. Secular*ism* is always secularity$_2$.

(3) Taylor distinguishes, however, his own third understanding. Secularity$_3$ refers, in this perspective, to the changing context of understanding in which our religious search takes place today. This change involves, according to Taylor, a shift in the conditions of belief that indicates "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."[7] It is in this sense that we live in a secular age, even if religious participation may still be visible and pervasive. And in this sense it would be possible to maintain a secularization$_3$ thesis: regardless of the actual rate of religious belief and practice, religious belief is no longer axiomatic; there are alternatives. This type of secularity, secularity$_3$, has a major impact on spirituality. It affects "the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place, […] the implicit, largely unfocussed background of this experience and search."[8]

From belief as unproblematic we have gone to belief as one of several possible options. What does it mean to be religious today? What is the context of understanding, or interpretation of the religious search?[9] What are the contemporary conditions for being religious?

According to secularity$_1$, what it means to be religious in a secular age is that one keeps one's religious convictions and practices private, and doesn't contaminate the public domain with them. According to secularity$_2$, what it means to be religious in a secular age is that one fights a losing battle against the forces of science and rationality. But what does it mean to be religious in an age that is secular in the sense of secularity$_3$?

Taylor is not satisfied with the explanation of the secularist proponents of secularity$_2$: science refutes and hence crowds out religious belief. Rather than treating belief and unbelief as two rival *theories* on ultimate reality, Taylor wants to focus on "the different kinds of lived experience involved in

7 SA, 3.

8 Ibid. As Taylor remarks, these three types of secularity are connected. Especially secularity$_2$, the falling off of traditional religious belief and practice, has large consequences for secularity$_3$, the conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual in our current age.

9 Taylor uses the Heideggerian term "pre-ontology" with regard to the religious search to stress that he does not refer to consciously held convictions here, but to "the implicit, largely unfocussed background of this experience and search" (SA, 3).

understanding your life in one way or the other, on what it's like to live as a believer or an unbeliever."[10] In order to capture this sense of lived experience he introduces the term "fullness."

## 2 Fullness

One important aspect of the spiritual life, according to Taylor, is a lived experience of a sense of what he calls "fullness": some way in which this life looks good, whole, proper, really being lived as it should. This can be a radical experience that unsettles and breaks through our ordinary sense of being in the world, and seems to promise a greater possibility, a greater sense of depth or completion. Or it can be an experience where "our highest aspirations and our life energies are somehow lined up, reinforcing each other, instead of producing psychic gridlock."[11] On the other end of the spectrum, there is the experience of emptiness, the suffering from the absence of fullness. This is the state of listlessness that comes across, for example, in the state of *acedia* (boredom or listlessness) of the mystic. Taylor tentatively describes "fullness" as follows:

> We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it should be. This is perhaps a place of power: we often experience this as deeply moving, as inspiring. Perhaps this sense of fullness is something we just catch glimpses of from afar off; we have the powerful intuition of what fullness would be, were we to be in that condition, e.g. of peace or wholeness; or able to act on that level, of integrity or generosity or abandonment or self-forgetfulness. But sometimes there will be moments of experienced fullness, of joy and fulfillment, where we feel ourselves there.[12]

According to Taylor, there is no escaping some version of fullness: even the unreligious person, who shuns religious ideas of fullness, has his or her own version of what real fullness consists in. The religious person, however, Taylor argues, usually considers such a fullness as beyond, or independent from,

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10 SA, 5.
11 Ibid., 6.
12 Ibid., 5.

ordinary human flourishing. Fullness implies some kind of self-transcendence. This is however not per se an ontological transcendence (such as relating to a personal God, or reaching *nirvāna* as a transcendent realm). It can also refer to an epistemological transcendence, in which the world appears in a radical new light (such as seeing one's Buddha nature and realizing enlightenment).

Sometimes, as we can read for example in the works of the mystics (or the stories about the Zen masters), such a sense of fullness comes in an experience which unsettles and breaks through our ordinary sense of being in the world, with its familiar objects, activities and points of reference, where something terrifyingly other seems to shine through. In other cases, such fullness is experienced as a state of ultimate balance and harmony, where our highest aspirations and our life energies are somehow lined up, producing an experience of "flow."[13] Taylor admits the inadequacy of "fullness" as a shorthand term for the condition we aspire to, especially with regard to Buddhism, where the highest aspiration is conceived as realizing emptiness (*śūnyatā*). As Taylor puts it, in Buddhism, real fullness only comes through emptiness.[14]

Many people who aspire to fullness live in a stabilized middle condition between emptiness and fullness: the routine of everyday, ordinary life. They evoke emptiness, but keep it at a distance. And yet, they live their life with a sense of gradually approaching fullness. For many others, however, this middle condition is "all there is." They call themselves secular or atheist, and do not believe in a state of fullness.[15]

Again, Taylor does not want to use the term "fullness" in an ontological sense (the question whether or not a higher form of being that transcends the human exists). His question is not whether the source of fullness lies within us or outside of us. Rather, he is using the term "fullness" in a phenomenological way. Do people recognize something beyond or transcendent to their lives? Does the highest, the best life involve our seeking a good which is beyond human

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13 See Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper, 1990).

14 SA, 780, fn. 8.

15 The longing for fullness has been conceptualized as the manifestation of eros (Plato), as *desiderium naturale* (Thomas Aquinas), or as *bodhicitta* in Mahāyāna Buddhism. One of the most clear expressions of the difference between those who believe in fullness, and those who do not can be found, surprisingly enough, in the prologue of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In his speech to the crowd, Zarathustra contrasts the person who longs for the Overman with the person without any ideals at all anymore whom he characterizes as "the last man."

flourishing? In Christianity, this higher good would be framed as to love and worship God. In Zen, this higher good might be framed as to realize our Buddha nature or to attain enlightenment.

For Taylor, both believers and unbelievers are able to have a longing for fullness. They have a radically different interpretation, however, of what constitutes fullness. For believers, fullness is something that comes to them, once they have become opened or transformed to that fullness. In Christianity, that means surrendering oneself to the grace of God. For Buddhists, it means letting go of the ego in order to realize enlightenment.[16]

For unbelievers, Taylor argues, the way to fullness lies within. For Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Feuerbach, reason is the way to realize fullness. For Romantic thinkers, the way to fullness lies beyond the rational. Reason is blind and destructive, and only through our deepest feelings can fullness be realized. For existentialist and postmodern thinkers, there is no alternative source of fullness. Division, pluralism and conflict are endless; fullness is but a pipe dream.[17]

Taylor argues that one of the main differences between modern man and medieval man is that in the Middle Ages, the experience of fullness was an immediate one, not something that was reflective and optional. The spiritual world was a reality.[18] Today, belief and unbelief are options, with unbelief as the more plausible option. We have gone from a naïve framework to a reflective framework, Taylor argues: "We have changed not just from a condition where most people lived "naïvely" in a construal (part Christian, part related to "spirits" of pagan origin) as simple reality, to one in which almost no one is capable of this, but all see their option as one among many."[19]

For Taylor, this is what makes our time secular, not the rise of unbelief. It is not only that our convictions have changed, but also that our very experience, our very sensibility has changed. Perhaps some kinds of immediate, naïve experiences of fullness are no longer accessible to our modern minds, Taylor suggests. He points out that in the Middle Ages, people spoke about their experience of fullness as an immediate experience of power, without making a distinction between their experience and their construal of it. To a (post)modern observer, their interpretation of their experience is one of a possible set of construals, but for themselves, they simply experience reality as it is. Taylor

16 SA, 8.
17 Ibid., 10.
18 Ibid., 12.
19 Ibid.

mentions contemporary African thought as another example. The spirit world is not a possible interpretation of their experience: the spirits that surround them are simply there, as an immediate certainty. In our civilization, these forms of immediate certainty have largely eroded. Taylor concludes:

> We have moved from a world in which the place of fullness was understood as unproblematically outside of or "beyond" human life, to a conflicted age in which this construal is challenged by others which place it (in a wide range of different ways) "within" human life.[20]

Secularity$_3$ is the new context in which all searching for the moral and the spiritual must proceed. It puts an end to the naïve acknowledgement of transcendence. This is very different from a change in which one naïve horizon replaces another (e.g. individually, when someone converts from Christianity to Islam, or culturally, when Indian Buddhism moved to China). In those cases, the interpretation of fullness changes. But nowadays, the very sensibility of a state of fullness is under discussion.[21]

## 3 Beyond Subtraction Stories

The most popular explanations for the rise of secularity (usually interpreted as secularity$_2$), such as that of Max Weber, claim that science has increasingly refuted and therefore robbed religious belief of its plausibility. Science has disclosed a natural world devoid of meaning, purpose, value, or God's presence, and therefore disenchanted. To be religious would demand a sacrifice of intellectual integrity.[22] As James Smith summarizes it in his book *How* (*Not*) *to be Secular:*

> Once upon a time, as these subtraction stories rehearse it, we believed in sprites and fairies and gods and demons. But as we became rational, and especially as we marshaled naturalist explanations for what we used to attribute to spirits and forces, the world became progressively disenchanted. Religion and belief withered with scientific exorcism of superstition. Natch.[23]

20 Ibid., 15.
21 Ibid., 21.
22 Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 26.
23 Smith, *How* (*Not*) *To Be Secular,* 24.

As the American scholar of religion Brad Gregory notes, this is the dominant view today among European and North American academics at leading research universities, as expressed for example by philosopher John Searle:

> Given what we know about the details of the world [...] this world view is not an option. It is not simply up for grabs along with a lot of competing world views. Our problem is not that somehow we have failed to come up with a convincing proof of the existence of God or that the hypothesis of an afterlife remains in serious doubt, it is rather that in our deepest reflections we cannot take such opinions seriously. When we encounter people who claim to believe such things, we may envy them the comfort and security they claim to derive from these beliefs, but at bottom we remain convinced that either they have not heard the news or they are in the grip of faith. We remain convinced that somehow they must separate their minds into separate compartments to believe such things.[24]

In this view, secularity is just an inescapable consequence of the rise of science: religious beliefs are being crowded out by scientific theories. Modern civilization therefore unavoidably results in a death of God. Taylor disagrees with such explanations, which he labels "subtraction stories": the idea that modern humanity has liberated itself from earlier, confining horizons, illusions, or limitations of knowledge.[25] According to Taylor, secularity is not just the result of a gradual disenchantment. It arose out of a newly invented and constructed self-understanding.[26] The death of God is not only the result of a particular option (belief in God) losing its plausibility; it is also the result of another option gaining in plausibility, the option of exclusive humanism.[27]

Our current understanding of ourselves is determined by a story about how we got here, and overcame a previous condition. Subtraction stories led us to believe that science and religion are opposites, and that the rise of science will inevitably lead to the decline of religion. Such subtraction stories, Taylor argues, are not so much untrue as wrong, in the sense of limited. Taylor wants to tell a different story, that will also change our current self-understanding, and

24 John R. Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 90–91.

25 Gregory argues that such explanations presuppose a supersessionist model of historical change: "the distant past is assumed to have been left behind, explanatory important to what immediately succeeded it but not to the present [...] as if, *all* things considered, *of course* we find ourselves where we are." Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 9.

26 Taylor gave an extensive overview of the making of our modern self-understanding in his earlier work *Sources of the Self*.

27 SA, 21.

our current horizon (in the sense that Gadamer and Heidegger use this term in philosophical hermeneutics).

Taylor disagrees with proponents of secularity$_2$ who claim that the "secular" is just the neutral, rational, areligious world that is left over once superstition, ritual, and belief in the gods have been left behind. For Taylor, the "secular" is connected with "the production of a new option, a new way of constructing meaning and significance without any reference to the divine or transcendence."[28] Secularity$_3$, according to Taylor, is characterized by the rise of a society in which such a new option, a self-sufficient humanism, became a valid one. Such an exclusive humanism, that denies the possibility of fullness, widens the range of possible options. It is indeed possible to live without a notion of approaching some kind of fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing. A secular age is a time in which the eclipse of all goals beyond ordinary human flourishing becomes conceivable, a time in which one can do without transcendence. Again, Taylor stresses that he doesn't mean ontological transcendence (the existence of God or a higher power), but the sense that there is some good higher than, beyond, human flourishing, a higher good that requires a transformation beyond the human, a higher power, and a life beyond this life.[29]

Taylor describes the rise of exclusive humanism with an alternative, more complex narrative than the traditional subtraction stories. The full narrative of how exclusive humanism came to be a realistic option need not concern us here. I will single out two related developments that are particularly relevant for our investigation: the process of disenchantment (which will be discussed more in Chapter 5) and the rise of the buffered self (which will be discussed more in Chapter 7).

## 4 Disenchantment

Five hundred years ago in Europe, religion was built into the very fabric of social, political and private life, much as it has been, and still is, in Asian Buddhist cultures. The existence of God was not a proposition to believe in; God was simply there, the way that oxygen is simply in the air whether we believe in it or not. The medieval enchanted world was permeated with God's presence, and with spirits, demons, and moral forces. Sacred presence could be "enacted

28 Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 26.

29 SA, 20.

in ritual, seen, felt, touched, walked toward (in pilgrimage)."[30] Such an enchanted world has given way to our modern world. Today, Taylor argues, we no longer believe in spirits. However, that doesn't mean that we experience spirits as non-existent. Rather, it means that we don't worry about their existence at all anymore. Generally, people are not that concerned about spirits, about whether they exist or not. Spirits are not an issue anymore, according to our current pre-understanding.[31]

Taylor's interpretation of this process of disenchantment subtly differs from other interpretations. Most secularization theorists interpret disenchantment as the replacement of religious explanations by naturalistic explanations, as a result of the rise of science. In this way, the magical, spiritual world is dissolved, and we are left with a disenchanted, natural world, devoid of spiritual meaning. In Taylor's account of disenchantment, however, he suggests that disenchantment is also, and maybe even primarily, a shift in the *location* of meaning, rather than a *loss* of meaning.[32] Meaning is no longer located "out there," in the world, but resides in the mind. Meaning and significance are a property of minds who perceive meaning internally. Things only have the meaning they do in that they awaken a certain response in us. We do not live in meaning, meaning lives *in* us. As Smith puts it, "the external world might be a catalyst for perceiving meaning, but the meanings are generated within the mind."[33]

Taylor argues that this is radically different from the enchanted cosmos where meanings are not in the mind but "out there." Spirits are entities that act (demons), there is a force in things (relics) and places (power spots). There is no clear boundary between minds and the world. Charged things have a causal power which matches their incorporated meaning. The worldview that goes with the enchanted world is the High Renaissance theory of correspondences. Things are inherently related to each other through association, not in any "disenchanted" causal way but in an "enchanted" correlational way. Why does mercury cure veneral disease? Because this is contracted in the market, and Hermes is the God of markets. Black bile is not so much the cause of melancholy, it embodies, it *is* melancholy.[34]

The process of disenchantment has fundamentally altered the conditions for being religious, Taylor argues. First of all, being nonreligious was difficult in the premodern enchanted world. God would guarantee that good would

30 Ibid., 554.
31 Ibid., 12.
32 Ibid., 31f.
33 Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, 29.
34 SA, 35ff.

triumph. Without God, one would need another protector in the field of forces. Secondly, disenchantment opened the way to the kind of disengagement from cosmos and God which makes exclusive humanism a possibility.[35]

## 5 The Buffered Self

In an enchanted cosmos, the mind is experienced as porous, as part of a field of forces. The mind is constantly under siege. Emotions are often seen not as created by the individual, but as the manifestation of collective energies. Emotions exist in a space which takes us beyond ourselves, and is porous to some outside power. This leads to a sense of vulnerability. This is why the fear of being possessed was a very real one.

The premodern porous self has gradually been replaced by what Taylor calls the modern "buffered" self. Minds have become enclosed inner spaces. Thoughts and feelings are somehow perceived as "inside" ourselves. We have bounded minds, that are separated from reality "out there." Taylor stresses that this is not a difference in theory, but in our "lived understanding": it is the glasses that we look through, or, in Heidegger's term, our pre-ontology.

The symbolism of the enchanted world is now situated in the depths of the soul. An ethic of discipline and self-control has given rise to the importance of privacy and intimacy. And the process of individualization has led to the fact that society is now conceived as being constituted by individuals, each in the possession of a buffered, autonomous self.[36]

Taylor stresses again that this is not theory, but how most people sense things to be, both believers and nonbelievers. The modern bounded, buffered self makes it possible to disengage from everything outside the mind. The boundary acts as a buffer. The buffered self can strive after autonomy, self-control, self-direction, free from the outside world.[37]

And even though we may experience nostalgia for the porous self (we go to movies about vampires and the uncanny), Taylor claims that we are incapable of really experiencing the fear of possession that medieval man experienced. We are forced to experience non-human forces as existing safely outside the

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35 Ibid., 41.

36 Ibid., 146. Taylor argues that this whole process has also been driven by what he calls the process of Reform. The shadow side of this has been, however, the decay of cosmic order and the decay of a sense of "higher time." The social order is now a constructed social space, where instrumental rationality rules, and secular time permeates everything.

37 Ibid., 38. This is often how the Buddhist ideal of nonattachment is interpreted in the West.

mind, as part of the realm of the laws of nature. We are all Cartesians, Taylor concludes, subject to the Cartesian split between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, not as a conscious conviction, but as a subconscious pre-understanding.[38]

## 6 The Immanent Frame

The result of all this is a collective pre-understanding with regard to reality that Taylor calls "the immanent frame." Today we live in what we sense to be a natural, immanent order, one which supposedly does not need to be connected to a transcendent supernatural order. We take such a self-sufficient immanent and impersonal natural order for granted. Important is, however, that this immanent natural order used to be complemented (and completed) by a transcendent supernatural order (Plato's world of Ideas, the Christian God), which has been disregarded now.[39] The immanent frame means that for most of us, the immanent natural order is self-evident, whereas the transcendent supernatural order has become an optional extra, for those who choose to be believers. Whether or not one believes in the transcendent supernatural order, however, has no effect on how one approaches the immanent natural order. Scientists who are believers are indistinguishable from non-believing scientists, it doesn't affect their work. This is why the immanent order is called self-sufficient, it doesn't need any transcendent order to validate or guarantee it. One can leave open the possibility of a transcendent order (the open version of the immanent frame) or one can rule it out (the closed version of the immanent frame); this is a personal matter of preference that has nothing to do with truth.

Taylor stresses that the immanent frame is not a theory but a lived understanding, "the construal we just live in, without ever being aware of it as a construal or—for most of us—without ever even formulating it."[40] It should not be taken as a set of beliefs which we entertain about our predicament; rather it is the sensed context in which we develop our beliefs: "we have here what Wittgenstein calls a "picture," a background to our thinking, within whose terms it is carried on, but which is often largely unformulated, and to which we can frequently, just for this reason, imagine no alternative."[41] The immanent frame

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 542.
40 Ibid., 30.
41 Ibid., 549.

is our very frame of reference for making sense of our world and for participating in it.

Although scholars across a wide range of fields (philosophy, cultural anthropology, history of science, sociology, literary studies, linguistics) have questioned the assumptions of the immanent frame, it is still a very convincing pre-understanding, also for Western Buddhists. And the various subtraction stories still feel self-evident to us.

As mentioned above, the immanent frame can have an "open" or a "closed" reading. In an open reading, there is still the sensed possibility of transcendent fullness, a higher good beyond ordinary human flourishing. One still seeks connection to the sacred in something beyond. The open reading is embraced not only by those who consider themselves religious, but also by many agnostics and so-called "spiritual but not religious."[42] It leads to various attempts at re-enchantment, the return of "repressed elements" from religion: Virgin Mary-worship, the belief in angels, spiritual festivals.[43]

However, Taylor observes, a "closed" reading of the immanent frame seems much more obvious today. In such a reading, the good is viewed as immanent, and religion is often seen as a threatening form of fanaticism.[44] In a further step, the good would even consist in the rejection of the higher aspirations of religion: they make us reject the sensual and the earth. There are no miracles, and no mysteries. Scientists find the mystery in science itself. Those who have a closed reading of the immanent frame aspire to civil values that are focused on the human good, and use scientific reason for realizing human progress.[45]

Taylor stresses that such a closed kind of religious sensibility used to be inconceivable and unintelligible. How could a life lived meaningfully orient itself in a fulfilling way to strictly immanent goals? Today, such a reading is not only conceivable but also the default option. This is the fundamental chasm between earlier times and our secular age.

Most people spin the immanent frame towards closure.[46] They feel that the closed reading is the natural and logical interpretation of the immanent frame. Of course, the natural world is the only world there is. Of course, we experience and think about the world more accurately than our ancestors. According to the many subtraction stories, science has liberated us from the false beliefs and superstitions of our ancestors, and has uncovered the bare truth about

42 See Linda A. Mercadante, *Belief without Borders. Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

43 SA, 545.

44 Ibid., 546.

45 Ibid., 548.

46 Ibid., 550.

existence for us. It is hard to see the secular worldview *as* a worldview, rather than as simply the way that science has revealed things to be.

Heuman criticizes such a closed reading of the immanent frame, that is also popular with Western Buddhists:

> When we assume that our secular worldview is de facto true, we are confusing *conditions for* reality with *features* of it. This is a little like setting our online newsfeed parameters so that we just get local news, and then coming to the conclusion that all news is local. In exactly the same way, immanence is a precondition for what can count as real in secular modernity. Western convert Buddhists often tend to mistake this background assumption for a feature of reality, and then as a consequence have a hard time making sense of transcendence, which was, by definition, just ruled out.[47]

For Taylor, choosing the open or closed reading is in both cases a leap of faith. He tries to undermine the sense of obviousness that we connect with the closed reading of the immanent frame. The rational obviousness of the closed reading has to do with what Taylor calls "closed world systems."[48] Epistemologically, Taylor argues, such closed world systems maintain the Cartesian split between the buffered self and the outside universe. Knowledge is dualistically viewed as the result of knowing agents as individuals, collecting representations of the outer world. Taylor mentions continental philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty who have rejected this Cartesian epistemology: they emphasized that the world is always already available to us, is "at hand" through our bodily existence.[49] In Chapter 5 I will further discuss Taylor's use of these thinkers.

Taylor notes that it is not simply that people at one point took off their blinkers and discovered the Cartesian epistemological picture. Rather, by means of a new way of looking, things could be presented this way. This new way of looking is the subtraction story that modern science inevitably leads to materialism, that religion is mythical thought, and that being religious implies a childish lack of courage to face the world in all its austerity: when God is dead, all we are left with is ordinary flourishing.[50] We have to issue the norms that we live

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47 Heuman, *What's at Stak*e.
48 SA, 551.
49 Ibid., 558.
50 Ibid.

by on our own authority rather than from God's authority. We have to be mature and have the courage to face the void, face nihilism.[51]

Taylor argues that today, many feel pulled two ways, towards openness and towards closure. Some waver between these two perspectives, they stand, like for example William James, "in that open space where you can feel the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief."[52] As Taylor points out, in our current fragmented society the positions are not fixed and stable. Many people change their positions during a lifetime, or between generations, to a greater degree than ever before.[53] "The whole culture experiences cross pressures, between the draw of the narratives of closed immanence on one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other."[54]

The developments within Western modernity have destabilized and rendered virtually unsustainable earlier forms of religious life, but new forms have sprung up. For the first time in history, a purely self-sufficient, or exclusive humanism (excluding a transcendent dimension) has become a widely available option as an alternative to religion. The rise of such an exclusive humanist alternative to Christian faith, coupled with the influx of Eastern forms of spirituality, eventually led to an ever-widening plurality of spiritual options, which Taylor calls "the nova-effect." According to Taylor, our current predicament is much more complicated than a simple battle between the open and closed versions of the immanent frame, a battle between believers and unbelievers, the sacred and the secular, transcendence and immanence.

## 7 A Three-Cornered Battle

Taylor reframes the struggle between the secular and the spiritual as a three-cornered battle:[55]

(1) There are secular, exclusive humanists with Enlightenment values who deny transcendence. As a result of centuries of disenchantment, God is dead. Religious beliefs have been rendered superfluous by the discoveries of science.

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51 Ibid., 562.

52 Ibid., 549. Gregory disagrees with Taylor on this point: "many millions of people today— devout religious believers or impassioned antireligious believers, for example—seem by all indications unperturbed by the hyperpluralism to which they themselves diversely contribute, convinced that their respective views are correct." (Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 12).

53 Ibid., 594.

54 Ibid., 595.

55 Ibid., 636f.

According to some Enlightenment thinkers, the power to reach fullness is located within. Kant would say that as rational agents, we have the power to make the laws by which we live. Feuerbach would add that we project God because of a sense of our inner power which we mistakenly project outside us: secularization would involve re-appropriating this power for ourselves. Exclusive humanism holds an "immanence perspective": it sees our highest goal in terms of a mutual human flourishing, each pursuing his or her own happiness on the basis of assured life and liberty, in a society of mutual benefit.[56] Secular, exclusive humanists seek fullness in ordinary human flourishing.

(2) Taylor describes a second group of thinkers that he describes as anti-humanists. They deny and attack the humanists' confidence in self-sufficient reason. As Taylor puts it, "reason by itself is narrow, blind to the demands of fullness, will run on perhaps to destruction, human and ecological."[57] For these postmodern thinkers, the buffered, rational modern self comes under heavy critique. They offer however no alternative strategy for reaching fullness, but stress the irremediable nature of division, the lack of center, and the perpetual absence of fullness. These anti-humanists turn against the values of the Enlightenment, but don't return to religion or the transcendent. They remain naturalistic.

Anti-humanists deconstruct any essentialized notion of fullness, whether as a higher good or as ordinary human flourishing. They are skeptical of believers in transcendence who essentialize fullness as a higher, teleological state. And they are skeptical of exclusive humanists that have a naïve optimism about fullness being realizable through instrumental rationality. Some anti-humanists might say that true fullness lies in the continuing practice of deconstructing all essentializing notions of fullness. Unlike the counter-enlightenment thinkers from the eighteenth century, who wanted to return to religion or the transcendent, the thinkers in this camp rebel against certain strands of modern exclusive humanism, but they are also radically anti-transcendence.[58]

They are anti-humanist, since they argue that exclusive humanism tends to reduce life to a rigid existence. Favoring "the affirmation of ordinary life" (ordinariness and everyday living), exclusive humanism denies any higher activities,

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56 Ibid., 430. Again, Taylor does not refer to ontological transcendence, but to transcendence in the sense of the existence of a higher good beyond ordinary human flourishing, which constitutes true fullness.

57 Ibid., 9.

58 Ibid., 369. Various comments on the *Immanent Frame* website by William Connolly, Lars Tonder, Elizabeth Hurd, and others (and by Hurd and Peter Gordon in other venues) have challenged Taylor's notion of the immanent counter-enlightenment. Some of them have suggested other labels, such as "immanent naturalists" and other terms.

any higher goals, any fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing. Therefore, it really is hostile to life, it can "threaten to crush our spontaneity, or our creativity, or our desiring natures."[59] Some anti-humanists argue that, just as the Protestant Reformers attacked the "higher" vocations of the monastic life, exclusive humanists attack the "higher" possibilities of spirituality and mysticism, and thereby flatten life.[60] The "affirmation of ordinary life" that is defended by exclusive humanism was originally inspired by a mode of Christian piety that was polemically directed against the pride and elitism of those who believed in "higher" spiritualities. In Chapter 6 I will go into this further.

The anti-humanist thinkers—a movement sparked by Schopenhauer, steered by Nietzsche, and flanked by the likes of Dostoyevsky, Bataille, Foucault, Derrida and Sloterdijk—attack the modern moral order of exclusive humanism ("the secular religion of life") that affirms the importance of preserving and enhancing life, and of avoiding death and suffering. They argue that such an ethos leads to a flattening of our understanding of life. According to Dostoyevsky's protagonist in *Notes from the Underground*, Taylor recounts, life in the "Crystal Palace" is stifling, diminishing, deadening and leveling.[61]

The anti-humanist movement regards modernity as a prison, Taylor explains, for it endorses the sort of existence that Nietzsche baptizes as "a miserable ease." This stance kills off the vibrant quality and the affirmative force of life. Nietzsche attempts to cure us of the disease of Christian morality, which he considers hostile to life. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes about the classic battle between the possibility of the Overman (the belief in a radical transformation that leads to fullness as a higher possibility beyond what man is now) and the Last Man (fullness as ordinary human flourishing). Taylor writes about Nietzsche:

> The Nietzschean understanding of enhanced life, which can fully affirm itself, also in a sense takes us beyond life; and in this it is analogous with other, religious notions of enhanced life [...] It doesn't acknowledge some supreme good beyond life, and in that sense, sees itself rightly as utterly antithetical to religion. The "transcendence" is, once again, in an important sense and paradoxically, immanent.[62]

59 Ibid., 599.

60 As we will see in Chapter 8, for similar reasons secular Buddhists such as Stephen Batchelor question the "higher" vocation of Buddhist *bhikkhus* and want to rehabilitate lay practice.

61 Ibid., 371.

62 Ibid., 374. However, some Nietzsche interpreters have forwarded the thesis that three phases in Nietzsche's thought can be distinguished, which correspond to his metaphor of

Several anti-humanists also deconstruct the notion of an autonomous self, which is very important in many exclusive humanist discourses. Nietzsche wrote "not I think, but "it thinks" in me, and even that would be saying too much."[63] Also, a Cartesian dualistic epistemology is deconstructed by anti-humanists in favor of a more embodied epistemology.

For the anti-humanists, exclusive humanism is a response to the death of God that inevitably leads to nihilism. The problem of nihilism and the possibility of its overcoming have been important themes for anti-humanists such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Dostoyevsky.[64] For these anti-humanists, the solution is not to simply cut off or eradicate all speaking about transcendence; the very notion of transcendence is in need of reimagining, as I will further discuss in Chapter 9.

(3) The third category of thinkers in Taylor's road map consists of reflective believers in transcendence who claim that the best life involves our seeking a good which is beyond our individual life, and that it is possible to aspire to a way of life that goes beyond ordinary human flourishing. Taylor calls this, in contrast to the immanence perspective, the "transformation perspective."[65]

Category (3) includes transcendence-based spirituality, such as Christianity and Buddhism, but also Romanticism. According to Romanticism, our rational mind has to open itself to something deeper and fuller, and these deeper sources lie at least partly within us: our own deepest feelings or instincts. Part of the Romantic tradition is an attempt to return to religion, but without the mistakes of the past. Within category (3), Taylor distinguishes those for whom the move to secular humanism was just a mistake which needs to be undone (3a), and those who think that secular humanism is a necessary and useful stage on the road to a more mature spirituality (3b).

Between these three corners, alliances shift continuously, Taylor notes. (1) and (2) are both anti-spirituality. They both share an immanent emancipation

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the metamorphosis of the spirit into a camel, a lion and a child. In the early camel phase of his thought, Nietzsche was a follower of Schopenhauer and Wagner, a believer in fullness and transcendence (3a). In the lion phase of his thought, Nietzsche deconstructed all forms of transcendence such as morality and religion, culminating in the death of God (2). In the child phase of his thought, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche reaffirmed an alternative notion of fullness, symbolized by the notion of the Overman (his Dionysian philosophy based on amor fati and eternal recurrence) (3b).

63 Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967), *Beyond Good and Evil* section 16.

64 Interestingly enough, "nihilism" is curiously absent as a topic in A *Secular Age*. The word is absent from the index, and occurs only twice in the whole book, on pages 635 and 638.

65 SA, 437.

narrative. (2) and (3) share forces against the naïve optimism and belief in progress of (1). (1) and (3) are both opposed to the relativism and nihilism of (2).

## 8 Discussion

In this chapter I have introduced four important concepts from Taylor's *A Secular Age*: (1) his notion of *fullness* to indicate a life well lived, either within secular parameters (fullness within ordinary human flourishing), or beyond merely secular goals (fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing); (2) the notion of a historical process of *disenchantment* (and the possibility of re-enchantment) that is the backdrop to much spiritual seeking today in the modern West; (3) his notion of *the buffered self* as the self-evident pre-understanding through which most modern Westerners understand themselves; (4) his claim that the three notions just mentioned constitute *the immanent frame*, that serves as the self-evident pre-understanding through which most modern Westerners understand their existential predicament. These four notions indicate the pre-understandings of Western culture with regard to religion. Any newcomers to the religious market in the West have to relate to these pre-understandings. They determine the kinds of questions that should be asked, and the range of possible answers to those questions that are recognized as valid. These notions help us to understand the challenges that are involved in Zen accommodation (how to explain Zen to Westerners?) and Zen advocacy (how to show that Zen can solve Western problems?).

In what follows in this book, I want to make use of these four notions in order to say more about reimagining Zen in a secular age. I aim to use Taylor's historical analysis of the secular West as a lens through which to look at Zen in the West. And I will also use the perspective of Zen as a lens through which to critically look at Taylor's analysis. Such a methodological approach has been described by the Indian scholar of comparative religion Arvind Sharma as one of "reciprocal illumination."[66]

(1) Taylor has put forward his phenomenological notion of "fullness" in order to escape the immanent/transcendent typology. However, Taylor also seems to firmly connect his notion of a fullness beyond ordinary flourishing to the notion of transcendence. The only way to achieve a fullness beyond ordinary flourishing seems to be to realize transcendence in some way.

66 Arvind Sharma, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology. The Case for Reciprocal Illumination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 23–43.

The Irish religion scholar Eoin Cassidy questions the appropriateness of Taylor's use of the transcendent/immanent distinction with regard to fullness. He contends that Taylor fails to fully appreciate the significance of the overlapping contours and radical interdependence of the concepts of immanence and transcendence.[67] For Taylor, some kind of connection to the transcendent is characteristic of true fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing. Cassidy argues that Augustine paints a very different picture in his *Confessions*:

> The *Confessions* remind us that the journey to fullness is not one that draws us beyond human life; rather, it is best described as a return [...] to the depths of one's own interiority [...] Augustine reminds us that god is neither to be found outside of nor beyond us, but is rather to be found in the depths of interiority, even "closer to me than I am to myself" (*Confessions* 10.27).[68]

According to Cassidy, although Augustine accepted a transcendent dimension to human fulfillment, there is little evidence that he considered the appropriate *telos* to life as one that draws us beyond human flourishing. This raises the question whether the transcendence/immanence distinction is a suitable template for distinguishing the religious believer from the exclusive humanist (the religious believer acknowledges transcendence, the exclusive humanist does not). In the main world religions, Cassidy argues, a wide range of contrasting positions on the transcendence/immanence scale can be found. There are many varied ways in which transcendence can be imagined.[69] There are transcendent frames of reference for human flourishing that in no way undermine the value of the immanent horizon of meaning that increasingly shapes contemporary culture.[70]

(2) Although Taylor aims to rebut subtraction stories that view disenchantment as an inevitable consequence of the rise of science and rationality, he does view disenchantment as an irreversible reality. Modernity produces a disenchanted world. However, Jason Josephson-Storm argues in his recent book *The Myth of Disenchantment* that this narrative is wrong.[71] Comparing several large-scale sociological surveys suggests that roughly three-in-four Americans

67 Cassidy, *Transcending Human Flourishing*, 7.

68 Ibid., 31.

69 For a recent study, see *Culture and Transcendence : A Typology of Transcendence,* edited by Wessel Stoker & Willie.L. van der Merwe (Leuven: Peeters 2012).

70 Cassidy, *Transcending Human Flourishing*, 34.

71 Jason Ā. Josephson Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017).

believe in ghosts, telepathy, witches, demonic possession, or something comparable. The secular skeptics are in the minority. And although there is less church attendance and reported belief in God in Western European countries, an analogous percentage of believers in the supernatural can be found there as well. Therefore, Josephson-Storm concludes, Western academics may experience the world as the closed immanent frame, but most people do not.

(3) The notion of the buffered self seems to be an irreversible reality for Taylor. We have moved on from a self-understanding as porous selves to a self-understanding as buffered selves, and there is no way back, even if we would want to. However, the American philosopher Peter Gordon points out a confusion around Taylor's views on the disengaged buffered self:

> According to phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty whose perspectives Taylor has worked to defend, the disengagement model should be rejected for the simple reason that it is wrong. It simply doesn't capture what it is like to be a human being. What is therefore so perplexing about *A Secular Age* is that Taylor seems to describe the disengagement-model as if it were the actual experience of modern selfhood when it is arguably only a prejudicial and inaccurate model common to a certain class of philosophers.[72]

As with disenchantment, the empirical veracity of the experience of modern selfhood as a buffered self can be questioned. However, it certainly is a "prejudicial and inaccurate model" that could benefit much from a dialogue with the Zen tradition. Chapter 5 will critically discuss Taylor's disengagement model of the buffered self, with a view to reimagining Zen in the West. It will refer to Taylor's own attempts to overcome Cartesian notions of body and mind in his recent work *Retrieving Reality*, to overcome the disengagement model of knowledge.[73] From a Zen point of view, the notion of embodiment has much to offer in this regard.

(4) The notion of the immanent frame is important for various reasons. First, it helps to identify and clarify various conceptual tensions in the presentation of Zen to the West. Taylor calls such tensions "cross pressures in the immanent frame." Chapter 3 will discuss several of such cross pressures. Second, the notion of the immanent frame helps to relativize subtraction stories

72 Peter E. Gordon, "The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69/4 (2008): 647–673, citation on 668.

73 Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

regarding the inevitable rise of science and progress. Heuman argues that we have to confront the biased and chauvinist presumption that the modern worldview is a triumph over all past forms of understanding, make the background assumptions of the immanent frame explicit, and start to see the secular worldview as a worldview that is no more resting on solid ground than the worldview of our medieval Western or Buddhist predecessors. To have a worldview means to operate within a vast web of implicit background understanding that limit what can count as valid beliefs and experiences. Heuman connects this to the Buddhist notion of two truths:

> When we as Buddhists consider that all our experiences, along with the objects of our experiences—and even subjectivity and objectivity themselves—arise within the context of implicit background assumptions, we recognize what we call "conventional truth." When we consider that therefore, as a consequence, no worldview can appeal to the objects of its own creation for its own validation—that no worldview rests on solid ground in this sense—we recognize "ultimate truth," emptiness.[74]

As with his notions of disenchantment and the buffered self, Taylor's notion of the immanent frame is not without its problems and critics. Joshua Craze, for example, argues that Taylor's notion of the immanent frame paints a tired picture of a world that has turned away from the transcendent, and left individuals without direction, full of anxiety and doubts. Craze laments that Taylor defines immanence negatively, as that what is left to us after the gods have departed.[75]

Also, we could ask, in what sense is the immanent frame immanent? Isn't Taylor holding on here to an outdated distinction between transcendence and immanence? Taylor's use of the transcendence/immanence distinction has been criticized. Adrian Ivakhiv, for example, has argued:

> It's only within a modern worldview that sets out the "religious" to refer to the invisible, unmeasurable, and empirically unverifiable, that 'transcendence' has to take on the form of that which is outside the measurable and verifiable world. […] Perhaps the 'transcendent/immanent frame' should be seen as a historical construct of the kind that Taylor posits

74 Heuman, *What's at Stake*.

75 Joshua Craze, "More immanence, more Gods," October 10, 2017. Accessed March 5, 2020. https://tif.ssrc.org/2017/10/10/more-immanence-more-gods/.

> the "immanent frame" to be, and it is this larger frame that needs to be subjected to the kind of interrogation that Taylor so deftly applies only to one half of it.[76]

These four notions have important repercussions for how we view religion. Taylor himself makes the important (and somewhat controversial) decision to use the transcendent/immanent distinction to describe religion in the West:

> If we are prudent (or perhaps cowardly), and reflect that we are trying to understand a set of forms and changes which have arisen in one particular civilization, that of the modern West—or in an earlier incarnation, Latin Christendom—we see to our relief that we don't need to forge a definition which covers everything "religious" in all human societies in all ages. […] A reading of "religion" in terms of the distinction transcendent/immanent is going to serve our purposes here. This is the beauty of the prudent (or cowardly) move I'm proposing here. [77]

Taylor argues here that his definition of religion specifically covers a set of phenomena that has taken place in the context of the rise and fall of Latin Christendom in the West. It does not have the purpose to also cover East Asian Buddhist phenomena, and as we will see in this study, it also does not cover them appropriately. Taylor defines religion in a way that allows him to explore what he considers to be the fundamental change with regard to religion in our secular age. However, as he admits,

> It is far from being the case that religion in general can be defined in terms of this distinction. One could even argue that marking our particular hard-and-fast distinction here is something which we (Westerners, Latin Christians) alone have done.[78]

Taylor's reading of religion in terms of the transcendence/immanence distinction can be criticized as being not well suited to capture East Asian Zen phenomena. In order to do that, a wider reading of religion is necessary. But, as Taylor himself notes,

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76 Adrian J. Ivakhiv, "Cracks in Charles Taylor's Immanent Frame," August 7, 2009. Accessed March 5, 2020. http://blog.uvm.edu/aivakhiv/2009/08/07/cracks-in-charles-taylors-immanent-frame/.

77 SA, 15.

78 Ibid.

> Defining religion in terms of the distinction immanent/transcendent is a move tailor-made for our culture. This may be seen as parochial, incestuous, navel-gazing, but I would argue that this is a wise move, since we are trying to understand changes in a culture for which this distinction has become foundational.[79]

However, Taylor seems to do more than simply using a distinction that has become foundational for Western culture. Gordon has criticized Taylor for assuming that transcendence is a transhistorical constant, an assumption that seems to contradict his own narrative:

> For it is a basic premise of Taylor's historical narrative that the background has changed over time. And a change in the background means a transformation in the sorts of entities that can show up. [...] If we are to take seriously Taylor's premise that a change in the background has brought forth new and unprecedented options for human life, including the life of faith, then we should also consider the possibility that the great transformations from the pre-modern religious world to our own world of immanent modernity may also have changed our conception of the sacred itself.[80]

According to Gordon, for Taylor, the sacred is historically invariant, *always and only* God. But if the background changes, our conception of the sacred also changes. Any "transformation in the background means a transformation in the sorts of entities that can show up." Perhaps, Gordon speculates, "*transcendence itself is but one phase in the history of the sacred.*"[81] Gordon goes on to suggest that also our current notion of transcendence has to be put in a historical perspective.[82]

The British sociologist Colin Campbell argues that it is exactly through the meeting with Zen and other forms of Eastern spirituality, especially since the Sixties of the last century, that the transcendence/immanence distinction has

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79 Ibid., 16.

80 Gordon, *Taylor's* A Secular Age, 670.

81 Ibid., 673.

82 Also Eoin Cassidy wants to allow room for "the possibility that the emergence of this immanent frame has the potential to be a catalyst for religious renewal of a most profound kind." Eoin G. Cassidy, "'Transcending Human Flourishing': Is There a Need for a Subtler Language?," in *The Taylor Effect: Responding to a Secular Age,* ed. by Ian Leask with Eoin Cassidy, Alan Kearns, Fainche Ryan and Mary Shanahan (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 34.

lost much of its power. The immanent frame itself is changing due to societal changes and such Eastern influences. This is the Easternization thesis that Campbell defends in his influential but also controversial book *The Easternization of the West*, published in the same year as Taylor's *A Secular Age*.[83] Campbell engages in a Weberian style cultural analysis as the study of worldviews. He adopts Weber's two ideal types with regard to the development of worldviews. As summarized by Campbell, the "Western" dualistic worldview sees ultimate reality as separate from, above, beyond, this world (often in the form of a transcendent personal creator God), and sees a fundamental division between the secular and the sacred.[84] Weber has also described an "Eastern" monist worldview that sees the world as a connected and self-contained cosmos, recognizes an immanent and impersonal principle of divinity in which humans can participate or adapt themselves to, and makes no fundamental distinction between the secular and the sacred: all activities can be spiritual exercises.[85]

Campbell argues that Western "dualistic" religiosity (separating the religious and secular spheres of life, the immanent and the transcendent, unbelievers versus believers) is giving way to an Eastern-style nondualistic spirituality (no separation between the sacred and the secular, the immanent and the transcendent). And this argument seems to be supported by those who investigate the fast growing group of Americans who view themselves as "spiritual but not religious."[86]

I agree with the critics that Taylor is still dualistic in his approach to religion and secularity. Even though he is critical of defining the secular by a negation, as the non-transcendent (this is secularity$_2$), he reinstates a binary way of thinking. Taylor makes the religious equivalent to the transcendent, and in his description of the immanent frame, the immanent is assumed by him to be secular. In my opinion, Taylor may be right in his historical claim that the transcendence-immanence distinction has been foundational for Western culture, but his analysis fails to adequately capture the recent developments that Campbell describes. However, the point is not whether Taylor is right or not, but whether the notion of the immanent frame can help us gain clarity on what was involved in the creation of Zen modernism. Taylor's use of the transcendence/immanence distinction seems to accurately describe the immanent

83 Campbell, *The Easternization of the West.*

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Mercadante notes how such SBNRs have a surprisingly consistent world view, in which the distinction between the transcendent and the immanent is absent. Mercadante, *Belief without Borders.*

frame within which the encounter of East Asian Zen with Western modernity has taken place. The meeting of Zen with the immanent frame has inevitably led to visions of Zen transcendence, fullness and practice according to the implicit background assumptions of Western secular modernity.

Therefore, Taylor will be useful in my philosophical analysis of Zen modernism in Part 2, but I will leave him behind in Part 3 when I will evaluate several contemporary attempts to go beyond Zen modernism. In order to evaluate such alternative Zen reimaginings, it will prove necessary to go beyond the various parameters of the immanent frame, including the transcendence/immanence distinction itself. The language of fullness as transcendence may not be the most appropriate language for imagining Zen in the West. I agree with Heuman who stresses that

> We need to start examining the immanent frame's background assumptions, which constrain our sense of the possible. As we hold each assumption up for examination—as we pull it from the background and into the foreground and subject it to analysis—something curious happens. In a certain sense it loses its power over us—its status as "the way things are"—and becomes one possible way among many ways that things could be.[87]

By examining the immanent frame's assumptions, Heuman claims,

> we begin to see our worldview as a worldview, to appreciate how it, too, came to be constituted on the basis of a number of sleights of hand and is, as a result, no more universal or final or resting on solid ground than the worldviews of our medieval Western or traditional Buddhist predecessors. Like their worldviews, ours is a set of conventions. We can then understand that this is what it means to have a worldview: the human form of life operates within a vast web of implicit background understandings that limit what can count as valid beliefs and experiences.[88]

I feel that my looking for ways beyond the immanent frame is similar to Taylor's agenda. For Taylor, the immanent frame is not a reality but a story that has become the default due to contingent historical reasons. In his book, Taylor aims to undermine the self-evident inevitability of this story. However, for Taylor overcoming the immanent frame means a return to Christianity. For me it means new ways to think about Zen in the West.

87 Heuman, *What's at Stake*.
88 Ibid.

In Chapter 1, I explained the twin processes of accommodation and advocacy that are involved in the transmission of a tradition to a new culture. In this chapter, Taylor's notions of fullness, disenchantment, the buffered self and the immanent frame have given us a sense of what Zen needed to accommodate itself to. In Chapter 3, I will investigate several "cross pressures in the immanent frame," and the resources that they have offered for Zen advocacy in the secular West.

CHAPTER 3

# Cross Pressures in the Immanent Frame

In this chapter I will address the meeting of horizons between Zen and the West in the context of Taylor's immanent frame. Japanese Zen representatives had to adapt their presentation of Zen to the various issues that were current in the context of the immanent frame (what Hershock calls the process of accommodation). However, those very issues also offered opportunities for Zen advocacy.

I will first describe Taylor's analysis of what he calls "the general malaise of immanence." Taylor distinguishes three different axes along which the various issues with regard to that malaise play itself out: axes of resonance, romantic axes, and postmodern axes. Consequently, I will review the problematic issues of those different axes with regard to the Zen tradition. First I will discuss Zen enlightenment as a new form of fullness. Second, I will discuss issues of disenchantment and re-enchantment. Third, I will discuss the need to go beyond the very distinction between transcendence and immanence itself. Fourth, I will discuss the question whether Zen practice in the immanent frame should be open or closed. In the discussion these issues will be further explored, and I will set the stage for the investigations of Chapters 4 through 7 in Part 2.

## 1 The General Malaise of Immanence

Based on the success story of science and progress, one would expect that all is well in the immanent frame. Taylor has described the movement from a premodern self-experience of a porous self to a modern self-experience of a buffered self. The buffered self offers several advantages: it provides a sense of power and control, through the tool of instrumental rationality. And in a disenchanted world, there are no spirits that form a threat. Taylor argues that this provides a sense of invulnerability and security, compared to the vulnerable and insecure existence in an enchanted world full of spirits, demons and entities. The realization of autonomy can lead to a positive sense of pride and self-esteem.[1]

However, in our age, the disadvantages of the buffered self and disenchantment are becoming more visible. The confined nature of the buffered self can

1 SA, 300f.

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also be experienced as a limitation and even a prison. And a disenchanted world can give rise to the question "is this all there is?." Therefore, in the contemporary disenchanted world there is, Taylor argues, a sense of malaise, a deeply felt sense of flatness and emptiness, which leads to the search for alternative spiritual sources, alternative forms of transcendence.[2] This search has led to an enormous increase in the available options, which Taylor calls "the nova-effect." Our secular age has experienced an explosion of options for finding or creating significance and meaning. However, in the midst of such a plethora of options, none of these options seem unquestionably true and inherently meaningful. Taylor speaks of a fragmentation and pluralization of our visions of the good life and human flourishing. It is no longer a matter of a binary choice between being religious or not: there is an array of options that generates what Taylor calls "cross pressures." According to Taylor we all shunt between two stances: between belief and unbelief, between transcendence and immanence.[3] The paradoxical result is that, amongst a wealth of available options, today's world suffers from a lack of meaning.[4]

Taylor makes a number of analytic distinctions in order to categorize the various sets of issues that are involved in such cross pressures.[5] He describes the principal group of issues as centering around "axes of resonance." The fragility of meaning in an age of disenchantment can lead to a sense of disillusionment: after the "death of God," is this all there is? The loss of transcendence leads to an unbearable lightness of being. If God is dead, everything is permitted. But it becomes difficult to find a satisfactory purpose for one's life. There is hardly any room anymore for human potential and higher aspirations. Many options are open, but none of them lead home.[6]

Another set of issues can be situated around what Taylor calls "Romantic axes." These issues pertain to the sense that the buffered self has become a

2 Ibid., 302ff. See also Smith, *How* (*Not*) *To Be Secular*, 60–65.

3 As noted before, Brad Gregory argues that, given the hyperpluralism of religious and secular commitments, it is simply not the case that "we all shunt between two stances." Orthodox Christians, Muslims and atheists do not. Also New Agers, SBNRs, and interspiritual religious belongers do not. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 11. Taylor himself admits that not everyone will go on being pulled both ways, see SA, 302.

4 SA, 303. Taylor remarks that this is ironic since in Luther's time, the world suffered from an excess of meaning: the sense of one-overbearing issue—am I saved or am I damned? Every event could be a sign of one's sinfulness.

5 Ibid., 311–321.

6 Ibid., 307. Taylor describes how the responses to this malaise range from nostalgia (various attempts at a re-enchantment of the world and the creation of a new type of spirituality, and new types of transcendence) to various degrees of heroic acceptance (from Max Weber to Richard Dawkins).

prison. The buffered self leads to a division which needs healing. This division is firstly an inner division: the rational, autonomous buffered self cuts us off from deep feeling. Therefore, we need to restore a harmonic unity between thought and feeling, the head and the heart. One solution is to fuse ordinary desire with the sense of a higher goal (fullness). Another solution is to achieve this harmonic unity through beauty, which aligns us. Secondly, this division is not only an inner division, but also a division between ourselves and nature. The buffered self cuts us off from nature and from others. Hence, Taylor notes, the nineteenth-century obsession with recovering the beautiful nature of the Greeks, as a higher synthesis (Hölderlin, Hegel, Nietzsche). Thirdly, the buffered self cuts us off from life and vitality. There is a yearning to be completely immersed in life. And fourthly, it cuts us off from the ecological balance of our biosphere.[7]

A third set of axes can be called "postmodern": division cannot be healed but is irremediable. I will now describe several cross pressures within these various sets of axes.

## 2 Enlightenment as a New Form of Fullness

The various issues around the axes of resonance center around the possibility of a fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing, in an ethical or soteriological sense. For Taylor, "fullness" takes us beyond mere human flourishing and relates us in some way to the realm of the transcendent (but not necessarily in an ontological way).

Since Zen is a Buddhist tradition, it would seem natural that the Zen goal of enlightenment is committed to such a fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing. However, does Zen enlightenment exist as a transcendent transhistorical essence? New secular forms of Zen and mindfulness entertain the possibility that Zen fullness merely refers to ordinary human flourishing. As Heuman notes, in such forms of (post)modern Western Buddhism, transcendent goals such as *nirvāna* (enlightenment), *bodhi* (awakening) or *prajñāpāramitā* (transcendent wisdom) have become optional, and often even the harder option to embrace. Buddhist narratives and doctrines concerning such highest goods can seem anachronistic and naïve. So, she wonders, does the Buddha's teaching point to a (steep) stairway to heaven, or to full human flourishing here on *terra firma*?[8]

7 Ibid., 317.
8 Heuman, *What's at Stake.*

The Zen discourse on enlightenment is rooted in two Indian Buddhist philosophical traditions: the Tathāgatagarbha tradition and the Mādhyamika thought of Nāgārjuna. It contains elements of both kataphasis (discourse which proceeds by affirmations) and apophasis (discourse which proceeds by negations).[9]

The kataphatic strains in Zen thought are connected with the Tathāgatagarbha notion of Buddha nature. The term *garbha* means both "embryo" and "womb." Therefore, on the one hand, it points to the fact that every sentient being possesses the germ to attain Buddhahood. On the other hand, it refers to the universal essence of Buddhahood (also called "Buddha nature"). In Tathāgatagarbha thought, enlightenment is conceptualized as the realization of one's Buddha nature.

"Buddha nature," however, is but one of the many Buddhist terms and concepts, such as *nirvāna*, *paramārtha*, and *śūnyatā*, that are to be properly used in a soteriological way, not a metaphysical way, as many Zen writings attest to. In order to avoid their reification, they need to be deconstructed again and again. Therefore, apart from the kataphatic strain in Zen thought, a continuous apophatic strain can be discerned, which goes back to Mādhyamika thought and its emphasis on *śūnyatā*. Philosopher Youru Wang describes the inner struggles within the evolution of Zen discourse on enlightenment as an ongoing dialectic between kataphasis and apophasis, between the substantialization of Buddha nature and its deconstruction.[10] According to Wang, the Chinese adaptation of Tathāgatagarbha thought eventually evolved into the deconstruction of Buddha nature in Zen.[11]

9 The following paragraphs are based on passages in van der Braak, *Towards a Philosophy of Chan Enlightenment.*

10 Ibid., 54.

11 Nāgārjuna's apophatic thought has been extensively interpreted in terms of and compared to deconstructive thinkers such as Derrida, following Magliola's influential book *Derrida on the Mend*. (Robert R. Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend,* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1984)). According to Magliola, the Zen tradition contains a logocentric, absolutist strain (connected with the Northern School of Chan, rooted in the kataphatic Yogācāra philosophy) and a differential strain (connected with the Southern School of Chan, rooted in the apophatic Mādhyamika tradition). According to Wang, however, the Southern School of Chan, especially Huineng and the Hongzhou School, deconstructs not only the Northern School of Chan, but also logocentric tendencies within the Southern Chan School itself (Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*). Wang emphasizes that the Hongzhou School is also engaged in self-deconstruction. He refers to Linji's self-erasing of his notion of "an authentic person without rank." Soon after Linji proposes this notion, he adds "What kind of shitty ass-wiper this authentic person without rank is!" (Burton Watson, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi: A Translation of the Lin-chi Lu* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 13). Wang holds that "Linji may be the one, among all Chan masters, who uses the

Karl Potter has made a useful distinction between path philosophies that consider enlightenment to be the result of continued spiritual practice, and leap philosophies that stress enlightenment as an immediate realization.[12] Early Buddhist and some Mahāyāna Buddhist schools can be characterized as path philosophies, whereas Zen can be characterized as a leap philosophy. It views all path-like approaches to enlightenment as "gradual cultivation": preliminary teachings that ultimately have to be superseded by *prajñāpāramitā*. The point is not so much to attain enlightenment, but to realize it.

The reimagining of Indian Buddhism as Zen led to a reimagining of Indian Buddhist notions of enlightenment. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the public demonstration of improvisational virtuosity, rather than the realization of exalted inner states of consciousness free from impure influences and defiling activities, became a new criterion for enlightenment.

When Zen came to the West, new reimaginings of Zen fullness became necessary. In order to translate Zen fullness in accessible terms for Westerners, both Suzuki and Western Romantic thinkers followed the literary custom adopted in the nineteenth century, and drew upon the European word "enlightenment."[13] The European Enlightenment was the historical era in which it was thought that the clear light of human reason would dispel the darkness of superstition. Kant thought that the Enlightenment would enable

clearest language to deconstruct all kataphatic terms that Chan Buddhists have been using, including those used by himself." (Wang, *Linguistic Strategies,* 79). He paints Linji as a champion of deconstruction: "the entire *Linji lu* is full of the spirit and energy of deconstruction and self-deconstruction." (ibid.) This is a long cry from translator Burton Watson's construal that Linji aims to still the mind in order to be able to perceive "the underlying unity of the absolute." In light of Wang's perspective, Watson's interpretation of Linji ascribes a rather kataphatic discourse on enlightenment to him. Robert Buswell has yet another interpretation of Linji's views of enlightenment. According to Buswell, Linji focused on the importance of cultivating faith, interpreted as the beneficial influence constantly emanating from the inherently enlightened Buddha nature, prompting all conscious beings toward enlightenment. Faith would then be equivalent to the innate functioning of *ti*. (Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "The 'Short-Cut' Approach of K'an-hua Meditation: The Evolution of a Practical Subitism in Chinese Ch'an Buddhism," in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 340–343). Buswell interprets this focus on the cultivation of faith as a restoration of the Zen focus on the direct experience of the essence of mind (ibid., 342). He also connects it to tathāgatagarbha thought, where faith is the principal soteriological tool prompting realization of immanent enlightenment (ibid., 343).

12 Karl Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963).

13 Wright comments on the irony of the fact that Romantic thinkers used the key term of their rival tradition to indicate the highest realization of Oriental wisdom. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*.

an emancipation from heteronomy and authority. By the use of reason, people would be able to see things as they are for themselves, rather than be dependent upon divine revelation. This idea of seeing things as they really are, out of a capacity to see clearly and without prejudice, was used to reimagine enlightenment. Once meditation and contemplation had liberated the mind from disturbing emotions, preconceptions and attachments, a clear and unbiased perception would become possible.

However, Suzuki diverged from this path and drew his images from Romanticism. This tradition preferred intuitive wisdom to rational analysis, feeling to thought, and ancient tradition to modern science. Therefore, since the early nineteenth century, Romantics had felt attracted to the mysterious and ancient Orient, with its profound wisdom that was unspoiled by the rationalism of Western science. In Romantic terms, enlightenment came to refer to a sudden breakthrough in consciousness, that allowed a direct contact with ultimate reality.

Whereas *nirvāna* is generally conceived as a type of fullness beyond ordinary flourishing, it could be argued that Zen's improvisational virtuosity is a form of optimal human flourishing, not beyond ordinary human flourishing. Someone might argue that such improvisational virtuosity is out of reach for most human beings, but even in that case it is only quantitatively beyond ordinary human flourishing, not qualitatively.

This throws doubt on Taylor's distinction between ordinary human flourishing and fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing. Is this distinction perhaps also a result of the "Western" dualistic approach to religiosity? Perhaps this very distinction needs to be left behind when considering Zen notions of fullness.

## 3 Disenchantment versus Re-enchantment

The issues around the Romantic axes center on the question of disenchantment versus re-enchantment. Is the process of disenchantment irreversible, or is some kind of re-enchantment still possible? Max Weber saw the process of disenchantment as nearly irresistible, and to those who still felt the need for religion, he offered the following advice:

> To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times, one must say: may he return rather silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him. After all, they do not make it hard

> for him. One way or another he has to bring his "intellectual sacrifice"—that is inevitable.[14]

Today, Weber would probably include the arms of the Zen center that are opened widely and compassionately for the renegade spiritual seeker.

Taylor himself argues, in an essay published several years after *A Secular Age*, that in some sense the process of disenchantment is irreversible, and that attempts at re-enchantment at most reproduce features analogous to the enchanted world, but do not restore it.[15] He argues that the first feature of the enchanted world was that it was filled with powerful spirits and moral forces, a world of "magic" where some objects, such as relics, were endowed with sacramental power. This is the power to impose a certain meaning on us. In the enchanted world, the meaning is already there in the object, quite independently of ourselves: it would be there even if we didn't exist. The object can bring us, as it were, into its field of force. For Taylor, this feature is irredeemably lost to modern Westerners.

The second feature of the enchanted world is that it placed meaning within the cosmos. The enchanted worldview saw the cosmos as a Chain of Being, "a whole that was bound together by relations of hierarchical complementarity, which should be reproduced in a well-ordered state."[16] Taylor thinks that this second feature of the enchanted world is easier to imagine recovering in this world.[17]

What does this discussion mean for the fate of Zen in the West? Suzuki responded to such concerns around Romantic axes by presenting Zen as a way to get out of the prison of the buffered self. The Zen path addresses the need for a deep healing of inner division, our being cut off from nature, from life and vitality, and from the ecological balance of our biosphere. For Suzuki, enlightenment came to refer not so much to "seeing things as they are," but to a sudden breakthrough in consciousness where a liberating intimacy with reality was realized.

However, many contemporary critics claim that the Buddhist enlightenment that Suzuki and others have presented to the West has never actually existed in Asia. It is a shared fantasy, a blank projection screen for all kinds of unacknowledged longings for perfection. When looking at such a form of

14 Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in: H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber*: *Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 155.

15 Charles Taylor, "Disenchantment-Reenchantment," in: *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Boston: Belknap, 2014), 287–302.

16 Ibid., 291.

17 Although he disparagingly adds that certainly many people hold "wacky" theories.

enlightenment, we are actually looking at our own distorted reflection, as if through a looking glass. Such an idealized notion of enlightenment could be called a form of reverse Orientalism. Rather than consider the East as inferior, it is now elevated to a superior position, a fountainhead of spiritual truth and wisdom, a panacea for the West that has lost touch with its spiritual sources.[18]

Responding to the cross pressures around disenchantment, some today argue for a disenchanted Zen, because Buddhism in the West should be purged of all references to enchantment. For example, neuroscientist Owen Flanagan argues for a "Buddhism naturalized," that says no to the supernatural:

> Imagine Buddhism without rebirth and without a karmic system that guarantees justice ultimately will be served, without nirvana, without bodhisattvas flying on lotus leaves, without Buddha worlds, without non-physical states of mind, without any deities, without heaven and hell realms, without oracles, and without lamas who are reincarnations of lamas.[19]

Such a type of Buddhism would be well suited for our modern secular age, he claims.

> Buddhism naturalized, [...] is compatible with the neodarwinian theory of evolution and with a commitment to scientific materialism.[...] Because such a theory would speak honestly, without the mind-numbing and wishful hocus pocus that infects much Mahāyāna Buddhism, but possibly not so much early Theravāda Buddhism, Buddhism naturalized [...] delivers what Buddhism possibly uniquely among the world's live spiritual traditions, promises to offer: no false promises, no positive illusions, no delusions.[20]

There are many who criticize Flanagan's project. For example, Linda Heuman ironically comments that in such a move, "we've shrugged off all that

18 As Heine comments, "Reverse Orientalism, which rejects comparisons with Western spirituality as being somehow beneath the pale of Zen, tends to view Eastern mysticism in a way that inverts—or converts—European Romantic fantasies of an idyllic realm, or at least builds on conceptions of religious experience initially developed by the West." (Heine, *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow*, 5).

19 Owen Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain: Buddhism Naturalized* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 3.

20 Ibid.

superstition about reincarnation and karma, ghosts and demons, visions and relics—got the bugs out of the belief system. We've updated to Dharma 2.0."[21]

Flanagan's argument is an example of the reasoning of proponents of secularity$_2$: if we could scrape off the "magical" and "religious" hocus pocus, we would be left with a neutral, rational and areligious Buddhism that fits in well with our secular age. However, such an undertaking would amount not only to scraping off some excessive fanciful notions, it would involve rejecting most of the Mahāyāna worldview, that can be seen as a sacramental worldview similar to that of Catholicism. Zen scholar and Dōgen translator Taigen Dan Leighton notes that:

> Zen is based on and grew out of a Buddhist worldview far apart from the currently prevalent preconceptions of a world formed of Newtonian objectifications. This objective worldview still clouds our attitudes toward many realms, including the study of religion, even though it has now been discredited by new cutting-edge physics. Contrary to present conventions, Zen Buddhism developed and cannot be fully understood outside of a worldview that sees reality itself as a vital, ephemeral agent of awareness and healing.[22]

According to the Mahāyāna Buddhist *trikāya* doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha, the Buddha manifests himself in three bodies, modes or dimensions. Firstly, in his historical manifestation as Shākyamuni, the Buddha has a *nirmanakāya*, a created body which manifests in time and space. Secondly, as an archetypical manifestation, the Buddha can manifest himself as a sublime celestial form in splendid paradises, where he teaches surrounded by bodhisattvas, using a *sambhogakāya* or body of mutual enjoyment. Thirdly, as the very principle of enlightenment, the Buddha manifests himself as the *dharmakāya*, the reality body or truth body.[23] This "reality body" should not be seen as a collection of lifeless objects, but as a vital agent of awareness and healing. The *dharmakāya* is continually co-active in bringing all beings to universal

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21 Heuman, *What's at Stake.* Heuman remarks that, before it arrived in Western secular modernity, Buddhism never had to reckon with transcendence being problematic in this way. However, when Buddhism was transmitted from India to China, it also had to reckon with very different views on transcendence.

22 Taigen Dan Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dōgen and the Lotus Sutra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

23 "Trikāya," The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions. *Encyclopedia.com.* Accessed March 5, 2020. http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/trikaya

liberation. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* [Flower Ornament Sutra] describes the interconnectedness of all phenomena: "The world is a site of radical, mutual interconnection of the subjective and objective, in which each event is the product of the interdependent co-arising of all things."[24]

According to the Mahāyāna Buddhist sacramental worldview, all of existence is grounded, or embedded, in the ultimate reality of the *dharmakāya*. The *dharmakāya* should not be interpreted ontologically as a transcendent cosmic Being that contains or projects the world, but should be seen as the fundamental activity of the world itself. In this sense, all of existence is itself buddhahood, and therefore lacks any value beyond itself. What is ultimately valuable (fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing) is built into existence itself, whether this is recognized and appreciated or not.

In an epistemological sense, the question is whether it is possible to reenchant the world by viewing it in a radically different light. In many Mahāyāna Buddhist sutras, enlightenment is conceived as a radical epistemological shift in which the world is seen in a radically different light. For example, in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the Buddha wriggles his toe, and the world suddenly looks like a paradise.[25]

## 4 Beyond Transcendence and Immanence

Perhaps, however, the very distinction between transcendence and immanence, the very notion of the immanent frame itself, needs to be questioned. This is what is implied in Taylor's third set of cross pressures, those around postmodern axes. Loy (who will be discussed further in Chapter 9), points to the complexities around transcendence and immanence in Buddhism. Traditional Theravāda often characterizes *nirvāna* as a transcendent, unconditioned realm. By transcending this suffering world (escaping from the prison of *samsāra* into *nirvāna*), we can ignore its problems. On the other hand, Loy argues, mindfulness is presented as purely immanent, as a psychological therapy. Rather than focusing on the problems of the world, we can escape them and focus on our own problems instead. Loy strongly feels that a new Buddhist

24 Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Time and Space,* 9.

25 "The Buddha then pressed his toe against the earth, and immediately the thousand-millionfold world was adorned with hundreds and thousands of rare jewels, till it resembled Jeweled Adornment Buddha's Jeweled Adornment Land of immeasurable blessings." Burton Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 30.

path needs to be found beyond transcendence and immanence, a way of balancing heaven and earth.[26]

The French sinologist François Jullien has argued that comparative Western and Chinese discussions of transcendence are skewed and do not take into account the different pre-understandings that characterize Western and Chinese statements that seem to convey transcendence:[27] "it is not that what they say is different, but, although each perspective might confirm the other, they do not correspond. Thus although parallels can be drawn, because they have different axes, these statements do not say the same thing."[28]

Jullien argues that in the West, the search for transcendence is dominated by a preoccupation with intelligible essences. In the Chinese context, the focus is on the efficacy at work in the course of things. Since it is simply the way by which one is supposed to proceed, the *dao* does not lend itself to theoretical constructions. Greek thought responds to ineffability by creating new, transcendent, levels of reality. According to Jullien, such a "doubling of planes" is absent in Chinese thought. Words and letters do not hint to a transcendent reality that is "higher" than the individual and concrete reality of the ten thousand things, but they aim to liberate us from being bogged down in the ten thousand things.[29] Whereas in the West, the metaphor of the veil is often being used (behind the exterior of religious language lies a mystery to be uncovered), in China the metaphor of the net and the fish is more prevalent. Zhuangzi wrote "Nets exist for catching fish; once a fish is caught, the net is forgotten."[30] This is reminiscent of the Buddhist parable of the raft that is left behind once one has arrived at the other shore.

The American comparative philosophers Roger Ames and David Hall argue that one of the most striking features of Chinese intellectual culture is the absence of transcendence in the articulation of its spiritual, moral and political sensibilities.[31] In their analysis of the Chinese term *tian* (translated by Jesuit missionaries as Heaven, Providence, God, Nature), Hall and Ames conclude

26 David Loy, *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment, Evolution and Ethics in the Modern World* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2015).

27 The remainder of this section has been published earlier in van der Braak, *Nietzsche and Zen*.

28 Francois Jullien, *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2000), 302.

29 Ibid., 304. However, although in some forms of Chinese philosophy this might be the case, it remains questionable whether this is also the case for Chinese cosmology in general.

30 Zhuangzi, quoted in Jullien, *Detour and Access*, 307.

31 David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 189.

that "the dualism that requires appeal to transcendent deity in the Western tradition has no relevance at all to Chinese culture."[32] They also comment that the notion of *dao*, which is often interpreted as an indication for a transcendent absolute, should be interpreted as a nontranscendent field. Such a reading of *dao* seems to point to a radical immanence, but Hall and Ames point out that, with regard to the Chinese tradition,

> the use of the concepts "transcendence" and "immanence" as applied to the Chinese world is misleading since the use of either of the terms seems to entail the other. Thus, simply referring to the Chinese sense of order as "immanental" suggests some type of transcendence by contrast.[33]

They go on to suggest that the resolution of this difficulty is to avoid languages of transcendence and immanence whenever possible. In Chapter 9 I will discuss members of the Kyoto School who have followed this suggestion.

## 5 Open versus Closed Zen Practice

The various cross pressures discussed so far all have to do with doctrinal issues. Does the highest good consist in a fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing, or not? Does a transcendent dimension actually exist or not? Those questions have to do with justified religious belief. However, the various Buddhist traditions, and especially the Zen tradition, are not in the first place characterized by orthodoxy (emphasizing right belief), but by orthopraxy (emphasizing right practice).

It is noteworthy that three of the turning points in the Zen tradition that I discussed in Chapter 1 (sudden realization versus gradual cultivation; a special transmission outside the scriptures versus the use of traditional Buddhist practices as a form of upaya; working with koans or silent illumination) concern themselves with practice, rather than doctrine. Dōgen states: "for a Buddhist the issue is not to debate the superiority or inferiority of one teaching or another, or to establish their respective depths. All he needs to know is whether the practice is authentic or not."[34] Such an attitude goes all the way back to the

32 Ibid., 235.

33 Ibid., 230.

34 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa* [Negotiating the Way], in Norman Waddell and Masao Abe (translation), *The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 16.

Buddha who rejected metaphysical questions that involve false dichotomies and dilemmas.

Because of this Zen emphasis on practice, it is most important to address the repercussions of the cross pressures that I just discussed for Zen practice. Does it take place in an "open" or a "closed" context? A closed context for Zen practice would construe its purpose as the improvement of one's psychological well-being or physical health, as a means to experience more harmony in one's relationships, or as a way to build a more equitable, kind, and peaceful society. Such a closed Zen practice would emphasize the therapeutic, as opposed to the purely religious, nature of practice, and would assimilate practices from humanistic psychotherapy. An example of this is the application of Buddhist mindfulness practices in a secular, scientific context, versus the Buddhist practitioner's use of mindfulness.

Tibetan Buddhist scholar Alan Wallace argues against closed Buddhist practice. He contends that when transcendence is denied, Buddhist practice is irrevocably altered:

> it is infeasible to alter or discard Buddhist worldviews without this having a powerful influence on one's meditative practice and way of life. If the way one views the world is out of accord with Buddhist worldviews, there is no way that one's meditation and lifestyle can be Buddhist[35]

The enchanted Mahāyāna Buddhist world view has great soteriological consequences for spiritual practice. More than aiming at achieving higher states of personal consciousness, or therapeutic calm, the point of spiritual practice becomes to embody, or appreciate, or participate in, achieve a liberating intimacy with, Buddha nature. This has led to the development of practices of transcendent faith and ritual enactment of buddhahood, dependent not on lifetimes of arduous practice, but rather on immediate, unmediated, and intuitional realization of the fundamental ground of awakening.[36]

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35 B. Alan Wallace, "The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West," in: Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 34–50, 47f.

36 Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Time and Space,* 7. The replacement of spiritual cultivation by a leap is expressed in the Zen tradition by sudden enlightenment and in more devotional Buddhist traditions by a leap of faith. In the context of medieval Japanese Buddhism, this leap paradigm was represented by the immensely influential Tendai Buddhist discourse of original enlightenment (*hongaku*), the assertion that all beings are Buddhas inherently. For an extended discussion of *hongaku* thought in medieval Japanese

In an open form of Buddhist practice, one would still strive for transcendent goals that make sense within a traditional Buddhist world, but seem incoherent against the backdrop of the immanent frame. As Heuman notes:

> Those who seek transcendence in the context of the immanent frame have a brand-new disadvantage, one that Milarepa or Dōgen never had to overcome. We have to perform a tug-of-war with ourselves that was never required of our spiritual predecessors. For Milarepa, to strive for awakening was to throw his weight *toward* the collective sense of cosmic order into which he was born. We, on the other hand, have to pull *against* ours.[37]

Contemporary American Zen teacher Dave Rutschman-Byler has contemplated these questions in a blog posting with regard to the bodhisattva practice that characterizes the Zen tradition.

> If the best human life is one marked by exclusively human flourishing, then bodhisattva practice is about improving human lives with reference only to human lives—making sure people are fed and clothed, that our illnesses are treated, that we have shelter and community and so on. That we're happy, as happiness is generally understood. On the other hand, there's something very deep and very basic in the Dharma that points to the *unsatisfactoriness* of precisely all those things. The First Noble Truth is a pretty serious attack on the "good" things in a human life—family, friends, work. [...] even a home, even a happy, stable, loving home, is somehow not the entirety of a life. [...] If we connect to this piece of the tradition, then, a bodhisattva's practice is not necessarily helping people be happy as that's usually (humanistically) understood—food, clothing, shelter, medicine, good friends, stimulating conversations, good books, etc. A bodhisattva's practice then would be actually to undermine that stuff, to return again and again to not-enoughness, to basic dissatisfaction, to pointing beyond.[38]

Does a closed approach to Zen still leave room for such bodhisattva practice? In bodhisattva practice, the very dualism between self and other needs to be

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Buddhism, see Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

37 Linda Heuman, *What's at Stake*.

38 Dave Rutschman-Byler, "Charles Taylor, exclusive humanism, and the Dharma," June 16, 2013 https://nozeninthewest.wordpress.com/2013/06/16/charles-taylor-exclusive-humanism-and-the-dharma/ [accessed March 5, 2020].

seen through. Buddhist practices are aimed at overcoming the illusory distinction between self and others. The buffered self needs to be seen through. An enchanted notion of compassion leads to other practices of cultivating compassion, such as a practice of great compassion, rather than one of ordinary compassion.[39]

## 6 Discussion

There are no easy answers to the various Zen cross pressures in the immanent frame that I have discussed in this chapter. Is it possible to reimagine enlightenment as a new form of fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing, untainted by notions of ontological transcendence, without essentializing and teleologizing it?[40] Is it possible to reimagine Zen in a re-enchanted way, in order to make room for the sacramental Mahāyāna Buddhist worldview, with its buddhas and bodhisattvas? Or can we find a way beyond transcendence and immanence? And are we to imagine Zen practice as open or closed?

The various forms of Zen in the West that I distinguished in Chapter 1 have each developed various strategies to respond to these Zen cross pressures in the immanent frame. *Traditional* Zen holds on to traditional, enchanted Asian Zen, ignoring disenchantment as an empirical phenomenon in the West. The American scholar of religion Robert Orsi has argued that the enchanted world of religious believers, the densely populated world of saints and spirits is not a thing of a bygone enchanted past: they remain real presences to many, in a modern secular world that finds no place for them.[41]

*Romantic* Zen separates Zen from the enchanted Mahāyāna Buddhist worldview, and claims that there is such a thing as "universal Zen," which is not a religion but a form of universal mysticism, as opposed to religious "Buddhist Zen." McMahan has described the creation of what he terms "the enchanted secular" as an attempt to at once embrace and transcend the secular. Through the new conception of a universal spirituality rooted in personal experience, Sōen, Suzuki and others attempted to shift enchantment from the external world to a cultivation of inner spiritual states, as a way to reinfuse sacrality into the world.[42] *Philosophical* Zen attempts to find new definitions of transcendence,

39 See the *Vimalakirti Sutra* for examples of this.

40 In my earlier study *Nietzsche and Zen* I attempted to come to a non-essentialist, non-foundational and non-teleological understanding of enlightenment based on a dialogue between four Zen thinkers (Nāgārjuna, Linji, Dōgen and Nishitani) and Nietzsche.

41 Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Boston: Belknap Press, 2016).

42 McMahan, *The Enchanted Secular.*

based on the claim that there are different types of transcendence in Asia and the West. *Meditation* Zen holds firm to an open approach to Zen practice. And *mindfulness* Zen strives after a disenchanted Zen by psychologizing and demythologizing enchanted Zen narratives, imagining Zen in a closed way as a toolbox for contemplative fitness.[43]

I want to stress again that cross pressures such as the ones discussed in this chapter have always been present in the historical Zen tradition. There are resources within the Chinese Chan tradition that deconstruct transcendent beings and realities. Brook Ziporyn argues that some early Chan teachers tended to read the mythological language of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhist texts as metaphors for aspects of the human mind and human virtues.[44] The *Platform Sutra* repeatedly rejects ontological transcendence: the Pure Land is not far away, but here and now. According to the interpretation of Ziporyn, Huineng denigrates the aspiration to be reborn in the Western paradise of Amitabha Buddha (common among practitioners of Pure Land Buddhism), "in favor of notions of Buddhist practice focused intensely on the immanence of ultimate Buddhist realities here and now, available within present human experience and forming an intrinsic and inalienable part of the human world."[45]

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We have now come to the end of Part 1 of this book, which has been the descriptive part of my investigation. In Chapter 1, I described the processes of accommodation and advocacy with regard to the various transmissions of Zen in Asia and the West, shaping it in various ways, always in the context of cross pressures. In Chapter 2, I used Taylor's *A Secular Age* to explicate what it was that Zen needed to accommodate itself to in its transmission to the West during the past century: the immanent frame, disenchantment, the buffered self, and fullness within ordinary human flourishing. In Chapter 3, I explicated the cross pressures that are inherent in the meeting of Asian Zen with the immanent frame: the loss and fragility of meaning; the sense of the buffered self having become a prison; the need to overcome the immanent/transcendent distinction, and their resulting challenging for Zen accommodation and opportunities for Zen advocacy. Now, we are ready to see how Japanese presenters of Zen have responded to such challenges and opportunities, and analyze

43 The phrase is from Kenneth Folk.

44 Brook Ziporyn, "The *Platform Sūtra* and Chinese Philosophy," in: *Readings of the* Platform Sūtra 161–187.

45 Ibid., 164.

how these processes of accommodation and advocacy have led to various forms of Zen modernism during the past century. In Part 2, I will take a closer look at four underlying processes that Taylor describes in his *A Secular Age*, that have set the current parameters regarding what it means to practice Zen in the West in our secular age.

First, part of Taylor's narrative is how our new self-understanding as buffered, bounded selves led to an emphasis on disengaged reason, freeing us from our narrow perspective and allowing us a view of the whole.[46] Science could now pursue objective truths with universal validity (*universalization*). Chapter 4 will discuss this development and its contribution to the imagining of Zen as a form of universal mysticism.

As a second development, through the practice of introspection, a rich vocabulary of interiority developed. Man conceived of himself as having inner depths. Even stronger, the depths which were previously located in the cosmos, the enchanted world, were now placed within.[47] The spiritual life became a matter of accessing those inner depths (*psychologization*). Chapter 5 will first describe how this development, together with the challenges of the buffered self and disenchantment, led to the popularity of "the Zen experience." Consequently it will present criticisms of this imagining of Zen and explore alternatives.

A third development, discussed in Chapter 6, was the development of a therapeutic discourse that transplanted a religious discourse (*the therapeutic turn*). In this discourse, fullness was imagined as being within ordinary human flourishing, and Zen was imagined as a form of therapy, aimed at healing. I will also criticize this imagining of Zen and explore alternatives.

A fourth development, discussed in Chapter 7, was that in Western societies, a culture of authenticity or *expressive individualism* has arisen. People are encouraged to discover their own fulfillment. This has led to shifting understandings of religion in general, and shifting understandings of Zen in particular. In this chapter I will question the story of the immanent frame itself, and look for alternatives.

In the narrative of Part 2, which will be roughly chronological, shifting understandings of what religion is play a large role. I will follow two road maps, one of the American theologian George Lindbeck and the other of the American scholar of religion Stephen Bush.[48] Lindbeck outlined three ideal types of

46 Ibid., 251.

47 Ibid., 540.

48 Stephen S. Bush, *Visions of Religion. Experience, Meaning, Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

theological approaches to religion in his seminal work *The Nature of Doctrine*.[49] These three types constitute all-embracing and fundamentally different notions of what religion is.[50]

(1) The *cognitive-propositional* model approaches religious traditions primarily in terms of their doctrines, and the ways in which they function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities. Religions are thus seen as similar to philosophy or science.[51] The truth of religious doctrines lies in their ontological correspondence to objective reality. This approach is the result of the Cartesian and Protestant emphasis on doctrinal truth.[52]

(2) The second type focuses on the *experiential-expressive* dimension of religion: the essence of religion is to be found in the inner feelings, attitudes and existential orientations that arise as a response to the divine. Religious doctrines are not to be seen as cognitive and discursive truth claims that correspond to reality, but as noninformative and nondiscursive expressions of those feelings, attitudes or existential orientations.[53] The truth of religious doctrines lies not in their correspondence to the divine (which is beyond conceptualization), but in how well they articulate or represent and communicate the experience of the divine.[54] The various religious traditions each articulate this experience in their own way, but

49 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009[1984]).

50 Talal Asad has introduced a fourth approach to religion, focusing not on doctrine, experience, or meaning, but on power. Drawing from postcolonial and postmodern thought, he emphasized the hidden power relations inherent in all things religious (Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1993)).

51 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 2.

52 As Taylor notes, such a cognitive-propositional approach to religion, that understands it as holding certain convictions and beliefs, is the most popular understanding of religion: "In our societies, the big issue about religion is usually defined in terms of belief. First Christianity has always defined itself in relation to credal statements. And secularism in sense 2 has often been seen as the decline of Christian belief; and this decline as largely powered by the rise of other beliefs, in science, reason, or by the deliverances of particular sciences: for instance, evolutionary theory, or neuro-physiological explanations of mental functioning." (SA, 4) Secularity$_2$ is often used to mean that religious convictions have been refuted by scientific evidence. Stephen Batchelor, Owen Flanagan and others, who argue for the necessity of a secular Buddhism, often mean by this a Buddhism that is stripped of certain "religious" convictions and beliefs (such as karma and rebirth) that are incompatible with secular modernity. In this, they reveal themselves to be proponents of both secularity$_2$ and a cognitive-propositional understanding of religion.

53 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 2.

54 Ibid., 33.

the experience itself is held to be universal and common to all religious traditions.

(3) Lindbeck himself introduces a third, *cultural-linguistic* model of religion (taken from cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz and other social scientists), which approaches religions as forms of life that are similar to languages and cultures. The truth of religious doctrines lies, in a Wittgensteinian sense, in their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action.[55] Religious doctrines are not hypotheses about reality, nor descriptions of religious experience. They are "different idioms for construing reality, expressing experience, and ordering life. Attention, when considering the question of "truth," focuses on the categories (or "grammar" or "rules of the game") in terms of which truth claims are made and expressive symbolisms employed."[56]

Lindbeck's work continues to be much criticized and discussed. At the time of writing (1984), Lindbeck noted that cognitive-propositional understandings of religion were on the defensive, and experiential-expressive ones in the ascendancy. Lindbeck was critical of the cognitive-propositional and experience-expressive models of religion, and considered only his own cultural-linguistic model as truly representative of religion. However, this view is by no means the standard view for theologians today. Since Lindbeck's work appeared in 1984, his cultural-linguistic type has been adopted by several theologians that are sometimes described as "particularists" or as followers of the "acceptance model."[57]

Although I feel that Lindbeck's road map has heuristic value as an organizational pattern for the analyses in Part 2, I also recognize that his theory is problematic for a number of reasons. David Tracy has argued that Lindbeck's concept of "experiential expressivism" is something of a caricature.[58] Lindbeck's appeal to Geertz's "cultural linguistic" concept of religion has been criticized from a postmodern angle by Kathryn Higgins,[59] and from a political perspective by Talal Asad. Asad argues that the cultural-linguistic approach, as put forward by Clifford Geertz, is tacitly Christian in privileging mentalistic items

55 Ibid., 4.

56 Ibid., 34.

57 See Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions* (London, SCM Press: 2010) and Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

58 See Tracy's review, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection," *The Thomist* 49/3 (1985): 460–472.

59 See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 104–119.

such as beliefs, and that Geertz's attempt to delineate an universal definition of religion is misguided and Eurocentric.[60] Although I am aware of Asad's criticisms of the cultural-linguistic approach, I agree with Bush that it is still a useful perspective on religion. Bush argues that Asad and other theorists of power overlook matters of meaning, which leads to an impoverished understanding of the motives, desires, and aims of religious practitioners.[61]

However, due to the limitations of Lindbeck's road map, I will use a second road map, that of Bush. His road map recapitulates the three main understandings of the nature of religion, that have dominated scholarly discussions during the past century. Bush distinguishes three hermeneutical phases in the field of religious studies: to view religion essentially in terms of experience, meaning, and power. At the beginning of the twentieth century, religion was essentially viewed in terms of experience. After the 1950's, the notion of experience became suspect, and religion was viewed in terms of the creation of meaning. Since the 1990's, the notion of meaning has also come under criticism, and religion is viewed in terms of power. By using both a theological and a religious studies road map, I hope to be able to be more inclusive in my analysis of Zen reimaginings of the past century.

60 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 27–54.
61 Bush, *Visions of Religion*, 12f.

# PART 2

## *Zen Modernism*

CHAPTER 4

# Universalization: Zen as Universal Mysticism

In Chapter 2 we have seen how Charles Taylor presented a narrative on the transition from an enchanted cosmos to a disenchanted universe. As a result of the process of disenchantment, the porous, socially oriented self in an enchanted cosmos gave way to a universe of buffered selves and bounded minds.

In this chapter I will first review how these developments gave rise to various universalist discourses with regard to truth, which contributed to the construction of "religion" as a universal category. McMahan has described how Buddhism came to the West in dialogue with the universalist discourses of the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Protestantism.[1] Each of those discourses emphasized different aspects of religion. Within the Protestant discourse, "true religion" was defined by true doctrine.[2] Within the Enlightenment discourse, Kant defined "true religion" as rational religion, religion within the bounds of reason. Within the Romanticist discourse, the German Protestant theologian Schleiermacher (1768–1834) defined true religion as religious experience. The encounter with the Protestant discourse led to Buddhism as a partner in interreligious dialogue as one of the five "world religions." The encounter with Enlightenment thinking led to the notion that Buddhism revealed universal truth; the encounter with Romanticism led to the notion that this universal truth was accessible through deep spiritual experiences.

Within this wider context, Zen came to be imagined as a universal religion, or even as the mystical core of all religions. I will critically review the notion of "pure experience" that played an important role in the construction of such a universal Zen. I will discuss three forms of critique, two external to the Zen tradition and one internal to Zen: the postmodern critique, as put forward by Zen scholar Dale Wright, the critique of universal mysticism, as put forward by Bernard McGinn, and the critique based on the work of Dōgen, as put forward by Dōgen scholar Hee-Jin Kim. In the discussion I return to the dilemma of universality versus particularity in the Zen tradition.

1 McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, Chapter 4.
2 See Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*.

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## 1 The Birth of Buddhism as a World Religion

Tomoko Masuzawa has described in her book *The Invention of World Religions* how a European universalism led in the nineteenth century to the construction of the paradigm of "world religions," and the imagining of Buddhism as one of those world religions.[3]

Although various disparate Buddhist doctrines and practices had been known in the West for several centuries, around 1820, the pieces of the puzzle were put together by Orientalist scholars: the birth of "Buddhism" as one of the world religions was a fact.[4] After the notion of "Buddhism" took hold in the Western imagination, "Buddhism" became an object of study, although in a way that was deeply tied in with colonialism. As Braun notes, "Working with texts housed in Europe, Orientalists reified Buddhism into something essentially immutable but subject to the depredations of historical circumstances in Asia, in which local folks always imperfectly expressed its essence."[5]

Western Orientalists created the world religion of Buddhism, based on the "common doctrines" of the many different local Buddhist traditions. The universal religion of Buddhism was presumed to stem from a pure and original "early Buddhism" (which was not to be confused with contemporary Theravāda Buddhism as lived religion in Asia). This early Buddhism was a rational reconstruction, or even an invention, of a pure, original tradition that is doubtful to have ever existed. The fascination with this early Buddhism predominantly had an intellectual orientation. It focused on the domain of Buddhist doctrine. The conversation on Buddhism was dominated by an interest in Buddhist belief systems, ethics, and the personality of the historical Buddha, rather than experiences or practices. Buddhist "atheist" beliefs were welcomed by many intellectuals as a rational, secular alternative to Christian beliefs.[6]

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3 Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

4 How, at a certain point in time and under particular circumstances, something called "Buddhism" was constructed in the Western mind is treated in detail by Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London, Routledge, 1999) and by Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

5 Erik Braun, *Local and Translocal*, 936f. This view of a dichotomy between a putatively pure original and a local corruption created what Anne Hansen has called a core-periphery model of Buddhist history. In this way, translocal Buddhism as a single entity could be found in the Pali texts, and the various forms of local Buddhism were seen as popular and corrupted forms of Buddhism (ibid.).

6 See e.g. Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988); Roger-Pol Droit, *The Cult of Nothingness: The Philosophers and the Buddha*

Buddhism came to the West in a cultural climate in which what Lindbeck calls the cognitive-propositional approach to religion was popular. Religion was conceived as "true doctrine." Religious belief became restricted to a matter of propositional truth claims that were to be debated and evaluated by the rational autonomous subject.[7] To be a follower of a religious tradition implied an inner assent to the religious truth claims of that tradition. However, the presence of a plurality of conflicting truth claims from the various religious traditions increasingly led to cross pressures. What is the justification for asserting that one's own truth claims are universally valid, in the light of such a plurality of claims?

McMahan recounts how, in order to adjudicate the various religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Descartes initiated an epistemology of propositional rationalism that promised a universal language of truth: truth was a relationship between interior mental representations and exterior facts. In this way it would be possible to mediate between contending truth claims. Based on this epistemological model, there could be such a thing as "religious truth." This was defined as the autonomous, buffered self's voluntary assent to enchanted religious beliefs that represented reality. Such "enchanted" religious truth was opposed to disenchanted scientific truth, which was the result of public rational debate, empirical observation and experimentation.

In order for a statement to be true, it had to be disembedded from its social context, and transcend cultural contexts, partisan religious claims, and political agendas. It had to establish universal laws and ethical norms. It had to be universally true. Proving that its doctrines were universally true was the challenge to which Asian Buddhist intellectuals had to respond. They responded initially by creating a discourse of "scientific Buddhism": Buddhist truth claims are true because they are in accordance with science, and can be scientifically verified.[8] McMahan has documented how a discourse on Buddhism arose that

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Donald S. Lopez, *From Stone to Flesh: A Short History of the Buddha* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

7 Talal Asad points out that this was a new and modern way of construing belief: "It is not that our present concept of belief (*that* something is true) was absent in pre-modern society but that the words translated as such were usually embedded in distinctive social and political relationships, articulated distinctive sensibilities. They were first of all lived and only occasionally theorized." Talal Asad, "Thinking about religion, belief and politics," in: R. Orsi (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 36–58, citation on 47.

8 Lopez notes that the referents for the terms "Buddhism" and "science" have varied widely throughout this process: "over the course of a century and a half, *Buddhism* has meant the Theravāda tradition of late nineteenth-century Sri Lanka, the "esoteric Buddhism" of Theosophy, the ethical Buddhism of the orientalists, the Zen of D.T. Suzuki, the Madhyamaka

presumed that Buddhist truth claims were universally valid and could be validated by science. As McMahan notes, "it was through apologists' presenting a selective picture of Buddhism as a predominantly secular philosophy in harmony with modern science and other secular disciplines that the tradition initially gained traction in the West."[9] Colonel Henry Olcott (1832–1907), one of the founders of the Theosophical Society, went to Sri Lanka to take refuge as a Theravāda Buddhist and compiled *The Buddhist Catechism*, a set of propositional statements to which Buddhists should assent.[10]

In this scientific discourse, Buddhism is true because it is compatible with science, or even is a type of science itself.[11] Religious truth claims are only true if they are confirmed by science. Buddhism is presented as a rational way of life, based on scientific principles.[12] The German-American scholar and writer Paul Carus (1952–1919) wrote *The Buddhist Gospel*, in which he presented a rationalist, scientific Buddhism that reflected a liberal Protestant discourse. His purpose, however, was not to promote Buddhism but to arrive at a new "purified" Christianity that would be perfectly in accord with science.[13] For Carus, Buddhism was the best available candidate for such a Religion of Science. In his selective presentation of Buddhism, he defined karma as an ethical natural law. The Buddhist motto "be a lamp unto yourselves" conveyed the scientific spirit.[14]

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philosophy of Nāgārjuna, and the Mahāyāna and tantric Buddhism of Tibet. Science has meant basic astronomy, a mechanistic universe, modern physics, modern cosmology, and neurobiology. The referent of *Buddhism* and the referent of *Science* have changed radically over the course of more than a century, yet the claim for the compatibility of Buddhism and Science has continued to be made." (Lopez, *Buddhism and Science*, 31f).

9 McMahan, *Intersections of Buddhism and Secularity*, 141.

10 Lopez notes that it was telling that no Sinhalese could be found to write such a catechism, so Olcott took it upon himself. Olcott's cognitive-propositional approach to religion was fundamentally foreign to his Sinhalese Buddhist contemporaries. Donald Lopez, "Belief," in: Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 23–35, citation on 33.

11 In the perennialist approach, Buddhism is considered an esoteric science (not only third person but also first person). Many of the defenders of this position use an expanded definition of science. For example, Olcott explained that the rays of light that emanate from the Buddha are his aura. It is not a supernatural, but a natural phenomenon (using an expanded definition of naturalism as well).

12 For Olcott, however, Buddhism was compatible with an occult understanding of science.

13 "Science is divine, and the truth of science is a revelation of God. Through science God speaks to us; by science he shows us the glory of his works; and in science he teaches us his will." Paul Carus, *The Dawn of a New Religious Era and Other Essays* (Chicago: Open Court 1916), 20.

14 See McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 102–107.

As McMahan notes, this suggests that one can know the world as it is through personal experience, and that one can bypass scientific observation and rational debate in this way.[15] Ultimate religious truth transcended propositional rationality through the notion of "spiritual experience," which yielded another order of "facts" inaccessible to the intellect: the direct, firsthand, intuitive, knowledge of ultimate reality.

## 2 Universal Zen

At the 1893 *World's Parliament of Religions*, Shaku Sōen had presented Zen to the West as a modern, cosmopolitan, humanistic, and socially responsible Buddhism—not a religion, but an empirical, rational and scientific mode of inquiry into the true nature of things. Lopez notes, that among all the topics that Sōen, a Zen priest and Mahāyāna master, could have chosen to introduce Buddhism to his American audience, he chose not emptiness or compassion or the Buddha nature, but the comparatively prosaic topic of causation, probably because it seemed utterly modern and scientific, explaining both the outer world of matter and the inner world of mind without recourse to God.[16]

Sōen's focus had been on a theological and philosophical analysis of Buddhist doctrines, demonstrating that they were compatible with science. In the early twentieth century, however, in accordance with the rising popularity of the experiential-expressive approach to religion, the focus shifted to experience. As Bush argues, experiential approaches to religion share two suppositions: (1) religion is a matter of a special type of experience, and (2) the experiential aspect of religion is cross-culturally universal.[17] Schleiermacher located the essence of religion in subjective feelings, as opposed to doctrines, creeds and institutions. William James shared the suppositions of the experiential approach to religion, with one specification: he viewed mysticism, a particular form of religious experience, as universal.[18]

One of the most important heirs of Schleiermacher was the German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869–1937). In *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto defined the essence of religion as the prerational feeling of the "numinous" that humans experience in the presence of the *mysterium tremendum*, the transcendent source

15 McMahan, *The Enchanted Secular*, 12.
16 Lopez, *Buddhism and Science*, 21.
17 Bush, *Visions of Religion*, 25.
18 Ibid.

experienced as the "Wholly Other."[19] Mystical experience could be seen as the identification of the personal self with the transcendent Reality.[20] The numinous is then conceived of as nothingness or as void or emptiness. In *Mysticism East and West*, Otto contrasted mysticism with theism: both are responses to the numinous. In the mystical experience, however, Otto claimed, the Godhead is encountered as an immanent principle, which is different from the transcendent God: "the [...] essential distinction [between mysticism and theism] is not that the mystic has another and a new relationship to God, but that he has a different God."[21] In this way, Otto was able to accommodate non-Western forms of mysticism (such as Zen mysticism) that did not focus on a transcendent God.[22]

A popular outlook was that of perennialism (popularized by the Theosophical Society and by Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*), which views each of the world's religious traditions as sharing a single, universal truth on whose foundation all religious knowledge and doctrine has grown. [23] From this perspective, the truth claims of all religions point to the same esoteric perennial Truth, that is beyond Enlightenment truth and can only be known by direct personal experience. By offering such a universalist interpretation of religious truth, the perennialists attempt to transcend conflicting truth claims. Since ultimate religious truth transcends religious differences, it is not bound to any tradition, but all religions can participate in it. The great founders and mystics throughout the ages were seen to have rediscovered this timeless ultimate religious truth. Afterwards, their followers and admirers let their original insights decay into fixed dogmas and formulas, and let religions and institutions arise. Perennialism points to such free spirits in all traditions: the German mystic Meister Eckhart (1260–1327), the Jewish mystic Martin Buber (1878–1965), the Sufi mystic Jalal ad-Din Rumi (1207–1273), the German Protestant mystic Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), the Chinese proto-Daoist writer Zhuangzi (fourth century BCE), and of course Zen masters such as Linji.

19 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958[1923]).

20 Ibid.

21 Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016[1923]), 140.

22 See Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 327ff for a critical review of Otto's thought on comparative mysticism.

23 Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1945); René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrine* (London: Luzac, 1945); Fritjhof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (New York: Harper, 1975).

According to the perennialists, a direct knowledge of ultimate reality represents the central core of all religions, and therefore is what most closely binds East and West. It claims that there is a universal stratum of "spiritual experience" that transcends cultural boundaries.

McMahan has described how this approach involved the creation of what he calls "the enchanted secular." This notion both embraces and transcends the secular.[24] It means that, just like scientific knowledge is the result of experiment, spiritual knowledge is the result of a direct investigation of reality through one's own experience. Through meditation, one can directly investigate reality in a way that transcends doctrine and authority. Buddhism was a "science of mind" or an "internal science" that established universal truth through direct encounter, in a way that bypasses the parochial truth claims of religions. Buddhist meditation is not a religious activity, but a scientific method of investigating the mind.[25] The fascination with enlightenment as an inner state led to a conception of Buddhism as a kind of inner science, or first-person science, that plumbs the depths of human consciousness.[26] Just like the secular, propositional model, such a model of "transcultural spirituality" aspires to universal, transcultural truth. It embraces the secular, naturalistic worldview, yet infuses a new kind of enchantment into it. Enchantment is shifted from the external world to a cultivation of interior states.[27] The enchanted secular involves a generic transcendent sphere, that can be known directly and intuitively. Such a form of universal, transcultural truth is a mirror image to the universal rationality of the secular.[28]

Within this context, the Zen masters were presented as examples of such a universal mysticism. In the first half of the twentieth century, Zen exercised a magnetic attraction on Western intellectuals with a passion for mysticism. Eugen Herrigel (1884–1955) is a paradigmatic example. He was a German philosopher who taught in Japan from 1924 until 1929, and wanted to study Zen. Because Zen meditation was considered too demanding for Westerners, he was advised to practice archery. He wrote a famous book on his experiences, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, that became very influential in creating a mystified image of Zen in the Western imagination. Herrigel writes, among other things, that his teacher instructed him not to aim at the target, but to wait patiently until the

24 McMahan, *The Enchanted Secular.*

25 Ibid., 14.

26 Much research has been done with neuroscientists, for example the research into the brain waves of Matthieu Ricard that Owen Flanagan describes (Flanagan, *The Bodhisattva's Brain*).

27 McMahan, *The Enchanted Secular*, 15.

28 Ibid.

arrow left the bow by itself, and "it" shot, not he himself.[29] Later research has proven much of Herrigel's story to be a romantic fabrication. Yamada has argued that much of Herrigel's account is the result of mistranslation and misunderstanding.[30]

At the end of the nineteenth century, D.T. Suzuki was sent to the West by his teacher Sōen. He became an editorial assistant to Paul Carus and proved himself a fast learner. Suzuki claimed that Zen pointed to a religious experience that is universal. The focus was on the phenomenological and mystical aspects of Buddhism. Suzuki and other Zen advocates connected perennialism with the Mahāyāna Buddhist hermeneutic of two truths, which distinguishes between conventional or relative truth (all truth claims that are expressed in language), and ultimate or absolute truth (which is beyond language). All truth claims are, since they are couched in language and thought, part of conventional truth. There are no "ultimate facts," and all Buddhist doctrines are only conventionally true. Ultimate truth is realized by not being attached to any conventional truths, by recognizing conventional truth as merely conventional, and not ultimately true. Therefore, all truth claims are merely conventional truth, and point to the realization of ultimate truth.[31] Such a hermeneutic resonates with popular Western views that all dogma is misguided, and is not where truth lies.

## 3 Pure Experience

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, Zen claimed to be about realizing the ineffable "without relying on words and letters." The Zen stories were presented as a spiritual technology (in Buddhist terms: upaya), intended to lead the Zen practitioner to a direct, unmediated experience of reality beyond the realm of conditioning. This precludes all kinds of mediating objects such as images, symbols, or other representations of deities.

The Japanese Zen philosopher Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) borrowed the term "pure experience" from William James, to describe the ineffable state of enlightenment: a state of being in the world where all the conceptual and categorizing activity of the mind was bracketed, so that reality could be perceived

29 Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*.

30 See Yamada Shōji, "The Myth of Zen in the Art of Archery," *Journal of Japanese Religious Studies* 28 nos 1–2 (2001): 1–30.

31 See e.g. Jay L. Garfield, *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); The Cowherds, *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

in its natural fullness, undistorted by the mind.[32] To describe the Zen enlightenment experience as a pure experience means that it is a mode of experiencing beyond the subject-object distinction, in which reality is seen as it really is, undistorted by disturbing emotions, preconceptions and attachments. And although Nishida dropped his notion of "pure experience" in his later work (or at least renamed it), Suzuki adapted it as the central hermeneutical principle in his presentation of Zen to the West.

Nishida, Suzuki, and other Romantic interpreters of Zen attempted to go "beyond the mind," and aimed at directly beholding "spirit," possibly through a faculty of mystical intuition or other extra-rational means. They were convinced it was possible to get through to the thing itself, as it exists objectively, independent of the mind of the one who understands. Some kind of pure experience of the world "as it is" was considered possible through transcending rational understanding. [33]

As Zen scholar Dale Wright notes, the standard view of a pure experience is that it is an undistorted experience of things as they are, beyond the shaping power of language—an immediate, intuitive grasp of reality, liberated from conditioning. This view considers language to be either an obstruction (a filter, a veil, a screen, a distortion, a piece of clothing that dresses up naked reality) or an instrument (the finger that points to the moon). The pure experience is seen as a universal experience that transcends language, and transcends culture and society. It is the result of a sudden breakthrough in consciousness where the ultimately Real (the original source, the ground of being) can reveal itself, a state of being in the world where all the conceptual and categorizing activity of the mind is bracketed, so that reality can be perceived in its natural fullness, undistorted by the mind.[34]

32 James had described the notion of pure experience as follows: "The instant field of the present is always experienced in its "pure" state, plain unqualified actuality, a simple *that*, as yet undifferentiated into thing and thought, and only virtually classifiable as objective fact or as someone's opinion about fact." William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1912), 74. The notion of pure experience has a complex genealogy. James used it in a pragmatic sense, D.T. Suzuki passed it on to Nishida, who used it as a way to describe "the Zen experience." See also Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 94–116.

33 Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, translated by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990 [1911]); Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*.

34 Dale S. Wright, "Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience," *Philosophy East and West*, 42/1 (1992): 113–138.

### 4 Criticizing the Universality of Pure Experience

The interpretation of the Zen enlightenment experience as an undistorted, pure experience of things as they are has been a fundamental component of Western-language imaginings of Zen. However, the "linguistic turn" in philosophy led to an alternative interpretation of Zen practice and enlightenment that focuses on the various ways in which "the Zen experience" is shaped and made possible by language and various linguistically articulated social practices. The view that Zen experience transcends language has been challenged especially by Wright. [35]

He argues that the notion of pure experience presupposes a separation between experience and language: an essential dichotomy between an initial experiential moment of unmediated contact through the senses, and a subsequent "filtering" through linguistic categories. This dichotomy is often expressed in conceptual terms as between the "raw data" of experience versus the "meaning" that linguistic interpretation bestows upon it, as between "pure experience" and a subsequent "conceptual overlay," as between "original image" versus "blurring through conceptual filters," as "prereflective awareness" versus "reflective categories," as "primordial given" versus "linguistic construct," and so on.[36] However, Wright argues, such a foundational dichotomy between original experience and subsequent linguistic interpretation is untenable. Human perception is always already linguistically shaped. There is no access possible to a pre-linguistic, objective "given."

The assumption of a transparent world outside the human mind, waiting to be discovered, has been called "the myth of the given." In his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, American philosopher Richard Rorty argues that Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein have each in their own way destroyed this modern myth in their philosophy.[37] The human mind is no "glassy essence," that can accurately reflect what is out there. Our minds are context-dependent, our knowing is always perspectival. Any form of understanding is always situated in particular cultural and historical settings. It is impossible for us to assume a "God's eye view" on reality.

Wright draws on poststructuralist theories of language that have been developed in the wake of the insights of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, and that have constituted a linguistic turn in contemporary Western thought. According to

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35 Ibid.

36 Wright, *Rethinking Transcendence*, 117.

37 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

such theories, language is embedded in all human experience, even at the primitive level of perception. Wright stresses that this does not mean that everything *is* language, but that we experience everything that is through the medium of language. It also does not mean that there is no such thing as nontheoretical experience: some experiences, such as burning your hand on a hot stove, are so immediate that they do not need to be expressed in conceptual language. However, perception, language and thinking are all interdependent.[38]

Gadamer would argue that when we say that enlightenment is ineffable and that we cannot describe it, we are already describing it: "all thinking about language is already once again drawn back into language."[39] Experience and language are not related to each other in the same way as people and their clothing. It's not that our "naked" experience is dressed up by our linguistic and conceptual interpretation of it. On the contrary: experience always comes already fully clothed. Language constitutes a dimension of any experience. Language is not only a tool for describing experience, it is also embedded in the content of our experience. As Wright puts it:

> Language is present even in the "direct" perception of an object. Language and perception "co-arise." [...] Awareness of what it is that we perceive is linguistically structured, and comes to us directly in the perception itself. We perceive "this" directly *as* what it is—a book, a sound, a strange situation. [...] Anything not experienced as something in particular is simply *not* experienced.[40]

Wright argues that it is precisely language and social practice that make Zen experience possible. The dichotomy between the given and the subsequent attribution of meaning is untenable, since perception is always already constituted by language.

The poststructuralist approach to experience and language requires new and more appropriate metaphors. Wright reviews a few of those from Gadamer:

> In his terms, language is not a barrier, obstructing access; it is a "reservoir" of possibilities which it holds open to those who participate in it. Language is not a "clothing" which hides the truth; it is a "medium"

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38 Wright, *Rethinking Transcendence*, 122.

39 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 62.

40 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations,* 71f.

> through which truth becomes manifest. Language is not a "veil" preventing vision; it is a "window" which opens vision.[41]

Therefore, in order to be able to say something meaningful about the Zen experience, we need to be initiated into the particular forms of understanding, the social, religious, philosophical and cultural contexts that gave rise to it. As Wright notices:

> We need to work our way into the language and customs of local practice before we can share in the subtleties of understanding. This is hard work, and typically not even attempted unless it appears that something important is to be gained from it. In our time, Romanticism has supplied this justification.[42]

Therefore, Wright concludes, much anthropological research is needed in order to establish the Chinese and Japanese social and cultural context that underlies Zen language.[43]

The above external criticism of the universality of the Zen experience is echoed by internal criticisms from within the Zen tradition itself, for example by Dōgen scholar Hee-Jin Kim when he writes that in many Zen writings,

> Enlightenment is construed as seeing things as they really are rather than as they appear; it is a direct insight into, and discernment of, the nature of reality that is apprehended only by wisdom, which transcends and is prior to the activity of discriminative thought.[44]

Kim strongly criticizes such an interpretation of Zen enlightenment. He identifies several problems with this reading: (1) it implies a strong separation between "things as they really are" and "things as they appear to be"; (2) it suggests that insight is reached by leaving behind all discriminative thought; (3) "seeing" is conceived predominantly in epistemological, intuitive, and mystical terms; (4) it privileges a pre-discriminative state of mind; (5) it assumes a final nonduality that negates all difference and multiplicity.[45]

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41 Wright, *Rethinking Transcendence*, 125.

42 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 47.

43 Wright himself has contributed to such anthropological research by co-editing several volumes on Zen with Steven Heine.

44 Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking*, 1.

45 Ibid.

## 5 Against Perennialism: Criticism of Universal Mysticism

Criticism of the universality of Zen experience is connected to criticism of the perennialist notion of "universal mysticism." The French scholar of mysticism Michel de Certeau has shown that the study of mysticism in its modern sense, as being connected with mystical experience, dates from the seventeenth century, as part of a shift in Western attitudes toward the sacred.[46] As Sharf notes, "mystical experience is generally construed as a direct encounter with the divine or the absolute, and as such some scholars claim that the "raw experience" itself is not affected by linguistic, cultural or historical contingencies."[47]

The American scholar of mysticism Bernard McGinn, however, has called attention to the ways in which "timeless" mystical experiences have always been conditioned by changes and developments in religious institutions and society at large.[48] There is no such thing as "universal mysticism": mystical reflection is always part of a specific religious tradition, as formed by its core texts and their interpretation. This means that, rather than presupposing a universal mystical experience across traditions, the mystical experience should be studied in its historical and traditional context. According to McGinn, the emphasis on mystical experience in the study of mysticism, and especially in comparative mysticism, has so far blocked a careful analysis of the special hermeneutics of mystical texts.[49]

The Jewish scholar of religion Gershom Scholem argues that there is no universal mysticism, only mysticism embedded in a specific religious tradition. There is no mystical tradition outside the holy texts and the community that interprets these texts.[50] Mysticism can only be found in and through the religious traditions that it arises in, and the mystical texts produced within that tradition.

Numerous scientific publications on mysticism have postulated that a mystical experience exists that transcends religious norms and convents, and that constitutes the universal core of mysticism.[51] But when scientists try to determine the qualities of that core via taxonomies and categories, it leads to differences of opinion. In 1978, an influential collection of essays by Steven

46 Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable. Vol. 1. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). See also McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 310ff and King, *Orientalism and Religion,* 7–34.

47 Sharf, *Experience*, 96.

48 McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xv.

49 Ibid., xiii.

50 Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 6.

51 E.g., Walter Terence Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961); Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

Katz appeared in which the contextual character of mystical experiences was stressed: all experience is formed, mediated and constructed by the terms, categories, convictions and linguistic background that the subject carries with him or her.[52] According to Katz, perennialism is hermeneutically naive, because it deals with texts in a way that is methodologically irresponsible (wrong translations, quoting out of context), assumes too easily that it can reveal the meaning behind the texts, and assumes beforehand that all mystics have identical mystical experiences.

The discussion between the constructivists (those in agreement with Katz) and the perennialists is ongoing. As a response to Katz's book, several books by Robert Forman appeared, who argued that something like a "pure consciousness event" does exist: an awake but content-less and non-intentional state of consciousness that is independent of culture and language.[53] And recently, the American philosopher of religion Kenneth Rose has argued that a growing body of research in the new cognitive, biological and evolutionary sciences of religion suggests that "human consciousness, whether due to genetics or a shared contemplative psychology, is characterized as much by general features of contemplative experience as by local differences between historically and culturally quite distinct religious traditions."[54]

## 6 Zen as Non-Mysticism

Even though "mystical Zen" became popular in the Sixties, several Japanese Zen thinkers no longer presented Zen as a form of mysticism. Later in his life, Suzuki regretted having called Zen a form of mysticism, "as I find it now highly misleading in elucidating Zen thought. Let it suffice to say here that Zen has nothing 'mystical' about it."[55]

Ueda interprets Zen as what he calls non-mysticism (*Nicht-Mystik* or *hi-shinpishugi*):[56] not so much a rejection of mysticism, but a movement through mysticism and beyond it:

52 Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis.*

53 Robert K.C. Forman (ed.), *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

54 Kenneth Rose, *Yoga, Meditation and Mysticism: Contemplative Universals and Meditative Landmarks* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 18.

55 Quoted in Hiroshi Sakamoto, "D.T. Suzuki and Mysticism," *The Eastern Buddhist* 10/1 (1977): 54–67, citation on 65f.

56 The material in this and the next section has been published earlier in van der Braak, *The Mystical Hermeneutics of Eckhart and Dōgen.*

> I regard true mysticism as the entire movement "from union to ekstasis," that is to say, the entire movement "from mysticism to non-mysticism," hence up to the point of including the moment of "to non-mysticism." In fact, in this case the expression mysticism ceases to be fitting; it is no longer appropriate. True mysticism is not mysticism. Rather, it is appropriate to call it non-mysticism."[57]

Non-mysticism is both an ultimate realization of true mysticism and a breakthrough beyond the mystical experience. According to the American philosopher Bret Davis, it is both about a complete development of mysticism (in the sense of realizing its full potential) and about a shedding of and releasing of mysticism:

> Non-mysticism involves a double negation, first a release from the ego and then from God. God is let go of for the sake of nothing, that is, for an experience of absolute nothingness, which in turn returns us to a direct engagement in the here and now of everyday activity.[58]

Davis distinguishes four moments in this non-mysticism: 1. An ecstatic transcendence of the ego; 2. A mystical union with God or the One; 3. An ecstatic breakthrough beyond God or the One to *śūnyatā*; 4. A return to an ecstatic/instatic engagement in the here and now.[59]

These four moments are not consecutive but are part of one movement. According to Ueda, mysticism in the narrower sense ends at the second moment of this movement, at the mystical union with God or the One as religious experience. The third moment constitutes the self-overcoming of mysticism. This is completed and expressed in the fourth moment. *Śūnyatā* is therefore for Ueda, unlike Suzuki, "not an apophatic indicator of an ineffably transcendent Godhead beyond God; it is not a negative theological sign for something "wholly Other" that lies "beyond Being." Rather, Ueda understands absolute nothingness dynamically as "the activity of emptying out," that is, as the ecstatic movement of de-mysticism itself."[60]

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57 *Ueda Shizuteru shū* [The Ueda Shizuteru Collection], 11 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2001–2003), 8, 38, quoted in Davis, *Letting Go of God for Nothing*, 225f.

58 Davis, *Letting Go of God for Nothing*, 222f. Davis suggests the term "de-mysticism" (*Ent-Mystik* or *datsu-shinpishugi*).

59 Ibid., 223.

60 Ibid., 224f.

## 7 Back to Language: Dōgen's Mystical Hermeneutics

Kim offers another interpretation of Zen enlightenment based on the work of Dōgen: rather than transcending duality through an unmediated, nonlinguistic awareness of things as they really are, enlightenment means fully realizing duality and embodying it. The Zen form of life is then aimed at practicing and embodying such an ongoing realization which takes place in the midst of language and thinking, rather than rising above them.

Whereas the Zen traditions that initially were transmitted to the West in the twentieth century, the Japanese Rinzai tradition and the Sanbōkyōdan reform movement, presented an iconoclastic attitude toward language and thought and considered Zen "a special transmission outside the scriptures," Dōgen advocates continuing hermeneutical reflection on scripture. Therefore, his Zen is sometimes referred to as the "oneness of Zen and the scriptures" (*kyōzen itchi*).[61] For Dōgen, Zen is not about realizing a universal mystical experience or transcending language and thinking but about the continuing realization-practice of Buddha nature *within* language and thinking.

As Kim notes, both scriptural tradition and a special tradition were legitimate parts of Dōgen's "rightly transmitted Buddhism."[62] Dōgen admonished his disciples to study the *sūtras*:

> An enlightened teacher is always thoroughly versed in the sūtras [...] The sūtras are made the instruments for liberating others and are turned into sitting, resting and walking in meditation. Being thoroughly versed changes the sūtras into parents, children, and grandchildren. Because an enlightened teacher understands the sūtras through practice, he/she penetrates them deeply.[63]

For Dōgen, the specific revelation of the Buddhist *sūtras* in their conventional sense was only a small portion of the sūtras in their cosmic context. Life is "an incessant round of hermeneutical activities aimed at trying to understand such cosmic *sūtras*."[64] For Dōgen, Zen koans were not nonsensical attempts to frustrate the intellect in order to facilitate a breakthrough to awakening but "parables, allegories, and mysteries that unfolded the horizons of existence

61 As Heine notes, however, such a distinction is more complex than a simple stereotypical polarization. Steven Heine, *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shōbōgenzō Texts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 8.
62 Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*, 53.
63 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Bukkyō* [The Buddha's Teaching], quoted in ibid., 78.
64 Ibid., 79.

before us."[65] The koan does not aim at an exit from language but to enter more deeply into the universal and non-anthropocentric language of mountains and rivers, bushes and trees. All phenomena in the universe can be seen as the self-expressions (*jidōshu*) of Buddha nature and emptiness[66] and they all endlessly express the truth. Therefore, Kim has characterized Dōgen's approach to Zen as a mystical realism:

> Mystery, in Dōgen´s view, did not consist of that which was hidden or unknown in darkness or that which would be revealed or made known in the future. Rather, it consisted of the present intimacy, transparency, and vividness of thusness, for "nothing throughout the entire universe is concealed" (*henkai-fuzōzō*).[67]

For Dōgen, an important aspect of his mysticism is the ongoing study and penetration of sacred scripture. Therefore, his thinking can be fruitfully interpreted as a form of mystical hermeneutics.

For Dōgen, enlightenment is not a static mystical experience but constitutes an awakening to the truth that is always already "presencing." One of his main essays, the *Genjōkōan*, has been translated by Bret Davis as "the presencing of truth." As Davis puts it,

> The *kōan* that Dōgen's text ultimately presents us with for verification is that the presencing of truth is always fully realizable—without ever being closed off and self-satisfied—in each singular moment of our being unceasingly under way.[68]

Dōgen sees reality as a process of ongoing revelation. For him, mystical experience is not so much a pure intuition of an ineffable realm as the ongoing affirmation and verification of the presencing of truth. Such a process always takes place within thought and language. According to Kim, Dōgen's mysticism is a far cry from apophatic mysticism, where reality is considered ineffable and unnamable. For Dōgen, mystical experience is constantly in need of affirmation through language and thought:

65 Ibid., 81.
66 Ibid., 83.
67 Ibid., 86.
68 Bret W. Davis, "The Presencing of Truth: Dōgen's *Genjokōan*," in William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield (eds.), *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 251–259, citation on 256.

> The *in*effable, however self-evident it may be, does not imply the absence of linguistic mediations; to the contrary, it is *affirmed* as such precisely because of linguistic mediations. Without the latter, the affirmation of the ineffable is unthinkable and impossible to experience in the first place.[69]

In Chapter 10 I will further explore to what extent Dōgen's mystical hermeneutics can contribute to fruitful new reimaginings of Zen in our secular age.

## 8 Zen Meditation as Universal Dharma Practice

It seems that many Western Zen practitioners today are not all that concerned with the truth value of Buddhist doctrines anymore, nor are they as fascinated by mystical experiences of enlightenment or the meaning of enlightenment as before. The practice of Zen meditation seems to have taken center stage. The transmission of Zen to Western modernity seems now dominated by the effectiveness of the practice of Zen meditation to combat the various malaises of modernity.

And yet again, the association with science is sought in order to universalize such claims to efficacy. Zen is now celebrated as a form of applied science. Today, scientific research claims the efficacy of Zen meditation practice. [70] The effects of Buddhist mindfulness are being investigated by neuroscientists and other empirical researchers. And also here, universalizing claims are widely heard. "The *dharma* is universal," Kabat-Zinn argues.[71] Such a presentation of mindfulness as a universal practice allows Buddhism to be reimagined as scientific. As Wilson puts it: "Rather than possible framings of Buddhists as backward, foreign, irrational, or idol-worshipping, MBSR and related neuroscientific research on mindfulness allows Buddhists to present themselves as being cutting-edge, compassionate, scientific, and useful."[72] As a result of this reimagining, "Buddhism appears simply to be mindfulness, and mindfulness is a scientifically verified, non-supernaturalistic method of healing."[73]

69 Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking*, 97.

70 E.g., James H. Austin, *Zen and the Brain: Toward an Understanding of Meditation and Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998). Austin wrote five more books on the neurological aspects of Zen.

71 Apparently, the mindfulness movement considers science to be the ultimate arbiter of the Buddhist claims of the efficacy of meditation.

72 Wilson, *Mindful America*, 102.

73 Ibid.

Just like Sōen in his presentation at the 1893 *World's Parliament of Religions*, Kabat-Zinn frames karma as a scientific description of natural processes:

> Karma means that this happens because that happened. B is connected in some way to A, every effect has an antecedent cause, and every cause an effect that is its measure and its consequence, at least at the non-quantum level. Overall, when we speak of a person's karma, it means the sum total of the person's direction in life, and the tenor of the things that occur around that person, caused by antecedent conditions, actions, thoughts, feelings, sense impressions, desires.[74]

Kabat-Zinn prefers to speak about the *dharma*, rather than about Buddhism. The term "*dharma*" carries different meanings in Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. In Buddhism, it can refer to the nature of liberated reality itself, to teachings that correctly accord with that reality and that lead to liberation, or to the specific teachings of the Buddha himself. Generally, the term (which literally means "law") has connotations with being universal, scientific, rational, non-theistic, natural, self-evident, discernible, embedded in and regulating the world. Kabat-Zinn himself uses the connotation of the laws of nature: "although the Buddha articulated the dharma, the *dharma* itself cannot be Buddhist any more than the law of gravity is English because of Newton or Italian because of Galileo. It is a universal lawfulness."[75]

Therefore, the term becomes available for appropriation and recontextualization. If *dharma* is universal truth, it is not really religious, since truth transcends religion. It is the essence of the scientific process itself:

> In some ways it is appropriate to characterize dharma as resembling scientific knowledge, ever growing, ever changing, yet with a core body of methods, observations, and natural laws distilled from thousands of years of inner exploration through highly disciplined self-observation and self-inquiry, a careful and precise recording and mapping of experiences encountered in investigating the nature of the mind, and direct empirical testing and confirming of the results.[76]

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74 Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), 220.

75 Jon Kabat-Zinn, "The Pioneer: Jon Kabat-Zinn on working toward a mindful society," *Lion's Roar,* https://www.lionsroar.com/mindful-living-the-pioneer-toward-a-mindful-society/ [accessed March 5, 2020]

76 Wilson, *Mindful America*, 88.

Kabat-Zinn claims that Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction is not only a defensible form of Buddhism, it is the proper next stage of Buddhist development:

> One might say that in order for Buddhism to be maximally effective as a *dharma* vehicle at this stage in the evolution of the planet, and for its sorely needed medicine to be maximally effective, it may have to give up being Buddhism in any formal religious sense, or at least, give up any attachments to it in name or form.[77]

## 9 Discussion

In this chapter, I have discussed several approaches to establishing the universality of Zen. Sōen and Suzuki presented Zen as a form of universal mysticism, that presented a unique inner form of knowledge through "the Zen experience." They contributed to the imagining of "Zen" as a single translocal form of Buddhism that forms an authentic core of Buddhist practice, superior compared to seemingly more ephemeral and corrupted local expressions. This has been an important reason for its allure in the West. This imagining of Zen was criticized both by Western critics and by Asian and Western interpreters of the work of Dōgen. However, Kabat-Zinn and other representatives of the mindfulness movement have rekindled a universalist discourse on Zen, focusing on the practice of meditation and its universally applicable effects, as proven by science.

The various attempts to imagine Zen as universal can be seen as somewhat ironic, since, as many Zen scholars have argued, Zen is a very historical tradition that has always been intimately connected to the writings, communities and institutions of the larger cultures that it was a part of. Therefore, the Zen rhetoric of universality[78] is belied by the lived reality of Zen "on the ground."

Zen scholar Carl Bielefeldt has connected the dilemma between universalism and particularity to a fundamental tension within the Zen tradition itself.[79] From its very first arrival in China, he says, the Zen movement presented

77 Jon Kabat-Zinn, "Dharma," in: *In the Face of Fear: Buddhist Wisdom for Challenging Times*, ed. by Barry Boyce (Boston: Shambhala, 2009), 11.

78 A variety of Zen's "rhetoric of immediacy." See Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy. A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

79 Bielefeldt, *Zen Wars III.* Quoted in van der Braak, *Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age I*, 50.

itself as both universal and historic. The myths around its fifth-century founding figure Bodhidharma present him on one hand as an Indian monk, heir to an esoteric understanding of the true Buddhist teachings, handed down in secret by a line of Indian patriarchs since the days of the Buddha himself. This committed the Zen movement to a historical vision of the true church with an apostolic succession. On the other hand, Bodhidharma is presented as a revolutionary whose radical message rejected all Buddhist dogma and ritual, and who taught a direct pointing at the fact that everybody is by nature spiritually complete, without need of religion.[80] Therefore, from the very first beginning, Zen's anti-establishment rhetoric and its message of universal, trans-historical salvation clashed with its deep historical commitments. Everyone possesses the enlightened Buddha mind and needs only to recognize it; yet in order to recognize it, one has to belong to the Zen lineage.

This fundamental tension within the Zen tradition between the timeless and the temporal (or the spiritual and the secular) has broken apart in modern times, and has led to warfare between Zen philosophy and Zen history. The Japanese persecution of Buddhism as a "foreign" religion in the Meiji Restoration led to the need for Buddhism to define itself as both central to the Japanese national experience, and as international and modern. Therefore, Suzuki presented Zen to the West as the universal core of all religions, a universal way to salvation, free from linguistic and cultural determination (to a Japanese audience, however, he presented Zen as the embodiment of the essence of Japanese culture).[81]

It is easy to criticize Suzuki for presenting a faulty picture of Zen to the West, and many Western scholars have done so.[82] However, in the self-understanding of the Zen tradition, such a core-periphery model has been used repeatedly to reimagine Zen. From this perspective, Suzuki and others were simply doing what other spokespersons for the Zen traditions had done before.[83]

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80 Ibid.

81 See Sharf, *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism.*

82 For example, Faure speaks of Suzuki as the "Xavier to the West." Sharf sharply criticizes Suzuki in *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism*.

83 Although it is outside the scope of this work, I want to touch briefly on the fact that the stress on the universality of Zen enlightenment has led to a dubious situation with regard to ethical issues. According to the Traditional Zen Narrative, although Zen spirituality is "beyond good and evil," ultimately Zen enlightenment leads to a benevolent social justice. In line with the universal claims of Zen, all beings are equal because they are all endowed with Buddha nature. The practice of Zen meditation will facilitate the manifestation of this Buddha nature, and therefore lead to world peace and harmony. But as part of its historical claims, Zen has been reconstructed in recent times by its Japanese adherents as a characteristically Japanese spirituality. This has caused it to become caught up in

We have seen that the attempt to reimagine Zen in accordance with the trend of universalization is connected with the larger approach of perennialism. I want to make two critical comments here. First, the perennialist strategy contains a paradoxical element. According to the perennialist logic, if all religious traditions, including Zen, point to universal truth, then such a universal truth is more important than Zen, and Zen is no better or worse than any other religious tradition that points to universal truth. Truth becomes the ultimate arbiter. So if necessary, aspects of the Zen tradition that are incompatible with the truth of one's personal experience, will need to be sacrificed for the sake of truth. Also, according to this logic it will not be necessary to become a Zen Buddhist in order to realize truth. We shall see in Chapter 7 that indeed, many contemporary Western Zen practitioners feel no need to belong to Buddhism. Their allegiance is not to Buddhism but to truth.

Second, a universalistic view on truth would claim that it is beyond cultural differences. As Wright notes, an interesting consequence would be that the Zen truth would not be much different from Christian truth or Platonic truth. In other words, what "they" have in Asia is not different from what "we" have in our own religious and philosophical traditions. Such a view amounts to a denial of the otherness of Zen. He argues that, when we recognize how Zen truth claims peak our interest because they fit within our language games, we become more open to contemplate the otherness of Zen. In that case, it would be exactly the difference and uniqueness of Zen that would make it worthwhile to study it.[84] Wright argues that there is something Eurocentric about this: since we already have direct access in our own culture to the highest and best in other cultures, we don't have anything to learn from Zen.[85]

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dubious political agendas, especially around World War II. Actual Zen practice in Japan has been characterized by social injustice, nationalism and military aggression. Zen critics say that Zen's radically relativistic position opens the door to antinomian tendencies, and that Zen is badly in need of a social ethic. See e.g., Heine, *Zen Skin, Zen Marrow*.

84 In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche already called attention to the fact that different language families would be able to disclose very different aspects of reality to us: "It is precisely where a relationship between languages is present that it cannot be avoided that, thanks to the common philosophy of grammar—I mean thanks to the unconscious mastery and guidance exercised by the same grammatical functions—everything has been prepared from the beginning for a similar development and order of philosophical systems, just as the road to certain other possibilities of interpreting the world seems sealed off. [...] There will be a greater probability that philosophers from the region of the Ural-Altaic language (in which the idea of the subject is most poorly developed) will look differently 'into the world' and will be found on other pathways than Indo-Germans or Muslims." Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, *Beyond Good and Evil* section 20.

85 Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*.

Another critical comment concerns the discourse of a scientific Buddhism.[86] We have seen in this chapter that Kabat-Zinn and other representatives of the mindfulness movement have rekindled a universalist discourse on Zen, focusing on the practice of meditation and its universally applicable effects, as proven by science. And indeed, the efficacy of mindfulness is supported by neurological, psychological, and biological research. However, the success of the scientific approach can lead to a self-defeating result: if science proves that "the Buddha was right," then science becomes the ultimate arbiter of truth claims. Buddhism is made subservient to the higher truth of science. Do we then still need Buddhism as a tradition? McMahan recounts how Buddhist author Daniel Goleman, when confronted with scientific results that confirmed Buddhist teachings, concluded "so it seems that the Buddha was right." However, when future scientific results disagree with Buddhist teachings, will that mean that the Buddha was wrong? The Dalai Lama has expressed an openness to science at many occasions. However, he is also quoted by Lopez as follows:

> I have great respect for science. But scientists, on their own, cannot prove nirvana. Science shows us that there are practices that can make a difference between a happy life and a miserable life. A real understanding of the true nature of the mind can only be gained through meditation.[87]

And although he has said that he will change Buddhist orthodoxy if science discovers differently, this has not occurred yet, and it seems doubtful that it will ever occur.

When Kabat-Zinn claims that mindfulness should be seen as a universal practice, rather than a Buddhist practice, it seems that he is sacrificing Buddhism for the sake of the transmission of Buddhism. In making science the ultimate arbiter of truth, Buddhism itself becomes superfluous, and even an

86 As McMahan and Lopez have observed, the discourse of a scientific Buddhism started in the nineteenth century, and has gradually became more voluminous and more sophisticated. McMahan has provided a genealogy of the discourse of scientific Buddhism, keeping in mind the different and overlapping agendas of the various participants: the Victorian crisis of faith in the West, and the crisis of colonialism and hegemony in Asia. As McMahan stresses, "'Scientific Buddhism' is not just a western orientalist representation of the eastern Other, nor is it just a native strategy of legitimation for Asian Buddhists, though it does involve both. It is instead a part of the ongoing hybridization of certain forms of Buddhism with distinctively modern cultural formations and intellectual practices." (McMahan, *The Making of Modern Buddhism*, 114f).

87 Lopez, *Buddhism and Science*, 34.

annoying distraction that reminds a secular Western audience of the religious roots of mindfulness.

This chapter has focused on the encounter of Japanese Zen with the Western discourses of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The encounter of Zen with the Protestant universalist discourse has played itself out in the field of interreligious dialogue. In the Christian theology of religions, four positions have emerged to frame the debate on religious truth in the light of religious diversity: exclusivism (Christian truth claims are universally true, and truth claims from other religions are not true); inclusivism (Christian truth claims are universally true, but truth claims from other religions also contain some truth, but not the whole truth); pluralism (truth claims from all religions point to a universal Truth); particularism (each religion has its own truth claims, that are incommensurable with the truth claims of other religions).[88]

When we look at the Chinese history of Zen, the discourses of *sanjiao* (the unity of the three teachings of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) and *panjiao* (a hierarchical classification of truth claims), indicate an inclusivist approach. Based on the Buddhist hermeneutics of ultimate and conventional truth, only ultimate truth is universally true, whereas various conventional truths can be ranked in their pragmatic usefulness in guiding the practitioner to ultimate truth. However, presenters of Zen to the West have mostly opted to side with (particular forms of) pluralism in order to defend Zen's truth claims. Suzuki and others claimed that Zen, in its notion of *śūnyatā*, was the direct path to universal Truth. However, pluralist discourse in the hands of Asian Buddhists has often turned out to be inclusivist or exclusivist. For example, for the Sri Lankan Buddhist Anagārika Dharmapala (1864–1933), the scientific rhetoric that he first employed to establish harmony with other religions later became a tool for espousing the superiority of Buddhism and the backwardness of other traditions. Later in his life he vehemently argued against the unity of all religions and the superiority of Buddhism. Rather than a theological pluralism, that argues that all religions point to the same Truth, this approach is more compatible with a theological exclusivism or inclusivism. Ultimately, Buddhism is the only way to realize the truth. Even the Dalai Lama has been called not a pluralist, but an inclusivist or perhaps even an exclusivist, in spite of his pluralist rhetoric.[89] Zen might be most compatible with a theological

88 See Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* and Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions.*

89 In his work, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2000), theologian Gavin D'Costa argues that the Dalai Lama is an exclusivist, since true liberation is only possible once one has become a geug Buddhist monk. D'Costa's comment here needs to be read, however, in the light of his somewhat polemical arguments against

particularism: all religions embody their own version of truth in their own particular, irreducible way. The truth claims of different religious traditions are incommensurable. Therefore, getting to the truth of Zen becomes a matter of "translating" Zen, in a bigger sense than only translating texts. It becomes a matter of reimagining Zen.

In this chapter I have critically looked at attempts to universalize Zen through conceiving of the Zen experience as a universally valid spiritual experience. Such attempts have taken place in the context of Lindbeck's experiential-expressive approach to religion, and Bush's notion of "experience" being a foundational notion for religion. In Chapter 5 I will describe how, as the experiential-expressive approach to religion gradually shifted to a cultural-linguistic approach to religion, and "experience" shifted to "meaning" as a primary category, even the notion of religious experience itself as somehow foundational came under attack. According to some Zen critics, not only is the Zen enlightenment experience not universal, Zen enlightenment is not about Zen experience at all.

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pluralism as exclusivism—which he later notes can best be seen as inclusivism and not exclusivism—which have not always been well received. Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Paul Hedges both refute the usage that D'Costa makes here of this argument.

CHAPTER 5

# Psychologization: The Zen Experience

In this chapter I will discuss the encounter of Zen with Western modernity in the light of Taylor's second trend of psychologization, the tendency to translate religious notions into psychological terms. I use the work of religion scholar Robert Orsi to show that the trend of psychologization is historically related to religious discussions between Catholics and Protestants with regard to "presence" and "absence."

This process of psychologization has been the context for debates regarding the notion of "religious experience." In Chapter 4 I have already looked into the various debates with regard to the universality of "the Zen experience." In this chapter I will take a step further. I will review various critics, such as Proudfoot and Sharf, who challenge the very notion of religious experience itself, and the assumption that Zen enlightenment is about religious experience at all. This is connected with a shift in the academic discussion of religion from Lindbeck's experiential-expressive approach, that considers experience as essential, to his cultural-linguistic approach, that focuses on meaning.

I discuss various alternatives to the Cartesian assumptions that are still inherent in current views on religious experience. Taylor and Dreyfus attempt to revive a contact theory of knowledge, as an alternative to Cartesian mediational theories of knowledge and experience. I then explore to what extent Dōgen's thought can be a helpful counterweight to Cartesian approaches to religious experience that assume the reality of the buffered self.

## 1 Psychologization

Taylor argues that the trend of psychologization is a result of both disenchantment and the rise of a buffered self. Often, disenchantment is seen as a process resulting in people no longer believing in supernatural entities. Taylor, however, stresses a different, but related aspect of disenchantment. Meaning resides in the mind, rather than in the cosmos, and is constructed, not discovered. Also the rise of a buffered self has led to a Cartesian preoccupation with interior subjectivity.

The process of disenchantment, that has led man from being an embodied, embedded participant in an enchanted cosmos to being an isolated, individual spectator of a universe consisting of dead matter, has led to a process of

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what Taylor calls the "excarnation" of religion. Religion is de-communized, de-ritualized and disembodied.[1]

McMahan has argued, in agreement with Taylor, that the excarnated view on fullness was related to the desacralization and disenchantment of the world that the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment brought about. Protestant thinkers rejected the existence of sacred objects, relics and places, and downplayed religious practices such as rituals, processions, ceremonies and church services, that used to serve as the collective embodiment of the religious life. The genuine spirit of the religious life was to be found in the experience of the sensible individual, much more so than much what went on in churches and synagogues.[2]

As a result, religious life has increasingly been conceived as concerning itself with religious experiences that take place "in the mind," rather than as an embodied participation in a cosmos that is permeated with fullness. As Taylor puts it:

> We have moved from an era in which religious life was more "embodied," where the presence of the sacred could be enacted in ritual, or seen, felt, touched, walked towards (in pilgrimage); into one which is more "in the mind," where the link with God passes more through our endorsing contested interpretations.[3]

In premodern forms of religious life, our relation to the highest was mediated in embodied form. Today's culture is very theory-oriented. As Taylor remarks, we tend to live in our heads, trusting our disengaged understandings of our experience. McMahan points out that this development fits within sociologist Peter Berger's thesis of a subjectivization of religion:

> Religious realities are increasingly "translated" from a frame of reference of facticities external to the individual consciousness to a frame of reference that locates them *within* consciousness. Thus, for example, the resurrection of Christ is no longer regarded as an event in the external world of physical nature, but is "translated" to refer to existential or psychological phenomena in the consciousness of the believer. Put differently, the *realissimum* to which religion refers is transposed from the cosmos or from

1 Taylor mentions Kant's "rational" religion as the apotheosis of such a religion that is purified of rituals and relics, and of emotion and bodies.

2 McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 220.

3 SA, 554.

> history to individual consciousness. Cosmology becomes psychology. [...] The traditional religious affirmation can now be regarded as "symbols"—what they supposedly "symbolize" usually turns out to be some realities presumed to exist in the "depths" of human consciousness.[4]

Orsi connects such a subjectivization of religion with Protestant and Catholic historical debates with regard to the notions of "absence" and "presence."[5] He outlines how divergent concepts of presence were rooted in the highly technical theological debates of the sixteenth century around the Eucharist. What had Jesus really meant when he said, "this is my body," "this is my blood," "do this in memory of me"? The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) had declared as orthodox the doctrine of transsubstantiation. It was central to the Catholic imaginary that the Host that was consumed at Communion was Jesus's actual flesh, his muscles, organs, sinews, and blood.

Orsi recounts how the Protestant reformers after Luther were horrified by the Catholic doctrine of the real presence of God's body in the Eucharist.[6] They sought to reimagine the Eucharist as the consumption of Jesus's body spiritually or symbolically present, arguing that "Jesus's actual and truly human body was in heaven and therefore could not be present on earth, because human bodies could not be in more than one place at the same time."[7]. The emergent Protestant religious imaginary was at fundamental odds with the Catholic way of being in the world, and led to much strife and conflict, introducing "an ontological fault line that would eventually run through all of modernity."[8]

It was within the context of this ontological fault line that "religion" emerged as a category in the seventeenth and eighteenth century as an effort to articulate a universal account of religion free of denominational specificity. As Orsi puts it:

> "religion" was the creation of the profound rupture between Catholics and the varieties of Protestantism over the question of presence, of the ongoing and intensifying caricatures of each other's theologies and rites

4 Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 166. Quoted in McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 48.

5 Orsi, *History and Presence*, 22.

6 For the Protestants, "it meant the disgusting idea that Jesus's actual body was there to be crunched on in the Host, his blood guzzled from the chalice." For Catholics, the Eucharist "meant the reality of the Catholic supernatural as opposed to the empty simulacrum of the Protestant holy." (Ibid., 9).

7 Ibid., 22.

8 Ibid., 38.

> of presence, and of their mutual denunciations for practicing what in their respective judgements was not really "religion." Protestants, according to Catholics, address themselves to a god who is not there. Catholics, according to Protestants, address themselves to a god who is grossly material, disgustingly and overly "present."[9]

The Protestant conception of divine presence (as symbolic and metaphorical) evolved into one of the normative categories of modernity, and into the theoretical lens for the modern study of religion. In modern theory of religion, the gods were reborn as symbols, signs, metaphors, functions, and abstractions. Expunging "superstition" from "religion" was crucial to the making of modernity and "modern religion." Catholic devotional practices of presence were thoroughly identified with "superstition" in modernity, a result of medieval credulity.[10]

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Asian religions were reconstructed by European scholars in the image of this confessional divide within Christianity. Hinduism, with its grinning demons and embodied deities, was Asia's Catholicism. As Lopez has shown, the Buddha was portrayed as the Luther of the East, who managed to overthrow the Indian culture of miracles, sacrifices, and rituals into which he was born.[11] However, Lopez writes, "For Buddhists, the statue is the Buddha, just as much as the Host of the Eucharist is the body of Christ."[12] It was around the denial of this reality that modern "Buddhism" was constructed.

## 2 Disenchanting the Bodhisattvas

If, in line with Taylor's trend of excarnation, religious realities are no longer seen as "facticities external to the individual consciousness," then even an imagining of Zen as a form of mysticism is seen by many as still too "religious." Due to the cross pressures around disenchantment and excarnation, Zen

9 Ibid., 32.

10 Orsi describes the complex and divided "politics of presence" within the Catholic Church. Whereas many liberal Catholic theologians were deeply critical of popular practices of presence, the antimodernist popes of the modern era "emphasized the metaphysics of real presence by encouraging new devotions to contemporary miracle-working saints and to various images and apparitions of the Blessed Mother, so long as they were approved by Rome." (Ibid., 28).

11 Lopez, *From Stone to Flesh*.

12 Ibid., 51.

realities are increasingly translated to psychological experiences, as part of the subjectivization of religion.

An example of such a subjectivization process with regard to Zen is the Western view on the existence of the Mahāyāna Buddhist bodhisattvas. McMahan discusses the strategy within various forms of Buddhist modernism of the demythologization of bodhisattvas and Mahāyāna deities by rendering them facets of the mind.[13] For example, Carl Jung, in his preface to W.Y. Evans-Wentz's publication of the first English translation of the *Bar do thos grol* [The Tibetan Book of the Dead], interpreted the *bar dos* (the three states in between death and rebirth that are connected with visions of various buddhas and bodhisattvas) as levels of the unconscious and the peaceful and wrathful deities of the realms as expressions of universal archetypes in the collective unconscious. As McMahan notes, "The wrathful deities came to be construed as ingenious images of inner realities discovered by intrepid explorers of the psyche rather than diabolical demons or primitive superstitions."[14]

Even though such a reading has some justification in the Buddhist notion of emptiness, according to which no phenomena have inherent self-existence, McMahan has some reservations about such a strategy:

> In retrospect, this has been a hasty hermeneutic that has failed to take into account the more complex reality that there are multiple levels of interpretation: the deities (like everything else) lack inherent self-existence, but in no Tibetan tradition does this render them wholly psychological entities. […] To Tibetans buddhas, bodhisattvas and protector deities are not merely symbols of psychological forces but real beings (as real, that is, as any other beings) who can have actual effects in the world, both benevolent and malevolent.[15][16]

Also in the contemporary mindfulness movement, Buddhist cosmological notions are reframed in psychological, metaphoric, or symbolic terms. As Wilson notes, for example, according to traditional Buddhist cosmology, the hungry

13 McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 53–56.
14 Ibid., 54.
15 Ibid.
16 This observation has been confirmed by my own experience with contemporary Chinese Buddhists in China and the West. The buddhas and bodhisattvas are experienced as real presences. One of my undergraduate students did a small survey in the Longquan Temple in Utrecht, The Netherlands (a subsidiary of Longquan Temple in Beijing). Whereas most Western visitors to the temple saw the bodhisattvas as symbolic, the Chinese nuns in the temple were convinced of their reality.

ghosts are one of the six forms in which a person can be reborn. Rather than being frightful supernatural entities that crowd about us unseen and slavering, they are reinterpreted today as metaphoric images of one's own mental states of desire and need. The Buddhist cosmological notion of *samsāra* being composed of six worlds (of humans, animals, asuras, devas, hungry ghosts, and hell beings), is psychologized as "six patterns of stress."[17]

Such contemporary Buddhist debates in the West (in Asia this is not a matter of contention) are related to the development of the concept of religious experience that was already discussed in Chapter 4. From a Taylorian perspective, the modern emphasis on religious experience can be seen as a response to the cross pressures experienced within the immanent frame. The sense of loss that came with the death of God led to a yearning for authentic religious experience. However, as Taylor notes, the Western notion of experience has a distinctly Cartesian flavor. It is connected to the buffered self. People tend to

> think of experience as something subjective, distinct from the object experienced; and as something to do with our feelings, distinct from changes in our being: dispositions, orientations, the bent of our lives, etc. [...] This notion of experience, as distinct both from the object and the continuing nature of the subject (experiencer), is quintessentially modern, and springs from the modern philosophy of mind and knowledge which comes down to us from Descartes and other writers of the seventeenth century.[18]

However, such a modern Cartesian notion of "experience" has increasingly been questioned in the academic study of religion.

## 3 Questioning the Zen Experience

I have described in Chapter 4 how Zen was imagined as a kind of universal mysticism that gives access to an enlightenment experience "beyond words and letters." I described various criticisms of the universality of the Zen experience. However, apart from questioning the universality of the Zen enlightenment experience, it is possible to question whether Zen enlightenment is best

17 Wilson, *Mindful America*, 47.
18 SA, 730.

conceived of as an experience at all.[19] The Zen notion of a pure experience fits well within what Lindbeck calls an experiential-expressive approach to religion. However, as Bush has argued and also described in detail, in the second half of the past century, approaches to religion that stress religious experience have been superseded by approaches that stress meaning (Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach). Bush notes that the notion of experience is a problematic concept today: "Many regard the term as too closely associated with Cartesian notions of interior subjectivity, according to which the mental is a realm thoroughly bifurcated from the public world."[20]

In the academic study of religion, a shift has taken place from universal experience to culturally specific meaning. As Lindbeck notes, when viewing a religious tradition from within a cultural-linguistic perspective, "its doctrines, cosmic stories or myths, and ethical directives are integrally integrated to the rituals it practices, the sentiments or experiences it evokes, the actions it recommends, and the institutional forms it develops."[21] Consequently, the experiential-expressive approach to Zen has been increasingly criticized and deconstructed. Zen has more recently been understood by Zen scholars such as Dale Wright as a religious tradition that is very much "within words and letters."[22] This means that the relationship between awakening, experience and language is quite complex.

From the cultural-linguistic approach, beyond the critique that the Zen experience is not universal, an even more fundamental critique of the Zen enlightenment experience would be that Zen enlightenment is more than an experience. It is a matter of mastering social practices, and becoming skillful at the Zen language game. Being proficient at the Zen language game means knowing how to use "live words": words that facilitate the kind of ongoing performance of enlightenment that Hershock has termed "improvisational virtuosity": the capacity to freely and spontaneously respond appropriately to a wide variety of situations, perfectly in tune with all persons and circumstances involved.[23]

The Japanese-American religion scholar and Zen practitioner Victor Hori elucidates such an understanding of enlightenment by using the example of gravity. Rather than desiring to transcend gravity (which would leave us completely incapacitated, floating helplessly and out of control, as is evident from

19 Some of the material in this section has been published earlier in van der Braak, *Zen-Christian Dual Belonging*.

20 Bush, *Visions of Religion*, 3.

21 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 19.

22 Wright, *Rethinking Transcendence* and *Philosophical Meditations*.

23 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*.

the experience of astronauts in zero gravity), we should strive to master gravity, which allows us to move about with grace and beauty. Just as there is no free flying beyond gravity, there is no Zen enlightenment beyond thought and language in a realm of pure consciousness.[24]

In this understanding of Zen, enlightenment is indeed beyond conceptualization, not however because it is somehow a "mystical" and transcendent state of mind, but rather in the same way as riding a bicycle is beyond conceptualization. Enlightenment is not something to be experienced but something to be continually performed. In order to reach such a performance, one needs to become proficient in the language game of Zen, mastering a reservoir of skills and practices. Wright calls attention to the importance of the shared language game within the Zen Buddhist monastic world. Zen doctrines are more than just a tool, more than just fingers pointing to the moon.

As Taylor points out, whereas the modern representation model of understanding views knowledge as an accurate representation of reality (the correspondence theory of truth), philosophers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have stressed the role of the linguistic pre-understandings that are formed by the communal and social practices of the culture that we grow up in. And because language is a communal or social practice, meaning and experience are not only grounded in the private sphere of the individual subject. Wright argues that the shared language of the Zen Buddhist monastic world is for a large part constitutive of Zen experience.[25] Zen monks are raised and educated in Zen monasteries. Enlightenment occurs not in the absence of language, but through language, through very complex Zen language games that include liberating "live words," stultifying "dead words," pointing, shouting, silence, and anti-language rhetoric. Westerners take such anti-language rhetoric language literally, but it is a form of language. Rather than speak about awakening *from* language, Wright argues, we should speak about awakening *to* language, by becoming proficient at the Zen language game, and learning how to use live words.[26]

Based on Wright's critique of the Zen experience, I have proposed elsewhere that Zen is best viewed as a form of life.[27] Philosopher of religion Paul Griffiths defines a form of life as "a pattern of activity that seems to those who belong to

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24 G. Victor Sōgen Hori, "*Kōan* and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum," in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (eds.), *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 280–312, citation on 309.

25 Wright, *Rethinking Transcendence*, 123.

26 Ibid. See also Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*.

27 André van der Braak, "Zen-Christian Dual Belonging and the Practice of Apophasis: Strategies of Meeting Rose Drew's Theological Challenge," *Open Theology* 3/1 (2017): 434–446.

it to have boundaries and particular actions proper or intrinsic to it."[28] Therefore, marriage is a form of life, as is playing squash or tennis. Griffiths defines a religion as "a form of life that seems to those who inhabit it to be comprehensive, incapable of abandonment, and of central importance."[29]

## 4 Beyond Religious Experience

Proudfoot and Sharf undertake an even more fundamental critique of the notion "religious experience." As Sharf points out, investigators of religious or mystical experience usually focus on the qualifiers "religious" or "mystical," whereas the term "experience" is taken as self-evident. However, he argues, "the notion that the referent of the term 'experience' is self-evident betrays a set of specifically Cartesian assumptions, according to which experience is held to be immediately present to consciousness."[30]

Sharf and Proudfoot subject the category of religious experience to genealogical analysis. They examine the conditions under which the category originated and the ideological purposes it served and continues to serve. Proudfoot points out that the concept of religious experience, that seems so ubiquitous today, is in reality not more than two centuries old. He describes the historical genesis of the term.[31] Due to the increasing secularization during the Enlightenment, any metaphysical justification of religious belief became suspect. Schleiermacher therefore introduced the concept of religious experience, in an effort to rescue religion from oblivion. As Proudfoot notes, "the turn to religious experience was motivated in large measure by an interest in freeing religious doctrine and practice from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions and grounding it in human experience."[32] By stressing that religion was a matter of experience, "Schleiermacher sought to free religious belief and practice from the requirement that they be justified by reference to nonreligious thought or action and to preclude the possibility of conflict between religious doctrine and any new knowledge that might emerge in the course of secular inquiry."[33]

28 Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 7.
29 Ibid.
30 Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42/3 (1995): 228–283, citation on 229.
31 Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Chapter 1.
32 Ibid., xiii.
33 Ibid.

Sharf has argued that the fascination with and yearning for religious experience may be more a reflection of modern Western preoccupations than an inherent quality of Zen Buddhism. He claims that the role of "experience" may have been exaggerated in contemporary scholarship on Zen.[34] He points out that the "rhetoric of experience" in Japanese Buddhism has been ideological through and through.

According to Sharf, historical and ethnographic evidence suggests that the privileging of experience may well be traced to twentieth-century Zen reform movements that urged a return to Zen meditation (especially the Sanbōkyōdan movement, see below), and that these reforms were profoundly influenced by religious developments in the West.[35] Sharf claims that "Zen monastic training in contemporary Japan continues to emphasize physical discipline and ritual competence, while little if any attention is paid to inner experience."[36]

Sharf questions whether well-known Buddhist "maps" of religious experiences (such as the *Visudhimagga*) were the result of mystical experiences of their author. He suggests the opposite: perhaps mystical experiences were supposed to be the result of the maps.[37] Sharf argues that the practice of meditation was never all that important in Buddhist monasteries. And Zen practice was not leading up to enlightenment experiences, but to the ritual embodiment of Buddhahood.[38]

Sharf argues that Zen practice could not be aimed at realizing some kind of inner experience, that would make it goal-oriented and "gradual."[39] On the other hand, the sudden approach is in danger of what Sharf calls "the Alan Watts Heresy": practice is a means to realize enlightenment, we all are already enlightened, therefore there is no need to practice.[40]

According to Sharf, the writings about enlightenment experiences are primarily meant for lay practitioners of Buddhism, in order to motivate them to practice. For them, the skills training of formal monastic practice is not available. By turning Buddhist wisdom into a mental event, it becomes possible to avoid the rigors of monastic ritual training. As a consequence, Sharf argues, in

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34 Sharf, *Buddhist Modernism*.

35 Sharf, *Sanbōkyōdan*.

36 Sharf, *Buddhist Modernism*, 249.

37 This is also a well-known phenomenon in many New Age discourses: descriptive accounts serve in fact as prescriptions. See Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

38 Sharf, *Buddhist Modernism*, 249.

39 Bernard Faure points to the same irony: Suzuki claimed that Sōtō Zen was gradual, but his own goal-oriented presentation of Rinzai makes Rinzai sound more gradual. Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 32–52.

40 Alan Watts (1915–1973) was a British philosopher, writer and speaker who was best known as a popularizer of Zen.

an age where ritual is being seen as bad science, Buddhist practice becomes psychotherapy.[41] He adds that the move to non-discursive experience also took place because traditional strategies of legitimization (institutional and scriptural authority) no longer worked. This is why experience as a superior, first-hand, form of knowledge is stressed, at the expense of second-hand knowledge from books or teachers.[42]

## 5 Going Beyond Excarnation and the Buffered Self

In *A Secular Age,* Taylor deplores such an excessive emphasis on nondiscursive experience at the expense of embodiment, a trend that he calls excarnation. He presents the work of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger as examples of an alternative epistemology that attempts to go beyond excarnation. In a subsequent work, *Retrieving Realism*, written together with philosopher Hubert Dreyfus, Taylor claims that the Cartesian framework of the buffered self is "a picture that holds us captive."[43] It leads to (mis)understanding knowledge as "mediational": as if we grasp external reality through internal representations.[44] Even the linguistic turn keeps the mediational structure intact, they argue. Now the contents of the mind are not little images in the mind, but something like sentences held true by the agent, or the person's beliefs. We still have not escaped the prison of "inner" and "outer."[45] They propose, as an alternative to mediational theories of knowledge, a "contact theory" of knowledge. They admit that this sounds like a return to the premodern "naïve realism" that Taylor has rejected in *A Secular Age*. However, they point out, premodern contact theories of knowledge, (e.g. Plato and Aristotle) depended on ontological notions of (transcendent) reality. New types of contact theories of knowledge, those put forward by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein, attempt to re-embed

41 With regard to the argument that this is a form of upaya, adapting Buddhist teachings to a Western secular audience, Sharf counters that through upaya, one is free to shape Buddhism to one's own liking.

42 The irony is, Sharf remarks, that one still needs the Buddhist books and the Buddhist teachers to determine whether one's enlightenment experience is authentic. Sanbōkyōdan teachers issued enlightenment certificates during *sesshins* (retreats) in order to authenticate enlightenment experiences. However, the Zen tradition is full of stories of Zen masters, such as Ikkyū (1394–1481), who tore up such enlightenment certificates.

43 Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

44 Ibid., 2.

45 Ibid., 5.

thought and knowledge in the bodily and social-cultural contexts in which it takes place.

For contact theories, truth is self-authenticating. When you're there, you know you're there. For the mediational theories, knowledge is justified, true belief (i.e. which corresponds to the way things are). According to contact theories, our beliefs and theories about reality take place within larger frameworks, within a larger context of presumed contact with reality. This is the aspect which contact theories grasp and mediational theories lose sight of.[46]

Mediational theories of knowledge are motivated by the desire for a stance of critical awareness, out of an ethic of personal responsibility. This stance of disengagement leads to an objectification of the world which allows us a certain control over it. However, this disengagement is not only a source of power, it is also the instrument of disenchantment.

The disengaged stance has generated forceful reactions since the Romantic period. The battle between the mediational and the contact construal of knowledge is not purely epistemological, but deeply involved with cross pressures in the immanent frame. What does it mean to know? Can we be directly in touch with reality?

## 6 Dōgen's Embodied Realization

So far in this chapter I have focused on Zen accommodation: the pre-understandings of disenchantment and the buffered self that Zen presenters had to take into account in their presentation of Zen to the West. Now I want to shift from Zen accommodation to Zen advocacy: what resources does the Zen tradition have to offer for going beyond the buffered self? Although Dreyfus and Taylor do not mention it, it is interesting to know that in Chinese and Japanese epistemology, contact theories are the standard. To know something means to be one with it. Philosopher Barry Allen speaks about "vanishing into things."[47] Let us therefore take a look at an example within the Zen tradition, the thought of Dōgen, where knowing is interpreted not as representation but as embodiment.[48]

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46 Ibid., 21.

47 Barry Allen, *Vanishing Into Things: Knowledge in Chinese Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

48 The paragraphs that follow have earlier been published in slightly different form in van der Braak, *Nietzsche and Japanese Buddhism on the Cultivation of the Body*, and in Chapter 6 and 7 of van der Braak, *Nietzsche and Zen*.

In Dōgen's work, social embeddedness and ritual embodiment are found, more than an emphasis on excarnated enlightenment experiences. Dōgen gave detailed instructions for a ritualized performance of daily activities up until the minutest details. Even the Zen meditation practice should, according to some of Dōgen's writings, be understood as part of a collective ritual practice.[49]

Japanese notions of body and mind differ in several respects from Cartesian dualism. Firstly, although mind and body may be conceptually distinguishable from some perspectives, they are not seen as ontologically distinct.[50] Secondly, Japanese thought, and Eastern philosophies generally, treat mind-body unity as an achievement, attained by a disciplined practice, rather than as an essential relation. This undercuts the Western dichotomy between theory and praxis.[51] In Japanese thought, the notion of *shinjin-ichinyō* (oneness of body and mind) has been developed in order to overcome a dualistic approach to body and mind. Such a unity between body and mind is also expressed in Dōgen's work: "Because the body necessarily fills the mind and the mind necessarily fills the body, we call this the permeation of body and mind."[52]

The ninth-century Japanese Buddhist thinker Kūkai (774–835), founder of Shingon (mantra) Buddhism, stressed the role of the body. The crucial point for Kūkai is not only that enlightenment is not a final redemptive state to be achieved over many lifetimes, but also that it is not some other-worldly truth to be grasped via a mystical experience. The central idea in Kūkai's philosophy is to "become a Buddha in this very body" (*sokushin jōbutsu*).[53] Realizing enlightenment is therefore not about attaining a mystical experience, it is about increasing the body's ability to process, to "digest" our ordinary experience, to incorporate the world. In this way, it reverses the way we understand the world in ordinary experience.

Dōgen inherited from Kūkai the tradition of giving precedence to the body over the mind. He maintained that in spiritual practice, the body plays the most important role:

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49 This social embeddedness that we find is, actually, not very different from the social embeddedness in Western premodern religious forms of life.

50 Thomas P. Kasulis, "Editor's Introduction," in: Yuasa Yasuo, *The Body: Towards an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 1.

51 Ibid., 2.

52 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, *Juki* [On Predicting Buddhahood], quoted in Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*, 101.

53 *Sokushin jōbutsu* ('this very' + 'body' + 'attain' + 'Buddha') literally means "this very body attaining Buddha." According to Kūkai, esoteric practice enabled one to be enlightened here and now. See David Edward Shaner, *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Study of Kūkai and Dōgen* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 75f.

> The human body, in Dōgen's view, was not a hindrance to the realization of enlightenment, but the very vehicle through which enlightenment was realized [...] Dōgen claimed that we search with the body, practice with the body, attain enlightenment with the body, and understand with the body.[54]

Dōgen speaks about the realization of enlightenment in terms of a radically transformed new relationship to the world, indicating the possibility of an epistemological transcendence. It is possible to transcend our ordinary ways of experiencing the world. But such a transformation is not a matter of self-actualization but self-transcendence, expressed as self-forgetting. For Dōgen, Zen practice involves leaving behind, even forgetting, the self.

Zen practice consists of continually breaking through a blind adherence to static conceptions of being: what we call "reality" needs to be continually "made real" or "made true." This is only possible by letting go of the limited personal self, and allowing oneself to be confirmed by the myriad things. For this to occur, the self needs to be destabilized and decentered. The very knower of truth with his or her limitations and preconditions must be left behind, forgotten. Dōgen expresses this as follows:

> To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things of the universe. To be enlightened by all things of the universe is to cast off the body and mind of the self as well as those of others.[55]

When the self has been forgotten, the ongoing confirmation by the myriad things can take place in oneself without any hindrance. Dōgen speaks about the realization of enlightenment as "casting off body and mind" (*shinjin datsuraku*), leaving behind the sense of self and becoming available for the larger dimension of reality that is called the Buddha:

> When you cast off and forget your body and mind and plunge into the abode of the Buddha, so that the Buddha may act upon you and you may devote yourself completely to him, you become a buddha, liberated from the suffering of birth-and-death, without effort and anxiety.[56]

54 Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*, 101.

55 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Genjōkōan* [Actualizing the Fundamental Point], quoted in Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*, 125.

56 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Shōji* [Birth and Death], quoted in Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking*, 110.

According to the Japanese philosopher Nagatomo, the phrase "casting off body and mind" should not be interpreted as any kind of Zen enlightenment experience, in the sense of a Unio Mystica, an emancipation from delusion or an epistemic state of seeing things as they are, but as a switching of perspectives: body and mind are suddenly no longer dualistically experienced as two separate entities, but body-mind is experienced as a nondual unity. What is cast off, is the dualistic everyday perspective on body and mind (the buffered self).[57] Although from the everyday perspective, body and mind are experienced as two separate things, a higher perspective is possible where body-mind is experienced as a continually changing configuration of dharmas, that doesn't contain any "I." Such a higher perspective is called "samadhic awareness" by Dōgen. It is incomprehensible from the point of view of the buffered self:

> The "oneness of the body-mind" cannot be understood from the perspective of our everyday existence. Epistemologically, this means that the function of external perception as it is directed towards the natural world, is incapable of experiencing, much less understanding, the oneness of the body-mind, and hence is useless in articulating the meaning of the oneness of the body-mind. [...] There must necessarily be an epistemological apparatus that operates in samadhic awareness quite distinct and different from the order that is operative in the everyday perceptual consciousness.[58]

The notion of samādhi usually refers to a concentrated state of awareness, but Dōgen uses it to refer to a state of mind that at once negates and subsumes self and other; a total freedom of self-realization without any dualism or antitheses. This does not mean that oppositions or dualities are obliterated or transcended, but that they are realized. Such a freedom realizes itself in duality, not apart from it.[59] "For playing joyfully in such a samādhi," Dōgen writes, "the upright sitting position in meditation is the right gate."[60] He refers here to the sitting practice of zazen. For Dōgen, zazen is not so much a psychological training aiming at particular states or experiences, but the ritual expression, embodiment and enactment of buddhahood. In his *Fukanzazengi* [Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen], Dōgen stresses that the zazen that he

57 Shigenori Nagatomo, *Attunement Through the Body* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 131.
58 Ibid., 129.
59 Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*, 55.
60 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa* [Negotiating the Way], quoted in: Ibid.

speaks of is not meditation practice, and admonishes the practitioner to not try to become a Buddha.[61] Zazen is not about attaining a mental state of enlightenment, but about an ongoing transformation that is as much physiological as it is psychological, in which one "realizes" one's own buddhahood, in the sense of fully participating in it. It is not a state but an activity.

The epistemic shift from a relative, provisional dualism that operates in our everyday existence (the buffered self), to the nondualism that operates in samadhic awareness, is not the result of some psychological breakthrough, but is connected to a transformation of the body. "Casting off body and mind" can be seen as the realization of what Dōgen calls a "true human body" (*shinjitsu nintai*): the body that has been transformed through self-cultivation.[62] The true body is a practical, experiential consequence of "casting off body and mind."[63] For Dōgen, this notion of "true human body" has cosmic connotations. The Japanese philosopher Kōgaku Arifuku notes that for Dōgen, body and mind are not only interwoven with each other, they are also united with the world as a whole, and quotes the following passage:

> The whole earth is the true body of the Buddha, the whole earth is the gateway to liberation, the whole earth is the eye of Vairocana Buddha, and the whole earth is the dharmakaya of the Buddhist self.[64]

The individual psycho-physical constitution is extended to a cosmic dimension. Dōgen uses phrases as "the body-mind of Dharma," "the body-mind of the Buddhas and ancestors." Therefore, understanding is only possible when we participate in this totality. Then, what Dōgen calls "the true human body" functions freely and authentically in harmony with the entire universe.[65]

> Everything which comes forth from the study of the way is the true human body. The entire world of the ten directions is nothing but the

61 Dōgen, *Fukanzazengi* [Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen], in Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, *Dōgen's Extensive Record: A Translation of the Eihei Kōroku* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008), 532–535. Citations on 534 and 533.

62 Ibid., 165.

63 Ibid., 166.

64 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Yuibutsu Yobutsu* [Only a Buddha and a Buddha], quoted in Kōgaku Arifuku, "The Problem of the Body in Nietzsche and Dōgen," in *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, ed. Graham Parkes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 214–225, citation on 223. Vairocana Buddha is seen in Mahāyāna Buddhism as the embodiment of the *dharmakāya*.

65 Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*, 104.

> true human body. The coming and going of birth and death is the true human body.[66]

The realization of such a true human body can occur in zazen, which is described by Dōgen as first and foremost a somatic practice. Dōgen makes a distinction between "spiritual practice" and "somatic practice":

> There are two methods of learning the Buddha Way: learning with the mind and learning with the body. Spiritual practice means learning with all the capabilities of the mind. [… ] Somatic practice means learning with the body, and practicing especially with the body of flesh and blood.[67]

For Dōgen, somatic practice takes the form of zazen, in the complete faith that such sitting practice is not a way to enlightenment, but *is* enlightenment itself. Meditation practice becomes the ritual embodiment of enlightenment. In Chapter 10 I will further discuss how such notions of a ritual embodiment of enlightenment can contribute to new reimaginings of Zen.

## 7 Discussion

In this chapter I have focused on Taylor's notions of the buffered self and disenchantment, and the connected trend of excarnation: the transfer of meaning from residing "out there" in the cosmos to a location within the human mind. In accordance with this trend, we have seen that Zen fullness (i.e., the notion of enlightenment) has been imagined first in terms of experience (in line with an experiential-expressive approach to religion), then by Wright and others in terms of language and culture (in line with a cultural-linguistic approach to religion), and eventually by Sharf in terms of power relations. In the course of these reimaginings, an increasing disenchantment of Zen fullness seems to occur.

We have seen that this development is connected with the larger process of a subjectivization of religion, in which religion is increasingly viewed as something that takes place within the mind, rather than being connected to reality.

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66 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Shinjingakudō* [Body-Soul-Practice], quoted in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, ed. Kazuaka Tanahashi (New York: North Point Press, 1985), 91.

67 Dōgen, *Shōbogenzō, Shinjinkagudō,* [Body-Soul-Practice], quoted in Kōgaku Arifuku, "The problem of the body in Nietzsche and Dōgen," in *Nietzsche and Asian Thought,* 218.

Orsi deplores such normative, disenchanted assumptions of modernity. He argues that the phrase "modern religion" is both descriptive and prescriptive. It inscribes a disenchanted way of being religious as "religion" itself:[68]

> "Modernity" and "religion" as the objects of modern critical inquiry were co-constitutive, and "modernity" and "religion" have been good for each other. The result is that lived religious practices around the contemporary world inevitably become some variation of modernity, pre-, post-, anti-, proto-, or braided. This is the finger trap of the normative modern, of the modern that we may never have been, but that nonetheless retains its authority and currency.[69]

Orsi pleads for a re-enchantment in the academic approach to religion, in which religion is taken out of the mind and put back into reality. For Orsi,

> The study of religion is or ought to be the study of what human beings do to, for, and against the gods really present—using "gods" as a synecdoche[70] for all the special suprahuman beings with whom humans have been in relationship in different times and places—and what the gods really present do with, to, for, and against humans.[71]

In a milder variation on the secularization thesis that predicts that religion will disappear altogether, religious theorists have assumed that religions of presence would die out as the human species evolved to higher forms of consciousness. However, as Orsi notes:

> To be in relationship with special beings really present is as old as the species and as new as every human's infancy. This is how most of the

68 Contemporary theorist of religion Jonathan Z. Smith distinguishes between an approach within religious studies that understands religion as presence, and an approach that understands religion as representation. (Jonathan Z. Smith, "A Twice-Told Tale: The History of the History of Religion's History," in: *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 363). The latter refers for Orsi to "the understanding of religious practice and imagination as being about something other than what they are about to practitioners. This something else may be human powerlessness, false consciousness, ignorance, hysteria, or neurosis. It may be a social group's shared identity of itself. Whatever it is, religion is not about itself." (Orsi, *History and Presence*, 38).

69 Orsi, *History and Presence*, 3.

70 A figure of speech that uses the name of a part of something to represent the whole.

71 Ibid., 4.

> world is religious today, from India to China; across and between the cities and rural areas of Asia; the market stalls, highways, and factories of Thailand and Taiwan.[72]

Orsi's argument for reconsidering the belief in nonmaterial beings covers only one aspect of what Taylor means by disenchantment. The second aspect is the shift from meaning as being located in the cosmos to being in the mind. Is it possible to also counter this second aspect of disenchantment, and find a way to shift meaning to the cosmos once again? In order to do so, it is necessary to find ways to go beyond the buffered self.

As we have seen in this chapter, Taylor himself has delivered, in *Retrieving Realism,* a radical critique of the Cartesian epistemic picture. He supports the efforts by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to offer "contact theories of knowledge" that assume we can gain knowledge of the world through bodily engagement with it, and contest Descartes' privileging of the individual mind.

As an example of East Asian contact theories, I have reviewed Dōgen's work. Dōgen's notion of reality as inherently liberating, and his radically embodied discourse on enlightenment reveals a rather different perspective on Zen and Zen practice than has been common in the West: not aiming at a transcendent mystical religious experience "beyond the mind," but an affirmation and even sacralization of "this very mind" and "this very body." In my view, such a perspective offers much resources for going beyond disenchantment and the buffered self. I will explore this further in Chapter 10.

In the next chapter, I will further investigate imaginings of Zen enlightenment, this time using the lens of Taylor's process of "the therapeutic turn." Rather than a dialogue with Christianity or science, this process led to dialogues between Zen and psychotherapy. I will focus on Taylor's notion of fullness, and his distinction between "fullness within ordinary human flourishing" and "fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing."

72 Ibid., 251.

CHAPTER 6

# The Therapeutic Turn: Zen as Therapy

I have now discussed two types of cross pressures in the immanent frame: those around universalization and particularization (leading to imaginings of Zen as a form of universal mysticism at the expense of the historicity and particularity of the Zen tradition) and those around psychologization and embodiment (leading to an emphasis on the psychology of the Zen experience at the expense of those aspects of the Zen tradition that stress the embodiment of universal Buddhahood).

Now I want to investigate the consequences for imaginings of Zen of a third type of cross pressures that Taylor calls attention to in *A Secular Age*,[1] and that take place around what Taylor calls "the therapeutic turn": the turn (both in academic and in public debate) from a religious vocabulary not only to a psychological one, but even to a therapeutic and medical one.[2] Such a therapeutic turn seems to be a further sign of secularization: not only are external religious realities excluded from the discourse on the spiritual, also the notion of a fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing is increasingly excluded from a discourse that only allows for therapeutic and medical benefits. Fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing is increasingly replaced by notions of fullness that are located within human flourishing itself. The therapeutic turn leads to a confluence of moral, psychological and medical vocabularies, and to a shift in perspective on both the nature of fullness, and the kind of practice that is connected with realizing fullness.

This chapter will address the consequences of these cross pressures for Zen imaginings. I will start with the shift from a religious discourse to a therapeutic discourse, in which the notion of a radical conversion is replaced by that of a more gradual healing. This is connected to the popular notion of the reaffirmation of ordinary life. Secondly, as part of a continuing process of secularization, a therapeutic discourse is increasingly being displaced by a nonmoral medical discourse. Taylor summarizes the shift from the religious to the therapeutic to the medical as a movement "from sin to sickness": what was formerly theologically interpreted as sin, is now medically diagnosed as sickness.[3]

1 Especially in pages 618–623 and 633–634.

2 For a broader discussion of the therapeutic turn, see Ole Jacob Madsen, *The Therapeutic Turn. How Psychology Altered Western Culture* (London: Routledge, 2014).

3 SA, 619.

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I will focus on an important aspect of medicalization: religious practices are often reinterpreted as therapeutic devices or medicines for healing sickness and realizing fullness. Often this involves a notion of instrumentalization, which clashes with the traditional notion of "Zen of no-gain." Can Zen practice be instrumentalized as a therapeutic device that leads to realizing fullness, or does its religious character precisely imply that it is non-instrumental?

## 1 From Conversion to Healing

Scholars of religion Jeremy Carrette and Richard King describe how during the past century the discourse of mysticism first gave way to a discourse of "altered states of consciousness" and "peak experiences," and then to a therapeutic discourse of spirituality.[4] Whereas the psychological discourse on fullness reduces it to a religious experience "in the mind," the therapeutic discourse leads to a further psychologization of the content of that experience, that threatens to erode its religious character altogether. This shifting perspective on the nature of fullness also has implications for how it is meant to be realized through religious practice. Transpersonal psychologists conceive of religious practice as a means towards self-actualization, rather than an attempt at self-transcendence. Realizing fullness no longer involves a radical transformation that results from a fundamental conversion, but involves a process of healing.

The religious search for transcendent fullness changes into a therapeutic search for this-worldly goods such as health and happiness. Taylor notes that one of the factors associated with this triumph of the therapeutic is "to reject the idea that our normal, middle-range existence is imperfect. We're perfectly all right as we are, as "natural" beings."[5] At most we need some healing which, however, doesn't involve any radical conversion, a growth in wisdom, a new higher way of seeing the world.[6]

Traditionally, a radical conversion experience was deemed necessary in order to be able to embark on a path towards fullness. Such an experience, that involved a radical reorientation of perspective and a break with the past, was labeled by Plato as *metanoia*, and in Mahāyāna Buddhism as *ashraya paravritti*. As the Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh puts it:

4 Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 78.

5 SA, 620.

6 SA, 619.

> The goal of meditation is to make a change at the root of manas and the store consciousness. This is called transformation at the base (ashraya paravritti). Paravritti means "revolution." Revolution means turning and going into a different direction. Ashraya is "base." Only with the light of mindfulness can this radical transformation take place. Through mindfulness, we can turn and go in the direction of awakening.[7]

Within the closed version of the immanent frame, however, there seems to be no room anymore for such radical breaks. Access to fullness no longer takes place through a religious conversion experience, where the old form of life is radically replaced by a new direction, but is seen as the optimum point in a continuum of psychological health, the result of steady spiritual practice. Spiritual transformation is interpreted not as realizing a fullness beyond the level of ordinary human flourishing, but as a therapeutic healing *within* ordinary human flourishing. The religious goal of transcending our humanity moves towards the more secular goal of realizing our humanity—but only at the psychological level.

The therapeutic turn has generated much fascination with the relationship between Zen and psychotherapy. In the 1950s, the comparative field of Zen and psychoanalysis led to dialogues between Japanese Zen masters and Western psychotherapists. In 1957, a conference on Zen and Psychoanalysis was held at the National University of Mexico at Cuernavaca, resulting in the famous collection of essays *Zen and Psychoanalysis*, with essays by D.T. Suzuki, psychologist Erich Fromm, and philosopher Richard de Martino.[8]

Suzuki, who was very active in such East-West dialogues, invited the Japanese Zen master Hisamatsu Shin'ichi (1889–1980) in 1957 to come to the West. In the fall semester of 1957, Hisamatsu taught at Harvard Divinity School, where he conducted dialogues with theologian Paul Tillich.[9] In early 1958, Hisamatsu had conversations with Carl Jung, Martin Buber and Martin Heidegger.[10] Since then, many publications have explored Zen and psychotherapy

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7 Thich Nhat Hanh, *Understanding our Mind* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2002), 106.

8 Erich Fromm, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Harper, 1960). See Wright, *Rethinking Transcendence,* for a critical review of Fromm's views on Zen and psychoanalysis.

9 A record of this dialogue was published as Paul Tillich, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Mrs. Hannah Tillich, Richard De Martino and Fujiyoshi Jikai, "Dialogues, East and West: Paul Tillich and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi," *Eastern Buddhist* 4/2 (1971): 89–107; 5/2 (1972): 107–128; and 6/2 (1973): 87–114.

10 C.G. Jung and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, "On the Unconscious, The Self, and Therapy," *Psychologica* 11 (1968): 80–87.

from various angles.[11] Are they two complementary perspectives on realizing fullness, "partners in liberation"?[12] Is Zen itself a form of therapy?[13] Or should they be followed as parallel, but separate ways to fullness?[14] Does Zen betray its Buddhist roots when it succumbs to the therapeutic turn?[15]

## 2 The Reaffirmation of Ordinary Life

The move from conversion to healing is connected to the notion that conversion somehow implies, in a problematic way, transcending or even renouncing our humanity. Many exclusive humanists feel uncomfortable with the ascetic, life-denying character of religion, and plead for a reaffirmation of ordinary life. Taylor mentions Martha Nussbaum as an example of someone who warns against attempts to transcend our humanity.[16] She views the desire to transcend our ordinary human condition as based upon the unease we experience in our limitations and vulnerability. According to Nussbaum, in such an aspiration, we are forgoing something that makes human life valuable. Moreover, aspiring to transcend ourselves actually damages us. It induces hate in us against our ordinary human desires and neediness. Nussbaum wants us to value the unspectacular, flawed everyday love, between lovers, friends, parents and children, with its routines and labors, partings and reunions, estrangements and returns.[17] An example of the damaging aspect of religion would be the Christian ascetic denial of human desires and neediness, in order to pursue a transcendent fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing, either in this life

11 Paul C. Cooper, *The Zen Impulse and the Psychoanalytic Encounter* (New York: Routledge, 2010); *Raul Moncayo: The Signifier Pointing at the Moon: Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism* (London: Karnac Books, 2012); Polly Young-Eisendrath and Shoji Muramoto (eds.), *Awakening and Insight: Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy* (East Sussex, UK: Brunner-Routledge, 2002).

12 Joseph Bobrow, *Zen and Psychotherapy: Partners in Liberation* (New York: Norton, 2010).

13 David Brazier, *Zen Therapy: A Buddhist Approach to Psychotherapy* (London: Constable, 1995).

14 Barry Magid, *Ordinary Mind: Exploring the Common Ground of Zen and Psychoanalysis* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002); Barry Magid, *Ending the Pursuit of Happiness: A Zen Guide* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008).

15 Sharf has argued that, under the influence of this therapeutic turn, "Zen was 'therapeutized' by European and North-American enthusiasts, rendering Zen, from a Buddhist point of view, part of the problem rather than the solution."

16 SA, 625ff.

17 Ibid., 628. However, as Taylor notes, such a "reaffirmation of ordinary life" does not necessarily imply letting go of all spiritual aspirations. It might still require considerable self-overcoming.

or the next. The exclusive humanist therefore argues for a reaffirmation of ordinary life, for a this-worldly art of living that involves a care of the self.[18]

Taylor points out another subtraction story in such an argument: we need to turn to secular humanism in order to be liberated from religion, since religion alienates us from our humanity with unrealistic promises of metaphysical transcendence and redemption. The reaffirmation of ordinary life seems to have humanistic origins. However, Taylor points out the theological origins of the reaffirmation of ordinary life. The trend towards a reaffirmation of ordinary life started within Christianity itself: it began in the Reformation and continues to our time. Taylor contrasts this attitude with premodern ones such as the medieval warrior ethic of honor and glory, the monastic ethic of self-denial and asceticism, and the Platonic philosophy which saw work and family as profane.[19] In early Reformation theologies, everyday activities such as dishwashing were seen as sacred.

During the Western Enlightenment, the re-affirmation of ordinary life was pushed further into the secular realm, relating it to the pursuit of happiness. Human happiness, and the proper means to it, became a dominant theme in the Enlightenment and the post-Enlightenment. In today's exclusive humanism, fullness has almost been made synonymous with happiness.[20] "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" are listed as the inalienable rights of man in the United States Declaration of Independence.

Taylor argues that in both Christianity and Buddhism, the way to fullness involves renouncing, or going beyond, such ordinary human flourishing.[21] In both religions, he argues, the believer is called on to make a profound inner break with the goals of their own flourishing; detachment from their own self in order to realize enlightenment, or renunciation of human fulfillment to serve God.[22]

Taylor briefly discusses the counterargument, that the renunciation of ordinary human flourishing could be seen as an instrumental move in order to

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18 Often Nietzsche's radical critique of Christianity, his declaration of the death of God, and his plea for remaining faithful to the earth is invoked by such exclusive humanists. But Nietzsche did not deny fullness, he merely relegated it from "the Crucified" to the Greek God Dionysus, in an attempt to resacralize life. See André van der Braak, "Nietzsche, Christianity and Zen on Redemption," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 18/1 (2008): 5–18.

19 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), 1992.

20 For Nietzsche, this is the emergence of his dreaded last man, who has lost all passion for fullness.

21 SA, 17.

22 Ibid.

realize "true" flourishing. However, he argues, that would imply that ordinary human flourishing would be seen through as not real flourishing, and that giving it up is a rational move. Taylor stresses that the ordinary human flourishing that is renounced, must be confirmed as valid in order to make the renunciation real. The death of Christ, who begged his father to spare him the cup of poison of the cross, is very different, according to Taylor, from the death of Socrates, who accepted the cup of poison because it would cure him from the illness of life. The death of Socrates was not a renunciatory death, he argues, but a rational move towards liberation.[23]

But what about Buddhism? Is the Buddhist notion of renunciation closer to the death of Christ or the death of Socrates? In early Buddhism and Theravāda, *nirvāna* is closely associated with transcending the cycle of *samsāra*: the cycle of birth, suffering, death, and rebirth. *Nirvāna* is seen as the *summum bonum*. Since *samsāra* portrays life as an endless succession of birth, death and rebirth, in which no true happiness can be found, it is essentially impossible to truly flourish within *samsāra*. The only way out is to renounce *samsāra* in order to realize *nirvāna*. The Theravadin renunciation might therefore be closer to that of Socrates than of Christ: it is a rational, therapeutic move that aims at overcoming suffering. Taylor notes an analogy between Buddhism and Christianity: in both religions, the renouncer is a source of compassion for those who suffer. He sees an analogy between karuna and agape.[24]

However, in Mahāyāna Buddhism a distinction is made between ordinary compassion, that is aimed at other individuals, and great compassion, in which the dualistic opposition between self and others has been overcome. Such a great compassion is closely related to the bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings, rather than focusing on attaining personal happiness. Magid provocatively describes the purpose of Zen as "ending the pursuit of happiness."[25] Therefore the question remains: does the affirmation of ordinary life have a place in Zen?

### 2.1 *Zen and the Affirmation of Ordinary Life*

When Zen was reimagined by Suzuki and others as a kind of mysticism, it inspired many Westerners to practice Zen because it seemed to promise a way of transcending the trials of everyday life.[26] The realization of enlightenment

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 18.

25 Magid, *Ending the Pursuit of Happiness*.

26 An earlier version of the material in this section and the next has been published in van der Braak, *Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age II*.

(framed as satori and "pure experience") would result in the consummate liberation from suffering. However, when looking more deeply into the Zen tradition, it becomes clear that it doesn't promise any such extraordinary state of full and final spiritual attainment. "Ordinary mind is the Way" is a famous Zen motto. As Hershock points out, such an ordinary mind is characterized by "the absence of any boundary or horizon on the other side of which lies something 'more' or 'better' or 'mystically complete.'"[27] The "dharma gates" of Zen open fully into the world, rather than leading out of it. Zen fullness can be described as

> an unending process of cultivating and demonstrating both appreciative and contributory virtuosity—a horizonless capacity for according with our situation and responding as needed. This is not freedom from the world and its relationships but tirelessly within them.[28]

This is in line with traditional Chinese thinking which has been characterized as "this-worldly" in orientation. Fullness, in this tradition, is realized not through securing a particular condition in the afterlife, much less through escaping from birth and death in the world, but through a mode of living in the world.[29] Such a freedom as a mode of living in the world is epitomized for example in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. It depicts Vimalakirti as a lay student of the Buddha with far more wisdom than the fully ordained disciples of the Buddha. His lay status appealed to the Chinese, not only because he represented a fully secular Buddhist ideal, but also because his spiritual insight manifested itself in action. He did not explain the gates to liberation but demonstrated them in his daily affairs.[30]

In an attempt to reaffirm ordinary life, without falling prey to either a crude materialism or to the kind of religiosity that they reject, some exclusive humanists have embraced Zen as providing a non-religious access to fullness, without any need for notions of transcendence. The various ways in which Zen has adapted to the needs and expectations of the West, also include an answer to this need for a resacralization of ordinary life, in the form of mindfulness. Originally a meditation technique developed by monks that ostensibly renounced ordinary life, in order to aim for a fullness beyond ordinary

27 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 1.

28 Ibid.

29 Ziporyn, *The* Platform Sūtra *and Chinese Philosophy*, 162f.

30 Watson, *Vimalakirti Sutra.*

flourishing, mindfulness has found its way into current Western society as a means towards greater affirmation and appreciation of ordinary life.

Wilson argues that in the various Buddhist traditions, mindfulness is presented as a strenuous lifelong task, that occurs within a framework of renunciation and detachment, rather than enjoying the activities of daily life via mindful attitudes. Mindfulness was related to an attitude of caution and heedfulness, in order to put distance between oneself and one's experience. As Wilson remarks, "it was decidedly not a process of inhabiting the present moment so that one connects with the immanent wonder of the sacred."[31]

However, in contemporary Zen, it is commonplace to find exhortations to perform the tasks of life with mindfulness and care. In this way, one can realize fullness in the most mundane things and activities. Thich Nhat Hanh recommends mindful housework, walking, eating, and dish washing ("taking my time with each dish, being fully aware of the dish, the water, and each movement of my hands"): the practitioner is advised to bring calm, alert, and non-evaluative attention to the flow of present moments, letting go of thoughts, memories, and anxieties about the past and future. Such meditative awareness to any activity brings greater awareness, skill and appreciation to every aspect of life. It is a way to learn to cherish and reaffirm ordinary life.[32] The popularity of mindfulness is one of various modern attempts to resacralize the everyday world, without a return to premodern modes of sacralization, such as the veneration of relics, common to both Christianity and Buddhism.[33]

Zen seems, therefore, to fit perfectly within the trend towards a reaffirmation of ordinary life. Many Western Zen practitioners have been relieved to find a form of spirituality that advocates simply being natural. Zen has become famous in the West for its radical view that in order to realize awakening, there is nothing special that one could or should do. A famous Zen dictum tells the practitioner just to eat when he's hungry, and to sleep when he's tired, following his natural inclinations, without running around looking for enlightenment.

However, whereas the Zen tradition does indeed stress a reaffirmation of the everyday, of the human, of the contents of the world as we know it, it does so apprehended in a new mode, recontextualized as an expression of Buddha nature. Indeed, impermanence, one of the fundamental characteristics of

31 Wilson, *Mindful America*, 22.

32 See McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 215–240 for an extensive and also critical discussion of mindfulness in modern Buddhism and its connection to an affirmation of ordinary life.

33 Ibid., 221.

*samsāra*, is itself an expression of Buddha nature. This idea pushes world affirmation to its most fundamental level.

### 2.2 *Dōgen on the Affirmation of Ordinary Life*

Let us now turn to Dōgen. There are two imaginings of enlightenment: as a gradual healing within ordinary life on the one hand, and a radical conversion to a transcendent fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing on the other hand. In Dōgen's Zen, this dualistic opposition is overcome. Enlightenment is not about overcoming duality, but about fully realizing it.[34] This implies the continual uncovering and manifesting the fullness (the Buddha nature) that is already there, not in the sense of "seeing into one's true nature" (resting on a conception of Buddha nature as buried within us), but in the sense of "all of existence *is* Buddha nature" (resting on a conception of Buddha nature as permeating all of existence, as the fundamental interrelatedness of all things). As Dōgen puts it in his essay *Bendōwa* [Negotiating the Way]: "The endeavor to negotiate the Way, as I teach now, consists in discerning all things in view of enlightenment, and putting such a unitive awareness into practice in the midst of the revaluated world."[35]

Dōgen's expression of self-forgetting, as quoted earlier, is at the same time a radical affirmation of ordinary life, as the necessary (and only) habitat in which we live and are enlightened: "Even the traces of enlightenment are wiped out, and life with traceless enlightenment goes on forever and ever."[36] All traces of enlightenment are wiped out when the dichotomy between "ordinary life" and "fullness beyond ordinary life" has disappeared. Then ordinary life becomes itself the location of sacrality, and Zen comes to be understood not as a way to a pure enlightenment experience but as, in the words of the Japanese Zen master Taizan Maezumi (1931–1995), a way to "appreciate your life."[37]

Dōgen is critical of the famous Zen dictum that tells the practitioner just to eat when he's hungry and sleep when he's tired, following his natural inclinations, without running around looking for enlightenment. He calls such rhetoric, that simply stresses a return to ordinary life, a form of "Zen naturalism." For

34 Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking,* 63.

35 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, *Bendōwa* [Negotiating the Way], quoted in Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking,* 21.

36 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, *Genjōkōan* [Actualizing the Fundamental Point], quoted in Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*, 125.

37 Taizan Maezumi, *Appreciate Your Life: The Essence of Zen Practice* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2001).

him, Zen practice is “the practice of buddhahood” (*butsugyō*): an active recognition of one’s own buddhahood, and an engagement with it. Practicing buddhahood is for Dōgen not just doing whatever one pleases, but refers to very specific activities modeled on the practice of the Buddha. Such activities include sitting in zazen, but also extend to one’s daily activities. As Dōgen scholar Dan Leighton explains:

> The point is to enact the meaning of the teachings in actualized practice, and the whole praxis, including meditation, may thus be viewed as ritual, ceremonial expressions of the teaching, rather than as a means to discover and attain some understanding of it. Therefore, the strong emphasis in much of this approach to Zen training is the mindful and dedicated expression of meditative awareness in everyday activities.[38]

The Zen mind needs to be embodied in everyday life, as part of the ongoing cultivation of the way of the bodhisattva in all that one is and does. In this way, Dōgen’s work contains resources for bridging the gap between healing and conversion.

## 3 The Medicalization of the Moral

Wilson describes how the recontextualization of mindfulness as psychological technique makes it part of the purview of the medical and psychological establishments.[39] It grants mindfulness access to many new sites such as hospitals and schools, that would otherwise be off-limits to spiritual practices. Once mindfulness is reframed as a powerful method for healing body and mind, it is taken out of its religious context and re-embedded in a secular, scientific, Western biomedical framework.[40]

In this way, the therapeutic turn leads to a medicalization of the moral. Taylor notes that many secular humanists, out of a desire to rehabilitate the human body and human desire, reject Christianity and its moralistic notions of guilt and sin. As a result, many issues which used to be considered from a

38 Taigen Dan Leighton, “Zazen as an Enactment Ritual,” in: Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (eds.), *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 167–184, citation on 169.

39 Wilson, *Mindful America*, 75–103.

40 Ibid., 77.

religious and moral perspective are now transferred to a medical register. What was formerly seen as sin is now often seen as sickness.[41]

Ironically, however, the effort to liberate people from the moralistic labels of "vice" and "sin" has in some circles led to the opposite effect: the moralization of the terms "health" and "sickness." Today, terms such as virtuous, healthy and spiritual seem to be used interchangeably. They are the opposite of terms such as vice, sickness and sin. Therefore, a negative moral aura surrounds sickness, as in the view that those who suffer from cancer are somehow themselves to blame. In contemporary society, Taylor notes, "the healthy feel a morally-tinged goodness, and the sick a vice-tainted badness."[42]

Such a process of medicalization of what used to be moral affairs has interesting consequences. In the field of health care institutions, theory and practice are split off into two separated domains. The health expert is knowledgeable, even if he doesn't practice what he preaches and leads an unhealthy life. The patient who follows his regime, has very little insight into why it is good for him, and also doesn't need such insight. He just has to follow the regime. There is an emphasis on objectified expertise over moral insight. Whereas traditional Buddhism emphasizes moral insight as the final criterion (the teacher is, thanks to his moral insight, the final arbiter with regard to the results of Buddhist practice in his students), the mindfulness movement emphasizes objectified expertise as the final criterion for the efficacy of Buddhist practice (MBSR works if neuro-scientific and empirical psychological research proves that it works: science is the final arbiter here). This approach is very different from Buddhist ethics, where moral knowledge cannot be separated from the practice of virtue (know how): to truly know what is wholesome means to be able to practice what is wholesome.

The medicalization of the moral has interesting repercussions for imagining the relationship between teacher and student. The traditional Zen student-teacher relationship is based on the unity of theory and practice. There is an osmosis between student and teacher which requires the virtuous example of the teacher. There is no such thing as only theoretical knowledge of the Zen path. The teacher practices what (s)he preaches, or (s)he ceases to be a credible teacher. In the context of MBSR, however, the student-teacher relationship changes into the client-instructor relationship, which operates within the two domains-model. The mindfulness teacher is the expert, even when (s)he is not always mindful. The mindfulness practitioners have very little insight into why it is good for them (that would require them to study Buddhism).

41 SA, 618.

42 Ibid., 500.

The many recent scandals around Zen teachers in the West abusing their authority[43] have been cause for a calling for a code of ethics, and some kind of registration: just like in the medical field: a code of ethics is necessary, because it cannot be assumed that health experts will behave morally. An example of this is one American Zen teacher who portrayed himself as the guide that shows his students where to find water, because he has found that water himself. The implication is that his moral conduct has no bearing upon his capacity as a trail finder. The traditional Zen metaphor of the finger (the teacher) that points to the moon (enlightenment), and the importance of focusing on the moon rather than on the finger, can be used to support such a line of reasoning. This is highly problematic and leads to a sense of cross pressures for many Zen practitioners: should the teacher be encountered as a knowledgeable expert, or as a living Buddha that the practitioner should try to become one with?

Although the trend of medicalization may seem very un-Buddhist, Buddhist traditions have often presented themselves through therapeutic and medical discourses. As many commentators have remarked, the Buddha can be seen as a physician who uses the four noble truths to diagnose our collective human disease. Many Western Buddhists, such as for example Kabat-Zinn, capitalize on this analogy:

> The Four Noble Truths were articulated by the Buddha in a medical framework, beginning with a specific diagnosis, dukkha itself: then a clearly stated etiology, that the dis-ease or dukkha has a specific cause, namely craving: a salutary prognosis, namely the possibility of a cure of the dis-ease through what he called cessation: and fourth, a practical treatment plan for bringing liberation from suffering, termed The Noble Eightfold Path.[44]

The Buddhist Eightfold Path is often interpreted according to a medical model: it is a matter of following the regime of the good doctor (the Buddha as health expert, and the Buddhist practitioner as the patient who does not need insight into why this regime is good for him or her). In this context, the Buddhist parable of the poisoned arrow[45] is often quoted: removing the poison is what is

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43 See e.g., Michael Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2002).

44 Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Contemporary Buddhism* 12/1 (2011), xxviii, quoted in Wilson, *Mindful America*, 89.

45 This parable occurs in the *Cūḷamālukya Sutta* (The Shorter Instructions to Mālukya) which is part of the middle length discourses (Majjhima Nikaya), one of the five sections of the Sutta Pitaka.

most important, not knowing which poison it is, or how the poison works, or what the antidote to the poison is. It is implied that the Buddha knows the answer to these questions, but he is not divulging them because it would not be beneficial, just like the health expert would not burden the cancer patient with a detailed oncological analysis of the cancer process: it would only confuse the patient, since (s)he lacks proper medical schooling to put this information in context.

These examples are from early Buddhism. But also the Mahāyāna sutras are full of therapeutic and medical imagery. For example, in the *Lotus Sutra*, the dharma is described as a medicine, and the Buddha as a physician.[46] And in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the story line revolves around Vimalakirti being sick and in need of healing (from dualistic views).[47]

## 4 Instrumentalization versus No Gain

Medicalization also implies instrumentalization: practices are seen as instruments for achieving tangible health benefits. In his book *Evolving Dharma*, Jay Michaelson redescribes Buddhist practice as a toolbox for contemplative fitness.[48] For him, "meditation is best understood not as spirituality but as technology, as a set of tools for upgrading the mind, no more mysterious than barbells."[49] From such a perspective, Zen offers a set of tools that can be extracted from their cultural and religious containers (but also thrive within them, he adds).

In a recent essay in the collection *What's Wrong with Mindfulness* (*And What Isn't*), Zen teachers Barry Magid and Marc Poirier critically comment on the fact that Zen practice is increasingly being instrumentalized as a technique or a therapy, whether for the relief of specific symptomatic problems within health care and psychology (anxiety, depression, etc.), or as part of an individual's idiosyncratic program of self-improvement or self-actualization. They characterize such instrumentalization as locating the value of an activity, not in the activity itself, but exclusively in its outcome or commodifiable

46 In one of the parables of the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha is as a physician who fakes his own death, in order to manipulate his deranged, deluded children into taking his medicine. The doctor can deceive the patient as a form of upaya, according to the *Lotus Sutra*.

47 Watson, *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

48 Jay Michaelson, *Evolving Dharma: Meditation, Buddhism, and the Next Generation of Enlightenment*. Berkeley, CA: Evolver Editions, 2013.

49 Ibid., xiv.

products. [50] They attempt to "offer an account of a laicized but not secularized Zen practice, one that engages the social and psychological realities of Western life, but which, by not jettisoning its religious core, seeks to avoid the pitfalls of instrumentalized forms of practice."[51] They contrast a secular, for gain approach to Zen with a no gain approach. Bringing Zen practice close to some styles of psychoanalytic and therapeutic work, they argue, flirts with the instrumentalization of Zen in ways that take it far from its original vision of no gain.[52]

The contemporary Japanese Sōtō Zen teacher Kōshō Itagaki mentions Dōgen's Copernican Revolution: one does not practice zazen in order to gain enlightenment—instead it is because one is already enlightened that one can practice.[53] Practice is not some esoteric and mysterious kind of training focusing on transrational koans—it is confirming one's original enlightenment.[54]

For Dōgen, zazen is not aimed at a particular purpose. Since zazen is seen as a ritual enactment of the enlightenment of the Buddha, it should not be practiced in order to gain therapeutic or religious benefits. Rather, for Dōgen, zazen is the prototype of ultimate meaninglessness. According to the twentieth-century Sōtō teacher Kōdō Sawaki (1880–1965), the practice of zazen requires leaving behind a means-end rationality:

> Zazen is an activity that comes to nothing. There is nothing more admirable than this activity that comes to nothing. To do something with a goal is really worthless. [...] Because it takes you out of the world of loss and gain, it should be practiced.[55]

From the perspective of Dōgen, it is precisely when meditation is no longer instrumentally conceived as a means to pursue happiness, but as "the expression

50 Barry Magid and Marc Poirier, "The Three Shaky Pillars of Western Buddhism," in R.M. Rosenbaum and B. Magid (eds.), *What's Wrong with Mindfulness,* 39–52.

51 Ibid., 40.

52 Ibid., 46.

53 Kōshō Itagaki, "Reflections on Dōgen's Practice and Philosophy," in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 15–35, citation on 24.

54 Ibid., 25.

55 Arthur Braverman, *Living and Dying in Zazen: Five Zen Masters of Modern Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 2003), 58f. Wright comments, however, that some sense of purpose remains in spite of such disclaimers: "If you lack the purpose of Zen, you will also lack everything else about Zen, including zazen. This is so because the purpose of casting off all purposes in an exalted state of no mind still stands there behind the scenes as the purpose that structures the entire practice, enabling it to make sense and be worth doing from beginning to end." (Dale S. Wright, "Introduction: Rethinking Ritual Practice in Zen Buddhism," in: Heine & Wright, *Zen Ritual*, 3–19, citation on 15).

or function of Buddhas," that an emphasis on meditative awareness in everyday life, and therefore a true reaffirmation of ordinary life, is made possible.[56] "As it would come to be understood in Zen, Buddhist practice does not consist of a method for arriving at the end of liberation but a method for its actualization and demonstration."[57]

The no gain approach to Zen is a powerful reminder of the religious character of Zen. As Magid and Poirier point out, part of what distinguishes zazen from a meditation technique is first of all the religious framework within which it takes place. A zendo is a locus of reverence and ritual, not the spiritual equivalent of the gym or health club.[58] A second sense in which Zen practice is religious, according to Magid and Poirier, is that the sustained practice of just sitting opens, softens, and embraces life as it is, ties into the interconnectedness of being, and thereby provides a regular, ritualized context for engaging impermanence.[59] Furthermore, the practice requires a level of lifelong commitment, both to the practice itself and to the community in which it is embedded, and a long-term relationship with a teacher.[60]

## 5 Discussion

In this chapter I have addressed four questions that arise due to the cross pressures around the therapeutic turn: (1) the question of conversion versus healing; (2) the question of the reaffirmation of ordinary life; (3) the question of the medicalization of the moral; (4) the question of instrumentalization versus no gain. The therapeutic focus on healing rather than conversion leads to cross pressures with regard to the goal of Zen practice: is enlightenment about healing and realizing our full humanity, or does it imply a radical conversion that involves transcending our humanity? I have offered Dōgen's thought as a potential resource that can bridge the gap between healing and conversion. The process of medicalization leads to questions about to what extent the dharma can be seen as medicine.

There are important differences in how Zen and mindfulness approach these four questions. (1) The Zen discourse of radical conversion differs from the contemporary MBSR discourse of healing; (2) The notion of the

56 Wright, *Introduction: Rethinking Ritual Practice in Zen Buddhism*, 18.
57 Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 58.
58 Magid and Poirier, *The Three Shaky Pillars of Western Buddhism*, 45.
59 Ibid., 50.
60 Ibid., 51.

reaffirmation of ordinary life, which is affirmed in the mindfulness discourse, seems at first glance very "Zen"; however, world affirmation in Zen implies that the world is recontextualized as an expression of Buddha nature; (3) The "medicalization of the moral" that is inherent in the contemporary MBSR discourse leads to very different views on the relationship between instructor and client, compared to the Zen student-teacher relationship; (4) The discourse of instrumentalization that is adopted by the mindfulness movement radically differs from the no gain approach of Zen.

However, there is a wide variety of views in the mindfulness movement. With regard to conversion and healing, for example, it is often assumed that mindfulness is seen as an instrument of healing. However, Kabat-Zinn takes care to define the term "healing" in a non-instrumental way:

> Healing, as we are using the word here, does not mean "curing" [...] there are few if any outright cures for chronic diseases or for stress-related disorders. While it may not be possible for us to cure ourselves or find someone who can, it is possible to heal ourselves. Healing implies the possibility for us to relate differently to illness, disability, even death as we learn to see with the eyes of wholeness.[61]

For Kabat-Zinn, healing is not the result of applying certain techniques from the Buddhist toolkit. It takes place through a fundamental shift in understanding:

> When we use the term healing to describe the experiences of people in the stress clinic, what we mean above all is that they are undergoing a profound transformation of view. This transformation is brought about by the encounter with one's wholeness, catalyzed by meditation practice.[62]

Such views make Kabat-Zinn stand out from the wider mindfulness movement that adopts medicalization and instrumentalization, and bring him closer to the Zen tradition.

The discussions in this chapter invite a reconsideration of what we consider as religion and religious. Taylor interprets the therapeutic turn as a movement towards a non-religious vocabulary: what was formerly called "sin" is now called "sickness." However, this is only the case if religion is approached as Weber's ideal type of "Western religion," that assumes a strict separation between

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61 Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*: *Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990), 173.

62 Ibid., 168.

religious and non-religious. From the perspective of Weber's "Eastern religion" ideal type, there are no such strict boundaries between religious and non-religious, between sacred and secular. Moreover, "sin" is not an issue in Weber's Eastern religion ideal type. Could it be that the therapeutic turn is an example of the "Easternization" of the West, as proposed by Campbell?[63]

Taylor also assumes that the therapeutic turn is a move from the open version of the immanent frame to the closed version: transcendence is no longer acknowledged by the new vocabulary. However, Campbell views the therapeutic turn as a shift in the meaning of religion, due to the Easternization of the West. He contends that by many today, redemption of sin is no longer viewed as a worthwhile religious goal, and that sin loses its meaning because of the demise of the ideas of a final judgment and a vengeful God.[64] In the new, "Easternized" understanding of religion there is no longer a separation between spiritual liberation and psychological and medical healing, and no boundary between the sacred and the secular. For Taylor, the therapeutic turn signifies a shift in perception with regard to the ultimate goal of human existence, from "fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing" to "ordinary human flourishing," from transcendent to immanent. However, Campbell would argue that the distinction between transcendent and immanent is part of the immanent frame as Taylor defines it. He would interpret it as a symptom of Easternization that this distinction is fading.

Taylor claims that the therapeutic turn implies a shift toward fullness within ordinary human flourishing. With regard to the goal of Zen, should it be viewed as transcending ordinary life or as embracing ordinary life? Taylor notes that the cross pressures between various approaches to spiritual practice, those that stress transcendence and overcoming, and those that stress the affirmation of ordinary life, is not a recent phenomenon. Taylor describes how this has been a persistent issue in the Western Christian tradition over the past five centuries, an issue that both Christian and secular humanist pleas for a reaffirmation of ordinary life have attempted to overcome. The current Western fascination with mindfulness in everyday life, a spiritual exercise that can also be practiced in ordinary life, can be seen as the most recent attempt to reunite those two perspectives.

Wilson notes that there is room for multiple imaginings of mindfulness:

63 Campbell, *The Easternization of the West*. Campbell does not use "Eastern religion" in a geographical sense, but as a Weberian ideal type. Also in Western religions, images of salvation as healing are not unknown. For example, the western term "soteriology" originates in *soter*, which means to heal.

64 Ibid., 257.

> Ultimately, mindfulness does not need to be religious OR spiritual OR therapeutic OR secular. It can operate in any of these modes, in more than one of these modes at the same time, and the same person can move from one mode to another with ease. Mindfulness and the movement it has spawned can draw on multiple, seemingly contradicting, modes of authority as each situation and user demands: it is by turns religious, spiritual, therapeutic, or secular as necessary. Thus the mindfulness movement can gesture to ancient tradition as evidence of authenticity, to scientific proof as evidence of reliability, to external authority (lineage, text, teacher, experimental results) for strength, and internal/personal experience and intuition for support.[65]

Wilson's consideration with respect to mindfulness applies to Zen as well. The Zen tradition contains its own hermeneutical device for addressing various ways of practicing Zen in Zen master Guifeng Zongmi's (780–841) notion of the "five styles of Zen." (1) *Bompu Zen* (ordinary Zen) is practiced in order to gain worldly benefits such as the improvement of mental or bodily health.[66] (2) *Gedo Zen* (outside the way Zen) is religious in character but follows teachings that are outside the Buddhist teachings, such as Christian contemplation. (3) *Shojo Zen* (Hinayana Zen) is practiced in order to realize fullness for oneself; (4) *Godo* Zen (Mahāyāna Zen) is practiced in order to liberate all sentient beings (bodhisattva Zen); (5) *Saijojo* Zen is the Zen of the Buddha, where striving and realization are understood to be one (the Zen of no gain).

Zongmi's five styles of Zen have been quoted in some lectures by Sanbōkyōdan founder and Sōtō teacher Yasuun Yasutani. Obviously, MBSR and other therapeutic, instrumental approaches to Zen would classify as Bompu Zen, whereas for example Dōgen's Zen would classify as *Saijojo Zen*. And even though Yasutani was sharply critical of *Bompu Zen*, the fact that it is listed as one of the five styles of Zen also renders it a legitimate form of Zen practice, as American Zen teacher James Ford argues.[67] The five styles of Zen can be seen as being aimed at five grades of fullness. Such an inclusive approach overcomes Taylor's opposition between fullness within ordinary human flourishing and fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing.

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65 Ibid., 194f.

66 See Issho Fujita, "Zazen Is Not the Same As Meditation," *Insight Journal*, Spring 2002, 37–39, accessed March 5, 2020. https://www.bcbsdharma.org/article/zazen-is-not-the-same-as-meditation/.

67 James Ford, "Guifeng's Five Styles of Zen, and Mine," Monkey Mind, accessed March 5, 2020, http://www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/2015/03/guifengs-five-styles-of-zen-and-mine.html.

In the previous chapters I have looked at resources within the Dōgen Zen tradition for overcoming disenchantment, the buffered self, and an oppositional perspective on fullness. These notions are constitutive of Taylor's story of the immanent frame. In Chapter 7, on Taylor's process of the rise of expressive individualism, I want to go into the various forms of Zen belonging, and the question of individual versus communual practice.

CHAPTER 7

# The Rise of Expressive Individualism: Zen as Global Spirituality

We have seen that the cross pressures around universalization, psychologization and the therapeutic turn have led to increasingly more secular imaginings of Zen. In this chapter I will review another set of cross pressures that supports such imaginings, and leads to images of Zen as a form of global spirituality. I will start with Taylor's description of what he calls "the rise of expressive individualism," and how this trend has contributed to the reimagining of Zen as a form of transtraditional global spirituality. I will then explore the cross pressures between individual spirituality and communal religious practice. This leads to a discussion of the nature of religious belonging. Using three ideal types of religious belonging that Taylor describes in *A Secular Age*, I will discuss the various forms of Zen belonging in the West.

The form that Zen belonging takes is also dependent on how Zen is imagined: is it a Buddhist denomination, or is it "a direct pointing to the human mind, beyond words and letters"? In this context I will discuss the cross pressures between "pure Zen" and "Buddhist Zen." Finally I will discuss the notion of Zen ritual as a form of communal religious practice.

## 1 The Rise of Expressive Individualism

The last half-century is dubbed by Taylor "the age of authenticity."[1] The individualization that already characterized modernity has shifted into a widespread expressive individualism. Many forms of therapy encourage their clients to find themselves and realize their true self. Taylor stresses that this move towards authenticity is not a move within a stable, perennial game: the available options have changed. Some options are no longer possible today. Taylor mentions the ideal of fixed gender roles in the family, in the context of Zen we could point to several traditional premodern Buddhist ideals. There are new options today, including various new Buddhist options.

1 An earlier version of the material in this section has been published in van der Braak, *Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age 1*.

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In such a context of *expressive individualism*, Taylor notes, it is no longer necessary to embed our search for the sacred in any broader religious framework. Doctrinal issues seem irrelevant, especially religious truth claims provided by religious institutions. One can only connect with the sacred through passion and deeply felt personal insight. The spiritual as such is no longer intrinsically related to society. The spiritual path becomes a personal search. Taylor observes that these days, many are looking for a more direct experience of the sacred, for greater immediacy, spontaneity and spiritual depth:

> They are seeking a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the inferior and often guilt-ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity. The stress is on unity, integrity, holism, individuality; their language often invokes "harmony, balance, flow, integrations, being at one, centered".[2]

Taylor notes that new forms of religious life are therefore more focused on a personal sense of commitment and devotion, rather than on old religious forms that centered around collective ritual. Current individual spirituality involves self-examination and self-development, which are thought to be ultimately resulting in authenticity.

I would add to Taylor's observations that today, we live in an age of the emergence of a post modern "liquid" self.[3] The self is opened up yet again to the outside world, but not in the way of a return to the premodern helpless porous self. The buffered self, with its fixed identity, has become the liquid self that is the result of an ever-changing process of identification (however, the contours of the autonomous self have become ever so stringent). The buffered self as a design project has turned into the liquid self as a flow that one needs to be in touch with. "Be true to thine own Self" has turned into "stay in touch with where the flow of your own self takes you."

The rise of expressive individualism has occurred since the Sixties and the Seventies—which is also, coincidentally or not so coincidentally, the rise of new streams of transmission of Buddhism to the West. In a sense, Taylor notes, individualization is nothing new. Moral, or spiritual, individualism and instrumental individualism, have been around for a long time. The move to expressive individualism, however, is new. The elitist movement of Romanticism has

2 SA, 507.
3 I coin this term after the German sociologist Bauman, who spoke of "liquid modernity."

now turned into a mass movement. In a certain way, we are all Romantics. Taylor defines our contemporary "culture of authenticity" as follows:

> Each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and […] it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.[4]

Religion scholars Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead claim that for many today, "religion" has a negative ring to it, whereas the turn to "spirituality" is seen as a move in the right direction. They have presented a "spiritual revolution claim" which entails that

> in the West those forms of religion that tell their followers to live their lives in conformity with external principles to the neglect of the cultivation of their unique subjective lives will be in decline […] By contrast, those forms of spirituality in the West that help people to live in accordance with the deepest, sacred dimension of their own unique lives can be expected to be growing.[5]

Carrette and King, on the other hand, evaluate the current turn to spirituality negatively.[6] They consider the rise of spirituality to be the result of a gradual individualization, psychologization, privatization and eventually commercialization of religion. "Spirituality" is in their opinion a term that is being used in order to avoid uncomfortable associations with ontological transcendence.[7]

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4 SA, 475. The stress on nonconformity in our current age of authenticity also brings up interesting questions about Western Buddhists. For does the Buddhist path not consist in following the model of the Buddha, or the Zen master, or the Tibetan lama? And with regard to the notion of finding your true self, rather than settling for the instrumental rational control of the buffered self, we could argue that this instrumental rational control is exactly what the Buddhist Pali Canon seemed to offer in the nineteenth century, and it seems to be exactly what MBSR promises today.

5 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spirituality Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 7. Heelas and Woodhead attempt to account for the movement from religion to spirituality by offering, based on Taylor's work, a "subjectivization thesis" (ibid., 2.) They distinguish life lived according to external expectations (life-as) from life lived according to one's own inner experience (subjective-life). They use the language of life-as and subjective-life to distinguish between life-as religion and subjective-life spirituality. Religion is bound up with the notion of life-as, whereas spirituality is bound up with subjective-life (ibid., 5).

6 Carrette & King, *Selling Spirituality*.

7 Ibid., 49f.

Within the context of the rise of expressive individualism, Zen is increasingly being reimagined as a form of personal spirituality, as has been explored by Zen scholars Jørn Borup and David McMahan. McMahan has documented how such a move beyond institutionalized religion to a form of "transtraditional spirituality" has come about historically. He gives a historical overview of how Zen has been increasingly imagined as a form of transtraditional spirituality.[8] In Chapter 4 I have already introduced his notion of "the enchanted secular": a way of thinking about the human and the cosmic that embraces the secular, naturalistic worldview, yet infuses a kind of enchantment into it. In the notion of the enchanted secular, the trends of universalization, psychologization, the therapeutic turn, and the rise of expressive individualism come together: the enchanted secular is universal, and can be found within the mind without requiring any ontological commitments. Realizing the enchanted secular is considered profoundly healing, and takes place individually.

Borup has commented on the different imaginings of Zen in the West and in Japan. He has recounted how Zen in the West has become part of a narrative of global spirituality:

> Apart from its association with Buddhism and Japanese culture, Zen in the West has, especially since the 1970s, become a practice and idea no longer bound by elitist and religious barriers. Spiritual seekers, thinkers, artists, avant-garde poets, counterculture beatniks, and ecologically and socially engaged activists from the well-educated middle class have used Zen as an inspiring way of life to gain insight and move beyond institutionalized religion. [...] As a result of their manifold transformations, Zen Buddhist notions and practices have become detached from their religious or cultural origins, and have turned into "Zen" as a mental ideal or therapeutic tool with which to live a pure and spiritual life.[9]

This narrative of Zen as global spirituality is connected with the cross pressures around universalism, psychologization and the therapeutic turn that we have encountered in chapters four through six. Today,

> the concept of Zen is a *floating* signifier that points to a general metanarrative relating to both religious, spiritual, and secular/popular levels of representation, which could be formulated like this: Once upon a time,

8 McMahan, *The Enchanted Secular*.

9 Jørn Borup, "Easternization of the East? Zen and Spirituality as Distinct Cultural Narratives in Japan," *Journal of Global Buddhism* Vol. 16 (2015): 70–93, citation on 71.

> absolute Truth was experienced and transmitted via teachings, practices, and institutions so that each individual through serious effort could experience the same authentic Truth, represented and symbolically accessible through metaphors pointing directly to authentic reality.[10]

On the other hand, Borup notes, Zen in East Asia is connected with a narrative of collective religious practice:

> Broadly generalized, a meta-narrative of living Zen Buddhism in East Asia is (and, to a large extent, has always been) related to institutionalized, collective religion, which is hierarchically represented by patriarchs functioning as ritual specialists and mediators of absolute truth and a trans-empirical otherworld on behalf of the majority population.[11]

These two narratives of Zen in the West (a form of global spirituality) and Zen in Japan (institutionalized, collective religion) almost perfectly correspond to the two narratives on spirituality and religion that have emerged in the West as part of the rise of expressive individualism: a positively valued personal spirituality versus a negatively valued collective religious practice.

## 2 Personal Spirituality versus Communal Religious Practice

Taylor traces such a strong separation between personal spirituality and communal religious practice back to William James. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,[12] James distinguished living religious experience from communal religious life. For James, true religious life was first of all a matter of the individual, not of a community, and second of all, it could be found in individual experience, in feeling.

In a publication several years before *A Secular Age*, Taylor critically reflects on James's work.[13] What James fails to recognize, according to Taylor, is that the religious connection between the spiritual practitioner and the divine may be essentially mediated by communal religious life:

10 Ibid., 72.
11 Ibid.
12 James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.
13 Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, 4–29.

> What James can't seem to accommodate is the phenomenon of collective religious life, which is not just the result of (individual) religious connections, but which in some way constitutes or *is* that connection. In other words, he hasn't got place for a collective connection through a common way of being.[14]

The emphasis on religion as a matter of personal, inward commitment and devotion is a specifically Western historical development. As Taylor points out, in many non-Western religious traditions this devaluation of the life of collective ritual has not taken place.[15] The recent stress on personal religion as more authentic than collective practice, as put forward especially in the work of James, is central to Western modernity.

Does the individualization of Western Buddhism actually promote modern Western individualism? Is it in danger of becoming a religion of the self? Carrette and King address this question.[16] They point out that there is an important difference in context. In Buddhism, there is no self. The Buddhist diagnosis of our condition is that we are all essentially practicing a "religion of the self"—devotion to ourselves. This is precisely the problem, hence the Buddhist emphasis on the importance of compassion. The focus of the Buddhist path is precisely to work on the problem of the individual self (the "buffered self") by exposing its contradictions and porous boundaries. Buddhist practice is only individualistic in its methods and starting point, but not in its goal or ultimate orientation.

The work of Shantideva on compassion, the notion of dependent co-origination, Thich Nhat Hanh's notion of inter-being, they all stress the illusoriness of the buffered self. They also imply an ecological consciousness of bio-interdependence and non-violence towards other species and the environment. According to thinkers such as David Loy and Sulak Sivaraksa, Buddhist interdependence constitutes a critique of consumerism and neoliberal ideology. Therefore, Buddhism could be seen as a radical critique of the "religion of the self."

This Buddhist critique can be situated in the postmodern responses to the malaises of modernity. However, the Buddhist de-centered self should be seen as an other-oriented self, not as a postmodern consumerist self. Thich Nhat

14 Ibid., 24.

15 Ibid., 12.

16 Carrette & King, *Selling Spirituality*, 104.

Hanh's engaged Buddhism stresses a reading of Buddhist ethical precepts as against social injustice and oppression.

The message of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* (impurity is in the eye of the beholder) does not constitute an endorsement of the status quo. Vimalakirti is ill because he feels the illness (dukkha) of all beings (great compassion). The *Vimalakirti Sutra* is counter-cultural, challenging the Buddhist status quo.

## 3 Religious Belonging

According to Taylor, the rise of expressive individualism takes place in the context of a shift to new forms of religious life. In a rough historical overview[17], Taylor introduces three Weber-style ideal types of social matrices in which religious life was carried on. In what follows, I want to interpret these types of social matrices as three types of religious belonging.

In the premodern age, religious life was characterized by what Taylor calls the "ancien régime" (AR) matrix. In this AR matrix, there was a strong link between religious identity and political identity: "a close connection between church membership and being part of a national, but particularly local community."[18] In this religious form, one's connection to the sacred entails one's belonging to a church, which is co-extensive with the state. The rituals, practices and beliefs that bind the nation together as a community also constitute one's individual religious identity. The religious tradition that one belongs to is the self-evident backdrop of collective existence. There is no connection to the sacred other than through the church. There is a link between adhering to a religion and belonging to the state. Medieval pre-Reformation Christianity was of such a type. The Australian Buddhist teacher Winton Higgins describes this type as follows:

> The individual was baptised into and learned to participate in "the Church" as a matter of course; it and its truth-claims had no rivals—in this sense belief was "naïve"; its structures based on the sacred/profane binary, its enchanted stories, doctrines, rituals and festivals had been there since "time out of mind" and constituted the very fabric of one's reality and way of life. Religion was something enacted, communally acted out, to win favour with benevolent supernatural forces and ward off the malevolent.[19]

17 Taylor himself speaks of "an outrageously simplified potted history," SA, 437.

18 Ibid, 440.

19 Winton Higgins, "The Coming of Secular Buddhism: A Synoptic View," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 13 (2012): 109–126, citation on 118.

Over time, Taylor claims, this AR-form of religious life led to a new phase and type: the Age of Mobilization (1800–1960), that led to what Taylor calls an M-type of religious life. The status quo of the AR is replaced by the mobilization of new rituals, practices and institutions. There is no ancien régime to be taken for granted, and no enchanted cosmos in which God resides and in which we are embedded. God is still present, however, in what Taylor calls a "Modern Moral Order" of mutual benefit that he has established, and to which religious institutions have to conform. In the M-type of religious life, there is a certain amount of disembedding. The emphasis is on voluntary association with the denomination of one's choice. This is an important step towards individualization: one joins a denomination because it seems right to one. But through this association one is still connected to the larger church and its heritage, which still feeds and fuels the nation.[20] Higgins describes this M-type of religious life as

> typically represented by an ever growing number of "denominations." The latter had clearly not existed since time immemorial: one had to commit to one of them as a matter of individual choice and conscience; they and their assets had to be built up, often from humble beginnings. The faithful lived largely in a modern, disciplined, disenchanted, soul-searching world. Their piety expressed itself in their orderly work, family and church lives, and their attention to civic duty: being a Christian meant being a robust citizen of one's community and nation.[…] Religious choice and piety were individual responsibilities, further aspects of individuation, but they fostered a communitarian ethic.[21]

Today, Taylor argues, we live in an Age of Authenticity, characterized by the rise of expressive individualism. Taylor claims that this has not only profoundly altered the conditions of belief in our societies, but also our lived experience of the religious life. The understanding of human life, agency and the good centers around the notion of authenticity. The primary value becomes choice: "bare choice as a prime value, irrespective of what it is a choice between, or in what domain."[22] The Age of Authenticity has radically expanded our available options. The religious pluralism that was already inherent in the Age of Mobilization has now exploded into unlimited options, which Taylor calls "the nova effect." As long as we stay within the modern moral order

20 In China, such a type of religious belonging is actively encouraged by the Chinese government. However, in spite of this there remains much connection to "the sacred" outside the five official religions in China, which is called "popular religion" or "superstition," depending on the discourse.

21 Higgins, *The Coming of Secular Buddhism*, 119.

22 SA, 478.

of mutual benefit—do not harm anyone and do not go against the public interest—we are all free to do our own thing.

With regard to religious belonging, this means a qualitative shift: "The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this."[23] In this type of belonging, that we could call the AA-type of belonging,

> there is no necessary embedding of our link to the sacred in any particular broader framework, whether "church" or state. Today, those that are Christian, or Buddhist, are so in their own way, and they fashion Jesus, or Buddha after their own taste, not beholden to any orthodoxy. This type of religious belonging no longer accepts the external constraints of any religion: "let everyone follow his/her own path of spiritual inspiration. Don't be let off yours by the allegation that it doesn't fit with some orthodoxy.[24]

Significantly, however, religious belonging is uncoupled not only from religious institutional authority, but also from political allegiance. The liberal understanding of religious belonging sees it as something private, something that should be kept behind the front door. This means that for many today, there are no longer external constraints (a larger church, an orthodoxy, social and political norms) that limit their religious identity.

Taylor's three types of religious life are ideal types. They do not accurately reflect reality, and they cannot be equated to different phases in history. However, the third type has come to increasingly color our secular age, and Taylor claims this shift goes a long way to explain the conditions of belief in our day.

Seen from Taylor's narrative, the transmission of Asian Zen to Western modernity has simply contributed to the nova effect: it expanded the range of available religious options even further. However, Taylor's three ideal types of religious life can be used to clarify some of the dynamics around Zen belonging in the West.

## 4 Zen Belonging in the West

As sociologist James Coleman has described,[25] the Sōtō and Rinzai traditions in Japan are the main Zen traditions that have come to the West. The early

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23 Ibid, 486.

24 Ibid, 489.

25 James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 86.

traditional Rinzai Zen communities that were founded in the West can be viewed as being of the AR type. They were mainly serving the needs of Japanese immigrants. However, more modernist Sōtō and Rinzai monasteries in the West can be viewed as attempts to mix traditional Japanese forms of belonging of the AR-type with Western forms of M-belonging. Such attempts at replicating Japanese AR-belonging in the West are mainly maintained by an alliance of Asian traditional teachers and monks and Western individualized students. The alliance is uneasy and unstable, since it is questionable whether the "naïve" religious belonging inherent in the AR-type is still truly accessible for Western Buddhists.

Many Western forms of Buddhist modernism have embraced the M-type of belonging. During the Age of Mobilization, they added several Buddhist denominations to the mix of available denominations, thereby expanding the range of available options to the spiritual seekers. Buddhist communities (*sanghas*) were often lay teaching centers offering reformed Buddhist teachings and practices. Examples of these are The White Plum Asanga and the San Francisco Zen Center. Such Zen *sanghas* might still be connected to the Sōtō or Rinzai tradition in Japan. However, they are also committed to what Higgins calls "the broad church of Buddhist modernism," an uneasy compromise that is starting to fall apart.[26] This leads to various types of conflict around gender roles, the relationship between clergy and the laity, the relationship between teachers and students, and so on.

The first conflict is between an AR-type of belonging and an M-type of belonging. When Zen institutions have to cater both to the needs of Asian Buddhists in the diaspora (who defer to the authority of monks, and the elevation of men above women, as a self-evident fact), and Western modernist Buddhists (who see the equality of men and women as a self-evident fact, and question the self-evidence of the authority of monks over lay people), the AR and M-type of belonging co-mingle uneasily.[27] There is a loyalty to both the orthodoxy of the Japanese Sōtō or Rinzai tradition, and the orthodoxy of the "church of Buddhist modernism." These conflicting loyalties play themselves out in sex scandals around Zen teachers, contestations of financial responsibilities, and discussions on the form of community leadership.[28]

26 Some have argued that the new Buddhist denominations, that have arisen during the Age of Mobilization, can be best interpreted according to the conceptual framework of new religious movements. Also in Asia, the new Buddhist reform movements that have arisen (Sanbōkyōdan, New Buddhism, Soka Gakkai, Humanistic Buddhism) should perhaps be primarily seen as new religious movements. See Sharf, *Sanbōkyōdan*.

27 Higgins, *The Coming of Secular Buddhism*.

28 See e.g. Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door*.

However, the most important form of Buddhist belonging today seems to be that of the AA-type. With the rise of expressive individualism, the options for religious belonging are exploding. Apart from more traditional forms of Buddhist belonging we can now find Thomas Tweed's "nightstand Buddhists" that read a Buddhist book once in a while;[29] members of local Buddhist reading or meditation groups; and the secular Buddhist groups envisioned by Stephen Batchelor that

> are committed to a practice of the dharma but have no affiliation to a particular school of Buddhism. These spiritual nomads tend to be informed more by writings and podcasts from across the Buddhist spectrum than by a teacher of any particular lineage. Their sense of belonging to a community may be more virtual than actual.[30]

An example of such new forms of Buddhist belonging is the Buddhist Geeks movement. In her article "From Buddhist Hippies to Buddhist Geeks," Ann Gleig reports on a new generation of North American Buddhist practitioners who are connected through the Buddhist Geeks network.[31] Their Buddhist belonging is virtual, through social media, podcasts, and online conferences. Their approach to Buddhism is pragmatic and utilitarian, freely drawing from Buddhist lineages and traditions. At a 2012 Buddhist Geeks conference, many conference participants preferred to label themselves as "hybrid" rather than Buddhist, and others wondered whether the term had become superfluous and even an obstacle to disseminating the pragmatic tools of the tradition to a wider audience. This is also connected with the imagining of Buddhist practice as a toolbox for contemplative fitness that I discussed in the previous chapter.

## 5 Pure Zen versus Buddhist Zen

An interesting subset of Zen belonging today is that of dual Zen-Christian belonging. Several Catholic priests have become certified Zen teachers while

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29 Thomas A. Tweed, "Who Is a Buddhist? Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures," in: Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 17–33.

30 Batchelor, *After Buddhism*, 320.

31 Ann Gleig, "From Buddhist Hippies to Buddhist Geeks: The Emergence of Buddhist Postmodernism?," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 15 (2014): 15–33. See also Ann Gleig, *American Dharma. American Buddhism Beyond Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

retaining their Catholic identity. Such dual belonging reawakens the old debates that we encountered in Chapter 1 about whether Zen is a form of Buddhism or not. According to the Sanbōkyōdan, it does not have to be.[32] One of the teachers in the Sanbōkyōdan, Yamada Koun, has legitimized Catholic-Zen dual belonging by making a distinction between "Buddhist Zen" and "pure Zen":

> There are two types of Zen practice. The first is really strict Buddhist Zen. You have all the statues and everything else like that; you follow all the Buddhist teaching and everything. And then there is just pure Zen. You will follow that, and that will make you a better Catholic.[33]

With regard to such a pure Zen, Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle stressed that it was not bound to any particular ideology. And Yamada Koun said that Zen is not a religion in the sense that Christianity is a religion.[34] This notion of a pure Zen was very much connected with Sanbōkyōdan's attempts to reform traditional Japanese Zen.

Sanbōkyōdan advocated an idiosyncratic use of koan, leading up to the experience of *satori*, or *kenshō*. It engaged in polemics against the Japanese Zen establishment, the use of testimonials, the promise of rapid spiritual progress, and its emphasis on lay followers (anti-clerical). Its goal-directed approach, focusing on religious experience, was also meant to take authority away from the monks. Meditation was advocated as a "mental discipline" leading up to an enlightenment experience (not to a liberation from *samsāra*). In this way, there was a collapse of the distinction between ordinary human flourishing (mundane) and a higher fullness (supra-mundane), between laity and clergy. As other Buddhist reform movements, it stressed that true Buddhism is not in institutions, rituals, or scriptures, but in a living experience.

The Sanbōkyōdan movement advocated a universal Zen spirituality for practitioners of any religious faith that single-mindedly stresses the importance of an experience of enlightenment (*kenshō*), much more so than traditional Japanese Sōtō or Rinzai Zen schools. And in line with the Western "culture of authenticity," *kenshō* does not refer to an experience of the transcendent, but to "seeing into one's own nature." One of the most famous American books on Zen, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, was introduced by its author Philip Kapleau

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32 Sharf, *Sanbōkyōdan*.

33 Quoted as a motto in: Richard Bryan McDaniel, *Catholicism and Zen* (Richmond Hill, ON, Canada: Sumeru Press, 2017).

34 Ibid., 39.

(a student of Yasutani) as "a manual of self-instruction."[35] The book was explicitly designed to enable spiritual seekers without access to a bona fide Zen master to start Zen meditation practice on their own.[36] Such a Zen spirituality fits very well within the immanent frame of Western culture. This is not altogether surprising, since the movement was a modern innovation, an attempt to reform the Zen tradition in order to make it more compatible with Western modernity.

## 6 Zen Ritual as Communal Practice

As we have seen, in many forms of Zen modernism, meditation as a spiritual practice aimed at an inner spiritual transformation came to be seen as a way to make contact with fullness, conceived as either some kind of religious experience or as a process of self-actualization, that allows the individual to transcend the prevailing social norms and attitudes. As Sharf points out, such a view of meditation makes it appear to be the very antithesis of ritual, which is often seen as precisely instilling those very same prevailing social norms and attitudes by means of outward scripted and stylized activity. Such an opposition, Sharf notes, is however more Western than Asian: a precise Asian Buddhist analogue to our distinction between ritual and meditation cannot easily be found.[37] The Western dichotomy between meditation and ritual corresponds to other Cartesian dichotomies, such as inner/outer, subjective/objective, and mind/body.

In their presentation of Zen to the West, Japanese (Rinzai) Zen scholars often stressed the antiritual character of Zen. The Zen school was, more than any other form of Buddhism, all about meditation rather than ritual, and therefore perfectly relevant to the modern age.[38] However, in traditional Zen

35 Philip Kapleau, *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), xvi.

36 Carrette and King comment on the irony of this development, which they label as "the privatization of Asian wisdom traditions": "Unlike the New Age emphasis upon cultivating the self and individualizing responsibility, in Buddhist thought the idea of an autonomous individual self (Sanskrit: *atman*) is precisely the *problem* to be overcome. [...] The Buddhist diagnosis of our condition is that we are all essentially practising a "religion of the self"—namely devotion to ourselves. It is this egocentricity that we must work upon." (Carrette & King, *Selling Spirituality*, 101).

37 Robert H. Sharf, "Ritual," in: Donald S. Lopez Jr. (ed.), *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 245–270, citation on 260.

38 T. Griffith Foulk, "Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism," in Heine & Wright, *Zen Ritual*, 21–82.

(as practiced in monasteries all around Asia today), a large portion of the monks' time is taken up with daily rituals and devotional ceremonies. In sutra chanting rituals, sacred verses are chanted to produce beneficial karma or merit, and that merit is then dedicated to aid all sentient beings.

In recent times, as the Japanese Zen traditions are being studied more and more within their cultural and historical context, it has become clear that Zen is more than a do-it-yourself spirituality. A collection on the role of ritual in Zen memorizes how the Beat Generation embraced the antinomian, demythologized and anti-ritualistic spirit of Zen with passion.[39] They considered Zen to be an antidote to the rigidity of post-war Western culture. To them, Zen spontaneity was incompatible with religious ritual, which they considered inauthentic, formulaic, repetitive, and incapable of the intense, creative fever of true spiritual experience.[40] But the collection of essays shows that collective ritual, often in a supernatural context, has always played a large part in actual Zen practice.

In Chapter 6, I already quoted Magid and Poirier who stressed that Zen practice requires a level of lifelong commitment to the community in which it is embedded. They add:

> For the notion of Sangha to be viable, we must have a group of practitioners who are committed to one another, not just to their own meditation practice. They must be united by something more substantial than the coincidence of meeting up at irregular intervals at a smorgasbord of workshops. This commitment is not merely a matter of peer support but of a shared ethical responsibility, based on the precepts.[41]

Such a focus on communal practice can also be found in the historical Zen tradition. For Dōgen, Zen practice is not a solitary endeavor, it is the practice of the three treasures: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. One does not practice alone. This means more than only the individual practitioner being supported by the example of the Buddha, the truth of the Dharma, and the communal bond of the Sangha:

> On an ideal level more deeply informed by Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, the realization that comes through practicing enlightenment is not the achievement of the individual at all, even as supported by a community, its

39 Heine & Wright, *Zen Ritual.*

40 Ibid., 5.

41 Magid & Poirier, *The Three Shaky Pillars of Western Buddhism*, 51.

> teaching, and the example of the Buddha. Realization is the work of Buddha-Dharma-Sangha actualizing itself.[42]

The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha neither reside outside the practitioner (as objects handed down from the past), nor within the practitioner (as hidden resources that can be activated). Rather, they "present themselves when a certain communion, communication, or connection is realized among those who practice the Way."[43] They "name a communal reality." Together, they embody enlightenment. For Dōgen, such a communal reality is also collective in a much larger sense: it includes countless buddhas and bodhisattvas that also participate when one practices zazen.[44]

This process of communal connection is intimately interwoven with the practice of ritual. The ritual activity connects the practitioners to each other and to the communal nature of the practice. Zazen meditation is included in such ritual activity. Dōgen gave detailed instructions for a ritualized performance of daily activities until the minutest details. Even zazen meditation practice should, according to some of Dōgen's writings, be understood as part of a collective ritual practice.

For Dōgen, zazen is a communal ritual and ceremonial performance that expresses "ultimate reality" (the *dharmakaya*). Dōgen stresses that all practitioners should practice zazen together: "standing out has no benefit; being different from others is not our conduct."[45] In such a way, he radically demythologizes standard Zen views on meditation, and remythologizes it as a liberating expression and activity of Buddha nature. Zazen does not *lead* to enlightenment, zazen itself *is* enlightenment. Dōgen uses the term practice-realization (*shushō*) in order to indicate how the two notions are mutually interwoven. For Dōgen, practice-realization is seen not as a psychological state, but as a liberating activity, liberating intimacy. The enactment of the sacred in ritual takes prime importance.

42 John C. Maraldo, "*Shushōgi* Paragraphs 11–14," in *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 115–120, quotation on 117.

43 Ibid.

44 See e.g. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa* [Negotiating the Way], in: *The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, translated by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 11f.

45 Leighton, *Zazen As an Enactment Ritual*, 170.

## 7 Discussion

In this chapter we have discussed Taylor's trend of the rise of expressive individualism, which has led to the proliferation of a reimagining of Zen as a form of transtraditional global spirituality, divorced from the religious tradition of Buddhism. I have reviewed Taylor's view of spirituality, as well as those of Heelas and Carrette and King. The cross pressures between individual and communal approaches to religion became highlighted in my presentation of Dōgen's emphasis on Buddhist sangha and ritual. In this discussion, I want to focus on three themes: spirituality, Zen belonging, and the possibilities for an inclusive rather than an exclusive imagining of Zen.

(1) The category of "spirituality" is not a contemporary form or sub-category of religion, as sociologist Fuller argues,[46] nor is it a disguised from of secular consumerism, an expression of capitalist neo-liberal ideology, as Carrette and King argue.[47] I agree with religion scholar Boaz Huss who argues that "contemporary use of the term 'spirituality' indicates the formation of a new cultural category, which defies the disjunction between the religious and the secular and creates new social institutions, cultural practices and personal identities."[48]

With regard to the theme of disenchantment and re-enchantment, spirituality is sometimes seen as a form of re-enchantment and a return to transcendence. However, in my view, in the move from "religion" to "spirituality," the transcendence-immanence dyad itself has given way to a non-dual view; the theistic view of divinity has given way to views of divinity as a cosmic principle; and the sacred-secular distinction is eroding as well.

(2) What are the consequences of the rise of expressive individualism for Zen belonging? The importance of the ideal of authenticity seems to lead to an ideal conception of fullness as being individual in a way that doesn't require communal belonging, at least of the AR or M types of belonging. In case of an AA type of belonging, does one have to belong to Buddhism in order to practice Zen? Many Western Zen practitioners would count as Buddhist M-belongers that conform to a Buddhist orthodoxy and a larger Buddhist church, a traditional Buddhist lineage. But do for example Sanbōkyōdan members

46 Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, But not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3f.

47 Carrette & King, *Selling Spirituality*, 2.

48 Boaz Huss, "The Sacred is the Profane, Spirituality is not Religion: The Decline of the Religion/Secular Divide and the Emergence of the Critical Discourse on Religion (review)," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 27/2 (2015): 97–103.

Habito and Enomiya-Lassalle combine a Christian M-belonging with a Buddhist AA-belonging because they practice "pure Zen"?

I want to make a critical observation here. Taylor's model of AR, M and AA modes of belonging, that I have reviewed in this chapter, is still approaching "belonging" in a Christian, creedal way. Belonging is conceived as an inner assent to cognitive propositions, either with a focus on individual belonging (the Protestant variety) or a focus on communal belonging (the Catholic variety). However, East Asian modes of belonging do not use membership or assent to beliefs as criteria, but participation in practices, experiences and values. Therefore, whereas AA-belonging can be characterized by the English sociologist Grace Davie's famous phrase "believing without belonging," East Asian belonging is perhaps best defined as "belonging without believing": as Lopez has argued, belief has nothing to do with it.[49] In the West, Buddhist belonging is also more and more a matter of participation in Buddhist practices, rather than embracing Buddhist belief.

The question of Zen belonging touches on the larger question of whether Zen is best imagined as a form of Buddhism or as a practice that goes beyond the tradition of Buddhism. As we have seen, this question has a long history in the various reimaginings of Zen throughout the ages. There are important historical precedents for the notion of a "pure Zen," not beholden to any ideology. In China, an important rhetoric has been to distance Zen from the Buddhist tradition. The discussion on "pure Zen" versus "Buddhist Zen" can be transposed into a discussion on Sanbōkyōdan Zen versus Dōgen Zen. According to Sanbōkyōdan Zen, Zen is not a religion in the cognitive-propositional sense of that term. However, Zen could be called a religion in the perennialist experience-expressive sense of that term. For Dōgen, Zen is not a religion in either the cognitive-propositional or the experience-expressive sense, but Zen is a religion in the cultural-linguistic sense: it is a collection of social practices aimed at fullness neither within nor beyond ordinary human flourishing.

For many contemporary Zen practitioners, it is far from clear what it means to be a Buddhist, or even if such a thing as "Buddhism" actually exists. And indeed, sometimes it seems that Buddhist traditions are changing so much beyond recognition in their adaptations to Western modernity, that they stop being "Buddhist." Heuman points to the very real possibility of genetic drift:

> We know from evolutionary biology that sometimes a species adapts to a point where it is no longer recognizable as itself, as happened 400 million years ago when the first animals made their way from ocean to land. Swimmers morphed into crawlers, and thus new species emerged. As we

49 Lopez, *Belief.*

> reflect on the nature of the transmission to date, we should be asking ourselves some very difficult questions. If we think of the dharma as a form of spiritual life, has the nature of its adaptation to a secular modernity changed it unrecognizably? Is modern dharma a new species? If so, in what sense can we then consider our dialogue with tradition authentic or our transmission successful?[50]

In this chapter I have described the Buddhist Geeks who prefer to label themselves as "hybrid" rather than Buddhist. Therefore, contemporary Western Buddhists such as Kabat-Zinn or Batchelor wonder whether the labels of Buddhism and Zen have become an obstacle to disseminating the pragmatic tools of the tradition to a wider audience.

(3) We could differentiate between an exclusive Zen spirituality, that distances itself from its religious roots and presents itself to the world as a universal, almost secular "spiritual technology," and a more inclusive Zen spirituality that honors and appropriates the ritual and communal religious aspects of its tradition.[51] Re-appropriating such religious elements that were previously judged to be "churchy" and stifling, can not only lead to such a more inclusive form of Zen spirituality, but can also help to counteract certain problematic trends that Taylor identifies in the modern Western relationship to spirituality. In my view, Dōgen's approach to Zen can contribute to such an inclusive Zen spirituality.

Just as Dōgen's emphasis on embodiment of buddhahood can serve to counterbalance the tendency of excarnation, his view on zazen as the communal ritual enactment of buddhahood can counteract the tendency to view meditation as only an individual pursuit of fullness. As Taylor notes, we need to enlarge our palette of points of contact with fullness. Too often we conceive of this in a limited way in terms of individual, subjective experience only.[52] In collective ritual, however, another kind of experience can occur, that can open the participants of the ritual to fullness. Such forms of access to fullness have however been marginalized in modern Western approaches to religion.[53]

In Dōgen's communal spirituality, ritual and practice are tightly interwoven, which can help to overcome the Western dichotomy between authentic inner individual experiences, and constricting outer communal "churchy" rituals and ceremonies. This can not only correct some Western misinterpretations of Zen, but also question the validity of Western discourses on fullness that have

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50 Heuman, *What's at Stake*.

51 See van der Braak, *Zen Spirituality in a Secular Age II*.

52 SA, 729.

53 Ibid., 730.

arisen within the immanent frame. If those discourses have contingently arisen due to various historical circumstances, the contemporary encounter with Dōgen and Sōtō Zen constitutes another historical influence, that could facilitate the development of a new discourse on fullness that includes embodiment, self-transcendence and re-affirmation of ordinary life. I will discuss this topic of an inclusive Dōgen Zen for our secular age further in Chapter 10.

We have now come to the end of Part 2. I have discussed the various cross pressures in the immanent frame that have influenced Zen imaginings so far, and that have led to the rise of various forms of Zen modernism. As discussed earlier, the compromises inherent in such forms of Zen modernism are increasingly being felt as problematic and unsatisfactory. Many experience the hybridity of Buddhist modernism as an unstable compromise between Western secular discourses and various forms of Asian Buddhism with thoroughly enchanted canons that elevate monasticism above lay practice and men over women, for example excluding women from full ordination. Another unstable compromise is between traditional Buddhist beliefs from the traditional Buddhist background context that supported them (e.g., the sacramental Mahāyāna Buddhist worldview) and a modern secular background (the immanent frame) with which they seem incompatible.

In Part 3, I want to describe and evaluate various contemporary attempts to go beyond Zen modernism. Today, there are at least three possible responses to the perceived inauthenticity of a hybrid Zen modernism. Some Zen teachers and practitioners feel there is still too much Buddhism and not enough modernity in Zen modernism, and want to promote a form of secular Zen in the West, purged of Buddhist cosmology and notions of karma and rebirth, that fully complies with the ontological, epistemological and ethical demands of the immanent frame. Others are dissatisfied with imaginings of Zen fullness as a form of Western-style transcendence, and attempt to reimagine Zen fullness. And other Zen teachers and practitioners feel there is too little Zen left in Zen modernism, and attempt to protect authentic, "traditional" Asian Zen from the contamination of Western-influenced Zen modernism. Heuman describes this as follows:

> Wanting to eliminate the tension drives some practitioners to adhere to tradition in the manner of fundamentalists. They retreat from the complexities of modernity into an anachronistic fantasy. Others think redefining "awakening" will resolve the tension: they reconstrue the problem so as not to reference samsara, assuming that recasting the problem won't change the solution. Still others take on traditional Buddhist beliefs, but in so doing they extract these beliefs from the traditional Buddhist background context that supported them, and try to insert them into a modern

> secular background with which they are incompatible. It's as if these practitioners are trying to run software designed for Windows on a Mac.[54]

These three strategies correspond to the three discourses that Taylor has distinguished in his new roadmap of today's religious landscape: exclusive humanists, anti-humanists and believers in transcendence. In Part 3 I will use Taylor's three-way roadmap to investigate three encounters of the Asian Zen traditions with secular Western modernity that have led to creative reimaginings of Zen:

(1) *Batchelor's secular Zen.* In Chapter 8 I will discuss Stephen Batchelor's attempt to create a secular form of Zen that is compatible with secular humanism. He argues that Zen should present itself to the West as not a religion, but as a secular way of life that offers a way to deal with *dukkha*. He claims that Buddhism should not be conceived as a set of metaphysical truth claims which will inevitably conflict with other truth claims. Rather, the Buddhist dharma consists of a number of principles, perspectives and values that allow the practitioner to respond appropriately to everyday situations in a non-reactive way.

(2) *Loy's philosophical Zen.* In Chapter 9 I first discuss the encounter of Zen with the West through the thinkers of the Japanese Kyoto School, who brought Zen in dialogue with Western anti-humanist thinkers such as Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. They reject exclusive humanism as ultimately leading to nihilism, but also attempt to go beyond notions of ontological transcendence. For example, Nishitani has attempted to rethink Buddhist transcendence as trans-descendence. In the wake of the Kyoto School thinkers, I discuss David Loy's attempt to reimagine the Buddhist path by focusing on new interpretations of *śúnyatā* and the bodhisattva path.

(3) *Dōgen's practice-based Zen.* In Chapter 10 I discuss contemporary forms of Western Dōgen Zen that reject the psychologization and expressive individualism of Buddhist modernism. Next to meditation, also ritual and liturgic activities are important. Individual experiences are less important than collective practices. Realizing personal enlightenment is less important than embodying the bodhisattva vow. Therefore, we could speak of a re-embedding of Zen, of a process of re-enchantment. This can be seen as part of a wider process of retraditionalization with regard to Buddhism in the West.

54 Heuman, *What's at Stake.*

**PART 3**

# *Beyond Zen Modernism*

CHAPTER 8

# Batchelor's Secular Buddhism

The past century has seen many forms of Buddhist modernism that attempted to modify beliefs and practices from traditional forms of Buddhism to make them compatible with secular modernity, in order to address the needs of secular Western Buddhist practitioners more adequately. The British writer and Buddhist teacher Stephen Batchelor, however, argues that the time for such uneasy and unstable compromises has passed.

Batchelor describes himself as someone who started out in the early 1970s as a Tibetan Buddhist "believer," moved into being a Zen Buddhist skeptic, then became an agnostic Buddhist, before coming out as a "secular" Buddhist primarily informed by the texts of the Pali Canon.[1] In his book *After Buddhism: Rethinking the Dharma for a Secular Age*, Batchelor contends that the very soteriological worldview of ancient India, which he claims informs both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist schools, is incompatible with today's secular age.[2] He compares the various forms of Buddhism with software programs that run on an operating system (a soteriology) that he calls Buddhism 1.0. Rather than write other software programs (mindfulness meditation, Soka Gakkai, Shambhala Buddhism), he argues, we must rewrite the operating system itself, and develop a Buddhism 2.0. Batchelor therefore distances himself from various secular Buddhist modernist movements that still retain "an ambivalent relation with the dogma's and hierarchies of the Buddhist institutions from which they originated,"[3] such as the mindfulness movement (still ambivalent with regard to Theravāda orthodoxy), Soka Gakkai (still ambivalent with regard to Japanese Nichiren orthodoxy), and Trungpa's Shambhala Buddhism (still beholden to Tibetan Buddhist orthodoxy).

Batchelor flirts with going beyond Buddhism altogether. He makes a distinction between the term "Buddhism," the nineteenth-century Western construction of one of the world religions, and the indigenous term *dharma* that is used in Buddhist traditions themselves to refer to the teachings of the Buddha.

In *After Buddhism,* he attempts to construct from the ground up a new secular Buddhist systematic theology for our secular age that can serve as a

1 Stephen Batchelor, *Secular Buddhism: Imagining the Dharma in an Uncertain World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 25.
2 Batchelor, *After Buddhism* [AB].
3 Ibid, 19.

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philosophical, ethical, historical and cultural framework for the contemporary mindfulness movement.[4] He argues that Buddhism should not be conceived as a set of metaphysical truth claims which will inevitably conflict with other truth claims. Rather, the Buddhist *dharma* consists of a number of principles, perspectives and values that allow the practitioner to respond appropriately to everyday situations in a non-reactive way.[5] Batchelor describes this elsewhere as the shift from a belief-based Buddhism (version 1.0) to a praxis-based Buddhism (version 2.0).[6]

In his description of secular Buddhism, Batchelor takes care to reject some of the trappings of a non-religious exclusive humanism:

> I do not envision a Buddhism that seeks to discard all trace of religiosity, that seeks to arrive at a dharma that is little more than a set of self-help techniques that enable us to operate more calmly and effectively as agents or clients, or both, of capitalist consumerism.[7]

We recognize here some Buddhist concerns regarding the mindfulness movement: commodification and commercialization[8] and the rise of McMindfulness.[9] Batchelor takes up the issue of mindfulness degenerating into a "religion of the self" that also calls to mind Taylor's discussion of the buffered self:

> We could make the case that the practice of mindfulness, taken out of its original context, reinforces the solipsistic isolation of the self by immunizing practitioners against the unsettling emotions, impulses, anxieties, and doubts that assail our fragile egos. Instead of imagining a dharma that erects even firmer barriers around the alienated self, let us imagine one that works toward a reenchantment of the world.[10]

Batchelor's anti-metaphysical interpretation of Buddhism involves a critique of Cartesian epistemological dualism that affirms the buffered self: "By adopting a language of truth, Buddhists moved from an engaged agency with

4 Ibid., 5.
5 Ibid., 3. Hershock would call this "improvisational virtuosity" (Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*).
6 Stephen Batchelor, "A Secular Buddhism," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 13 (2012): 87–107.
7 Ibid., 17.
8 See Carrette & King, *Selling Spirituality.*
9 See Ronald Purser and David Loy, "Beyond McMindfulness," *The Huffington Post.* August 31, 2013. Accessed March 5, 2020. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-purser/beyond-mcmindfulness_b_3519289.html.
10 AB, 17.

the world to the theorizing stance of a detached subject contemplating epistemic objects."[11]

In this chapter I will critically describe Batchelor's secular Buddhism by focusing on his search for the human Buddha, his attempt to go beyond karma, and his reimagining of Buddhist enlightenment. In the discussion, I will address in what sense his Buddhism can be called secular, and to what extent it fits within Taylor's first discourse of exclusive humanism. Finally, I will evaluate it with regard to its potential for overcoming Zen modernism.

## 1 The Search for the Human Buddha

Batchelor grounds his project to find a new articulation of the dharma for our secular age in a historical project. He attempts to recover a thoroughly human Buddha in the writings of the Pali Canon.[12] Batchelor describes his purpose as "to return to the roots of the tradition and rethink and rearticulate the dharma anew."[13] He announces he "will pursue the quest for the historical Buddha," and will investigate "whether it is still possible to recover the dharma that existed prior to the emergence of Buddhist orthodoxy."[14] This agenda is reminiscent not only of nineteenth-century attempts to identify a pure and authentic early Buddhism before it became corrupted by later developments, but also of nineteenth century attempts to identify pure and authentic early Christianity, before it became corrupted by Paul and others.[15]

Batchelor's attempts to return to the roots of the Buddhist tradition run counter to recent developments in Buddhist historiography. Few scholars would be open to the possibility to gain access to "what the Buddha really taught." To be fair, Batchelor himself is sensitive to the danger of falling into the trap of the very dogmatism that he is criticizing:

11 Ibid., 115.

12 Ibid., 5.

13 Ibid., 19.

14 Ibid., 28.

15 For example, Ernest Renan (1823–1892) wrote an enormously popular *Life of Jesus* (*Vie de Jésus*, 1863), in which he depicted Jesus as a Galilean who was transformed from a Jew into a Christian, and that Christianity emerged purified of any Jewish influences. The book depicted Jesus as a man but not God, and rejected the miracles of the Gospel. Renan believed that by humanizing Jesus, he was restoring to him a greater dignity. The book's controversial assertions that the life of Jesus should be written like the life of any historical person, and that the Bible could and should be subject to the same critical scrutiny as other historical documents caused controversy and enraged many Christians.

> The more I am seduced by the force of my own arguments, the more I am tempted to imagine that my secular version of Buddhism is what the Buddha originally thought, which the traditional schools have either lost sight of or distorted. This would be a mistake; for it is impossible to read the historical Buddha's mind in order to know what he "really" meant or intended.[16]

In his article *Suttas as History*, Buddhist scholar Jonathan Walters goes into the problem of Buddhist historiography.[17] He recounts the great enthusiasm of nineteenth-century scholars about the ancient *suttas* of the Theravāda Pali Canon, that were considered to provide us with a transparent window into the events and ideas of the original Buddhist community, and the events and ideas of the Buddha's own life. Based on these *suttas*, historians spun out a biography of the "historical Buddha," a social history of India in the time of the Buddha, and widely varying conclusions about an "original" Buddhist teaching.[18] However, during the past decades, Buddhologists, anthropologists, and historians of religion have raised serious doubts about the naïve use of the *suttas* as sources for reconstructing Theravāda Buddhist history. The form in which the *suttas* have survived, is the result of grammatical and editorial decisions made in Sri Lanka centuries after the lifetime of the Buddha. There are great divergences between a constructed "canonical Buddhism" and the actual Buddhist practices as early as the time of Asoka (third century B.C.). The question emerges whether the reconstructed "early Buddhism" ever existed at all.

As a result, "among contemporary historians of the Theravāda there has been a marked shift away from attempting to say much of anything at all about "early Buddhism." Whereas earlier scholars tended to ignore post-Asokan Buddhist history as corrupt, more recent scholars have tended to regard early

16 Batchelor, *A Secular Buddhism*.

17 Jonathan Walters, "Suttas as History: Four Approaches to the 'Sermon on the Noble Quest' (Ariyapariyesanasutta)," *History of Religions* 38/3 (1999): 247–284.

18 Frank E. Reynolds, "The Many Lives of Buddha: A Study of Sacred Biography and Theravāda Tradition," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps (Mouton: The Hague, 1976), 37–61. For fruits of this approach, see the wide-ranging collection of articles in J. Schober, ed., *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997); John Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), and The *Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) are exemplary in this regard. For a non-Theravadin parallel, see Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, *Monks and Magicians: Religious Biographies in Asia* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1988).

Buddhist history as unknowable."[19] Batchelor's historical approach seems an example of what Walters calls "historical source mode," which

> is based on what I believe to be an erroneous assumption that the compilers of the suttas were somehow *trying* to objectively report historical facts in a would-be nineteenth-century European way. [...] It should come as little surprise that the final results of an enterprise devoted entirely to judging suttas on the basis of standards that do not belong to them turns out to be hand-wringing, uneasy compromise, and ennui.[20]

As part of his historical project, Batchelor argues that, a few centuries after Gotama's death, Buddhism seems to have taken a metaphysical turn:

> Rather than consider injunctions to guide their ethical actions, they debated the truth of propositions in order to support their beliefs. They shifted [...] from prescription to description, from pragmatism to ontology, from skepticism to dogmatism.[21]

Batchelor argues that this shift from a pragmatic, ethical philosophy to an Indian religion required making metaphysical assertions supposedly describing the nature of reality, and the adoption of a rhetoric of truth.

Batchelor deplores the central importance of the concept of "truth" in Buddhist traditions. He argues that the Buddha's original pragmatic teachings were changed when Buddhist philosophy embraced a correspondence theory of truth, leading to Buddhist claims to know things "as they really are" as a means of arriving at liberating ultimate truth. Buddhist tradition, he claims, began to privilege abstract knowledge over felt experience.[22]

However, Batchelor argues, the *dharma* cannot be reduced to a set of truth claims, which will inevitably conflict with other truth claims:

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19 Walters, *Suttas as History*.

20 Ibid. If the compilers of the *suttas* were not trying to report historical facts, what were their motives? Walters notes that modern scholars focus on two possibilities: (1) they were meant for an external readership, and were used as recitations to and about outsiders (i.e., the Brahmins of that time); (2) they were meant for an internal readership, and were composed and interpreted by and for fellow Buddhists.

21 AB, 115f.

22 Batchelor argues that "the term 'truth' (*sacca*) in the Pali discourses predominantly refers to the virtue of being truthful, honest, loyal, and sincere. Truth is seen as an ethical practice rather than a metaphysical claim; it is something to do, not something to believe in, let alone be enlightened about." (AB, 117f).

> In contrast to those who base their behavior on metaphysical truth claims, the practitioner of the dharma as Gotama envisioned it takes into account the totality of each situation and responds in accordance with the principles, perspective, and values of the dharma.[23]

Batchelor considers the introduction of the doctrine of two truths, the distinction between ultimate truth and conventional truth, as a fatal fork in the road for the Buddhist tradition:

> The two truths doctrine is a way of distinguishing between the conventional truths of everyday life that we need in order to function as social and moral agents and the ultimate truth. By gaining direct, nonconceptual insight of the latter we achieve the liberating knowledge that frees us from suffering and rebirth.[24]

Batchelor views the development of the doctrine of the two truths as an unfortunate development with dire consequences. Firstly,

> The "enlightened" can now be understood as those who have gained a direct understanding of ultimate truth, whereas the "unenlightened" are those who remain mired in the ambiguous truths of custom and convention. When phrased in this way, the achievement of enlightenment becomes the private affair of a person who has gained a privileged mystical cognition of the Truth with a capital T.[25]

Secondly, as Batchelor notes, "religious authority could now be understood as the privilege of those who had gained personal insight into the nature of ultimate truth."[26]

Related to the rhetoric of truth is an ontological understanding of *nirvāna*. The interpretation of *nirvāna* as an ontologically transcendent, ineffable ultimate reality that exists apart from the conventional world, is supported by an often-quoted fragment from the Pali Canon:

> There is, monks, an Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, Uncompounded. If there were not this Unborn […], then there would be no deliverance here

23 Ibid., 3.
24 Ibid., 130.
25 Ibid., 133.
26 Ibid., 134.

> visible from what is born, become, made, compounded. But since there is an Unborn, Unbecome, Unmade, Uncompounded, therefore a deliverance is visible from what is born, become, made, compounded.[27]

Batchelor interprets this passage as an "ex cathedra declaration of a transcendent reality lying beyond the conditioned world." [28] He claims that the Buddha rejected this as a form of eternalism. However, he argues, it is not necessary to interpret this passage as a claim to ontological transcendence. Batchelor prefers an ethical rather than a metaphysical interpretation of this passage. It affirms the possibility of ethical transcendence: realizing fullness, expressed here as a deliverance from what is born, become, made, compounded. Batchelor paraphrases the passage as follows:

> It is possible not to be conditioned (by reactivity). Were this not possible, emancipation here for those who are conditioned (by reactivity) would be unintelligible. But since it is possible not to be conditioned (by reactivity), then emancipation of those who are conditioned (by it) is intelligible.[29]

Batchelor's reformulation of Buddhist truth claims as ethical statements about practice is reminiscent of the move from Lindbeck's first cognitive-propositional model of religion (religion as a set of truth claims that followers have to adhere to) to his third cultural-linguistic model (religion as a set of culturally and linguistically mediated practices). It therefore fits very well with the contemporary reimaginings of Zen that I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

## 2 Beyond Karma

Batchelor draws on pragmatic and skeptical voices in the Pali Canon, although he admits the existence of dogmatic and mythic beliefs as well. However, he has come to the conclusion that such beliefs are not truly Buddhist:

> Some time ago I realized that what I found most difficult to accept in Buddhism were those beliefs that it shared with its sister Indian religions, Hinduism and Jainism. In forming the common backdrop to so much of

27 Ibid., 137.
28 Ibid., 25.
29 Ibid., 148.

> Indian thought, such beliefs cannot be exclusively identified with any one of these in particular. What I struggled with, therefore, was not a uniquely Buddhist teaching but the widespread worldview of ancient India (and beyond) that jarred with the one with which I had been raised. The bracketing off of such beliefs does not, in my opinion, result in a fragmentary and emasculated dharma. Instead, the result is what appears to an entirely adequate ethical, contemplative, and philosophical framework for leading a flourishing life in *this* world.[30]

Important examples of such beliefs that Batchelor want to bracket off are karma and rebirth. Batchelor rejects them as beliefs that are embedded in Buddhist culture, as "a picture that holds Buddhists captive." Many Buddhist rituals presuppose belief in karma and rebirth, Batchelor argues, but Asian Buddhists participate in such rituals without consciously worrying about the underlying theology that legitimates them. Therefore, "the theoretical validity of the doctrines of karma and rebirth turns out to be subordinate to the practical role they play in the historical, social, and political life of a culture."[31] However, Batchelor notes, for Western Buddhists it is impossible to take karma and rebirth for granted. This is where a Buddhist frame clashes with the immanent frame.

Batchelor's bracketing off of parts of the Buddhist worldview is very different from Alan Wallace's perspective, quoted earlier in Chapter 3 that, when Buddhist worldviews are altered or denied, Buddhist practice is irrevocably altered:

> it is infeasible to alter or discard Buddhist worldviews without this having a powerful influence on one's meditative practice and way of life. If the way one views the world is out of accord with Buddhist worldviews, there is no way that one's meditation and lifestyle can be Buddhist [...].[32]

There has been a heated debate between Wallace and Batchelor with regard to the notions of karma and rebirth.[33] However, from a Taylorian perspective,

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30 Ibid., 27.

31 Ibid., 295.

32 Wallace, *The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West*, 47f.

33 B. Alan Wallace, "Distorted visions of Buddhism: Agnostic and Atheist," *Mandala Publications,* October 2010, accessed March 5, 2020, http://mandalamagazine.org/archives/mandala-issues-for-2010/october; Stephen Batchelor, "An Open Letter to B Alan Wallace," *Mandala Magazine* January 2011, accessed March 5, 2020, https://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-issues-for-2011/january/an-open-letter-to-b-alan-wallace/.

such clashes between premodern Buddhist truth claims and modern secular Western truth claims are beside the point. Rather than discussing their truth value, questions of belief should be approached in terms of the pre-ontological cultural background and situational experience out of which such views are held. Being embedded in a particular culture and its stage of development (one's conditions of belief) informs the degree to which Buddhist practitioners are receptive or resistant to various values and beliefs.[34]

## 3 Reimagining Enlightenment

Batchelor describes the goal of Buddhist practice in terms of ordinary human flourishing rather than a fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing: "the challenge of practicing the dharma is to discover how to establish the optimal conditions under which human life can flourish from its ground."[35]

He argues that the four noble truths of suffering are usually interpreted as four truth claims: (1) life is suffering; (2) craving is the origin of suffering; (3) *nirvāna* is the cessation of suffering; (4) the eightfold path is the way to the cessation of suffering. Batchelor redefines them as single fourfold task: to comprehend suffering, to let go of the arising (of reactivity), to see the ceasing (of reactivity), and to cultivate the path. To practice this path requires practical knowledge (know how) rather than theoretical knowledge. It involves coping.[36]

Batchelor translates the eightfold path as "complete view, complete thought, complete speech, complete action, complete livelihood, complete effort, complete mindfulness, complete concentration."[37] He redefines it as "a model for a centered life, which is balanced, harmonious, and integrated instead of imbalanced, discordant, and fragmented."[38] In cultivating the eightfold path, "practitioners aspire to think, speak, act and work in ways that respond appropriately to the situations of life in which they find themselves."[39] By translating proper practice as "complete" rather than as "right," Batchelor aims to defuse

34 See also Higgins, *The Coming of Secular Buddhism*, 118.

35 Ibid.

36 In the Zen tradition many examples of this argument can be found, e.g. in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*: "the Dharma has nothing to do with idle theorizing. To declare that one must recognize suffering, renounce attachments, realize how to reach extinction, and practice the Way is mere idle theorizing, not the Dharma." (Watson, *Vimalakirti Sutra*, 75).

37 AB, 85.

38 Ibid., 83.

39 Ibid., 86.

moralistic overtones. Ethics is pragmatic, not based on ontology or legalistic rules. In cultivating the eightfold path, Buddhist practitioners "are no longer "tied" by moral rules but have embraced an ethics of care and risk."[40]

In a move that fits within Taylor's therapeutic turn that I discussed in Chapter 6, Batchelor interprets *nirvāna* as understanding reactivity for what it is and gaining freedom from its control. He interprets Buddhist practice as "overcoming certain perceptual distinctions that lead to patterns of reactivity that block the flow of the stream of the path. Whether such perceptual adjustments thereby disclose an objective "truth" is beside the point."[41]

Batchelor redefines Buddhist concepts such as the five *skandhas* (the five processes that together constitute the human personality) and *namarupa* (the totality of mental and physical processes). He rejects the notion of a "pure consciousness" and interprets consciousness as an emergent property, "something that occurs when the necessary conditions for it are in place."[42] He also reinterprets the Buddhist notion of *anatta*, which is not no-self, but the fact that nowhere in the five *skandhas* a self can be found (this leaves open the possibility for a relational notion of the self).

Batchelor reimagines enlightenment as a radical shift in perspective, rather than an arrival at a set of answers to existential questions (epistemological transcendence rather than ontological transcendence). Awakening means realizing a twofold ground, with conditioned arising and *nirvāna* as two dimensions. Conditioned arising is not a metaphysical claim about causal principles that underpin the workings of the natural world, but a pragmatic disclosure of the causal unfolding of life. *Nirvāna* includes the "stilling of inclinations" and the "fading away of reactivity." Batchelor compares attaining *nirvāna* to reaching a clearing in the forest, an opening that allows one to see and move more freely, which enables human flourishing. He describes it as "a space of moral possibility, the gateway to an ethical life."[43] This is not a quasi-mystical experience only accessible to trained meditators, but the immediately present ground on which to live one's life in this world.

Such a radical transformation is in the Zen tradition interpreted as an epistemological transcendence: a complete transformation of one's relationship to the world that leaves behind a dualistic framework. Batchelor understands the Buddha's awakening in terms of exactly such an epistemological transcendence:

40 Ibid., 87.
41 Ibid., 181.
42 Ibid., 192.
43 Ibid., 80.

> His awakening was not achieved by gaining privileged knowledge of an ultimate truth but by seeing himself and his world in a radically different way. The existential shift he underwent might be understood perceptually as a gestalt switch, as when one suddenly sees two faces in profile rather than a vase or, in Ludwig Wittgenstein's example, a rabbit instead of a duck.[44]

Batchelor argues that the nonconceptional insight that constitutes Buddhist ultimate truth is often conceptualized as the insight into the emptiness of inherent existence. He contrasts the various Mahāyāna metaphysical interpretations of emptiness with an existentialist interpretation from the Pali Canon, according to which "emptiness is first and foremost a condition in which we dwell, abide and live."[45] Emptiness is "a perspective, a sensibility, a way of being in this poignant, contingent world."[46] Batchelor concludes that

> Such emptiness is far from being an ultimate truth that needs to be understood through logical inference and then directly realized in a state of nonconceptual meditation. It is a sensibility in which one dwells, not a privileged epistemological object that, through knowing, one gains a cognitive enlightenment.[47]

Batchelor seems to criticize here especially Tibetan Buddhist understandings of emptiness, but in his critique he comes very close to Zen critiques of emptiness as a privileged epistemological object. Batchelor also comes close to the *Vimalakirti Sutra*'s position on duality and nonduality when he argues:

> The polarities embedded in human consciousness are useful, if not indispensable, in providing a framework to guide our course through life. They are like the pole carried by the tightrope walker that provides the crucial stability to take the next step. The point, therefore, is not to reject dualities in favor of a hypothetical "non-duality" but to learn to live with them more lightly, fluidly and ironically.[48]

He also comes close to Dōgen's position on duality and nonduality that we have encountered in Chapter 6.

44 Ibid., 62.
45 Ibid., 7.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 8.
48 Ibid., 11.

## 4 Discussion

In this discussion I want to address two sets of questions: (1) To what extent and in what sense is Batchelor's secular Buddhism secular? Is it truly "after Buddhism" or is his secular Buddhism a reimagining of Buddhism?; (2) How are we to evaluate Batchelor's secular Buddhism in terms of Taylor's immanent frame? To what extent and in what sense can his reimagining of Buddhism as secular Buddhism (or even simply *dharma*) be placed in Taylor's first category of exclusive humanism?

(1) Batchelor uses the "secular" of secular Buddhism in three senses: (1) as opposed to "religious"; (2) in the sense of the Latin *saeculum*, which means "this age," "this siècle (century)," "this generation"; (3) in the political sense of the transfer of authority from the Church to the temporal power of the State.[49] Secular Buddhism is therefore non-religious, this-worldly, and not beholden to religious institutional authority. For Batchelor, to be secular means to be primarily concerned with this world, rather than with a hypothetical afterlife. It also means to not uncritically adopt Buddhist beliefs (such as karma or rebirth) that Asian Buddhists take for granted, but to remain faithful to one's own embedded Western worldview.

In terms of Taylor's threefold definition of "secular" (a secular society that maintains religiously neutral public spaces; a secular worldview that is non-religious; a secular age in which the conditions for belief have changed), Batchelor seems to waver between Taylor's $\text{secularity}_3$ and $\text{secularity}_2$. He implies that secular Buddhism is a type of Buddhism that conforms to the conditions of belief in our secular age, a Buddhism suitable for (a closed reading of) the immanent frame, a Buddhism without transcendence. The subtitle of his book *After Buddhism* ("Rethinking the dharma for a secular age") seems to confirm this.[50] On the other hand, Batchelor declares that he uses the term "secular" also in the popular sense, as that which stands in contrast or opposition to whatever is called "religion" ($\text{secularity}_2$).[51] However, in *After Buddhism,* Batchelor seems to drop the non-religious meaning of "secular," and claims that a secular Buddhism can also be religious. He uses the term "religious" in two

49 Batchelor, *A Secular Buddhism*. Batchelor self-identifies with the Protestant movements within Christianity, and his secular Buddhism can also be seen as a form of Protestant Buddhism, skeptical of the authority and charisma of priests, and seeking a direct relationship with the dharma.

50 However, strictly speaking, all forms of contemporary Western Buddhism would be secular in this sense.

51 Batchelor, *A Secular Buddhism.*

senses: being motivated by ultimate concerns, and engaging in overt behavior in order to articulate, frame and enact such ultimate concerns.

One's understanding of "secular" is closely related to one's understanding of religion. Batchelor seems to be of two minds with regard to how to understand religion. In some places where he presents his understanding of religion, Batchelor seems to show affinity with the cultural-linguistic approach to religion:

> I understand "religious" to denote our wish to come to terms with or reconcile ourselves to our own birth and death, [... and] whatever formal means are employed—adherence to sacred texts, submission to the authority of monastics and priests, performance of rites and rituals, participation in spiritual retreats—to articulate, frame, and exact ultimate concerns.[52]

However, at other places in his work he seems to assume that religion means cognitive-propositional religion, for example when he suggests that "religious Buddhists tend to base their practice on *beliefs*, whereas secular Buddhists tend to base their practice on *questions*."[53] Here, Batchelor somewhat curiously sets up a distinction between "religious" Buddhists who base their practice on doctrinal articles of faith regarding birth, sickness, aging and death, and "secular" Buddhists who base their practice on the urgent need to find an authentic and autonomous response to birth, sickness, aging and death as existential questions.[54] According to this distinction, most of the Zen tradition would count as secular Buddhism.

The Australian religion scholar and Buddhist teacher Winton Higgins admits to an initial skepticism with regard to the term "secular Buddhism," before embracing it and defending it as an answer to the need to resolve incoherencies in Buddhist modernism (he calls this the "push" factor), as well as a response to the secularizing impulses in contemporary Western society (the "pull" factor).[55]

Higgins argues that "secular Buddhism makes a priority of returning to the Buddha's own teachings while cultivating a sense of their historical context."[56]

52 AB, 15.

53 Ibid., 24.

54 Ibid.

55 Higgins, *The Coming of Secular Buddhism,* 110f.

56 Higgins attempts to circumvent the objections that I raised earlier in this chapter, around the impossibility of establishing what the Buddha "really" meant, by referring to Gianni Vattimo's notion of "the productiveness of interpretation" which can add something

It rejects enchanted truth claims and monastic authority. But again, in what sense is it secular? According to Taylor's model, it could be secular in terms of $\text{secularity}_2$ as a challenge to religion. Secular Buddhism then would be a way of life that denies transcendence, religious dogma and ritual. Batchelor calls it "practice-oriented" and "post-metaphysical." However, it could also be secular in terms of $\text{secularity}_3$. Secular Buddhism would then be a Buddhism that takes seriously, and tries to accommodate, the conditions for the contemporary search for the spiritual in the West. It would be Buddhism in the immanent frame. Just like Buddhist modernism tried to accommodate the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' Western modernity (often in a colonial context), secular Buddhism (or dharma for a Secular Age) tries to accommodate the twenty-first century Western postmodernity, or post secularity.

(2) To what degree can Batchelor's secular Buddhism be interpreted as a contemporary creative reimaging of Buddhism that fits within Taylor's category of exclusive humanism? Much of his approach seems to fall within this category: his search for the human Buddha, his "secular rather than religious vision of human flourishing";[57] his egalitarian approach to Buddhist authority, his this-worldly approach to fullness and Buddhist practice; his rejection of metaphysics and ontological transcendence in favor of a pragmatism and skepticism; his rejection of karma and rebirth in favor of a naturalistic worldview; his anti-religious rhetoric (based on a cognitive-propositional understanding of religion). According to Higgins,

> Secular Buddhism leans towards what Taylor (SA, 18) calls an "exclusive humanism," that is, a discourse and set of practices in aid of full human flourishing, one that disavows superhuman agencies and supernatural processes, and thus soteriological exits from the human condition.[58]

However, there are also various elements in Batchelor's secular Buddhism that seem to fit more in Taylor's category of anti-humanism. Batchelor himself is critical of some key values within exclusive humanism, such as instrumental rationality and the buffered self. Batchelor distinguishes secular Buddhism not only from secular Buddhist modernist movements, as we saw above, but also from a secularization of Buddhism "which renders Buddhist ideas and practices palatable and useful for those who have no interest in committing

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essential to texts so that they can better address our own contexts and predicaments. Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 62f.

57 Batchelor, *A Secular Buddhism*, 25.

58 Ibid., 111.

themselves to the core values of the dharma." Rather, his secular Buddhism affirms those core values as "a necessary framework for humans to flourish and to realize ultimate concerns."[59]

Also several other elements in Batchelor's thinking (his emphasis on awakening as a radical epistemological transcendence; his critique of the correspondence theory of truth in favor of a more Heideggerian notion of truth; his notions of emptiness and non-duality that seem to bring him in close proximity to for example Dōgen) might justify interpreting his secular Buddhism 2.0 in more existentialist terms. Perhaps, the notion of "existential Buddhism" would be more appropriate here as a label.

In terms of Taylor's notions of the immanent frame, disenchantment, fullness and the buffered self, we can say that Batchelor rejects the buffered self (in this he differs from the mindfulness movement). However, although he seems to accept disenchantment as simply a given, and rejects any form of ontological transcendence (but not epistemological transcendence), he also calls his reader, as we have seen, to "imagine [a dharma] that works toward a reenchantment of the world."[60]

With regard to fullness, Batchelor argues for a fullness within ordinary human flourishing, and he rejects any notion of a fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing. In his secular approaches to disenchantment and fullness, Batchelor clearly stays within the story of the immanent frame, even strengthening it. Batchelor defends his secular approach by saying that "my approach simply reflects an embedded cultural worldview that I could no more discard than I could willfully cease to comprehend the English language."[61] However, such an embedded cultural worldview amounts to what Taylor calls a "Closed World System" that allows for no transcendence. In this, Batchelor resembles those defenders of the closed reading of the immanent frame, criticized by Taylor, who simply see it as the only available reasonable option.

Finally, I want to briefly evaluate Batchelor's attempt to overcome the problems related to Zen modernism with his secular Buddhism. Although I am sympathetic to several aspects of his approach (focusing on Buddhist practices rather than on Buddhist truth claims; his egalitarian approach to Buddhism; his existentialism that brings him close to the Zen tradition), I disagree with his purely this-worldly approach to fullness and Buddhist practice and his anti-religious rhetoric. In my view, the limitations of Batchelor's approach are that it doesn't allow for Buddhist bodhisattvas, and his approach to fullness as

59 Ibid.
60 AB, 17.
61 Ibid., 16.

being within ordinary human flourishing does away with the radicality of the bodhisattva vow. These are serious limitations to his reimagining of Buddhism. Batchelor speaks about secular Buddhism as a fundamental upgrade of the Buddhist operating system to version 2.0, rather than designing new secular Buddhist applications to run on the old Buddhist operating system. His Buddhism 2.0 has debugged the Buddhist belief system and cleared it of incompatible software routines such as belief in reincarnation and karma. I agree with Heuman who is skeptical of such efforts to update Buddhism to fit with our secular mindset:

> It is an attempt to fix the dharma, to make it right, which is to say, scientific. From the perspective of scientific naturalism, it makes sense to do this, because when one operates within that perspective, it seems that only believers are making leaps of faith. Secular humanists assume themselves to be commitment-free rationalists. But that is a profound misunderstanding. To assume "this is all there is" is also to make a leap of faith.[62]

62 Ibid.

CHAPTER 9

# Reimagining Emptiness: Toward a Subtler Language of Fullness

In this chapter I will discuss attempts of Zen thinkers to engage with Taylor's second discourse, that of anti-humanism. There are many points of resonance between the classic Zen masters and Western anti-humanist thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger. The "radical Zen" of Linji, who criticized all cherished Buddhist notions and admonished his followers to "kill the Buddha" could be seen as an example of deconstruction avant-la-lettre. It may therefore come as no surprise that, in advocating Zen for a Western audience, many Japanese philosophers have attempted to use resources from this immanent counter-enlightenment. In this chapter, I will first discuss three twentieth century authors from the Kyoto School (Nishitani, Hisamatsu and Abe) and then a contemporary Western Zen scholar and teacher with connections to the Kyoto School, David Loy.

## 1 The Kyoto School

In Chapter 1 we already came across an undertaking by several twentieth-century Japanese Zen Buddhist philosophers and religious thinkers, known as the Kyoto School. The main Kyoto school philosophers were Nishida, Tanabe, Nishitani, Hisamatsu, Abe and Ueda. We have already encountered Ueda in Chapter 4. In this chapter I will focus on Nishitani, Hisamatsu and Abe.

The Kyoto School members actively engaged post-Kantian European thinking and the Western theological and philosophical traditions. They exhibited an unprecedented openness to and interaction with such traditions. Their work significantly inspired philosophers and theologians in the twentieth century to rethink the meaning of transcendence.

As James Heisig has noted, although the Kyoto philosophers freely used Zen concepts in their writings, their aim was not to represent Zen to the West (in contrast to D.T. Suzuki).[1] However, "they have had, and continue to have, a

1 "It is no more correct to speak of the Kyoto philosophers as representing eastern philosophy than it is to speak of their use of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism as representing Mahāyāna Buddhism. Let there be no mistake about it: the Kyoto philosophers are eastern and they are

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considerable impact on those among Zen and Pure Land theoreticians, few in numbers though they be, in search of a fresh self-understanding grounded in a wider intellectual perspective."[2]

Heisig mentions three characteristics of the Kyoto School philosophers:

(1) they reject the Western clear delineation between philosophy and religion;
(2) they are not interested in discussions of literal truth claims;
(3) they exhibit a kind of apophatic preference for experiencing without the interference of logical criticism or religious doctrine.[3]

The Kyoto school thinkers were forging what Taylor has called "subtler languages of fullness," languages that were in some ways as unfamiliar to the Japanese as to Westerners.[4] During the 1980s, the Kyoto School enjoyed its greatest blossoming in the West, due to the concentrated decade of teaching that one of its members, Masao Abe (1915–2006), spent in the United States.[5]

Whereas the fundamental question of the onto-theological mainstream of the West has been "what is being?," the counter question of the Kyoto School has been "what is nothingness?."[6] Rather than an ontology, the philosophy of the Kyoto School can be described as a *me*ontology, a philosophy of non-being or nothingness.[7] However, the nothingness of the Kyoto School is not a relative nothingness, that is, merely an absence of being, but an absolute nothingness (*zettai-mu*) that encompasses both being and not-being. The term *zettai* literally means a "severing of opposition." This implies the sense of "without an opposing other." Absolute nothingness "must embrace, rather than stand over against" relative nothingness.[8]

## 2 Śūnyatā as Zen Fullness

*Śūnyatā* occupies a crucial position in Chinese and Japanese Buddhist traditions. Its importance as a religious notion is comparable to that of transcendence

Buddhist. But their aim and context is neither eastern nor Buddhist." James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness. An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 8.

2 Ibid., 9.

3 Ibid., 13–16.

4 Ibid., 19.

5 See Mitchell, *Masao Abe: A Zen Life of Dialogue,* xiv.

6 General information on the Kyoto School in this chapter has been taken from Bret W. Davis, "The Kyoto School," in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, May 6, 2010, accessed March 5, 2020, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/kyoto-school.

7 Davis, *The Kyoto School,* section 3.1.

8 Ibid., section 3.3, para. 10.

in the West. It may therefore come as no surprise that, in bringing Zen to the West, *śūnyatā* has been translated into Western notions of fullness.[9]

*Śūnyatā* could be seen as encompassing elements of both transcendence and immanence, since the notion is connected to immanent Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of suchness (*tathāta*) and, especially in China, Buddha nature. Buddha nature is the true nature of the Zen practitioner himself, yet it also permeates the entire universe. Realizing this Buddha nature takes place exactly in and through mundane reality. Alternatively, *śūnyatā* could also be interpreted as radical transcendence in the sense of being radically beyond all philosophical distinctions. Nāgārjuna's two truth theory indicates that all conventional perspectives on reality (*samvrti-satya*) fall short; the ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*) of all things is that they are empty.

As Sharf has put it, "emptiness […] is not attained through transcending the world of form. Rather, emptiness is the world of form properly apprehended."[10] Therefore, in the Zen koans, one finds the logically paradoxical structure of "x if and only if not x": freedom lies in the realization that there is no freedom; enlightenment lies in the notion that there is no enlightenment; transcendence lies in the understanding that there is no transcendence. This makes the Zen koans interesting reading for students of Western postmodern thought.[11] Especially in the Zen tradition, *śūnyatā* plays an important role in a rhetorical tradition of deconstruction. In the Zen tradition, kataphatic expressions of enlightenment (for example, the discourse of "Buddha nature" as a pure inner essence to be realized) are continually deconstructed by the apophatic discourse of *śūnyatā*.[12]

However, in its emphasis on actualization and embodiment, Zen moves beyond mere deconstruction to a practice of radical world-affirmation.[13] In Mahāyāna Buddhism, wisdom (the realization of *śūnyatā*) is inseparably

9 Taylor himself remarks that the Buddhist notion of "nothingness" can be seen as a form of fullness. SA, 780 n8.

10 Robert H. Sharf, "How to think with Chan Gong'an," in: C. Furth, J. Zeitlin and H. Ping-chen (eds.), *Thinking with Cases: Specialized Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 205–243, citation on 225.

11 Ibid. For Western encounters between postmodern thought and śūnyatā, see, for example, Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*; Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*; Carl Olson, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Liberation from the Representational Mode of Thinking* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

12 For a more extensive description of this process, see Wang, *Linguistic Strategies* and van der Braak, *Towards a Philosophy of Chan Enlightenment*.

13 Such a practice can be elucidated in terms of Nietzsche's affirmative notion of amor fati. Nishitani attempts such an elucidation in Chapter 4 of his *The self-overcoming of Nihilism*. Nishitani Keiji, *The self-overcoming of Nihilism*. Translated from Japanese by G. Parkes, with S. Aihara (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

connected with compassion (expressed in the bodhisattva vow of saving all sentient beings). Therefore, the Zen path of *śūnyatā* always culminates in a return to the marketplace. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the realization of *śūnyatā* paradoxically completes itself only in a movement through its own negation. One can point out a dialectical movement toward reaffirmation through double negation: first the realization of emptiness, then the realization of the emptiness of emptiness. This second negation indicates a return to compassionate activity within the world of conditioned existence.

The American philosopher Thomas Kasulis has distinguished between two kinds of emptiness that recur throughout Zen literature.[14] The first one means that "linguistic distinctions (and the concepts formulated through them) cannot be the medium of an adequate description of reality."[15] This points primarily to a critique of philosophical distinctions and is connected to Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā*. The term *śūnyatā* means "empty from *svabhava,*" a complex notion that can mean "substance," "essence" or "true nature," depending on the context in which it is used.[16] Nāgārjuna distinguished between relative or conventional truth (*samvrti-satya*), which is based on conceptual or philosophical distinctions, and the absolute or ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*) of *śūnyatā,* which is beyond verbal expression.

The second kind of Zen emptiness means that "experience (or, alternatively, reality) arises out of a source that cannot be described as either Being or Nonbeing, form or no form."[17] This refers to the Chinese Daoist pre-ontology of *wu*, which emphasizes an indeterminate, distinctionless reality as the origin of all things.[18] This unnamable, nondualistic source of all being and relative nonbeing is also referred to as the nontranscendent field of *dao*. Both of these strands of thought, Nāgārjuna's *śūnyatā* and the Daoist *wu*, were combined in the Zen notion of nothingness.[19]

14 Thomas P. Kasulis, *Zen Action Zen Person* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1981). Curtis Rigsby has argued that three types of emptiness can be distinguished. See Curtis A. Rigsby, "Three Strands of Nothingness in Chinese Philosophy and the Kyoto School: A Summary and Evaluation," *Dao* 13 (2014): 469–489.

15 Kasulis, *Zen Action Zen Person*, 14.

16 Jan Westerhoff, *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).

17 Kasulis, *Zen Action Zen Person*, 14.

18 Although this seems a kind of ontological transcendence, it should not be described in terms of the conceptual pair transcendence–immanence, as we have seen.

19 See also Allen, *Vanishing Into Things*, 165f for the difference between Daoist and Zen emptiness.

*Śūnyatā* is technically translated as *kū* (*kong* in Chinese) and the Chinese *wu* is changed only in pronunciation into the Japanese *mu*.[20] The thinkers of the Kyoto School tend to favor the term *mu*, which is found predominantly in Zen. Nishida introduced the term "absolute nothingness." In his mature writings, however, Nishitani explicitly employs the Mahāyāna Buddhist term *śūnyatā* to refer to absolute nothingness.

## 3 Nishitani and *Śūnyatā*[21]

Nishitani was educated in both Japanese and European philosophical traditions, studying with Heidegger from 1937 to 1939. Just like his teacher Nishida, Nishitani attempts to bring about a synthesis between Japanese Zen Buddhist philosophy and Western philosophy, but from the opposite perspective.[22] Nishida attempts to integrate nothingness into Western frameworks, to interpret the Zen experience in phenomenological and ontological terms. Nishitani, on the other hand, attempts to integrate being into Eastern frameworks. He focuses on the problem of nihilism, and how Western thinkers and Zen Buddhists can find ways to overcome it.

Nishitani attempts, in a Zen Buddhist dialogue with the Western antihumanist thinkers Nietzsche and Heidegger, to come to a revalued or reimagined notion of transcendence. In his work *The Self-overcoming of Nihilism*, he interprets Nietzsche's thought as not only a diagnosis of nihilism in Western culture as the result of the death of God, but also as an attempt to describe the way to the self-overcoming of this nihilism.[23] In his later work *Religion and Nothingness*, Nishitani attempts to come to a "transcendence" of transcendence and immanence altogether, a nonmetaphysical "ecstatic trans-descendence"—that is, the affirmation of transcendence in immanence.[24] If it is to be truly transformative and meaningful for a postmetaphysical world, then transcendence needs to be fully and absolutely actualized or, in other words, embodied. In this way, it is possible, according to Nishitani, to ecstatically trans-descend the nihilistic abyss left by the death of God.

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20 Kasulis, *Zen Action Zen Person*, 39.

21 The material in this section is based on Chapter 10 of van der Braak, *Nietzsche and Zen*.

22 Jan Van Bragt, "Translator's introduction," in Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*. Translated from Japanese by J. van Bragt (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982) pp. xxiii–xlix, here xxxii.

23 Nishitani, *The Self-overcoming of Nihilism.*

24 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*.

Nishitani distinguishes three different perspectives: the standpoint of egoity, the standpoint of nihility (relative nothingness) and the standpoint of *śūnyatā* (absolute nothingness).[25] The standpoint of egoity can be equated to Taylor's Cartesian buffered self, looking out at a disenchanted world. The standpoint of relative nothingness refers to the deconstruction of the standpoint of egoity. The standpoint of absolute nothingness refers to a perspective that reflects the spontaneous, unconditioned way of natural existence, the simultaneous unity and difference of all entities. Absolute nothingness is the standpoint from which all that "is" and "is not" emerges as it is grasped by the non-egocentric self. The egoistic self must be broken through in order to actualize the fundamental standpoint of non-ego or no-self. Absolute nothingness signifies the fundamental unity that encloses all differentiation.

As Davis has noted, Nishitani suggests that the way out of nihilism is not that of willful human progress, nor that of transcending this world to a beyond. He urges, rather, that we reorient ourselves in the direction of a radical regress. We must step all the way back through nihilism. Nihilism can only be overcome by way of a trans-descendence to a more authentic mode of everyday existence: that is, to a released engagement in the world of radical everydayness. For Nishitani, such an aboriginal standpoint, which he calls "the standpoint of *śūnyatā*"[26] is not reached by willfully transcending nihilism. He asserts that *śūnyatā* is reached through trans-descendence. One has to step back from the field of (representational) consciousness and (possession of) being, through the relative nothingness of the field of nihility, to the absolute nothingness of the field of *śūnyatā*.[27] Davis puts this as follows:

> Nishitani stresses that this conversion does not settle down on "the field of nirvana," but rather comes full circle in a 360-degree spiraling return to what he calls "the field of samsara-sive-nirvana."[28] The "great negation" of emptiness or sunyata does not put an end to all activity, but clears the ground for a radically different kind of ceaseless activity, one no longer centered on the ego and producing karmic debt. On the field

25 This overview is based on the summary of Nishitani's thought in Brian Schroeder, "Dancing Through Nothing: Nietzsche, the Kyoto School, and Transcendence," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 37 (2009): 44–65.

26 Bret W. Davis, "Zen after Zarathustra: The Problem of the Will in the Confrontation between Nietzsche and Buddhism," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 28 (2004): 89–138, here 106.

27 Ibid.

28 Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 250.

> of samsara-sive-nirvana, "constant doing is constant non-doing," and "all being-at-doing […] takes the shape of non-doing."[29]

A *kenosis*, or emptying, of God constitutes only the initial movement of the death of God.[30] From such an initial movement, one might conclude that transcendence is impossible. According to Nishitani, however, this constitutes exactly the nihilism that can and must be overcome.

## 4 Hisamatsu and Oriental Nothingness

As a student of Nishida and a teacher of Abe, Hisamatsu can be seen as loosely connected to the Kyoto School. However, although he was a professor at Kyoto University and received an honorary doctoral degree from Harvard University, Hisamatsu has primarily become known in the West as a charismatic lay Zen master, who criticized Japanese Zen for its lack of focus on practice and realization, and its misinterpretation of awakening (*satori*) as separate from social and political issues. His aim was to come to a reformed, true Zen.[31]

As his student Masao Abe recounts in a biographical essay, Hisamatsu's life was filled with the cross pressures that Taylor describes. He was raised in a devout Shin Buddhist family but then underwent a secular conversion, a "conversion from the religious life of naive religious belief which avoids rational doubt, to the critical life of modern man based on autonomous rational judgment and empirical proof."[32] He turned to Western philosophy (which had been introduced to Japan as a highly rational and logical discipline), and left behind the religious faith in which he was reared and deeply believed, a faith that he described later as merely a case of "leave-it-up-to-the-Almighty-ism which avoided all doubt."[33] However, his life of reason and logic also proved unsatisfactory. Hisamatsu came to despair of philosophy and human reason. Autonomous Enlightenment reason could not address Hisamatsu's deeply felt existential religious concerns. He turned to Zen in an attempt to break through

29 Davis, *Zen after Zarathustra*, 101.

30 Schroeder, *Dancing Through Nothing*, 47.

31 The material in this section is more fully covered in André van der Braak, "Hisamatsu Shin'ichi: Oriental Nothingness," in Gereon Kopf (ed.) *The Dao Companion to Japanese Buddhist Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019), 635–647.

32 Abe Masao, "Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening," Translated by Christopher A. Ives. *The Eastern Buddhist* 14/1 (1981): 26–42, citation on 28.

33 Ibid., 30.

such inescapable self-contradiction and to find a standpoint beyond both the theocentric, heteronomous faith of his youth, and the anthropocentric, autonomous reason of academic philosophy. He studied with Zen Master Ikegami Shosan. During a sesshin in December 1915, he attained awakening, *kenshō*.[34] The standpoint of such an awakening is, in Abe's terms,

> a world with neither God nor man, transcendence nor immanence, self nor other, mind nor matter, life nor death, good nor evil, right nor wrong, love nor hate, inner nor outer, movement nor stillness, time nor space, past nor present nor future.[…] It transcends all aspects of man and God, the profane and the sacred, time and eternity, philosophy and religion, knowledge and faith. It brings about the absolute transcendence of transcendence, though not in the direction of some distant beyond: the very standpoint of transcendence is inverted from its foundation. This is a fundamental conversion of all things, including even the standpoint of immanence transcended by transcendence.[35]

Hisamatsu initially attempted to express this "standpoint of awakening" by the term "Oriental nothingness" (*tōyō-teki mu*), which he used until about 1946 as an expression of the true Self.[36] After 1946, he used the expression "the absolute subject."

Together with several of his students at Kyoto University, Hisamatsu had founded in 1944 the Gakuko Dojo (Association for Self-Awakening). In 1958 the Gakuko Dojo was renamed the FAS Society. Its aim is to spread the standpoint of fundamental self-awakening of all mankind. "F" stands for "realizing the Formless Self," "A" stands for "All mankind," and "S" stands for "Suprahistorical history." In such a three-dimensional view of awakening, awakening to the Formless Self is only the first dimension, that of depth. It is a basis for the dimensions of width (expanding this awakening to include all of humanity) and length (creating history supra-historically). For Hisamatsu, awakening to the Formless Self also implies taking the standpoint of all humankind and creating history anew:

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34 As Abe notes (Abe, *Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening,* 32 n4), Hisamatsu himself does not take *kenshō* (seeing one's Nature, insight into the Self) as an experience, for "experience" indicates something happening in time and space, whereas *kenshō* by nature is trans-temporal and trans-spatial.

35 Abe, *Hisamatsu's Philosophy of Awakening,* 37f.

36 Ohashi Ryōsuke, "Shin-ichi Hisamatsu," in Ohashi Ryōsuke (hrsg.), *Die Philosophie der Kyoto-Schule: Texte und Einführung* (Freiburg/München: Karl Alber Verlag, 1990), 227–251, citation on 229.

> The Formless Self, which is no-birth-and-death freed from birth-and-death, must function and give rise to all things in actuality. This is the True Self (F), which constitutes the source of A and S. It is Self-Awakening. In that it is spatially boundless (formless), it is the basis of All Humankind, and in that it transcends the three periods of past, present and future, it is the basis of Suprahistorical history. Since this Self is no-thought (*mu-nen*), no-mind (*mu-shin*), and the true reality of no-boundary, one can stand in the standpoint of all humankind and create history while transcending history.[37]

## 5 Masao Abe

Masao Abe continued the Zen dialogue with the West, not only through comparative philosophical scholarship but also through interfaith dialogue. His Western dialogue partners were liberal theologians such as Paul Tillich, pluralists such as John Hick, process theologians such as John Cobb, and God is dead-theologians such as Thomas Altizer. He has been called the philosophical successor of D.T. Suzuki. For Abe, *śūnyatā* is especially a notion that challenges Western notions of religious transcendence. For Abe, interfaith dialogue was not just a matter of adding his Zen contribution to the other religions he encountered. Rather, he was offering *śūnyatā* as a nondualistic depth dimension that could be found in the deepest experience of other religions. His aim was to uphold *śūnyatā* as a Zen mirror by which other faiths could come to deeper spiritual self-discovery. In this, Abe followed in the footsteps of D.T. Suzuki, but with much greater philosophical and theological preparation.

Abe has put forward an interpretation of *śūnyatā* as *kenosis*: it is an absolute principle, however, not one that should be sought outside mundane reality. It is continually emptying itself in mundane reality. With this, Abe sought the dialogue with Western God is dead-theologians such as Thomas Altizer, who attempted to connect the God is dead-theology with Mahāyāna Buddhism:

> The death of God […] is a dissolution of the transcendence of Being and precisely thereby a realization of a new and total immanence. This is the very immanence that modern Buddhist thinkers have entered as an arena for the realization of sunyata. […] If such an immanence has inevitably

37 Christopher Ives, "True Person, Formless Self: Lay Zen Master Hisamatsu Shin'ichi," in Steven Heine & Dale S. Wright (eds.), *Zen Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 217–238, citation on 227.

> been known in the West as a radically new kind, the Buddhist thinker can apprehend it as a primordial totality of Emptiness [...] If nihilism is now an overwhelming reality in the modern world, it would appear that only Buddhist thinking can purely reverse our nihilism, and reverse it by calling forth the totality of sunyata.[38]

As Altizer has pointed out, from the standpoint of *śūnyatā*:

> everything 'is' or arises or originates with everything else, an 'isness' that is 'is-notness', and precisely thereby is agape or compassion. Abe can speak the language of compassion, or seemingly so, but he can do so only insofar as his language embodies Emptiness, and compassion can be present only to the degree that Emptiness itself is realized. Yet this is clearly something absent from our Western deconstruction.[39]

Nishitani, Hisamatsu and Abe have been quite influential in academic circles (but not with a larger public) through their attempts to find theological and philosophical resonances between Zen and Western anti-humanist thinkers. Recently, however, the influence of the Kyoto School seems to be lessening. Therefore, I will now discuss a contemporary Western Zen scholar and teacher who attempts to reimagine *śūnyatā* in order to come to an alternative for Western-style transcendence, David Loy.

## 6 David Loy's New Buddhist Path

The American David Loy is both an authorized Zen teacher (he received dharma transmission from the Sanbōkyōdan Zen teacher Yamada Koun Roshi in 1988) and a professor of Buddhist and comparative philosophy. In his book, *A New Buddhist Path: Enlightenment, Evolution and Ethics in the Modern World*, Loy attempts to come to "a contemporary Buddhism that tries to be both faithful to its most important traditional teachings and also compatible with modernity, or at least with many of the most characteristic elements of the modern worldview."[40]

38 Thomas J.J. Altizer, "Kenosis and *Śūnyatā* in the Contemporary Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," in Mitchell, *Masao Abe: A Zen Life of Dialogue,* 151–160, here 151f.

39 Ibid., 158.

40 Loy, *A New Buddhist Path*, 2f. [NBP].

As Buddhism spreads to the West, Loy contends, it is not only encountering the challenge of the naturalistic worldview and materialistic values of the modern values, but also that of the deeply rooted ecological, economic and social crises that modernity has created but seems unable to resolve.[41] In order to meet these challenges, he argues, a genuine dialogue must be achieved between Asian Buddhist traditions and Western tradition that avoids the mistake of evaluating one side in terms of the other.[42]

Loy considers the two main approaches to such a dialogue as flawed. On the one hand, there are those who attempt to advocate the premodern enchanted notions of the traditional Asian Buddhist teachings to a Western audience, using Taylor's third discourse of believing in Axial-age types of transcendence. Loy summarizes such an approach as follows:

> "Some adjustments need to be made, of course, but without conceding any significant alteration in the basic teachings and ways of practicing. That such traditions are premodern is not a weakness but their strength, given what the modern world has become and where it seems to be going. The prevalent Western worldview promotes individualism and narcissism, its economic system encourages greed, and society as a whole seems to be entranced in consumerist addictions and fantasies. We need to revitalize this ancient wisdom that can point us back in the right direction."[43]

For Loy, such traditionalists make the mistake of holding on to Buddhist truth claims, and evaluating Western truth claims in terms of those Buddhist truth claims.

On the other hand, there are those secularizers who use Taylor's first discourse of exclusive humanism. As Loy describes it,

> The main concern is to make Buddhism more relevant to contemporary society by secularizing it, replacing its Iron Age mythological roots with a worldview more compatible with science and other modern ways of knowing. "Sure, modernity has its problems, but we must build on the best of what it has discovered. […] Instead of accepting premodern beliefs that are no longer plausible today, we can also benefit from what

41 Ibid., 1.

42 Ibid., 3.

43 Ibid.

> anthropology and archaeology, for example, have learned about ancient ways of thinking.[44]

For Loy, such secularizers make the mistake of evaluating Buddhist truth claims in terms of the world views and epistemic standards of Western modernity.

Loy rejects both approaches: a new Buddhist path needs to be found beyond transcendence and immanence,[45] a path that aims at directly addressing and transforming global and social conflict just as much as individual suffering. Loy advocates a third, perspectival approach that goes beyond the one-sided approaches of secularizers and traditionalists. In such a third approach, both traditional and secular viewpoints are used to interrogate each other, without accepting either perspective as absolute.[46] Such an approach has much affinity with postmodern neo-Nietzschean discourses. Loy attempts to steer a course between secularizers and traditionalists:

> Dwelling "in-between"—what might be called *the position of no fixed position*—does not mean rejecting either perspective but being able to appreciate both. Each is realized to be a heuristic construct that can be helpful, according to the situation, yet neither has exclusive claims to the Truth.[47]

With regard to the approach to truth claims, Loy's nondual Zen approach to Buddhism has important similarities to that of existential psychotherapy.[48] Loy quotes existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom:

> Therapists may offer the patient any number of explanations to clarify the same issue [...] *None, despite vehement claims to the contrary, has*

44 Ibid., 3f.

45 Loy has discussed more generally the difference between transcendence in East Asia, South Asia and the West in "Transcendence East and West," *Man and World* 26, no. 4 (1993): 403–427.

46 NBP, 4.

47 Ibid., 29.

48 Loy comments on the dialogue between Buddhism and psychotherapy: "Given the premodern roots of the Buddhist tradition, the question from a psychotherapeutic perspective is whether Buddhist teachings mythologize the developmental process by understanding the ultimate goal as transcending this world of suffering and delusion. Given the secular roots and pragmatic goals of psychotherapy, the question from a Buddhist perspective is whether such therapies still remain too limited an understanding of our human potential, ignoring possibilities that transcend modern assumptions about what it means to be human." (Ibid., 32–33).

> *sole rights to the truth*. After all, they are all based on imaginary "as if" structures [...] They are all fictions, psychological constructs created for semantic convenience, and they justify their existence only by virtue of their explanatory power.[49]

According to Mahāyāna Buddhist sutras such as the *Heart Sutra*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra*, all Buddhist views have the status of such fictions, created for semantic convenience (or in Buddhist language, created as forms of conventional truth), and only useful for their explanatory power (or in Buddhist language, as upaya). As Loy argues, such constructed conventional fictions are necessary because the human mind is activated by such constructs. He quotes the Buddha in the *Canki Sutta* when he says "it is not proper for a wise man [...] to come to the conclusion 'this alone is truth, and everything else is false.'"[50] In the classic Buddhist formulation, Buddhist teachings are not truth claims but serve as a raft that can temporarily be used to cross the river of suffering in order to be abandoned afterwards. Or in a modern formulation, they serve as a road map for the Buddhist path.

Based on this nondual approach, Loy undertakes his critical-constructive project, focusing on three topics: (1) deconstructing both transcendent and immanent imaginings of Buddhist enlightenment; (2) reconstructing a new Buddhist cosmological worldview that is in accordance with recent developments within modern science; (3) reconstructing Buddhist ethics for our secular age by reimaging the bodhisattva path.

## 6.1 *Deconstructing Enlightenment: Beyond Transcendence and Immanence*

Loy argues that in traditional forms of Asian Buddhism, especially those that base themselves upon some early versions of Buddhism, enlightenment (*nirvāna*) is conceived, consistent with other Axial Age-religions, as transcending this world (*samsāra*). In such an understanding of enlightenment, Loy contends, "the world as we normally experience it is devalued in comparison with a more transcendent reality. Like these other Axial developments, early Buddhism as usually understood also rests on such a cosmological dualism."[51] Such a conception of another and better world has been problematic for Buddhism:

49 Ibid., 29.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 20.

> The dualism between the transcendent and this world became reproduced within us, between the "higher" part of ourselves (the soul, rationality) that yearns for escape from this vale of sorrow and the "lower" part that is of the earth (our physical bodies with their emotions and desires).[52]

This has led to the mind/body dualism of Descartes and to Taylor's notion of the buffered self. Loy argues that such Axial-type transcendence is no longer adequate for what we know today.

On the other hand, in many forms of contemporary this-worldly, secular Buddhism, perspectives on enlightenment have become popular that emphasize accepting and adapting to this world. The Buddhist path is reimagined as a program of psychological development, due to the dialogue between Buddhism and psychology: "Buddhism is providing new perspectives on the nature of psychological well-being and new practices that help to promote it."[53] Loy refers to this perspective on enlightenment as "immanent." He argues that they are equally inadequate.

Loy offers another, nondual, interpretation of enlightenment as epistemological transcendence: a nongrasping and therefore nondual awakened way of experiencing and living in the world that transcends our usual dualistic understanding of it. Although such a nondual understanding sounds similar to what is advocated by many contemporary writers on mindfulness, Loy stresses that mindfulness is not merely an ethical neutral practice for reducing stress and improving concentration (this invites a consumerist approach to mindfulness that he has called McMindfulness). Rather, it includes developing wholesome behaviors. Loy stresses that mindfulness

> is a *distinct quality of attention* that depends upon many factors: the nature of one's thoughts, speech, and actions; one's way of making a living; and one's efforts to avoid unwholesome and unskillful behaviors, while developing those that are conducive to wise action, social harmony, and compassion.[54]

Loy argues that the mindfulness movement underestimates the traditional role of moral precepts, community practice, and the importance of viewing

52 Ibid., 23.
53 Ibid., 26.
54 Ibid., 34.

enlightenment as a fullness beyond ordinary human flourishing.[55] The mindfulness movement leaves intact the prevalent, Western-derived worldview. But what if that very worldview is one of the main causes of *dukkha*?

Loy's third perspective on enlightenment involves a Buddhist constructivism: "the sense of self is a psychological and social construct that can be deconstructed and reconstructed, and that *needs* to be deconstructed and reconstructed, because the delusion of a separate self is the source of our most problematic *dukkha*, or 'suffering.'"[56] In such an understanding, enlightenment refers to "an *awakened* way of experiencing and living in this world," which can be called transcendent in an epistemological rather than an ontological sense, because "[it] does indeed transcend our usual dualistic understanding of the world and ourselves within it."[57]

In such a form of epistemological transcendence, the self and the world are seen in a radically different light:

> Buddhist enlightenment is not simply a more mindful adaptation to our unfortunate existential condition, nor is it attaining some other dimension that is distinct from and therefore indifferent to this world. Rather, it is a transformative realization that the world as we usually experience it (including the way that I usually experience myself) is neither real nor unreal but a *psychological and social construction* that can be deconstructed and reconstructed, which is what happens when one follows the Buddhist path.[58]

For such an epistemological transformation to take place, the buffered self needs to be seen through. Both the sense of a separate self, and the sense of an independently existing "objective" world ("the myth of the given") need to be deconstructed.

Loy argues that "the subjective sense of a self *inside* that is separate from an objective reality *outside* is a product of the ways that our minds usually function."[59] And he recounts how many Buddhist texts refer to how the mind "fabricates" what we usually take to be reality. The problem is a sense of self that feels and believes itself to be *separate* from the rest of the world. Such a sense of self is empty of any self-existence. Loy not only deconstructs the sense

55 Ibid., 39.
56 Ibid., 5.
57 Ibid., 6.
58 Ibid., 40.
59 Ibid.

of self but also the myth of the given: “If the internal self is a construct, so is the external world, for if there is no inside (my mind), the outside is no longer outside (of an inside).”[60]

We have seen that in the Mahāyāna sutras the world is transfigured when experienced nondually, e.g., in the *Vimalakirti Sutra* where the world appears in a radically different light when the Buddha wriggles his toe. According to Loy, “what we normally perceive as solid objects is the luminous *presencing* of something not-finite, unbounded.”[61] Loy stresses that such a nondual experience of the world does not involve a form of ontological transcendence: “If it transcends the way we usually experience this world, it is still *this world*.”[62] However, “one transcends the usual dualism between an alienated and anxious sense of self that is separate from but trapped within an external, objectified world.”[63] In the Buddhist language of *śūnyatā*: both the internal self and the external world are empty of self-nature.

### 6.2 *Evolution: A New Enchanted Buddhist Worldview*

After the deconstruction of transcendent and immanent views of enlightenment, and the deconstruction of the sense of self and the myth of the given, a reconstruction is necessary, a new credible worldview for our secular age that combines both premodern Asian Buddhist and modern Western sources. Loy attempts to construct such a new enchanted worldview by means of a new evolutionary myth.

Loy contends that at the root of our ecological and economic challenges is the defective, dysfunctional worldview that is none other than Taylor’s closed version of the immanent frame. For Loy, this has “stranded us, for better and worse, in a desacralized world that has lost the source of its meaning, without a binding moral code to regulate how we relate to each other.”[64]

Loy seeks to come to a new paradigm by turning to recent views on cosmology and evolution as a possible new story. With regard to evolution, he argues,

> We are most familiar with two stories that attempt to explain it. One of them involves belief in a Being outside these processes who is directing it. […] In contrast to guided evolution, most biologists see

60 Ibid., 54.
61 Ibid., 59.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 60.
64 Ibid., 68.

> these developments as more haphazard: the evolution of species is due to random DNA mutations, some of which enable the organism to be more reproductively successful in its specific environment. Is our choice between intelligent design and haphazard mutation, or is there a third alternative?[65]

Loy argues that the two options of God or chance mutation reproduce the dominant duality of the Western tradition: mind versus matter:

> Both explanations take that dualism for granted but privilege opposite sides. Theists believe that God created the universe (a version of consciousness creating matter), while materialists believe that consciousness arises only when organisms develop to a certain complexity (matter creates consciousness). Non-Western philosophical traditions offer worldviews that escape this bipolar dualism.[66]

Loy quotes biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky, who considers evolution neither random nor predetermined but creative, and evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris, who describes evolution as an intelligent, improvisational dance. The dance evolves as the dancers discover new possibilities. In other words, the cosmos self-organizes. Loy comments that, instead of reducing biology to physics and viewing the cosmos as a machine, this approach understands the physical universe according to a biological model.[67] Loy quotes philosopher Ervin Laszlo who calls such a new paradigm an example of re-enchantment:

> At the cutting edge of contemporary science a remarkable insight is surfacing: the universe, with all things in it, is a quasi-living, coherent whole. All things in it are connected. […] A cosmos that is connected, coherent and whole recalls an ancient notion that was present in the tradition of every civilization: it is an enchanted cosmos. […] We are part of each other and of nature. We are a conscious part of the world, a being through which the cosmos comes to know itself. […] We are at home in the universe.[68]

Such a more dynamic, self-organizing understanding of the evolutionary progress goes against disenchantment. Other than Taylor's trend of excarnation

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65 Ibid., 80.
66 Ibid., 81.
67 Ibid., 82.
68 Ibid., 83.

suggests, meaning does not reside "in the mind," but is co-created by the mind and an evolving universe. As Loy argues, "the universe is the totality of the ongoing creative process, irreducible to specific constituents that we might try to pick out."[69]

For such a new enchanted Buddhist worldview, Loy uses the concept of *śūnyatā*, this time not in a deconstructive but in a reconstructive sense. He offers a new dynamic understanding of *śūnyatā* as unlimited potentiality:

> We are now approaching the heart of the matter. Shunyata is not only a metaphor for the irreducible dynamic creativity of the cosmos, ceaselessly generating new forms out of itself; it also describes the true nature of my own and your own "nondwelling" mind, which is supple in its ability to adapt and assume any particular form because it lacks any fixed form of its own. Does awakening, then, involve realizing that one's own true nature is not different from that of the entire universe? That my own "groundless ground" is in fact the ground of the whole cosmos?[70]

*Śūnyatā* as unlimited potentiality can never be known in Descartes' epistemological sense, but it can be known in a different epistemological sense (characteristic for the Chinese and Japanese philosophical traditions) by being one with it:[71]

> The incessant self-organizing creativity that produces all things can never be perceived or comprehended in itself, apart from its particular manifestations. And yet in the most important sense we can know it—we *do* know it—because we *are* it.[72]

### 6.3 *Ethics: Reimagining the Bodhisattva Path*

In the third part of his book, Loy focuses on the ethical implications of the new Buddhist/Western worldview that he discussed in the second part:

> That human beings are the only species (so far as we know) that can *know* it is a manifestation of the entire cosmos opens up a possibility that may

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69 Ibid., 88.

70 Ibid., 89.

71 I already alluded to this in Chapter 5 when I mentioned Allen's book *Vanishing into Things* and discussed Dōgen's epistemology.

72 NBP, 89f.

> need to be embraced if we are to survive the crises that now confront us. *We can choose to work for the well-being of the whole*, to make that the meaning of our lives. "The well-being of the whole" in this case can mean not only the well-being of the biosphere, but conceivably even (should a suitable situation arise) for the well-being of the whole universe. That we are the self-awareness of the cosmos makes the whole cosmos our body, in effect, which implies not only a special understanding but also a special role in response to that realization. […] Is that how the bodhisattva path should be understood today?[73]

An important consequence of Loy's new enchanted worldview is that meaning does not reside in the mind, but is co-created by ourselves and the universe: "We are meaning-makers, the beings by which the universe introduces a new scale of meaning and value."[74]

Based on this, Loy reimagines the Mahāyāna Buddhist notions of the bodhisattva and the bodhisattva path:

> According to the usual mythology, bodhisattvas are self-sacrificing because they could choose to transcend this world of samsara by entering into nirvana and ending rebirth, but instead they take a vow to hang around here in order to help the rest of us. That kind of altruism still distinguishes the best interests of the bodhisattva from the best interests of everyone else. There is a better way to understand what motivates the bodhisattva—if we understand awakening as the realization that I am not separate from (the rest of) the world. Then the bodhisattva's preoccupation with helping "others" is not a personal sacrifice but a further stage of personal development. Because awakening to my nonduality with the world does not automatically eliminate habitual self-centered ways of thinking and acting, following a bodhisattva path becomes important for reorienting my relationship with the world. Instead of asking, "What can I get out of this situation?" one asks, "What can I contribute to this situation, to make it better?"[75]

According to this interpretation, choosing to become a bodhisattva is not a form of renunciation, but a sign of higher personal development. Also, this

73 Ibid., 99f.
74 Ibid., 100.
75 Ibid., 129.

choice is not a personal affair, but comes out of *bodhicitta* (the longing for awakening). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, *bodhicitta* is not seen as a personal quality but as a result of cosmic resonance (see especially the *Avatamsaka Sutra*).

Another consequence of this reinterpretation is, that practice is not only individual but also, and perhaps especially, collective. This notion of collective practice means that social and cultural issues such as climate change and the ecological crisis are the very issues that should be the focus of contemporary bodhisattva practice. This is why Loy's reimagining of Buddhism for our secular age can be seen as a form of engaged Buddhism.[76]

## 7 Discussion

In this chapter, I have discussed Kyoto School members Nishitani, Hisamatsu and Abe, followed by Loy. All these thinkers attempt in their own way to go beyond Taylor's story of the immanent frame, the immanence-transcendence distinction, disenchantment, and the opposition between fullness within or beyond ordinary human flourishing.

Both the members of the Kyoto School and David Loy reject Taylor's immanent frame and attempt to replace it with a new story. For the early thinkers of the Kyoto School, this was the notion of absolute nothingness. Nishida's notion of absolute nothingness occupied a specific, time-bound place in the discourse of the Kyoto School thinkers. As Ueda notes in his evaluation of the Kyoto School in a recent collection of essays, Nishida attempted to use the notion of absolute nothingness with the purpose of "bridging the differences between East and West, with the aim of conceiving the world anew within a horizon that included these differences."[77] After World War II, however, the problem of the arrival of nihilism in both European and non-European cultures increasingly made the notion of the "absolute" ring hollow: "even "absolute nothingness"— an idea conceived in the horizon of the world and with Eastern traditions in

76 Engaged Buddhism refers to Buddhists who attempt to apply Buddhist insights from meditation practice to situations of social, political, environmental and economic suffering and injustice. Organizations such as Soka Gakkai International, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Buddhist Global Relief, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, Zen Peacemakers and Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing are devoted to building the movement of engaged Buddhists.

77 Ueda Shizuteru, "Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School," in *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School,* edited by Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 19–32, citation on 24.

the background—had ceased to be effective in its present form."[78] Therefore, Ueda concludes, it could no longer be the basic category of thought in a world horizon.

Nishitani responded to this by "borrowing" the notion of *śūnyatā* and using it rather freely in his philosophy.[79]Hisamatsu took a different direction: that of the multidimensionality of awakening. The realization of the Formless Self (Oriental nothingness) was only the basis for the dimensions of All Mankind and Suprahistorical History. Hisamatsu stressed the political and historical aspects of compassion, creating history anew for all mankind, and decried the overemphasis on *satori* in contemporary Zen in Japan, leading to an apolitical "Zen within a ghostly cave." Abe used the notion of *śūnyatā* to engage in interreligious dialogue with various Christian theologians.

The Kyoto School thinkers have been criticized by Sharf and others for mixing their presentation of Zen to the West with *nihonjinron*, the popular Japanese pseudo-science devoted to demonstrating the uniqueness and superiority of Japanese culture and spirit.[80] This usually took the form of claiming that only Japanese are capable of truly grasping Zen. Sharf quotes Hisamatsu:

> I have long spoken of "Oriental Nothingness" [...] I qualify it as Oriental because in the West such Nothingness has never been fully awakened, nor has there been penetration to such a level. However, this does not mean that it belongs exclusively to the East. On the contrary, it is the most profound basis or root source of man; in this sense it belongs neither to the East or West. Only as regards the actual Awakening to such a Self, there have been no instances in the West; hence the regional qualification "Oriental."[81]

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78 Ibid., 26.

79 In terms of Taylor's roadmap, Nishitani's three stages of nihilism can be likened to exclusive humanism (the first stage), critical strands of anti-humanism (the second stage), and affirmative strands of anti-humanism (the third stage). Nishitani himself uses Nietzsche's three metamorphoses of the spirit as stages that correspond to his three stages of nihilism: the spirit starts out as the camel (firmly ensconced in exclusive humanism), then transforms into the no-saying lion, and ultimately transforms into the affirmative child. Nishitani, *The Self-overcoming of Nihilism*, 79–99.

80 Sharf, *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism*. See also James W. Heisig & John C. Maraldo (eds.), *Rude Awakenings*: *Zen, the Kyoto School, and Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

81 Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, *Zen and the Fine Arts* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1971), 48. See Sharf, *The Zen of Japanese Nationalism*, 31f.

The Kyoto School thinkers presented the Zen tradition as a medicine for a Western culture that was so rationalistic and so infected by subject-object dualism (so caught within the immanent frame) that all Westerners are spiritually immature. However, as Loy remarks in a discussion of this topic, the problem could also be on the other side: that a supposedly universal experience has in fact come to be defined primarily in Japanese terms.[82]

Kasulis points out an interesting contrast (intentionally overdrawn) between on one hand the thinking of Suzuki, Hisamatsu and Abe, who wrote primarily for a Western audience, and on the other hand the thinking of Nishitani, Watsuji and Tanabe, who wrote primarily for a Japanese audience. The first group of thinkers emphasized the immediate and mystical experience of *śūnyatā* (*satori*) as a precondition for philosophical thinking on transcendence. Rather than locate *satori* within the everyday, they had to show their Western audience that it was *beyond* the everyday, but in a non-Western, non-Christian way. Nishitani, however, tended to avoid references to the *satori* experience as a foundation for his philosophy. For him, *satori* was something to be explained philosophically, not something that explains (away) the problems of philosophy. For a Japanese audience, the reality and importance of the experience of *śūnyatā* was not in question. The challenge was, rather, to find ways in which this experience could enrich Western philosophy with new and useful categories.[83]

For Loy, his new story that goes beyond disenchantment-enchantment and immanence-transcendence is connected with modern Western science. For Loy, *śūnyatā* is a metaphor for the irreducible dynamic creativity of the cosmos, the incessant self-organizing creativity that produces all things.[84] In that sense, he attempts to go "beyond East and West" rather than fully staying within the West like Batchelor. More fully than Batchelor's project, Loy's critical-constructive project addresses the Zen cross pressures that I discussed in Chapter 3:

(1) the cross pressures between immanence and transcendence, between disenchantment and re-enchantment;
(2) the cross pressures between fullness within and beyond ordinary human flourishing;
(3) the cross pressures between closed forms of Zen practice and open forms such as bodhisattva practice.

82 David R. Loy, "Is Zen Buddhism?," *The Eastern Buddhist* Vol. 28 no. 2 (1995): 273–286, here 285.

83 Kasulis, *Masao Abe as D.T. Suzuki's Philosophical Successor*, 256ff.

84 NBP, 89f.

Loy remains in Taylor's second camp: he attempts to reimagine transcendence, and to go beyond the transcendence-immanence distinction. Compared to Batchelor, who attempts to cut out all ontological transcendence in Buddhism, I find this a more fruitful approach to reimagining Zen that leaves room for the bodhisattva path.

However, what I find lacking in Loy are the specific practices that will help us to engage such a reimagined transcendence. These are to be found in the historical Buddhist traditions, in ritual, liturgy, and other forms of embodied practice. In Chapter 10 I will attempt to extend Loy's philosophical work into the realm of Buddhist practice by focusing on resources from Dōgen's practice-based approach.

CHAPTER 10

# Engaging Dōgen's Zen

After having discussed the proposals by Batchelor and Loy for a new reimagining of Zen for our secular age, I now want to put forward my own proposal. For me as a Zen philosopher and Zen theologian, reimagining Zen is an important matter in which I want to voice a normative standpoint. I agree with David Loy that neither the new secular imaginings of Zen nor the traditional Buddhist notions of transcendence (seen through the lens of the immanent frame) are what the future of Zen in the West will hold. In this chapter, I want to present a reimagining of Zen beyond the boundaries of the immanent frame.

As Erik Braun notes in a recent article about the popularity of traditional jhana meditation practices in the US, Buddhism can also be reimagined in ways that make it appear to go "back" towards traditional Buddhism, as much as "forward" in terms of continuing modernization.[1] In this chapter, I want to argue for such a reimagining of Zen that both goes back towards traditional Zen, and forward towards modernization. Throughout this book, I have used resources from the Sōtō Zen tradition that is connected with Dōgen. I now want to use these resources to find new ways of engaging Dōgen's Zen in a secular age.

In this chapter I want to argue against the prominent Zen modernist imagination of Zen as some kind of universal spirituality that leads to the realization of a universal pure experience that is somehow beyond language. In this, I agree with both Batchelor and Loy. However, unlike Batchelor I don't advocate going beyond Buddhism, but rather to go from a universal, "pure" Zen to a more Buddhist Zen. Similar to Loy, I think that to reimagine Zen in a secular age, we need to make more use of the Buddhist resources in the historical Zen traditions. However, I want to extend Loy's philosophical use of Buddhist resources in a more practice-based direction. My aim in this is to go beyond Taylor's view of fullness as transcendence in opposition to immanence, beyond his view of disenchantment as an irreversible reality in our secular age, beyond the Cartesian prison of the buffered self, and finally even to break out of the immanent frame altogether. In what follows, I want to revisit several threads from Chapters 4 through 7 and bring them together.

1 Braun, *The United States of* Jhana, 175. However, as Braun notes, the distinction between "traditional" and "modern" is not neutral: "The label 'traditional' is not a neutral term but a way to separate beliefs or practices seen as somehow poised for the future (and so 'modern') from those judged to be aligned with (and ultimately consigned to) the past." (ibid.).

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For many Zen modernists, Zen is primarily about decontextualized enlightenment. In my view, Zen is primarily about contextualized practice. This means that language is important, that embodiment and enchantment are important, that practice, ritual and liturgy are important, and, most of all, that the tradition of Buddhism is important. Buddhist scriptures, rituals and liturgies are not cultural ballast but an integral part of the Zen path. Therefore, with regard to the various approaches to religion that I have discussed in Part 2 (a cognitive-propositional approach that views beliefs as essential, an experiential-expressive approach that views experience as essential, and a cultural-linguistic approach that views religious traditions as sets of culturally determined practices), my own approach to religion is the cultural-linguistic approach. I view Zen as a collection of individual and collective practices that are always mediated by their Mahāyāna Buddhist cultural and historical context. In Chapters 4 through 7 of this book, I have been arguing that Dōgen Zen contains much resources for such a Buddhist reimagining of Zen in our current secular age.

In this chapter, I want to pull together the threads of these four chapters in order to make a reasoned case for an "inclusive" Zen spirituality based on resources from Dōgen's work. I will first revisit the reimaginings just mentioned that were at stake in Chapters 4 through 7, and expand them further based on Dōgen's work. After having elaborated these four themes I will discuss, as a case study, a contemporary attempt to engage Dōgen Zen for our secular age: the English translation of Dōgen's *Shushōgi,* a nineteenth-century Japanese primer of his *Shōbōgenzō*.[2]

## 1 Back to Buddhist Scriptures

In Chapter 4 I discussed how Zen claims to universality, and Zen imaginings as a universal mysticism that is somehow beyond language, have clashed with the "linguistic turn" in academic circles that stresses the inevitable role of language. I introduced Dōgen's mystical hermeneutics there as an approach to Zen that does include language, and is therefore more in tune with the linguistic turn. I now want to engage further with Dōgen's mystical hermeneutics that I discussed in Chapter 4.[3] For me, Zen practice is mystical in that it opens one up to the direct transmission of the inexpressible and the inconceivable by

2 Wirth, Schroeder & Davis, *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*.

3 I have made extensive use of the reflections on Dōgen's mysticism in William Harmless, S.J., *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

immersing oneself in silence. However, Zen is not only about silence and direct transmission, language is also important.

The imagining of Zen as mysticism is related to a popular interpretation of the slogan that we encountered in Chapter 1, that Zen is a "special transmission outside the scriptures / without reliance on words and letters." In Chapter 4 I discussed popular Western imaginings of Zen that conclude from this slogan that Zen needs no scriptures, that it is independent of them, that Zen is ultimately about wordlessness.

Dōgen both agreed and disagreed with this traditional slogan. He agreed that there had been a "special transmission," that the Buddha dharma had been passed on for centuries from master to disciple.[4] His *Shōbōgenzō* literally translates as "The Treasury House of the True Dharma Eye." This title alludes to the Buddha's first transmission. Holding up a flower, the Buddha blinked and Mahākāśyapa smiled. The Buddha responded, "I possess the true Dharma eye, the marvelous mind of nirvana, the true form of the formless, the subtle Dharma gate that does not rest on words or letters but is a special transmission outside of the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahākāśyapa."[5]

Still, Dōgen insisted that although this special transmission may have been "outside the scriptures," that did not mean that it was contrary to the scriptures, nor was it ignorant of them. Quite the opposite. He insisted that the transmission signified a "oneness of Zen and scriptures" (*kyōzen itchi*). Scriptural formulations pervaded his writings. In his essay *Bukkyō* [Buddha Sutras], Dōgen defends the importance of the three vehicles and twelve divisions of the teaching and in essence defends the entire Buddha Dharma canon.[6]

In his essay *Kattō* [Entangling Vines], Dōgen argues that, although words can entangle practitioners, they can also liberate. The Buddha himself had used the entanglements of words to liberate:

> Generally, although all Buddhist sages in their training study how to cut off entanglements at their root, they do not study how to cut off entanglements by using entanglements. They do not realize that entanglements entangle entanglements. How little do they know what it is to transmit entanglements in terms of entanglements. How rarely do they realize that the transmission of the Dharma is itself an entanglement.[7]

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4 See Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Menjū* [Mind-to-Mind Transmission].

5 Quoted in Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History, vol. 1: India and China*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 9.

6 Tetsuzen Jason M. Wirth, "Introduction," in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 1–11, citation on 9.

7 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Kattō* [Entangling Vines]; translation Heine, *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition*, 244.

In Chapter 1, I described two Zen imaginings in China in the tenth century. The followers of Linji stressed that Zen was beyond words and letters, and the followers of Fayan stressed that Chan was a Buddhist tradition, and that Buddhist scriptures and doctrines could be used as a form of upaya. Zen modernism has so for followed the Linji faction. I think it is time to return to Fayan.

## 2 An Enchanted Zen

In Chapter 5, I discussed Cartesian mind-body dualism and excarnation, and how these developments supported imaginings of the Zen experience as being somehow "in the mind." I also argued that for Dōgen, Zen practice and enlightenment do not only take place in the mind, but also and especially in the body, not only in the human body but ultimately in the cosmic body. In this way, Cartesian mind-body dualism is superseded in Dōgen's view. The challenge is to reimagine Zen experience from a "pure experience" to an endlessly unfolding embodied nondual seeing, in order to go beyond the buffered self and disenchantment. I want to go beyond the imagining of Zen fullness as some kind of breakthrough "pure experience" that is beyond ordinary human flourishing. Zazen should not be imagined as a technique aimed towards realizing any kind of special experience of some Absolute that would somehow liberate us from the conundrums of ordinary life, but an ongoing practice in the midst of ordinary life. Yet, this is not a secular practice but an enchanted one, aimed towards resonating with the meaning that is co-created with the cosmos, according to the Mahāyāna Buddhist worldview that I have discussed in this book.

The challenge is therefore to find a way to go beyond disenchantment. To repeat, disenchantment in Taylor's sense means not only that no supernatural entities are believed to exist, but also and especially that meaning is located "in the mind" rather than "out there" in the cosmos. Such a disenchantment presupposes both a body-mind dualism and a mind-world dualism. Dōgen denies such dualisms. Awakening is awakening to the nondual person ("body-mind") or even nonperson (the cosmic body). We move into a new world that was always there: the original interconnectedness of self-and-others-and-world.

Such an awakening refers to an utterly new, nondual way of seeing, thinking, feeling, acting and being. It shatters illusory distinctions between self and others and world. However, for Dōgen such a Zen awakening is not about experiencing some transcendental eternal Absolute. In this sense, he would agree with Stephen Batchelor's criticism of unwarranted Buddhist metaphysics. For Dōgen, such enlightenment is not a static final resting place, but an embodied nondual seeing and performing that endlessly unfolds. Therefore, rather than

present a new version of "the Zen experience" as a new attempt at radical transcendence, or a new conception of religious experience, Dōgen's thought can serve to overcome the implicit dichotomies in Western modes of thought between inner and outer, mind and body, and the individual and the world.

## 3 Zen Fullness as Ongoing Practice-Realization

In Chapter 6, I argued that Zen imaginings in accordance with the therapeutic turn tend to view Zen enlightenment as the result of the ongoing instrumental practice of zazen, aimed at fullness in the sense of healing (fullness within ordinary human flourishing), for example through a reaffirmation of ordinary life, rather than a radical conversion beyond ordinary human flourishing. I put forward Dōgen's rejection of an instrumental approach to zazen. In this way, Zen enlightenment is reimagined from being the result of practice to being intimately connected with practice, as evidenced in Dōgen's notion of practice-realization.

Although I mentioned in Chapter 6 that traditionally, instrumental *Bompu* Zen is also a legitimate form of Zen practice, I want to argue here that Zen practice should not be instrumentalized as a technique for acquiring a state of enlightenment. Rather, I want to reimagine ongoing Zen practice as a continuous expression, embodiment and performance of original enlightenment. Zen should not primarily be practiced for personal benefit but as part of the bodhisattva path, as an expression of the wish to liberate all sentient beings.

In Chapter 3 we discussed the Zen cross pressure between fullness within ordinary human flourishing, and fullness beyond it. For Dōgen, Zen fullness is on the one hand clearly beyond ordinary human flourishing. Dōgen was firmly rooted in the "sudden enlightenment" tradition of Zen.[8] He often cited classic stories of sudden awakenings such that of Xiāngyan Zhixian (c. 820–898), who experienced enlightenment after hearing a pebble strike bamboo, or of Lingyun Zhiqin (ninth century), who awakened after seeing peach blossoms. However, for Dōgen, such awakenings are always intimately connected with ongoing practice-realization. In his essay *Zuimonki* [Record of Things Heard], Dōgen alluded to both stories and teased out links between practice, enlightenment, and the everyday.

> Look. There was one who was enlightened with the sound of a bamboo being struck and another who clarified his mind upon seeing peach

8 What follows is more fully explicated in Harmless, *Mystics,* 209f.

> blossoms. [...] Although flowers blossom year after year, not everyone who sees them is enlightened. When a bamboo cracks, not everyone who hears it realizes the way. Enlightenment and clarity of mind occur only in response to the sustained effort of study and practice. [...] You attain the way when conditions come together [...] A stone is turned to a jewel by polishing. A person becomes a sage by cultivation. What stone is originally shiny? Who is mature from the beginning? You ought to polish and cultivate yourself.[9]

What Dōgen means by cultivating yourself is practicing zazen. Zazen is practice-realization. It does not send one off into some otherworldly realm. It moves one into the mundane. It gives one eyes to see the everyday world as it is—as sacred. As he puts it in his essay *Gyōji* [Continuous Practice]: "Do not wait for great enlightenment, as great enlightenment is the tea and rice of daily activity."[10]

Dōgen's rejection of the opposition between fullness within and beyond ordinary human flourishing, and his imagining of fullness as being just as much within ordinary human flourishing as beyond it may serve as a helpful antidote to Western approaches to fullness, and may also illuminate certain materialist and consumerist orientations to spirituality (fullness as a religious experience or a condition of self-actualization to be attained). The very distinction itself between spiritual practice and fullness is radically problematized by Dōgen.

## 4 From Individual Pure Zen to Communal Bodhisattva Zen

In Chapter 7, I argued that current imaginings of Zen as a form of global spirituality emphasize the individual aspects of Zen practice, and leave out collective and communal aspects. I also argued that Dōgen's approach does include those collective and communal aspects, including such traditional aspects as ritual and liturgy. In this way, pure Zen as a global individual spirituality is reimagined as Buddhist Zen. I want to reimagine Zen practice not as an individual track to personal development but as collective bodhisattva work.

For Dōgen, Zen is always Buddhist Zen. On the one hand, Dōgen was very critical of sectarian approaches to Zen. In his essay *Butsudō* [The Buddha Way] he wrote that those who speak of Zen as a school or sect (*shū*) are devils,

9 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Zuimonki* [Record of Things Heard] quoted in Kazuaka Tanahashi (ed.), *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dōgen* (Boston, Shambhala, 1999), 56.

10 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Gyōji* [Continuous Practice], quoted in ibid., 127.

demons who violate the Buddha Way, and enemies who are not welcomed by Buddhas and ancestors.[11]

On the other hand, the claim that Zen is a kind of global individual spirituality, divorced from the Buddhist tradition, does not fit with Dōgen's thought. Tradition was important to him. As we already discussed, Dōgen deeply valued the liberating entanglements of words. We have also seen that for Dōgen, the enchanted Mahāyāna Buddhist world view is crucial to Zen practice-realization. And his enactment ritual approach to zazen deeply values Buddhist ritual and liturgy.

Another aspect of the Buddhist context of Zen is community. For Dōgen, community is an important part of the Zen life. Zen awakening passes from generation to generation in community. Zen experiences are not private affairs. They are dialogical, even communal. Disciples learn from masters. And Zen texts should be seen as liturgical performances. In Dōgen's writings, the words of the Zen masters are enacted, delivered, performed, in the context of communal events. For Dōgen, Zen texts, like musical scores or scripts of plays, presuppose live performance. And Zen practice takes place in the context of what religion scholar William Harmless calls a "mystical community," a "religious community that self-consciously commits its members and its communal resources to religious perfection."[12] Dōgen devoted much care in his later years to crafting monastic legislation as a framework for cultivating such a mystical community.

However, for Dōgen, Zen practice does not only take place in horizontal community but also in vertical community. For Dōgen, zazen is not an individual form of self-cultivation, but a cosmic practice that is undertaken together with the buddhas and bodhisattvas that permeate reality according to the enchanted Mahāyāna Buddhist world view. In his essay *Bendōwa* [Negotiating the Way], Dōgen notes:

> When just one person does zazen even one time, he becomes, imperceptibly, one with each and all of the myriad things and permeates completely all time, so that within the limitless universe, throughout past, future and present, he is performing the eternal and ceaseless work of guiding beings to enlightenment. It is, for each and every thing, one and the same undifferentiated practice, one and the same undifferentiated realization.[13]

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11 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Butsudō* [The Buddha Way].

12 Harmless, *Mystics*, 238.

13 Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō, Bendōwa* [Negotiating the Way], in Waddell and Abe, *The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*, 13f.

After having pulled together the threads of Chapters 4 through 7, I now want to move on to a case study of contemporary Dōgen Zen in the West.

## 5 Dōgen's *Shushōgi*

As I mentioned at the end of Chapter 1, Dōgen's work has increasingly been studied since the Seventies of the last century. Initially he was especially engaged as a Buddhist philosopher, but recently more "theological" approaches to Dōgen and his relevance for today have appeared. For example, several American scholar-practitioners of Dōgen Zen around the Eishōji Sōtō Zen training facility in Seattle, Washington have recently published an English translation and commentary of the *Shushōgi* (The Meaning of Practice-Realization), a primer of Dōgen's work that first appeared in Japan in 1890.[14] *Shushōgi* encapsulates some of Dōgen's key teachings. It essentially consists of highly selective interwoven passages selected from Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*. Interestingly enough, the text does not mention zazen practice at all. From a Zen modernist point of view, this would render the text completely uninteresting, and not representative of Dōgen's thought at all. Therefore, the fact that this text now has been translated into English is an indication of the shifting tides with regard to Zen modernism. In what follows I will look at the contemporary commentaries on sections in the text that are organized around the traditional Buddhist notions of "repenting and eliminating bad karma," "receiving precepts and joining the ranks," "making the vow to benefit beings," and "practicing Buddhism and repaying blessings."

### 5.1 *Repenting and Eliminating Bad Karma*

Karma tends to be less often discussed in Western forms of Zen modernism. And in Chapter 8, we have seen that Batchelor wants to abolish all talk of karma altogether in Western imaginations of Buddhism. For Dōgen, however, karma is something we cannot avoid. Everything generates karma. In the *Shushōgi* he says:

> 5. The karmic consequences of good and evil occur at three different times. The first is retribution experienced in our present life; the second is retribution experienced in the life following this one; and the third is retribution in subsequent lives. In practicing the way of the buddhas and

14 Wirth, Schroeder & Davis, *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*.

> ancestors, from the start we should study and clarify the principle of karmic retribution in these three times. Otherwise, we will often make mistakes and fall into false views. Not only will we fall into false views, we will fall into evil births and undergo long periods of suffering.[15]

However, Brian Schroeder emphasizes that for Dōgen, we should not essentialize karma, reduce it to a fixed status or understand it as fundamentally unchanging in its expression:

> Turning either karma or self into any form of "essence" necessarily results in positing a dualism on the metaphysical (for example, soul/body), ontological (agent/action), and epistemological (knower/known) levels.[16]

Schroeder adds that karma is a problem only if one construes karma as something that obstructs the realization of *nirvāna*. Steven DeCaroli remarks in a commentary of the *Shushōgi* section on karma and repentance that karma is often misunderstood:

> The meaning of karma has often been misconstrued, especially in the West where it is used colloquially as a synonym for fate or providential justice. Within the Buddhist context, karma, which literally means volitional action or deed, has nothing to do with either reward or punishment, but is rather an expression of the ego.[17]

The fact that karma is an expression of ego leads to it often being obscured, according to Dōgen, says DeCaroli:

> Ordinarily we are not aware of karma. While we are certainly aware of physical cause and effect relationships, we are largely blind to the cognitive side of causality, which stems from our self-conception [...] The primary effect of karma is the construction of the self in all its obviousness, which in being obvious makes karma disappear from our awareness. The obviousness of the self is, therefore, inversely proportional to the obviousness of karma. The more we experience life from an ego-centered

15 *Shushōgi* 5, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 70.

16 Brian Schroeder, "Practice-Realization: Dōgen Zen and Original Awakening," in: *Engaging Dōgen Zen*, 37–51, citation on 41.

17 Steven DeCaroli, "Shushōgi Paragraphs 5–6," in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 97–101, citation on 99.

> point of view […] the further away we stray from grasping karmic causality.[…] Being ignorant of the nature of causality, we fail to see how our own actions and perceptions form behavioral pathways, which profoundly affect our future actions.[18]

The more one experiences life from an ego-centered point of view, the more karma tends to be obscured, Dōgen says, according to DeCaroli:

> The more we attempt to make sense of our experiences in terms of the ego, the deeper we plant the illusion of the self. This circle of intentional action, whereby the ego differentiates itself from the very world it strives to make sense of, is karma—a form of cognitive causality together with the habits of behavior and awareness it creates and perpetuates.[19]

In terms of Taylor, karma is what creates and strengthens the illusion of the buffered self:

> Karma, then, is the name given to a self-generated pattern of actions that establish an inside, which manifests an outside in relation to which we are normatively related. The coemergence of inside and outside, and the dualism this manifests, is the root of karma. […] On the one hand, we posit a fixed external world, while on the other, we take for granted a permanent self. This cognitive structure effectively serves to generate the boundary conditions of the ego. […] What the ego is, is precisely this projected appearance of permanence, the causal effects of which are karma.[20]

Awakening does not put an end to karma, but puts an end to locating karma outside of oneself, as it puts an end to the opposition between the internal mind and the external world:

> When the mind wanders beyond itself, discriminating between an internal ego and an external world, it erroneously locates karma outside of itself as well, and in doing so fashions the notions of transmigration and rebirth, which are simply metaphors for the wandering mind itself.[21]

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18 Ibid., 99f.
19 Ibid., 100.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 101.

The *Shushōgi* contains several passages that link karma with repentance:

> 7. [...] Although karmic retribution for evil acts must come in one of the three times, repentance lessens the effects, or eliminates the bad karma and brings about purification.[22]
>
> 8. Therefore, we should repent before buddha in all sincerity. The power of the merit that results from repenting in this way before buddha saves and purifies us. This merit encourages the growth of unobstructed faith and effort.[23]
>
> 10. "All my past and harmful karma, born from beginningless greed, hate, and delusion, through body, speech and mind, I now fully avow." If we repent in this way, we will certainly receive the mysterious guidance of the buddhas and ancestors. Keeping this in mind and acting in the appropriate manner, we should openly confess before the buddha. The power of this confession will cut the roots of our bad karma.[24]

Such passages may seem surprising since repentance seems to be such a non-Buddhist notion. Steven Heine has speculated that including these passages in the *Shushōgi* represents more of an attempt to compete with Christianity than to present the gist of Dōgen's own thought and practice.[25] However, for Dōgen, the Buddhist meaning of repentance is quite different from Christian perspectives that see repentance as a form of contrition for past sins. The Buddhist notion of repentance is often thought to refer to the notion that negative karma can be eliminated through acts of contrition. However, in Dōgen's perspective, "repentance must be understood not as an act of contrition but as the first honest glimpse of ourselves as the source of karma."[26] Also, as Steve Bein emphasizes, for Dōgen, there is no such thing as eliminating bad karma:

> Dōgen is not talking about eliminating bad karma. He speaks only of disentangling ourselves from its effects long enough to properly study and practice the Way. In effect, bad karma from the past is a disturbance to present meditation, something like having the radio on when one

22 *Shushōgi* 7, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 71.
23 *Shushōgi* 8, in: Ibid.
24 *Shushōgi* 10, in: Ibid. 71f.
25 Steven Heine, "Abbreviation or Aberration: The Role of the *Shushōgi* in Modern Sōtō Zen Buddhism," in: *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, eds. Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 169–192.
26 Ibid.

> requires peace and quiet, and here Dōgen says the function of repentance is to turn down the radio, that is, to silence the disturbance long enough that we can study and practice the Way.[27]

As with the notion of karma, also with the notion of repentance, Buddhist modernist misconstructions are being corrected. Dōgen Zen does not conceive of repentance in the Christian sense of contrition for past sins. Bad karma is not the same thing as sin. By repentance, one admits and embraces one's past wrongs. In that way, one can get free of them long enough to practice the Way. Rather than an act of contrition for real past wrongs, repentance is a meditation aid.[28]

### 5.2 *Receiving Precepts and Joining the Ranks*

In Chapter 6 we have discussed various forms of Zen belonging in our secular age. For Dōgen, Buddhist belonging is an important part of Zen practice, not an optional extra. This is why he stresses the importance of respect for the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha:

> 11. Next, we should pay profound respects to the three treasures of buddha, dharma and Sangha. We should vow to make offerings and pay respects to the three treasures even in future lives and bodies. This reverent veneration of buddha, dharma, and sangha is what the buddhas and ancestors in both India and China correctly transmitted.[29]

John Maraldo comments on the *Shushōgi* sections on taking refuge.[30] As we have seen, for Dōgen, Zen practice is not a solitary endeavor, it is "the practice of the buddhas." This is why Dōgen also stresses taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. On a superficial level, taking refuge supports the efforts of the individual practitioner. On an ideal level, awakening is not the achievement of the individual at all, but the work of Buddha-Dharma-Sangha actualizing itself.[31] These Three Treasures are not objects outside of us, handed down from the past, neither are they resources within us that can be triggered or activated. Rather, they "present themselves when a certain communion,

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27 Steve Bein, "*Shushōgi* Paragraphs 7–10," in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 107–111, citation on 109f.
28 Ibid., 111.
29 *Shushōgi* 11, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 72.
30 John C. Maraldo, "*Shushōgi* Paragraphs 11–14," in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen,* 115–120.
31 Ibid., 117.

communication, or connection is realized among those who practice the Way, and the act of veneration fosters this realization."[32] The three treasures name a communal reality. They embody enlightenment, which then is not reduced to a psychological state within the individual. Taking refuge can invoke the power of a spiritual connection with all beings as they realize Buddhahood.

Part of the ceremony of taking refuge is the taking of the Buddhist precepts. For Dōgen, this is crucially important:

> 15. Next we should receive the three sets of pure precepts: the precepts of restraining behavior, the precepts of doing good, and the precepts of benefiting living beings. We should then accept the ten grave prohibitions.[33]

In some forms of Zen modernism, the value of ritually taking up the Buddhist precepts for an awakened life is questioned, because the precepts are sometimes taken up conventionally by premodern traditionalists in a moralizing and fundamentalist mode. Michael Schwartz stresses, in his commentary on this section, that Buddhist precepts should not only be seen as individual ethical rules that can combat narcissism and egoistic inflation in order to support the quest for enlightenment, but also in a more mature way as embodiments of ongoing practice-realization itself.[34] For Dōgen, receiving the precepts is verifying one's original enlightenment:

> 16. Those who receive the precepts verify the unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment verified by all the buddhas of the three times, the fruit of Buddhahood, adamantine and indestructible. [...] The World-Honored One has clearly shown to all living beings that when they receive the buddha's precepts, they join the ranks of the buddhas, the rank equal to the great awakening; truly they are the children of the buddhas.[35]

Taking up the precepts should not only be interpreted in an instrumental way (although they do orient the Zen practitioner toward awakening by releasing the reified sense of the buffered self as something solid and concrete). They are

32 Ibid.
33 *Shushōgi* 15, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 73.
34 Michael Schwartz, "*Shushōgi* Paragraphs 15–17," in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen,* 121–126.
35 *Shushōgi* 16, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 73.

also part of awakening itself. They are a description of true bodhisattva conduct. For example, the statement "a gentleman does not take advantage of women" is not a conventional moral code for gentlemen, but should rather be taken as a description of what a true gentleman's character is like.

### 5.3 *Making the Vow to Benefit Beings*

In Chapter 7 I have argued against an individualized Zen practice, in favor of a more communal form of Zen bodhisattva practice. The bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings is crucial for Dōgen:

> 18. To arouse the thought of enlightenment is to vow to save all beings before saving ourselves. Whether lay person or monk, whether a deva or a human, whether suffering or at ease, we should quickly form the intention of first saving others before saving ourselves.[36]

Jason Wirth comments on the sections on *bodhicitta* (the thought of enlightenment) and the bodhisattva vow (the vow to save all beings before saving ourselves):

> For Dōgen, *bodhicitta* is the awakening of the great earth already as the awakening of the aspiration to practice. It is not the awakening of the desire to achieve something for oneself, to gain something new, because it is already the casting and falling away of body and mind, the forgetting of the self. [...] The aspiration to awaken oneself first so that one can subsequently awaken others is the counsel of demons and fraudulent teachers.[37]

For Dōgen, the aspiration to awaken and awakening as such are not separable.

> In awakening to the desire to awaken one is already awake. One is awakening to the ongoing practice of awakening. It is only a matter of speaking that we say that full awakening issues from the awakening of the desire to awaken, as if this were a temporal succession of two separate states.[38]

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36 *Shushōgi* 18, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 74.

37 Tetsuzen Jason M. Wirth, "*Shushōgi* Paragraphs 18–20," in *Engaging Dōgen's Zen* 130–144, citation on 131.

38 Ibid., 132f.

The bodhisattva vow is not something that must be taken once, but should be practiced continuously. Dōgen describes four kinds of wisdom that embody the bodhisattva vow:

> 21. There are four kinds of wisdom that benefit living beings: giving, kind speech, beneficial deeds, and cooperation. These are the practices of the vow of the bodhisattva.[39]

The practice of giving is connected with sharing the merit of one's bodhisattva path. The Buddhist concept of "merit" is a challenging notion for many Westerners. As T. Griffith Foulk has remarked, for most secular Westerners, "the underlying assumption is that "merit" is a magical, superstitious, or at best symbolic kind of thing that no rational, scientifically minded person could take seriously as actually existing."[40]

Such merit practices can lead secular Western Zen practitioners to experience strong Zen cross pressures in the immanent frame. American Zen teacher Philip Kapleau recorded in his diary his shock at seeing Japanese monks chanting and bowing before statues of the Buddha:

> What a weird scene of refined sorcery and idolatry: shaven-headed black-robed monks sitting motionlessly chanting mystic gibberish to the accompaniment of a huge wooden tom-tom emitting otherworldly sounds, while the roshi, like some elegantly gowned witch-doctor is making magic passes and prostrating himself again and again before an altar bristling with idols and images.[41]

The attitude cultivated through merit-transfer rituals is the spirit of generosity in which all charity must be carried out. For Dōgen, the act of giving should not be thought of simply as transferring something that one owns oneself to someone else.[42] Ownership has nothing to do with the act of giving. This view is aimed directly at the calculating mind that can only imagine gifts as justified according to the everyday economics of ownership and exchange. Freeing the

39 *Shushōgi* 21, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 74.

40 Foulk, *Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism*, 64.

41 Kapleau, *Three Pillars of Zen,* 211. This quote is obviously very questionable due to its exoticization of Asian Buddhism and its racist and orientalist tendencies.

42 Leah Kalmanson, "*Shushōgi* Paragraph 21," in *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 145–150, citation on 148.

self from the delusion of ownership is in itself the act of giving. As Leah Kalmanson puts it:

> If there is no "self," then who is compassionate, who gives compassionately to others, and to whom are such gifts given? The act of giving does indeed draw lines from self to other whose causal effectiveness can be felt concretely. […] Dōgen does not speak of the merit that accords to giving in terms of overcoming the duality of self and other; rather, he seems to suggest that this merit has to do with redrawing the boundary of self and other on more compassionate lines. Generosity is our most powerful tool for bringing these lines into focus.[43]

As Kalmanson notes, Zen centers in the West are increasingly incorporating Buddhist merit rituals into their regular activities.

In the section *Practicing Buddhism and Repaying Blessings,* Dōgen stresses the importance of expressing gratitude to the Buddha and to Buddhist teachers. In order to repay the benevolence and blessings that the practitioner receives, there is a need to give back to others:

> 28. That we are now able to see the buddha and hear the dharma is due to the blessings that have come to us through the practice of every one of the buddhas and ancestors. If the buddhas and ancestors had not directly transmitted the dharma, how could it have reached us today? We should be grateful for the blessings of even a single phrase; we should be grateful for the blessings of even a single dharma. How much more should we be grateful for the great blessings of the treasury of the eye of the true dharma, the supreme great dharma.[44]

However, such gratitude and giving back to others is not a merely ceremonial matter for Dōgen, but takes the form of dedicating oneself to ongoing practice-realization:

> 29. Our expression of gratitude should not consist in any other practices; the truth path of such expression lies solely in our daily practice of Buddhism.[45]

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43 Ibid., 149.

44 *Shushōgi* 28, in: *Engaging Dōgen's Zen*, 76.

45 *Shushōgi* 29, in: Ibid.

## 6 Discussion

In this chapter, I have considered elements from Dōgen's approach to Zen that suggest that language, embodiment, affirmation of ordinary life and communal practice can be fruitful elements in a contemporary reimagining of Zen, with a more inclusive non-Cartesian notion of Zen fullness. For Dōgen, meaning is not just located in the mind of the buffered self—the Cartesian buffered self is itself called into question.

The Western form of Dōgen Zen presented in this chapter can be seen as part of a Buddhist theological strategy of retraditionalization, as a response to the perceived inconsistencies of Buddhist modernism that involves remaining true to (or going back to) the Buddhist roots. McMahan has called attention to this process of retraditionalization:

> We see across the globe a number of movements attempting to reappropriate tradition, to cast off some of the staples of Buddhist modernism, and to reassert more conventional views of the dharma. Such "returns" are themselves products of modernity: they reconstruct tradition in response to some of modernity's dominant themes, attempting to imagine their opposites in the ancient past.[46]

This strategy of retraditionalization should not be equated with of one of the discourses in Taylor's three-way roadmap, that of the "believers in transcendence." Western adepts of Dōgen Zen break out of the immanent frame altogether and reject Western materialism, Cartesianism, and rationalism. They consider the buffered self to be a mistake that should be undone by the Zen practice of no-self and interdependence.

The question remains whether such a Dōgen Zen is actually capable of offering a new access to fullness for modern Westerners. As Taylor notes, "there is a condition of lived experience, where what we might call a construal of the moral/spiritual is lived not as such, but as immediate reality, like stones, rivers and mountains."[47] It is perhaps precisely indicative of the process of secularization that such direct experiences of fullness, such forms of "naïve" immediate certainty have become very difficult in our age. Although some would argue that Dōgen's perspective on fullness as the embodiment of universal buddhahood could help to re-establish such a condition of immediate certainty,

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46 McMahan, *The Making of Modern Buddhism*, 246.
47 Ibid., 12.

various objections could be raised. Isn't Dōgen's universal buddhahood simply another version of a premodern, outdated Western cosmos? And how could it be possible for us moderns to return to a pre-modern direct apprehension of an enchanted universe?

However, Dōgen's notion of universal buddhahood is not simply a return to a premodern naïve framework, leaving behind our modern reflective framework. For Dōgen, the way we construct our experience in thinking and language is not excluded from universal buddhahood—the latter is not a metaphysical notion of some transcendent supreme Being, but rather describes an ongoing activity that is intrinsic to the temporality of all phenomena.[48] However, universal Buddhahood also differs from Western notions of immanence, for example the notion of an immanent order in nature that can be understood and explained on its own terms, regardless of the existence of a transcendent, supernatural creator beyond it.[49] Dōgen's view of nature differs substantially from our modern Western understanding of nature. As Ōkōchi notes, the Japanese notion of *shizen* (nature) does not refer to anything objective or objectified that takes place in front of or outside of human beings, but is rather an expression of the spontaneous way of being of all things. It was originally used in an adjectival or adverbial form—comparable to the Western notions of "naturally" or "by nature."[50] Harmless notes that Dōgen's mysticism is not the "nature mysticism" of nineteenth-century romantic poets or American transcendentalists, but a Buddha nature mysticism: all being and every being is impermanence-Buddha nature.[51]

## 7 The Future of Zen

In the last chapter of his *A Secular Age*, Taylor finally allows himself, after a whole book of painstakingly attempting to remain impartial and even-handed in his philosophical approach, some normative comments regarding the future

48 Kim notes that, although Dōgen could be described as a mystical realist (Kim, *Eihei Dōgen–Mystical Realist*), his mysticism is a far cry from Western and Eastern forms of apophatic mysticism where God, Dao, Brahman are said to be ineffable, only to be known by systematically negating language and thought. For Dōgen, the embodiment of universal buddhahood takes place precisely through language and thought (Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking*, 90).

49 SA, 15.

50 Ryōgi Ōkōchi, "Nietzsche's Conception of Nature from an East-Asian Point of View," in Parkes, *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, 200–213, citation on 204.

51 Harmless, *Mystics*, 222.

of religion. One future, one that is predicted by secularization theorists, sees religion shrinking further and further. However, Taylor notes,

> I foresee another future, based on another supposition. This is the opposite of the mainstream view. In our religious lives we are responding to a transcendent reality. We all have some sense of this, which emerges in our identifying and recognizing some mode of what I have called fullness, and seeking to attain it. Modes of fullness recognized by exclusive humanisms, and others that remain within the immanent frame, are therefore responding to transcendent reality, but misrecognizing it. They are shutting out crucial features of it.[52]

Such a renewed response to transcendence is also how Linda Heuman frames the predicament of Buddhism in the West:

> To be unaware that reality has moral and spiritual dimensions has always meant, as our texts tell us, that one is out of touch with how things are. To ignore reality's moral and spiritual imperatives has a consequence—continued suffering. Buddhist practice, in its traditional context, is to align oneself more and more deeply with the cosmic order. Transcendence occurs when that coming into alignment is complete. In this paradigm, transcendence isn't ruled out by the definition of the real. It is the definition of the real.[53]

Although I would not use the language of transcendence myself, I agree with Taylor and Heuman here. It is necessary to go beyond the immanent frame, rather than to remain within it and attempt to fit Zen within it. Just as Taylor mentions, the mainstream view seems to be that a progressing secularization of Zen in the West is the most likely option. Martin Baumann, for example, has argued that modernist Buddhism will be followed by postmodern Buddhism, in which post-Buddhist practitioners are secularizing and psychologizing Buddhist teachings and practices.[54] However, the trajectory of the development of

52 SA, 768. Taylor develops his ideas about "the future of the religious past" more fully in a later article: Charles Taylor, "The Future of the Religious Past," in: Hent de Vries (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 178–244.

53 Heuman, *What's at Stake*.

54 Martin Baumann, "Global Buddhism: Developmental Periods, Regional Histories, and a New Analytical Perspective," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 2 (2001): 1–43, here at 32.

Buddhism in a secular age is more complex than that. Continuing secularization is only one of a number of possibilities, as this chapter on retraditionalization has shown.

So what is the fate of Zen in the West? Will Zen turn into a disenchanted toolkit for contemplative fitness, or will there be more and more Zen bodhisattvas that practice an enchanted form of Zen? In *A Secular Age*, Taylor mentions "ratchet effects":[55] transitions in history in the aftermath of which people find it impossible, or even inconceivable, to return to the previously reigning outlook. For example, after Newtonian mechanics it was impossible to go back to the Aristotelian paradigm of science. It seems that Taylor considers disenchantment to be such a ratchet effect. As we have seen earlier, in his later article "disenchantment-reenchantment" he talks about not being able to go back to enchantment.[56]

In the final chapter of *A Secular Age*, called *Conversions*, Taylor considers "those who broke out of the immanent frame,"[57] those who inhabited the immanent frame with a "closed" take, but felt the cross-pressure of transcendence in such a way that they converted to an "open" take. For Taylor, this means that they converted (often reconverted) to Christianity. Taylor suggests that all such conversions are to some extent conversions back to a social imaginary that animated Europe in the past, a completely different social imaginary that was open to transcendence, and to a *telos* for human flourishing beyond ordinary human flourishing. He expects that "the dominant secularization narrative [...] will become *less* plausible over time," and that "many young people will begin again to explore beyond the boundaries."[58]

Such an exploration beyond the boundaries is just what Campbell has attempted to describe in his book *The Easternization of the West*. From Campbell's perspective, the basic oppositions that the immanent frame presumes (immanent and transcendent, disenchantment and re-enchantment, fullness within and beyond ordinary human flourishing, open and closed versions of the immanent frame; exclusive and inclusive discourses) no longer adequately reflect the realities of spiritual seekers in the West today, including Zen practitioners.

Perhaps it is time for new imaginings of Zen, new stories to be told. Perhaps in this way Linda Heuman's hope could come true:

55 SA, 273.
56 Taylor, *Disenchantment-Reenchantment*.
57 SA, 728.
58 Ibid., 770.

> At some moment it could hit us that the liberative possibilities spoken of in Buddhist texts may not be superstitious fairy tales. They may be real possibilities. For the first time it may seem plausible, indeed credible, that just as our form of human life gave rise to the material accomplishments toward which it directed its aspirations—skyscrapers and Internet technology and the like—so too might another form of human life, operating within different background assumptions, with different aspirations and *with an understanding of its own conventional nature*, be capable of giving rise to spiritual accomplishments like liberation and enlightenment.[59]

A famous Zen image is that of bodhisattva Guanyin with her thousand arms and hands, who can take any shape that is necessary and appropriate for any given context. Perhaps the future shape of Zen in (or beyond) the immanent frame will be determined by our given context in necessary and appropriate ways that we cannot even imagine yet at this moment. In our secular age, with its cross pressures within the immanent frame, no easy solutions are in sight. But perhaps a more inclusive Zen spirituality, that goes beyond the trappings of a Romantic Zen modernism, can help us, at the very least, to continue to stand "in that open space where you can feel the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief."[60]

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59 Heuman, *What's at Stake*.

60 SA, 549.

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# Index


Accommodation 28–30, 45, 64, 72–73, 88–89, 131
Advocacy 28–30, 45, 64, 72–73, 88–89, 131
Anti-humanist(s) 19–20, 61–63, 177, 197, 201, 206
Authenticity 17, 19, 89, 156, 158–160, 165, 169, 173, 176
Awakening 2, 31–32, 42, 75, 85–86, 110–111, 126–127, 176, 190–191, 195, 203–205, 214–217, 223–226, 229, 231–233

Batchelor, Stephen 19, 62n, 90n, 168, 175, 177, 181–196, 218–220, 223, 227
Belief(s) 1, 14–15, 33, 46–48, 51–54, 57–58, 60, 67, 71, 84, 90n, 96–98n, 128, 131, 164–166, 174, 176, 182, 185, 187–189, 192–193, 196, 207, 212, 220n, 221, 240
Bodhisattva 14, 21, 80, 81, 87, 123–124, 156, 172, 195, 226, 239, 240
  work 17, 225
  path 148, 177, 209, 214–216, 219, 224
  practice 86, 218, 233
  conduct 232
  vow 144, 177, 196, 200, 233–234
Body 122–123, 148–149
  and mind 66, 132–136, 210, 223–224, 228, 233
  cosmic 215, 223
  Buddha 81, 133, 135
Buddha 81, 82, 98n, 113, 117, 123, 150–151, 171–172, 183–185, 212, 222, 230–231, 235
Buddha nature 27–28, 31–32, 50–51, 76, 85, 110–111, 115n, 146–147, 172, 199, 237
Buddhahood 27, 32, 76, 82, 85, 129, 134, 135, 139, 148, 175, 232, 236–237
Buddhism 1–9, 30–37, 42–45, 50, 112–118, 143–144, 168, 173–177, 219–221, 235
  Early 26, 96, 144, 151, 183–184, 209
  Indian 25–30, 45, 52, 77
  in the West 75, 80, 95–102, 159, 163, 206–210, 216, 227, 235
  Mahāyāna 26–27, 50n, 80–82, 85, 151, 191, 199–201, 205, 209, 215, 216, 226
  New 37, 40, 42
  Secular 181–196
  Shingon 132
  Theravāda 7, 26, 40, 80, 82, 96, 98, 144, 181, 184
  Zen 129, 162, 169–170
Buddhist modernism 2–6, 44n, 123, 167, 176
  *See also* Zen modernism
Buddhist Zen 87, 158, 168–169, 174, 220, 225
Buffered self 56–57, 66, 73–75, 125, 130–131, 134–135, 159, 182, 195, 210, 211, 229, 236
Bush, Stephen 17, 89, 92, 99, 126

Chan 21, 26–37, 42, 44, 76n, 88, 223
Cognitive-propositional 90–91, 97, 98n, 174, 187, 193, 194, 221
Communal practice 19, 20, 45, 127, 158, 162, 171–175, 225–226, 232–233, 236
Conversion 19, 139–142, 153–154, 203, 204, 239
Cross pressures 15–19, 74–88, 123–125, 153, 173, 203, 218, 234, 240
Cultural-linguistic 91–92, 120, 126, 136, 174, 187, 193, 221

Disenchantment 53–56, 65–66, 78–82, 95, 120–125, 195, 218, 223, 239
Dōgen 39, 84, 110–112, 131–136, 138, 147–148, 152, 156, 171–176, 220–237

Embodiment 40, 121, 129, 130–136, 175–176, 199, 224, 232, 236, 237n
Emptiness 20, 30, 30n, 49, 50, 67, 100, 124, 191, 199, 200–203
Enchanted secular 87, 101, 161
Enlightenment (Buddhist) 8, 30–32, 36, 75–82, 101–106, 110–112, 125–136, 147–153, 171–172, 190–191, 209–212, 223–226, 232–233
  Original 36, 85n, 152, 224, 232
  Sudden 30–32, 37, 85n, 224
Enlightenment (Western) 51, 60, 61, 77, 78, 95, 100, 118, 121, 128, 143, 203
Exclusive humanism 53–56, 60–63, 142–145, 177, 182, 194–195, 207–208, 217n, 238
Experiential-expressive 90, 91, 99, 119, 120, 126, 136

Expressive individualism 17, 19, 89, 158–177

Fullness 49–52, 61, 64–65, 75–78, 140, 143, 175, 187, 198, 216, 218, 220, 236, 238
  Beyond ordinary human flourishing 54, 58, 62, 64–65, 82, 87, 142
  Within ordinary human flourishing 61, 139, 141, 146, 155, 189, 195
  Zen notions of 78, 136, 103, 136, 145–147, 156, 169, 174, 176, 198–201, 223, 224–225

Healing 19, 75, 79, 81, 112, 139, 140–142, 150–151, 154
Heidegger, Martin 11, 48n, 56, 66, 104, 127, 130, 138, 195, 201
Hermeneutical 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10–13, 34, 45, 92, 103, 108, 110–112, 156
Heuman, Linda 1, 2, 14n, 59, 67, 71, 75, 80–81, 86, 174–175, 176–177, 196, 238, 239–240
Hisamatsu, Shin'ichi 141, 203–205, 217, 218
Huineng 30–33, 76n, 88

Immanence 59, 60, 61, 65, 67, 73–75, 82–84, 88, 201, 204, 205, 209–210, 237
Immanent frame 57–60, 66–68, 70–71, 73, 82, 86, 141, 155, 170, 176, 188, 195, 216, 220, 236–240
Instrumentalization 140, 151–153, 154
Interconnectedness 82, 153, 223

Kabat-Zinn, Jon 7n, 41, 112–114, 117, 150, 154
Kant 51, 61, 77, 95, 121n
Karma 29, 90n, 98, 113, 171, 187–189, 227–231
Kim, Hee-Jin 39n, 106, 110–112, 237n
Koan 36–37, 84, 110–111, 152, 169, 199
Kyoto School 20, 38, 197–206, 216–218

Language 102–106, 116n, 126–128, 182–183
  beyond 32–35, 37
  of fullness 20n, 77, 197–198
  within 37, 110–112
Lindbeck, George 89–92, 97, 119, 120, 126, 187
Linji 34–37, 76n, 77n, 197, 223
Lopez, Donald 3, 4, 97n, 98n, 99, 117, 123, 174
Loy, David 82–83, 177, 206–216, 218–219, 220

McMahan, David 4, 8n, 87, 95, 97–99, 101, 117, 117n, 121, 124, 161, 236

Medicalization 148–151, 154
Meditation 28, 30–32, 38, 101, 112–114, 129, 134–136, 145–146, 151, 152–153, 170–172, 220
Merit 171, 230, 234–235
Mindfulness 40–41, 41n, 82, 88, 112, 117, 141, 145–146, 148–149, 153–154, 155–156, 182, 210
Movement 7n, 117, 124, 149, 154, 181–182, 195, 210–211
Modernity 46–48, 65–71, 97–99, 112–114, 120–123, 137, 165–166, 206–209, 237
Modern Buddhism 2–6, 238
Modernism *see* Zen modernism
Mysticism, mystical 38, 95–109, 237, 237n
Mystical hermeneutics 110–112

Non-mysticism 108–109
Nāgārjuna 26, 76, 76n, 199, 200
Nietzsche, Friedrich 10, 20n, 50n, 62–63, 116n, 143n, 199n, 217n
Nishida, Kitarō 102–103, 201, 216
Nishitani, Keiji 20n, 201–203, 217, 217n, 218
Nirvāna 26, 82, 117, 144, 186, 190, 202–203
No gain 151–153, 156

Ordinary life 50, 61, 62, 139, 142–148, 155, 223
Orsi, Robert 87, 122–123, 137–138

Particularism 118, 119
Perennialism 18, 98n, 100–101, 102, 107–108, 116
Philosophy 21, 77, 98, 104, 185, 198, 218
Practices 104, 121, 126–128, 149, 162–164
Protestantism 35, 95, 118, 122–123, 192n
Psychologization 89, 120–138, 140–142
Pure experience 102–106, 126, 223
Pure Zen 168–170, 174, 225–227

Re-enchantment 58, 78–82, 137, 173, 182, 213–214
Religion 47, 64, 68–70, 89–92, 95–101, 118–119, 121–125, 128, 136–138, 154–155, 160–164, 174, 193, 238
Rinzai 37, 39, 44, 166–167, 170
Ritual 85, 121, 129, 132, 136, 148, 152, 170–172, 175, 234–235
Romanticism 63, 78, 95, 106

Samsāra 26, 82, 125, 144, 202–203, 215
Sanbōkyōdan 39, 110, 129–130, 156, 167n, 169–170, 174
Schleiermacher 95, 99, 128
Science 14, 48, 52–53, 58–59, 97–98, 101, 112, 117
Secular Age 13–16, 46–72, 80–81, 181–196
Secularity 14, 46–48, 52–54, 192, 194
Sharf, Robert 39n, 40, 107, 128–130, 167n, 170, 199, 217
Sōtō 37, 39, 152, 156, 166, 167, 227
Spirituality, global 158–176
Subtraction stories 14, 52–54, 58, 143
Śūnyatā 26, 76, 198–206, 212, 214, 217, 218

Taylor, Charles 13–16, 46–72, 73–75, 79, 130, 139, 143, 144, 155, 158–160, 162–163, 164–166, 237–239
Therapeutic turn 139–157, 208n
Transcendence 50, 64–65, 67–71, 82–88, 133, 173, 187, 190, 195, 199, 201–203, 204, 207–212, 218, 219, 238
  Epistemological 59, 82, 133–134, 190–191, 195, 210–211, 214
  Ontological 50, 54, 61n, 82, 88, 122, 186–187, 212
Truth claims 90, 91, 97–102, 116–119, 182, 185–187, 189, 198, 207, 208

Ueda, Shizuteru 108–109, 216–217
Universalization 89, 95–119
Upaya 34, 45, 84, 102, 130n, 151n, 209, 223

Wilson, Jeff 41, 112, 124–125, 146, 148, 155–156
Wittgenstein 57, 91, 104, 130, 191
Wright, Dale 9–13, 103–106, 116, 126–128, 152n

Zazen 40, 134–136, 148, 152–153, 156, 172, 175, 223, 225, 226, 227
Zen
  belonging 166–176
  experience 89, 32n, 104–106, 120–138, 223–234, 226
  modernism 7–8, 43, 70–71, 176, 227, 232, 240
  practice 26, 28, 30, 36, 84–87, 88, 112–114, 115n, 129, 132, 133, 136, 148, 152, 156, 169, 170–172, 193–195, 221, 224–225, 226, 231–235