

Nothing Transcended

An examination of the metaphysical implications of
interdependence

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This thesis draws upon the work of many great thinkers, scholars and academics – where any mistakes occur they are my own. I offer this thesis as some small contribution.

May all find wisdom and peace.

Abstract

Recent debate has questioned the validity of Zen as a school of Buddhism, claiming that the characteristic justification of apparently immoral acts by ‘enlightened’ individuals cannot be reconciled with the Buddhist eight-fold path, which emphasises ‘right’ actions and states of mind. To simply dismiss Zen as deviant, however, ignores the ramifications of this problem for Buddhists more widely and overlooks parallels with the contemporary problem of nihilism.

This thesis investigates the philosophical ground of the ‘Zen moral problem’ in ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*), through the construction of a metaphysical framework based upon the related Mahāyāna Buddhist principle: ‘interdependence’ (*pratītyasamutpāda*). In order to critique the validity of Zen as philosophy, I am guided by the goal of the Buddhist soteriological project; the promise of enlightenment in order to overcome the experience of suffering. If a framework built up from base principles of Zen thought is capable of explaining and maintaining the Buddhist goal, then we must still determine how the moral problem arises.

It is important to note that this thesis does not represent a Buddhist position, in a textual sense; instead it is a philosophical examination of Buddhist principles – addressing the *problems* that motivated specific historical positions. Rather than an analysis of these historical positions as such, the current work takes them as responses to a common concern, and makes use of them as critical examples. To this end the metaphysical framework developed here is used to analyse those foundations in contemporary thought which give rise to the moral problem.

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Introduction

The mind should be neither solemn nor agitated, neither pensive nor fearful; it should be straight and ample. This is the state of mind that should be sought after. The will should not be heavy, but the depth of one's awareness should be; in this way you make your mind like water that reacts appropriately to shifting situations. Whether it is a drop or an ocean with blue depths, it is water. You should examine this well.

- *Miyamoto Musashi*, (1641).¹

The above quotation illustrates an application of Zen² philosophy, though it is not from a religious leader, rather it is a letter from one of the most eminent swordsmen in Japanese history; extolling the strategic benefits of this state of mind in combat. The record of Zen reveals numerous examples of the practical application of Zen states of mind put to violent ends. The 'nothingness' at the heart of Zen thought appears to allow such applications, or at least cannot be used to deny them. Recent debate has questioned the validity of Zen as a school of Buddhism, claiming that the characteristic justification of apparently immoral acts by 'enlightened' individuals cannot be reconciled with the Buddhist eight-fold path, which emphasises 'right' actions and states of mind. To simply dismiss Zen as deviant, however, ignores the ramifications of this problem for Buddhists more widely and overlooks parallels with the contemporary problem of nihilism.

¹ Musashi M., S.8 of *Hyoho sanju go kajo* ('Thirty-Five Instructions on Strategy'), in Tokitsu, K., *Miyamoto Musashi: His Life and Writings*, P.203.

² The Japanese term 'Zen' is here adopted rather than the Chinese 'Ch'an', since contemporary debate on the problem of morality has arisen specifically with respect to Japanese Zen, and also 'Zen' has become the dominant term in English (language) discussion (mainly due to early 20th Century Japanese exchange). This is not to claim that there is no difference between Ch'an and Zen; indeed it is on this point that some criticism focuses - see chapter 2 for details.

This thesis aims to investigate the philosophical ground of the ‘Zen moral problem’ in ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*),³ through the construction of a metaphysical framework based upon the related Mahāyāna Buddhist principle: ‘interdependence’ (*pratītyasamutpāda*). In order to critique the validity of Zen as philosophy, I am guided by the goal of the Buddhist soteriological project; the promise of enlightenment in order to overcome the experience of suffering. If a framework built up from base principles of Zen thought is capable of explaining and maintaining the Buddhist goal, then we must still determine how the moral problem arises.

It is important to note that this thesis does not represent a Buddhist position, in a textual sense; instead it is a philosophical examination of Buddhist principles – addressing the *problems* that motivated specific historical positions. Rather than an analysis of these historical positions as such, the current work takes them as responses to a common concern,⁴ and makes use of them as critical examples. The success or failure of a particular system is measured against its success in addressing its motivating problem. As a philosophical enterprise – seeking wisdom rather than mere cataloguing - priority is given to the current emergence of a problem over the historical occurrence thereof. This should not be seen as a criticism of the original presentation, merely a recognition that the setting and expressions of perennial issues are impermanent and should be continually reassessed. I consider this to be in the spirit of Buddhism, but this will be further elaborated below.

³ Translations of key terms are given in Sanskrit unless otherwise stated. Japanese and Chinese terms are rendered in Romanised transliterations: *Jp.* = *Japanese*, *Ch.* = *Chinese (Pin-Yin)*.

⁴ With due recognition of cultural and historical influences.

The Zen Moral Problem

The thesis examines two connected problems: the first is the aforementioned 'Zen moral problem', while the second is the issue of making sense of 'a groundless metaphysics', which arises in response to the moral problem. The problem is seen to arise due to a distinction made between two 'levels' of reality – corresponding to 'conventional' and 'ultimate' modes of understanding, also known as 'two truths' in the Buddhist tradition.⁵

Examining the nature of the problem metaphysically, the connection and separation of the two modes should be explicable. This connection is found in the principle of 'interdependence'. Interdependence, it is argued, implicates a universe empty of intrinsic existence *at any level*. The solution to the problem is to be found in a complete framework of interdependence.

The motivating problem, the 'Zen moral problem', is simply that Zen is *supposed* to be moral and it appears not to be.⁶ How could this be so? The first point to address is the normative claim, that Zen *should* be one way or another. Indeed such a claim must be strongly denied from the basis of Zen thought – the enlightened state is beyond such deliberative distinctions as 'good' or 'bad' – 'Zen', as an expression of the ultimate truth⁷, is amoral.⁸

⁵ The development of this idea is credited to Nāgārjuna - See Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, P.88.

⁶ Dale Wright points out that, "It is not that we see a history of moral error or atrocity, but rather that we do see a history of disinterest." (Wright, D., 'Satori and the Moral Dimension of Enlightenment', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.13 (2006), p.4.) This has consequences for Buddhist soteriology; see for example the arguments made in the name of 'Critical Buddhism' from Matsumoto and Hakamaya. An overview is given in Swanson, 'Zen is not Buddhism' in *Numen*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May, 1993), pp. 115-149.

⁷ Note that 'Zen' is used in the literature in two senses – First, 'Zen' is the cultural/ historical tradition. Second, as alluded to in the noted sentence, 'Zen' refers to the ultimate truth. For the distinction between historical Zen and 'Zen as Zen' / 'understood from the inside', see Suzuki, 'Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih', in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Apr., 1953), pp. 25-46; in response to Hu Shih, 'Chan (Zen) Buddhism in China Its History and Method', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.3, No.1 (Apr. 1953), pp.3-24. The misinterpretation between the two is expanded in Sellmann, J.D., 'A Belated Response to Hu Shih and D. T. Suzuki', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.45, No.1 (Jan. 1995), pp.97-104.

⁸ The position of transcendent 'amorality' is attributed to Suzuki, though this reading is contentious – see Brear, A.D., 'The Nature and Status of Moral Behavior in Zen Buddhist Tradition', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.24 No.4 (Oct, 1974), pp.429-441.

This is the key issue, and is examined in depth in chapter 2 of this thesis, but the accusation levelled against Zen targets the conventional expression rather than the nature of the ultimate state of reality. At the conventional level a Buddhist is supposed to abide by three modes of practice: meditation (*samādhi*), wisdom (*prajñā*) and morality (*śīla*). If a Zen master is recorded as acting in an apparently immoral manner, then the validity of their ‘enlightened’ realisation (wisdom) is brought into question, which in turn places the foundational principles of the Zen tradition at issue.

The recent attacks on the validity of Zen have emerged from a new field of Buddhist analysis termed ‘Critical Buddhism’ (Jp. *hihan bukkō*).⁹ In addition to claiming that ‘Zen is not Buddhism’,¹⁰ the adherents of this philosophy present an ideological attempt to return to the philosophical and practical foundations of Buddhism. They maintain that only those who abide by the anti-essentialist principle of ‘dependent arising’ can be considered Buddhist. As the current project takes interdependence as its key focus it would appear that I am in accord with the Critical Buddhists, however I must also criticise the extent of their attack on Zen, particularly in relation to the core principle of ‘Buddha-nature’. For instance, Matsumoto claims that Dōgen is heavily influenced by the ‘*dhātu-vāda* tradition’¹¹ and his work is thus antithetical to Buddhism.¹² In Chapter 5, I present a different interpretation of Dōgen based on the idea of an ‘empty’ Buddha-nature, thus maintaining both the principle of interdependence as well as Dōgen’s particular Buddhist expression, which, as will be shown, significantly benefits the current project.

⁹ An anthology of articles on this topic are available in Hubbard, J. & Swanson, P. (Eds.), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*.

¹⁰ For this discussion see Swanson, ‘Zen is Not Buddhism’, which is addressed in chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹¹ The “theory of locus” – coined by Matsumoto, also a Sōto Zen adherent.

¹² Matsumoto Shirō, ‘Comments on Critical Buddhism’, in Hubbard, J. & Swanson, P. (Eds.), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, pp.161-162.

In the same vein as the Critical Buddhists, it is important to examine the influences upon the development of Zen when assessing potential deviation from the Buddhist teaching.¹³ The focus here is philosophical rather than cultural/historical, so investigation will focus on those concepts which are compatible with the key principle of interdependence. For this reason it is useful to briefly compare Daoist metaphysics (chapter 2) as well as the connection of Kegon (Ch. *Huayan*) philosophy to Dōgen specifically (chapter 5), both of which could be classified as falling into the essentialism of the '*dhātu-vāda* tradition'.

A further point for consideration is that Zen ideas have been adopted across many fields, and in many cases unfortunately misappropriated leading to a widespread misrepresentation of Zen. Titles integrating "Zen and the art of...", after Herrigal's autobiographical account,¹⁴ have become commonplace and associated more with new age spiritualism than Zen Buddhism. The prominence of Zen concepts in popular literature have seen the concepts come to be associated with such topics as 'how to make one's fortune', 'success in warfare', and so on.¹⁵ The adoption of the term 'Nothing' to refer to the ultimate nature of reality, *as well as* a justification for selfishly motivated actions, has led to entanglement with the philosophical notions associated with the Western existential tradition; addressing 'nothingness' as 'nihilism'.

Nihilism can be seen as the wider problem of which the Zen moral problem is an instance.

This connection has not gone unnoticed among Zen thinkers, the Kyōto school being a prime

¹³ Not content with the developed scriptural tradition, Hakamaya Noriaki goes so far in legitimising their approach to say that "Buddhism is criticism". (Hakamaya N., 'Critical Philosophy versus Topical Philosophy', in Hubbard, J. & Swanson, P. (Eds.), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, p.56.)

¹⁴ Herrigal, E., *Zen in the Art of Archery*.

¹⁵ Despite the widespread use and adoption of Zen concepts, no academic survey of Zen in popular literature has been undertaken (outside of the fine arts). This is certainly owing to the often frivolous and uncritical use of such concepts, however the feedback into critical studies from the popular literature (such as that widely attributed to D.T. Suzuki) does modify cultural interpretation and so should be seriously considered.

example of engagement with the problem of nihilism as a cross-cultural phenomenon. If the Zen moral problem is taken as a case study of the wider issue, the principles garnered from a study of interdependence would have direct implications for contemporary philosophical thought beyond Buddhism. One such implication is the development of meta-moral principles; guidelines for the development of a universally viable understanding of compassion (*karuṇā*), following the Buddhist soteriological project.

The major point of contention is how to reconcile the experience of a conventional being with the enlightened perspective. The characteristic of enlightenment is not merely knowledge of how the world is; an enlightened being is said to affect *compassion* towards all. And yet, the concept used to best characterise reality from the perspective of this enlightened understanding is *nothingness*. If both this wisdom and compassion are to be maintained, we must determine how it is possible that morality can emerge from *nothing*.

At the end of his *Zen at War*, Victoria writes the following:

Experienced Zen practitioners know that the “no-mind” of Zen does in fact exist. Equally, they know that *Samadhi* (i.e., meditative) power also exists. But they also know, or at least *ought to know*, that these things, in their original Buddhist formulation, had *absolutely nothing to do with bringing harm to others*. On the contrary, authentic Buddhist awakening is characterised by a combination of wisdom and compassion – identifying oneself with others and seeking to eliminate suffering in all its forms. Thus, the question must be asked, even though it cannot be answered in this book – How is the Zen school to be restored and reconnected to its Buddhist roots? Until this question is satisfactorily answered *and acted upon*, Zen’s claim to be an authentic expression of the Buddha Dharma must remain in doubt.¹⁶

¹⁶ Victoria, *Zen at War*, pp. 230-231.

I will, in this thesis, examine the philosophical basis of the misappropriation of Zen and explicate the correlation between Zen thought and the Buddhist soteriological project. It is for this purpose I propose a metaphysical study.

Metaphysical Method

Metaphysical studies tend to be speculative when posited as self-contained systems,¹⁷ so it is not surprising to find metaphysics was shunned by Gautama Buddha and his followers, preferring instead to focus on more practical problems.¹⁸ Even a metaphysical framework built upon ‘interdependence’ has the potential to, ironically, become conceptually isolated from experienced reality and thus irrelevant to worldly concerns. In this thesis the focal problem of explaining the philosophical distillation of the Zen position is both the motivation for the metaphysical framework and a test to its success or failure. If this metaphysical framework is to make sense of Buddhist soteriology it must present practical outcomes.

‘Metaphysics’ in the sense it is adopted here does not fall under a classical definition,¹⁹ other than to simply state that I am concerned with revealing the nature of reality *as it is*.

To this end the emphasis is on uncovering universally applicable principles which aid in

¹⁷ Systems of metaphysics as ‘transcendent’ are free to spin their own ontological realities, which inform upon, but are not revised by, worldly discoveries. Rudolf Carnap, trumpeting logical positivism, derided this detached creativity of metaphysicians as the recourse of “musicians without musical ability” (Carnap, R., ‘The Elimination of Metaphysics’, in Schlick, M., et al (Eds.), *Logical Empiricism at its Peak*, p.30)

¹⁸ A commonly cited analogy from Gautama Buddha is the parable of the arrow, (*Majjhima-nikaya, Sutta 63*), recounted in Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha’s Words*, pp.230-233; whereby one should first tend to one’s injury (i.e. incarnate suffering) before inquiring after less immediate details.

¹⁹ The enterprise undertaken in this thesis certainly does not follow Aristotle; since to study ‘first causes’ or the ‘unchanging’ nature of ‘being as such’ (or later, that which cannot be assigned to ‘the categories’) proves to be either antithetical or irrelevant to the Buddhist position. However, the adoption of the term ‘metaphysics’ follows later developments, whereby “a philosopher who denied the existence of those things that had once been seen as constituting the subject-matter of metaphysics—first causes or unchanging things—would now be considered to be making thereby a metaphysical assertion.” (van Inwagen, P., ‘Metaphysics’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2010.)

defining the interactions of the phenomenal world. Following the implications of śūnyatā, these principles are not recognised as having any intrinsic existence of their own beyond the phenomenon they describe. The content these principles refer to is absolutely contingent upon the particular characteristics of the world, without which they do not exist. This is necessary, since any classical definition based upon 'essence' will be incompatible with śūnyatā. For this thesis the simple definition of metaphysics just is a study of *interdependence*.²⁰

It is apparent that we are led to discuss metaphysics in two senses: first as a system of understanding, or 'metaphysical *framework*'. The second is to use the term 'metaphysics' to refer to reality *as it is*, indicating the underlying reality that enlightened, unobscured consciousness is privy to. One apparent difficulty with using the term in the second sense is that metaphysics then has no content. With interdependence as the key principle there is no transcendent set of laws which dictates the functioning of the universe, as there can be nothing *separate* from the universe - or the phenomenon in question would not be interdependent. The referent of such a metaphysics is just the empty universe – nothing but absolute interdependence. Attempting to take a further step, to speak metaphysically of metaphysics, is to attribute reality some existence that is not covered in the metaphysical explication itself – to assume that there is something implicit to reality untouched by our inquiries into metaphysics. If this were accepted then the nature of reality *as it is* would become ineffable and so fall beyond our epistemological ability. All we could say of reality would be transcendental, in Kant's sense, referring to the necessary characteristics of reality which are absolutely unrealisable but through reasoned reflection. Such a metaphysics

²⁰ As '*pratītyasamutpāda*' - The scope of 'interdependence' will be set out in chapter 2, while the metaphysical study, examining the consequences of these limits, will begin in chapter 3.

would still, however, be bound by the conventionality of epistemological limitations. In other words, it is still a 'metaphysical framework' which cannot capture the nature of reality, but moreover is not in accord with the Buddhist project.

To avoid confusing 'metaphysical reality', as the manner in which reality functions, with the system that is set up to represent it, I refer to the 'metaphysics' developed from interdependence throughout as the 'metaphysical framework'.²¹ I admit that this is a limited system that cannot capture reality *as such*,²² but it is proposed as an 'empty' system in order to reevaluate our conventional interpretations, justifications and explanations overlayed on the world of our experience. For this project to succeed we cannot properly talk of metaphysics without considering epistemology.²³

As stated previously, Buddhist metaphysics is intimately bound up with the concept of the 'two truths'. The implications of this division does not allow for a simple conflation of truth into a single unity. The reason for this is evident in the four noble truths: *There is suffering, there is a root of suffering, there is a cessation of suffering, and the eight-fold path is this solution*. If reality were merely ultimate truth there would be no suffering. If reality were merely conventional truth there would be no cessation. If Buddhist metaphysics is misunderstood then its soteriological project cannot function.

²¹ In this sense metaphysics *is* just the study of the implications of interdependence. A similar argument, concerning the position of Dōgen, can be found in Schilbrack, K., 'Metaphysics in Dōgen', *Philosophy East West*, vol.50 no.1 (Jan, 2000), p.47. – Dōgen's apparent denial of the possibility of entities *independent of experience* is not a denial of metaphysics, rather it invites a redefinition of metaphysics as the investigation of the features of necessarily impermanent, and thus *interdependent* phenomenon. (See also *ibid.*, P.40 – on the 'metaphysical' significance of Dōgen's other key concepts.)

²² At least, not in its metaphysical representation. As a worldly phenomenon however it is as equally valid an aspect of interpenetrating reality as anything else– see chapter 5, 'flowers in the sky'.

²³ If this reasoning is followed through one should not find issue with the ultimate truth in Zen being described as 'ineffable' while, at the same time, the historical record reveals that; "Zen monks wrote many more books than those of any other Buddhist sect in China." (Chang, C., 'The Nature of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.6, No.4 (Jan. 1957), p.338.) If such records are understood as 'empty', no conflict arises.

Enlightenment is explained to be the perfection of wisdom²⁴: i.e. ‘seeing reality *as it is*’.²⁵

The two interpretations of metaphysics I am dealing with could be consumed under the Buddhist ‘two truths’. Metaphysics as a system is *always* conventional truth, whereas metaphysics as the nature of reality (not even as the study thereof) indicates ultimate truth. Maintaining this division, one must realise that there can be no explanation or systematisation of ultimate reality (*reality as it is*) that can escape conventional systematisation (reification). Importantly in Zen this distinction *does not* involve a ‘bracketing away’ or denial of some underlying reality, nor does it relegate reality to pure empiricism or phenomenology. Ultimate reality is beyond conventional experience, and thus is conventionally ‘transcendent’, *however* reality is realisable *qua reality* (non-obstructed) through the experience of awakening (Jp. *satori*).

As absolute interdependence denies the possibility of metaphysical transcendence, where ‘transcendence’ applies to the framework developed here it must be understood in accordance with the Buddhist soteriological project. When a being becomes enlightened ontologically nothing has changed, but epistemologically their perspective has been transformed. To unpack the complications arising from this ‘transcendence’ the inextricable interconnection between metaphysics and epistemology must be recognised. One consequence of this is that when one changes one’s mind, in a real sense one changes the world. (Though, it should be noted that this is an inter-causal connection and is not akin to simply re-interpreting the world and expecting the world to have changed to accord to this interpretation.)

²⁴ ‘*Prajñāpāramitā*’ – *Diamond Sutra*, Trans. Red Pine.

²⁵ In reference to realizing the nature of the true self (non-self) - Suzuki, D.T., ed., *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text*, XVI, p.52.

So why then speak of 'metaphysics' at all, if it is equally applicable to all things (all entities, both mental and physical) and has no content? Because every possible content for any possible context or system of understanding is explained to be metaphysically connected *and can be explained as metaphysically (read epistemologically) separated*. Without such connection no communication is possible, nor is causation or understanding in any form. Without such separation no explanation is possible, nor is causation or understanding in any form. With either denied, the myriad forms are condensed into a nihilistic 'one'. The metaphysical project undertaken here sets out to provide a common ground (touchstone) for inter-subjective dialogue, such as morality, through explaining reality as being both separated and connected concurrently.

From the Buddhist position the simple metaphysical solution to the question of morality, as stated by Schilbrack, is that "Metaphysics provides the answer to the question: why should one be selfless and nonattached rather than otherwise? The answer is: because everything is impermanent, and attachment to self is thus inauthentic, a result of false views."²⁶ This metaphysical explanation is not enough however if it is to fulfil the requirements of the Buddhist soteriological project. In order to overcome suffering one must not only recognise such a metaphysic, but express it. The metaphysical understanding must tell us *why* a view is correct or false *and* it should allow the derivation of principles which can be applied to everyday action. This is the goal of the thesis.

To solve the Zen moral problem, the nature of ultimate truth must be investigated. We must make sense of a groundless metaphysics, a 'nothingness' that is somehow manifest as the myriad phenomena making up our world, apparently incapable of providing a solid basis

²⁶ Schilbrack, 'Metaphysics in Dōgen', *Philosophy East West*, vol.50 no.1 p.43

for our beliefs. Can a reading of nihilism be avoided? Is it possible to transcend nothingness?

Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into seven chapters, which can be further grouped into three stages:

Chapters 1 and 2 set up the focal problem, its nature and limits.

Chapters 3 and 4 develop the metaphysical framework, while chapter 5 applies a specifically Zen reading to complete the framework.

Chapters 6 and 7 outline the implications and direct application of the framework.

The discussion engages the themes of the chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 – Nihilism. As Zen apparently reduces Buddhist philosophy to the practice of meditation and a focus on ‘nothingness’, this will be used as the starting point for our metaphysical analysis and to introduce the problem at hand. The character of ‘the moral problem’ is not unique to studies of the Zen tradition, and is shown to have arisen in ‘existential’ thought,²⁷ provoking interesting parallels and alternative responses. Here, the wider problem of nihilism is set out and comparisons are made to Buddhist ‘*śūnyatā*’. Of particular concern is the revoking of traditional morality in response to nihilism, for which Nietzsche’s ‘revaluation of values’ provides a problematic contrast to the Buddhist ideal.

Following the Kyōto school, these issues are directly engaged with as a real existential

²⁷ The term ‘existential’ is adopted here as a designation of a particular characteristic philosophical enterprise, (commonly associated with those predominantly European, late 19th-20th century philosophies) focused upon the human experience of existence, regardless of whether or not the particular individuals considered themselves ‘existentialist’ or not.

problem for Zen thought. In this manner the emergence of nihilism serves as a guideline for philosophical analysis, illustrating the pitfalls of incomplete understanding.

Chapter 2 – Transcendence. With nihilism in focus, the historical emergence of the Zen moral problem is analysed. In Zen literature the ‘amoralism’ associated with the actions of enlightened beings has been philosophically justified as *transcendent*. I argue that this is the cause of the moral problem. Nihilism indicates that all systems of understanding are necessarily limited, including Buddhist systems. This prompts an examination of the Buddhist soteriological project to end suffering and the Daoist influences on Zen, in order to enquire into the purpose and, therefore, the validity of Zen thought with regard to this project. To this end the connection of compassion and enlightened wisdom must be made sense of. This prompts the question: with transcendence denied, upon what basis can we universally (and morally) respond to nihilism? It is for this purpose that a metaphysical framework is proposed.

Chapter 3 - Interdependent Entities. In order to construct a metaphysical framework capable of addressing the problem of nihilism, interdependence is established as the key principle. It is argued that without recognition of interdependence conventional experience cannot be understood. Following Nāgārjuna, whose philosophy informed later Zen thought, emptiness is explained to be synonymous with dependent origination, avoiding the extremes of reification and nihilism. The framework is proposed as an alternative to a reductionist account of reality, and explicitly denies the existence of any metaphysical foundation. This implies a self-defining universe, with no external influences, whereby the ‘laws’ attributed to reality also arise dependently.

Chapter 4 - Interdependent Minds. The difficulty in proposing any universal metaphysical connection is that it tends to ignore the other side – the apparent separation of phenomena – the experience of which prompts such metaphysical investigations in the first place. This is prominent when examining enlightened *compassion*, as the emergence of separate minds must be explained. Specifically, the enlightened experience of ‘non-suffering’ must be reconciled with the conventional experience of ‘suffering’, without one overriding the other. The integration of the causal capacity of ‘mind’ into the groundless metaphysical framework presents a new understanding of epistemic levels, through which no particular level can be considered fundamental. Thus presented, the metaphysical framework explains the possibility of coming to directly ‘see reality as it is’, giving credence to the Zen mode of Buddhist practice.

Chapter 5 – Interpenetration. At this point the framework of interdependent metaphysics is turned to examine the work of Zen master Dōgen. Dōgen’s position, with regard to the problem of ‘original nature’, strikes at the heart of the Zen moral problem, and adds a further layer of complexity to the framework through the integration of *interpenetration*. This implicates an entanglement of both sides of any duality for enlightened epistemology. Together with Dōgen’s emphasis on the connection of practice and realisation, the basis is set for the awareness of conventional modes, including morality, from an enlightened perspective.

Chapter 6 - Moral Implications. The construction of a system of morality is beyond the scope of this thesis, however certain meta-moral principles can be drawn from the

metaphysics of interdependence, which can in turn be used to critique everyday actions. This is especially applicable to Zen concepts such as 'no-mind' and spontaneity, given their prominent position on the path to ultimate realisation and also in the creation of the Zen moral problem. To resolve this issue I turn to Huineng's discussions on the state of 'no-mind' to determine a more complete reading than that appropriated in the popular literature. An understanding of the metaphysics of interdependence together with recognition of the goal of ultimate realisation helps to explain the significance of 'no-mind', and why it should not be read as mere 'mindlessness'.

Chapter 7 - Practical Application. Turning to pragmatic concerns, the problem of nihilism is re-introduced as the antithesis to the position pursued throughout the thesis. It is argued that even if one is merely focussed on what is pragmatically useful, one must still recognise interdependence and thus the implications of the metaphysical framework follow. In the spirit of the quotation opening this introduction, the martial art is examined as the paradigmatic example of the (mis)appropriation of Zen. Here, if the concepts of Zen are to be practically applied, they must be adopted completely or ultimately fail. *Formlessness* is established as a guiding pragmatic principle that is existentially realisable, in accordance with the groundless framework of metaphysics.

This progression is set out to resolve the Zen moral problem by investigating the implications of interdependence metaphysically constructed. In so doing we must make sense of Zen, which Suzuki describes as follows:

Psychologically, to become conscious of the unconscious; ethically, to be detached while attached; and metaphysically, to see the infinite in the finite.

- *D.T. Suzuki, (1958).*²⁸

²⁸ Suzuki, D.T., from the series *Wisdom*, NBC 1958, quoted in Smith, H., 'Foreword' in Mitchell, D. (Ed.), *Masao Abe: A Zen Life of Dialogue*, p.x.

Chapter 1: Nihilism

With a focus on 'nothingness' the Zen practitioner is forced to base their everyday interactions either on adherence to codes of conduct or uncritically continue their habitual actions, either of which would contradict the heart of the Zen position. Examined as a philosophical position, with any positive affirmation apparently negated by 'emptiness', we may ask what it is that guides the actions of the Zennist? From the position of 'nothingness' as ultimate truth, by what can we measure 'good'? Expressions of the Zen moral problem, to be examined in the next chapter, are characteristic of a wider problem, namely the problem of nihilism.

Nihilism is the belief that there is no meaning, usually developed through a deep scepticism, denying the foundations of apparent core principles. This perception of meaninglessness is either applied immediately to oneself or, and more significantly, to the world at large. The term 'nihilism' covers a range of areas in which thought can be *brought to nothing*. For the sake of the present study these can be divided into 'ontological nihilism', 'epistemic nihilism' and 'moral nihilism'. These demarcations are not exclusive, and in most respects are co-entailing, however the manner in which they are addressed must differ according to their type. Ontological nihilism denies existence, though through the act of positing non-existence is self-refuting thus deferring the metaphysical question and falling into epistemic nihilism - a weak version denying *external* existence can be seen in Buddhist 'mind-only' interpretations of reality. Epistemic nihilism denies comprehension, which is revealed as extreme scepticism. Moral nihilism is the denial of meaning and of ethical bounds and is the closest to the earliest definitions of nihilism.

Nihilism posits an ontological void, in conflict with, and purportedly derived from the failure of, the human desire to make sense of the world. Nihilism problematises ontology, but *the problem of nihilism* is not ontological. Without the enquirer, the natural world is not nihilistic. A quick survey of people on the street would illustrate that nihilism is not revealed through everyday interactions. Only when an individual turns philosophical and seeks the *basis* of their beliefs about the world (of meaning, morality or truth) and their scepticism probes deep enough to find such a basis lacking, does nihilism emerge. Camus states the issue in the following way, “what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational [world] and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart.”²⁹ The problem of nihilism, once the inquiry has begun, is that the world appears meaningless to us and yet, given the motivation of this very inquiry, we seem to require meaning. Nihilism is an epistemological problem.

As a philosophical mode nihilism is nonsensical, or at best necessarily ironic, since any claim made from the position of nihilism is undermined through its assertion of meaninglessness. The existentialist response reappraises the situation by claiming, in Sartre’s terms, that ‘existence precedes essence’³⁰, and yet as a refutation of fundamental essence, nihilism casts its shadow back over existence. When existence begins to question the foundation of its own being, the characteristics of a nihilistic limit to the epistemological mode become reflected in that very existence. Whilst this question appears to arise from an embodied mind, embedded in the world, the question of nihilism negates the nature of the questioning. Nihilism refutes the process which brought it to realisation, and so nihilism can only be expressed as the *problem* of nihilism.

²⁹ Camus, A., *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, p.21.

³⁰ Sartre, 1946, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism’, in Langiulli, N. (Ed.) *European Existentialism*, pp.391-416.

Moving towards a postmodernist reading of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, no assessment can be made of any valuation other than the effectiveness of a project at achieving its own ends. On this relativistic model the pursuit of capital, of happiness or the collection of stamps are all equally valid. Of course one may argue that some values are more basic than others, purely relationally and without need of an ultimate basis, so that if we were to find that money does not buy happiness, or that happiness cannot buy money, one may be ditched in favour of the other. If any dichotomy is reversible then a hierarchy is not apparent.

With nothing as a basis we struggle to *add* ethics to self-defined systems and their specific ends (such as economics, scientific research, or simple hedonistic pursuits). Prior to epistemic nihilism, the positing of a base, whether mistaken or otherwise, brought forth morality as a consequence of its foundational principles. A prominent example is the foundation of a creator God – morality and meaning are derived from this underlying relation to a 'greater purpose' – but *telos* can also be grounded more generally. If one point of *meaning/morality* is established then all further assessments can be built up from this foundation. The determination that no such point can be established is the problem of nihilism. Without foundations, the artificial addition of ethics to a system will certainly be undermined by the projected nihilism at its core. Any such ethical system would then be judged, from the base of the system, as equivalent to *any* artificial valuation. To avoid this relativism morality must become a consequence of the recognition of a shared reality. How we, given the problem of nihilism, can come to realise such a reality (and indeed what this 'reality' could possibly entail) is the subject of this thesis.

This chapter examines the problem of nihilism through selected historical and cross-cultural responses in order to set the limits of the metaphysical project to commence from chapter

3. Taken in conjunction with chapter 2, which pursues the related problem of 'transcendence' and implications for meaning and justification, the present chapter also introduces the Zen distillation of Buddhist philosophy and the problems that stem from it.

This chapter is divided into three sections:

The first section, *Nihilist Existenz*, marks out the limitations of nihilism with reference to European existentialism. Nietzsche characterises the problem historically as the 'death of God' through the failure of absolutist foundations (Christianity in particular) and proposes the *Übermensch* in order for humanity to overcome its nihilistic limitations. Following Nietzsche, our contemporary reaction to the realisation of the problem of nihilism is to propose the *creation* of values, ignoring the abyss at their base, derived from an existential mode of affirmation.

The second section, *Śūnyatā*, first addresses nihilistic attacks on Buddhism and how 'emptiness' as a concept differs from simple 'nothingness', as expressed through the nihilistic perspective. Nāgārjuna's explanation of the entanglement of reification and nihilism leads our discussion to the recognition of the limitations of systems. The existential nihilist account is shown to be just such a destructive entanglement. Here, following Nāgārjuna, the importance of a perspective that avoids both the extremes is stressed.

Finally, *The Great Doubt*; as the Kyōto school acts as an intellectual bridge between Buddhist and European existential modes, Nietzsche's recognition of nihilism is reaffirmed. According to Nishitani, nihilism must be existentially realised, and then passed through in order to realise 'nothingness' in the Zen Buddhist sense. Because of this no system can analyse the

state beyond 'nothingness', however this realisation sets the stage for the metaphysics of interdependence that is to follow.

Nihilist Existenz

"God is dead" cries Nietzsche, and "we have killed him!"³¹ As the creator of the universe God would not be missed, for an effect will continue after the extinction of the cause. As the fundamental ground behind the forces of the universe there may be some difficulties. If such a ground is necessary however, the difficulty turns out to be self-refuting; for if we exist to ask the question, to think rationally, then the world persists, and so must whatever forces allow it to do so. On the other hand, the removal of God as the foundation of morality is truly a problem since, to echo the sentiment of Dostoevsky's fiction; *if God does not exist anything is permitted*.³²

Countless philosophical proofs have used God, or some omnipotent equivalent, as an anchor for their thought – as a moral metre that stands behind and beyond the worldly foci under enquiry. If this anchor is undermined then not only is anything morally permitted; every theory loses its grounding and is left 'in the air'. The simultaneous result of absolutely opening the possibility of meaning is to problematise the value of any one particular interpretation. That is to say that since each interpretation is valued *relatively* there can be no absolute value, and so no universal morality.

³¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 125

³² Dostoevsky, from the character Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov*. A similar phrase is recounted by Nietzsche in *Thus spake Zarathustra*, IV. 69.

This is the situation which Nietzsche presented as a ‘catastrophe’³³ for western thought. Not because a point had been reached where thought undermined itself, rather, that the entire history of western thought up to this point had been intentionally covering up the nihilism at the base of reality for the sake of universalising individual interpretations in what was really a pluralistic world. Criticising the Christian mainstream specifically, and all thought generally, Nietzsche labelled the traditional moral conventions ‘slave morality’. For Nietzsche this was a valuation of the weak against the natural supremacy of the strong (whom he termed the ‘masters’ of bygone eras). His intention was to characterise these traditional moral values as the very opposite of what they presented themselves to be – they are selfish and ultimately have a negative effect on the whole of humanity. But more than this, faced with the actuality that there *is no* absolute value, one finds nothingness. “If one cannot confront the Abyss, the best thing is to chase it out of sight. This is exactly what society/ religion achieves”,³⁴ and they do this by relegating to ‘other-worldly’ values or, in our contemporary context, by pursuing pre-established ends and ignoring the question of nihilism.

From the period of the Enlightenment onwards a trickle of scepticism became a flood of rebellion against the religious, absolutist and transcendent world-views. Reinforced with the utility of scientific method,³⁵ one no longer found the need to look beyond the world for explanation of worldly phenomena. This shift did not end theological foundations within philosophical enquiry but it did initiate a move away from a reliance and justification based purely upon religious assumptions. Characteristic of the age of reason was an attempt to

³³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* III 27

³⁴ Bauman, Z., 1995, *Life in Fragments*, p.15

³⁵ Indeed Nietzsche’s thought can be seen to be indebted to the development of evolutionary theory in his production of the world as ‘will to power’. For further discussion see pp.78-9 below.

ground beliefs in a naturalistic teleology, yet this drive towards naturalism was to come into conflict with that reasoning which inspired it, that is, the naturalistic fallacy. With all events in this world apparently limited to the immanent, the 'other world' is dismissed,³⁶ and along with it the transcendent basis of morality. Even if one were to ignore the scientific mandate and hold onto the 'other-world' one may well be forced to question what affect, moral or otherwise, this realm can have on the world in which we live. Through such demonic scepticism, human imperfection takes on a decidedly different hue under the radiance of God's impotence. Camus asks us to contemplate; "When man submits God to moral judgement, he kills him in his own heart. And then what is the basis of morality?"³⁷ This should not be seen as a call to blind 'faith', instead, here lies a hint that the foundation of morality is not (simply) 'out there', but has something to do with individuals themselves. The significance of 'the death of God' should be understood in this way – as an existentially human dilemma.

The dramatic 'event' of God's death became the signifier of a turn into 'post-modern' thought and general non-absolutist morality. Just as the 'modernist' movement in art had turned away from a symbolism that was predominantly religious, and philosophy of the Enlightenment claimed its focus on reason over Dogma, the 'post-modern' turn in both fields recognised multiple narratives and the opening up of interpretation, building upon the *creation* of meaning emphasised by the 'modernists'.³⁸ In modern thought the human being becomes the foundation of morality in place of God. It is a radical shift in the history of

³⁶ Ala Ockham's Razor, we select the solution which posits the least and dismiss speculation which does not aid our explanation.

³⁷ Camus, *The Rebel*, p.57.

³⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre – "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself." (Sartre, J., 'Existentialism is a Humanism', in Langiulli, N. (Ed.), *European Existentialism*, p.395.) Simone de Beauvoir – "the task of man is one: to fashion the world by giving it a meaning." ('An Existentialist Looks at Americans', New York Times Magazine, May 25th, 1947 in Beauvoir, S., *Philosophical Writings*, p.325.)

ideas, from a search for 'truth' to a rebellion against dogma in pursuit of a new understanding and finally to a meta-theory that claims that *every* theory is created – selected – and could be otherwise, characteristic of the 'post-modern'. This is an existential phenomena, since as human beings we are constantly capable of selecting what we accept as reality, within limitations. More importantly, any reliance upon transcendent or otherworldly values is undermined.

The significance of Nietzsche's cry is not that God does not exist, rather that God *did* exist but now we have destroyed the idea of God and, along with it, all explanation of meaning in the world.³⁹ This is the problem of nihilism as Nietzsche sees it; a meaninglessness that we have brought upon ourselves and are unprepared for. The solution to nihilism then is not to create a new system of otherworldly virtues, for this could not save us from nihilism and is itself 'nihilistic' (that is leading to nihilism). Instead, according to Nietzsche, we must become consummate nihilists ourselves⁴⁰. Nihilism is not something which can be avoided – to attempt to do so would only result in a passive nihilism, a facade of ignorance.⁴¹ We must first embrace nihilism in order to overcome it. The difficulties with this approach will become apparent later, though for Nietzsche we cannot fail to realise nihilism or we will be doomed to a really nihilistic existence – not living in fear of the Abyss, but living so as to deny the reality of the world by adhering to projected values. To avoid this fate Nietzsche proposes that traditional values must be overcome in a 'transvaluation of values'. We must

³⁹ Camus remarks; "Contrary to the opinion of certain of his Christian critics, Nietzsche did not form a project to kill God. He found Him dead in the soul of his contemporaries." Camus, *The Rebel*, p.59.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche called himself the first consummate nihilist, *The Will to Power*, Preface 3. Alan White adopts the term 'complete nihilist' to describe Nietzsche's ideal position, of one who will ultimately overcome nihilism, in opposition to the radical nihilist (ala the Russian paradigm) and the denial of the religious nihilist. (White, A., 'Nietzschean Nihilism: A Typology', *International Studies in Philosophy*, XIX/2 (1987), pp. 29-44.)

⁴¹ See Nietzsche's discussion in *On The Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1 S.10, pp.22-25.

then find a position 'beyond good and evil'⁴² from which these valuations are created. The basis of this is the idea of 'will to power'.

All that exists for Nietzsche is an expression of will to power and humanity represents various expressions and reactions to this natural 'law'. Following Nietzsche's distinction between two classes of individuals; historically, the masters, and their self-created goodness along with them, have been overcome by the slaves who, due to their weakness of will, band together to call 'evil' anything which stands over and above them. "Man would rather will *nothingness* than *not will*",⁴³ and so their denial leads to false faith and falls into nihilism. This is both a key characteristic of will, that it can revalue weakness into strength, and the apparent shortfall of the slave moralists. They submit to values placed upon them by manipulators (with the church being Nietzsche's primary example of such an institution). Now that those values have been swept aside (for whatever reason), the slave moralists have nothing to adhere to and the master moralists, torn down by slavish society, no longer exist. Something new is needed to overcome nihilism, something that must emerge from among the ranks of the slaves yet exhibiting the characteristics of the masters of old. This new form of humanity he dubs the *Übermensch* – 'superman' or 'overman'. Contrasted with the masters, who were blindly self-determinate, this new human has integrated a key characteristic of the slaves: introspection. The *Übermensch* can be seen to differ from the master in a rather important respect; they are not only able to forge meaning for themselves, they are also self-aware. Whether parallels can be drawn between the *Übermensch* and an enlightened being in the Buddhist or Daoist traditions along these lines remains to be seen.

⁴² From the book of the same name, published in 1886.

⁴³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 1 S.28, p.163.

If nihilism is held to be true we are faced with a problem. A belief in meaninglessness is self-refuting; it is in effect a belief that all beliefs are baseless and thus false.⁴⁴ Moreover, nihilism as a belief is impossible because we are beings of meaning, we live, we act, we think, and so nihilism becomes an existential paradox. Nihilism comes into immediate conflict with our mode of being. Simply to contemplate the possibility of nihilism forces us to rebel against the idea, to ‘chase the Abyss out of sight’, in order to continue our mode of being. Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* was founded on the principle of irreducible subjectivity; “I am, I exist, is necessarily true”⁴⁵; Heidegger’s *Dasein* as the being who raises the question of *Being*; and Nietzsche’s fundamental principle on the inability of the will to negate itself – each an essential self-affirmation from which it is impossible to accept nihilism. To invoke this *nothingness* at any of these levels is to attempt to deny that which brought about its contemplation, presence or desire. Nihilism is not a characteristic of the world nor can it be our considered interpretation of it. Nihilism is a fear that something is fundamentally flawed in one’s own worldview.

Nietzsche’s position on nihilism has been described as ‘a condition of tension between what we want to value and how the world appears to operate.’⁴⁶ This distinction, between our mental projection of the world and the way the world impacts upon us is not only an evaluative or epistemological issue, but also has a direct bearing on the positing and application of metaphysics. From a purely reductive, materialist standpoint we can conclude that life itself is meaningless, yet it must be conceded that we are not. The paradox of nihilism cannot be ignored when examining the nature of reality, for to explain a

⁴⁴ Notice that the belief that all beliefs are baseless must then also be false. This is the ‘absurd’ position indicated by Camus – a meaninglessness that denies the human, and thus denies its own conception.

⁴⁵ Descartes, *Meditations*, II, Trans. Veitch, J., in *The Rationalists*, P.119.

⁴⁶ Carr, K.L., *The Banalization of Nihilism*, p.25.

world without the individual conducting metaphysics (i.e. the metaphysician) included in that explanation, the call of metaphysics is certainly missed – to explain the nature of reality *as it is*. Perhaps only one who posits metaphysics in order to explain the position of sentient beings should warrant the label ‘metaphysician’ (rather than ‘metaphysicist’).

As nihilism is only a problem for us because there is a difference between our interpretation of the universe as a ‘whole’ and the practice of our own lives within it, we are presented with three possibilities. First, we could ignore individualistic meaning and stoically go about life within a disinterested universe. Second, we could be post-modern and ignore the nihilistic ‘whole’ to focus in on an arbitrary value system. Or finally, we accept Nietzsche’s challenge to be consummate nihilists and only accept a universal ‘whole’ that includes subjective realities (various perspectives) as constituting the universe. While Nietzsche followed this all the way, that there is nothing but perspectives⁴⁷, I am inclined to be more hesitant and first situate the subject in the world before positioning the affectivity of subjective realities.

While the self and the position of the will are certainly concerns for Nietzsche, they appear problematic given the nihilism at the ground of his philosophy. To examine the possibility of a will consistent with an apparently nihilistic world, which Nietzsche saw as necessary, we will shortly turn to Buddhist thought regarding self and emptiness. While Nietzsche’s perspective on Buddhism is technically deficient, it is interesting to compare his ideas of ‘Buddhist nihilism’ to his own brand of nothingness. It is widely believed that Nietzsche knew little of Buddhism outside of Schopenhauer’s interpretation, so as a result Nietzsche

⁴⁷ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 3 S.12.

accepts the characterisation of Buddhism as ‘world-denying’.⁴⁸ With a focus on *Nirvāṇa* as the ‘extinguishing’ of this world, Schopenhauer saw Buddhism as akin to the nihilistic theologies of the west. For Nietzsche, since the Buddhist soteriological project is focussed on escaping the very suffering which he saw as a key strengthening force⁴⁹, he saw Buddhism as the very antithesis of the self-affirmative worldliness he wished to inspire.⁵⁰

There was another side to Nietzsche’s Buddhism that he saw as a potential positive force for his contemporary context. In a notebook, Nietzsche remarked, “I could become the Buddha of Europe:

yet this would of course be a counterpart to the Indian Buddha.”⁵¹ Buddha fails, according to Nietzsche, since he has built a religion with all the pitfalls of Christianity rather than pursuing nihilism and harnessing the empowerment it provokes of the will.⁵² Ignoring the orientalist imposition of ‘religion’ to various Buddhists throughout Asia, the implication of a ‘weakness’ even greater than that of the Christian ‘slave moralists’ is really where Nietzsche condemns Buddhist practice as a fundamental ignorance of ‘will to power’. From the Buddhist position, the question of power stems quite neatly from the positing of individual will, though the outcome is utterly opposed to Nietzsche’s as the individual is conceptually dissolved. The result is a deeper ‘nihilism’ than Nietzsche proposed, undermining the apparently obvious natural ‘law’ of ‘will to power’.

⁴⁸ A good study can be found in, Morrison, R., *Nietzsche and Buddhism*.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 1. Maxim 8. “What does not destroy me, makes me stronger.”

⁵⁰ See Morrison, R., *Nietzsche and Buddhism*, pp.30-31.

⁵¹ Quoted in Davis, *Zen after Zarathustra*, p.90 - Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. G. Colli and M. Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), Division 7, vol. 1, p. 111.

⁵² Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 23.

Heidegger, in his voluminous commentary on Nietzsche, states that “Nietzsche’s metaphysics is not an overcoming of nihilism. It is the ultimate entanglement in nihilism.”⁵³ Indeed, Davis reinforces the criticism saying, “it appears that it may, in fact, be Nietzsche who remained unable to let nihilism overcome itself.”⁵⁴ For Heidegger it was the stagnation of metaphysics, as the mode of Nietzsche’s inquiry, which prevented Nietzsche from following through the implications of nihilism, one important aspect of which Davis hints at. If one who begins the inquiry into nihilism follows it through, without reifying the concept of nihilism into a metaphysical existent, then nihilism is found to be an impossible state of being. A thesis which claims that all is meaningless is self-contradictory and an individual who justifies their actions as nihilistic is plainly deluded. Was this due to some weakness of the will on Nietzsche’s part or a more insidious characteristic of his philosophy that held him within the grasp of an impossible nihilism? I want to reiterate here that this ‘impossible nihilism’ is not unique to Nietzsche’s philosophy and is fundamental to our contemporary world.

Of course there is the possibility that Nietzsche was right. Like a coin that has lost its monetary significance and now appears as a simple metal disc,⁵⁵ morality has become a mere token, holding the place of something lost. The only valuation possible on this model is brought about through struggle and eventual triumph of the strong over the weak. Power as a ‘right’ from nature overrides the traditional moral values, now mere tokens, and there is no right and wrong other than those concepts an individual takes on of their own will.⁵⁶

So morality, understood as universally justifiable valuation, simply does not exist. For

⁵³ Heidegger, Nietzsche vol IV; 340; referenced in Davis, B.W., *Zen after Zarathustra*, p.129, fn.2.

⁵⁴ Davis, B. W., *Zen after Zarathustra*, p. 106.

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, 'On truth and lie in an extra-moral sense,' *The Viking Portable Nietzsche*, p.46-7, Trans. Kaufmann.

⁵⁶ Even if a valuation is forced upon another a value must still be *self affirmed* if it is to hold subjectively.

Nietzsche, acting on this realisation places us in a position ‘beyond good and evil’ – inasmuch as this position transcends conventional moral valuation this is true, but trivially so. To secede to Nietzsche’s ideal, to become the *Übermensch*, the character of action beyond good and evil must be self-affirming, world-affirming, in the face of nihilism. Revealed in this paradox is some realisation of empowerment opened up by the revelation of nothingness at the base of reality. In the extremes of scepticism something remains hidden. The positive interpretation of nihilism is identical to its negative and terrifying aspect – absolute freedom. How to address this tenet is the preoccupation of the existential mode.

How indeed can one derive meaning from nothingness? This is not a problem to be solved, such a solution is impossible if it were addressed directly, instead it must be dissolved. In this respect philosophical concepts gleaned from Zen have found contemporary application far outside the field of their inception. Modern commentators on this problem have drawn various conclusions, such as; to live in the moment,⁵⁷ to act spontaneously,⁵⁸ non-grasping,⁵⁹ to make all life a state of play,⁶⁰ intuitive intellectualisation,⁶¹ or emphasising nihilism and interconnectedness.⁶² These responses tend to resolve either towards oneness or complete individuality. I believe conclusions such as these betray a misunderstanding of the complication of ‘nothingness’; that it cannot be one or other (nor both), and yet most

⁵⁷ Feldshuh, D., ‘Zen and the Actor’, *The Drama Review*, Vol.20, No.1, (Mar., 1976), pp. 79-89.

⁵⁸ As a Taoist principle in relation to martial arts; Keenan, J., ‘Spontaneity in Western Martial Arts – A Yogācāra Critique of *Mushin* (No-Mind)’ , *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 16/4, 1989, pp.285-298.

⁵⁹ See Wright, D., *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* , p.198.

⁶⁰ Whitehill, J., ‘Is There a Zen Ethic?’ , *The Eastern Buddhist*, v.20/1, 1987, p.32. This manner of interpretation has also been adopted into performance theory; see for instance - Gregory Bateson’s ‘A Theory of Play and Fantasy’, in Bateson, G., *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, pp.177-193.

⁶¹ Following Spinoza; See Nagatomo S., ‘Zeami’s Conception of Freedom’, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Oct., 1981), pp. 401-416

⁶² Davis, B., ‘Zen After Zarathustra: The Problem of the Will in the Confrontation Between Nietzsche and Buddhism’, *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 28, Autumn 2004, pp.89-138. – Following Nishitani.

studies conclude along the lines of positivity, of affirmation. Reflection upon absolute freedom reveals a desire to act for oneself (to be self-willed), so it is not surprising to find a common bias at the outset of any study. The alternative mode would be self-destructive nihilism which has obvious pragmatic limitations but should be considered as a philosophical possibility nevertheless, if only to point out the necessity of pragmatic considerations when assessing a world-view.

The immediacy of existential awareness in response to a particular world-view and the pragmatic implications this entails should indicate that philosophy, specifically here our response to nihilism, has radical consequences. Nietzsche himself remarks, “The thought of suicide is a powerful solace: by means of it one gets through many a bad night⁶³”, succinctly expressing the two-fold nature of affirmative nihilism and the existential dilemma it presents. A dilemma since the drive for affirmation is tied up with the individual will, which finds itself physically limited and reflects upon itself as a philosophical paradox. The manner of dissolving the problem of nihilism may lie in disentangling the will and drive for affirmation in the face of meaninglessness. In response to nihilism Nishitani presents a fundamental difference between the standpoint of will and the standpoint of Buddhist śūnyatā⁶⁴. The will is always necessarily limited to the individual, whereas śūnyatā nihilates even the individual.

Śūnyatā

In Mahāyāna Buddhism *Śūnyatā* or ‘Emptiness’ is used to designate the ultimate reality of non-(intrinsically existent) things. ‘Nothingness’, as a concept, is commonly presented as

⁶³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, IV, 157.

⁶⁴ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p.265.

absolute otherness; the ‘no-thing’.⁶⁵ But this is a poor understanding of nothingness.

Consider the property of “not non-monkey” which is necessarily an exclusive concept applicable only to monkeys. Nothing as merely non-thing gains its exclusivity from a play of logic. The more significant step is to be found in *śūnya*, the ‘empty’, as those things in the world which are characterised by emptiness, so that *śūnyatā* designates a common characteristic of worldly things and is *transcendental* rather than transcendent. While the ‘nothingness’ at the base of every consideration under a nihilistic world-view presents the existential dilemma of being utterly other than the will’s desire for affirmation, emptiness implicates the base but refers directly to the thing itself and is not other than that thing.

‘Emptiness’ is not posited as a nihilistic ‘nothingness’, though the history of the idea is decorated with accusations to this effect. Two related distinctions and a metaphysical principle characterise a strong Mādhyamika approach, elaborated by Nāgārjuna, which will be taken up here. The first distinction is between conventional and ultimate interpretations of reality, which is tied in with the second: the relationship of ‘emptiness’ to ‘dependent arising’. The metaphysical principle, derived from this pedagogical identification, presents a ‘middle way’ between the extremes of nihilism and its co-entailing opposite, reification. Simply put, if both nihilism and reification are shown to be untenable positions, that is to say that they fail to explain reality or how it appears, then the solution must be a metaphysically valid principle that proposes an alternative that is neither reifying nor nihilistic. To achieve this the concept of emptiness must be carefully elaborated.

⁶⁵ This is the sense of ‘wu’ in Daoism, as transcendent and absolutely ‘other’, which is examined in the next chapter as divergent from Mahāyāna Buddhism. “If one predicates being of the generated, then the generator must be termed ‘non-being’, not because it does not exist, but because its mode of being is entirely different (transcendent) from that of the thing generated.” Saso, M., ‘Buddhist and Taoist Ideas of Transcendence’, in Saso and Chappell (Eds.), *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I*, p.17.

Glass says that making a choice of type (or definition) of emptiness is a leap of faith⁶⁶, yet if this were true then why 'emptiness' at all? If it could mean anything, then it is unnecessary. 'Emptiness' is based in metaphysical reality, thus the understanding implicit to Buddhist soteriology is dependent upon a realisation of this reality. Whatever 'emptiness' is understood to mean, it must be metaphysically valid. Thus far two criteria have been identified which must be met: it must answer the existential sceptic's charge of nihilism; while maintaining an avoidance of reifying the characteristic of emptiness.

The problem with reification will be examined in more detail below, but crucially to tie into the Buddhist project and the existentialist's search for meaning, things are explained to be 'empty' of intrinsic existence because to hold *any* concept or entity as intrinsically existent will cause one's beliefs to come into conflict with the world apparent as soon as the functional limits of the idea of that 'individual' thing are exceeded, either spatially, temporally or conceptually. The claim here is that no idea can be extended indefinitely *and remain functional* without coming into conflict with reality. Things are considered 'empty' rather than merely 'limited' though because even the limited validity of any thing does not indicate its intrinsic existence but is rather a reflection of the bounds of the system that defined it, just as the recognition of its conflict is a reflection of the limits of that system. To posit an existent thing, ignoring the defining system, is to reify, which leads to the failure of that position and so to nihilism. To posit nihilism is to reify nihilism, which presents the paradox of nihilism; that it denies itself through affirmation. More practically, nihilism is always posited beyond its bounds of applicability and so is always in conflict with apparent reality. This is the binary paradox of nihilism and reification from which the doctrine of śūnyatā must escape.

⁶⁶ Glass, *Working Emptiness*, p 107.

The two-fold extremes of nihilism and reification (essentialism), which appear to entail one another in turn, seem unable to satisfy human desire for a meaningful existence. The inability to find any essential reality invokes a confrontation with ‘nothingness’ that directly conflicts with a common-sense view of the world and threatens to undermine all understanding. However, this ‘nothingness’ is a nihilistic result of the pursuit of essence, and is hence a negation of what the seekers believe *should* be. It denies not only meaning, but existence, the interaction of ‘things’ and even ‘things’ themselves, including negating the existence of self. Moving now to a Buddhist conception of this ‘nothingness’ – *śūnyatā* – the negations remain, but since the focus is inverted, the impact is also altered. This understanding seeks to avoid both nihilism and reification through a ‘middle path’. Hopkins expresses the problem well; “When we find out that people do not inherently exist, we want to have nothing to do with them, we become indifferent to them. However, this is just due to our addiction to the extremes; actually, emptiness is supposed to be the key to compassion.”⁶⁷ How this functions is the focus of the metaphysics developed in this thesis.

To examine the connection between emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and morality from within the Buddhist tradition it is useful to understand the concept of emptiness as functioning in two distinct ways; metaphysically and epistemologically. While these two remain distinct for the purposes here, it is important to recognise that these are interrelated and ultimately inextricable. When emptiness is understood metaphysically it refers to individual entities being empty of essence (*śūnya*), that things exist only conventionally and that in reality there are no intrinsically existent things. This is explained through ‘dependent origination’ which will be explained in more detail below and elaborated into a contemporary metaphysical framework in chapter 3. Epistemologically, emptiness can be understood as a

⁶⁷ Hopkins, J., *Emptiness Yoga: The Tibetan Middle Way*, p.104.

negation of reified concepts which do not in fact hold in reality; indeed many Buddhist schools take this as the *only* use of emptiness (denying a metaphysical aspect). The purpose of this is to distinguish conventional understanding from the realisation of ultimate reality as expressed by the Buddha. These 'two truths', and the distinction between them, forms the basis of much interschool argument, however the authority of the Buddha is always maintained for it cannot be denied that there is a distinction, however it is explained, between the experience of a common individual and that of an enlightened being.

Regarding morality, it is possible to distinguish three aspects of the Buddha's teaching; the Dharma as expressed for lay disciples, the Dharma as expressed for members of the Sangha (Buddhist monks and nuns) and finally the morality of an enlightened being. Each 'level' builds upon the last and while the Buddhist ontology does not change, what characterises each level is its soteriological focus. This is not to imply that the goals are in conflict (as there is a single soteriology), but rather that the epistemic outlook is transformed at each level. The distinction between each level is focus. There is only one Dharma: for lay disciples the focus is on positive and negative actions with regard suffering through *karma*; for the Sangha there is an added emphasis on the complete annihilation of suffering through the pursuit of enlightenment for both themselves and encouraging it in others; and finally for an enlightened being, one who has become free of suffering, there can be no such pursuit, yet their actions are an embodiment of the Dharma. Recognising the difference drawn between these modes will benefit the discussion that follows and will act as background for the discussion of transcendence in the next chapter.

The *Heart Sutra* states that “whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form.”⁶⁸ This apparent paradox has become one of the most important texts in the Mahāyāna tradition. As Lopez notes, no sutra has been more pervasive⁶⁹, indeed it is said that there is nothing explained in Buddhist philosophy that is not already expressed in the lines that make up the short text. The sutra goes on to say that the same holds for all the other aggregates in the same way, every aspect that makes up our reality is empty. This immediately contradicts theories, both in the time of the Buddha and today, that posit essential existence in any form (consider Plato’s forms, an immutable soul, an existent creator God or even physical atomism). But such theories are put forward in order to satisfy that philosophical desire for a primary explanation, some anchor upon which all further explanations may be tethered and so justified. If such a basis is denied, how are we to avoid the negative implications of nihilism, or even more immediately how are we to make sense of the world?

For the sake of moving towards a coherent metaphysical understanding, *śūnyatā* (‘emptiness’) is said to be synonymous with *pratītya-samutpāda* (‘co-dependent arising’).⁷⁰ Simply, if every ‘thing’ is dependent upon its causes and conditions for its state of being, and this ‘thing’ is also among the causes and conditions of other entities, then no single entity contains the cause of its own existence. Even so, reality still holds and cause and effect can still be seen to function through the interactions of empty things. Nāgārjuna points out that if any entity actually had intrinsic existence it would be unable to change (since an intrinsic existent is a single state) and so could not interact (since this would alter the relational

⁶⁸ *Heart Sutra* in Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.163.

⁶⁹ Lopez, D., 1996, *Elaborations on Emptiness*, p.5.

⁷⁰ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* [abbreviated as *MK*] 24, v.18. See also, Nāgārjuna’s *śūnyatāsaptati* (‘*Seventy Verses on Emptiness*’) for an in depth discussion.

character of the intrinsic state) and thus would not exist. The complication here is not only that emptiness is feasible but that it is also *essential* to any rational framework of reality. If *any* aspect of reality is essentialised, then that aspect will come into conflict with the rest of the system, rather than allowing explanations to be built upon it, as was the original desire. Rather than being nihilistic, emptiness is the *foundation* of epistemology, meaning and morality for the Mādhyamika Buddhists. Nāgārjuna succinctly summarises, “For one who contradicts emptiness there would be nothing that ought to be done; activity would be uninitiated and an agent would be non-acting.”⁷¹

Emptiness as a metaphysical principle has implications that extend beyond the traditional field of ‘metaphysics’ and which have direct consequences for the problem of nihilism. Since emptiness allows for change, and if things were non-empty there could be no activity, then metaphysical emptiness also extends to considerations of personal freedom. An intrinsically existent value could no more interact or be made use of than an intrinsically existent object. On this reading it is the lack of inherent existence, that same void which fuels the problem of nihilism, which allows for change and the possibility of one action or another and only then is the valuation of action made possible. If all things in the world simply *were*, intrinsically, then the question of morality would not arise – there would be no interaction, no changes and so no possible consideration of right or wrong affects or effects. If the universe were not empty, there could be no morality⁷² and no normative direction. This is a complete *inversion* of the problem from a traditional reductionist perspective.

The problem of nihilism arose as a result of postulating a solid metaphysical reality beyond our perceptions and then attempting, unsuccessfully, to derive a normative value from

⁷¹ Book 24 of the *MK*, (Trans. Garfield, p.37.)

⁷² See also *MK* 35.

these (so-defined) existent properties. Nāgārjuna begins by rejecting intrinsic existence since it would deny values we *already* have. Interesting as this is, an existential thinker may well compare this to denying the 'death of god' merely because this would entail a world wherein godly values did not exist, thus missing (or never arriving at) the point at which the loss of faith presents us with the very problem. Yet there is a significant difference between those traditional values rejected by Nietzsche, held on a basis of transcendent faith, and the Buddhist moral valuations which are intertwined with worldly reality and rely upon knowledge of that reality for their foundation. Where the problem of transcendent valuation does still arise in Buddhism will be examined in chapter 2.

Understanding the basic metaphysical function of emptiness in no way solves the problem of moral nihilism and is presented here to signal the extent of the implications of emptiness to Buddhist philosophical thought. If a realisation of intrinsic emptiness were sufficient to understand moral valuations, then following the deep scepticism discussed in the last section through to its nihilistic conclusions should eventuate in a great outpouring of moral responsibility, or something of the sort. In fact the problem of nihilism has historically presented the opposite. "What can be broken should be broken; what will stand the blow is fit to live; what breaks into smithereens is rubbish; in any case, strike right and left, it will not and cannot do any harm."⁷³ To focus on the 'empty' things themselves, Nāgārjuna was attempting to avoid the potential nihilism of relating to 'emptiness' as some greater underlying reality in itself. Padhye is critical of Nāgārjuna's use of *śūnya*, which he sees as a tool to eliminate the impossible openness the Buddha's direct teaching leaves regarding morality and society.⁷⁴ *Śūnyatā* is not an aspect of reality but rather the denial that any

⁷³ Dmitri Psarev, quoted in Audi, (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p.805 'Russian Nihilism'.

⁷⁴ 'Conclusion' in Padhye, A., *The Framework of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*.

property is an essential characterisation of an object and that any such property could not (on its own, or in combination) provide an adequate description of that object. What Nāgārjuna emphasises with regard to metaphysics is *not* the methodological limitations,⁷⁵ but that there should be restrictions on how *śūnyatā* is to be used or understood. The middle path between absolute reification and nihilism depends upon such a refined understanding of emptiness.

Kalupahana, in his commentary on the *kārikā* states; “If Nāgārjuna had merely relied upon the abstract concept of “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), ignoring “the empty” (*śūnya*)... the abstract concept could easily have been reconciled with the notion of substance.”⁷⁶ This also signifies a conscious shift away from some great underlying nothingness, the nihilistic perspective, to a focus upon the interactions of those everyday things apparent to us. This is a turn to a metaphysics of immanence, according to the consequences of interdependence, with the most radical implication being a complete lack of substance at any level. Empty things, being dependent for their existence and in turn being depended upon for the existence of other empty things, cannot be said to exist substantially or independently, that is to *reify* any particular thing. In the same way, if the concept ‘emptiness’ is understood as separate from empty things, as some underlying metaphysical existent which somehow functions through things in the world, then it too has been falsely reified. Conversely, to extrapolate from this interdependence that there is *nothing at all* would be utter nihilism and is immediately found to be in conflict with this functioning reality we are confronted with.

⁷⁵ see *ibid.*, pp.56-7

⁷⁶ Kalupahana, D., *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna*, p.338.

Nāgārjuna emphasises the ‘middle path’ between reification and nihilism since the outcome of either extreme fails to describe our reality, and so too, from a soteriological perspective, a false view could not lead to liberation. Debates throughout Buddhist history indicate various instances of falling into these extreme views, though, unlike the existential nihilists, always with Buddhist goals in mind. Tachikawa proposes that by the time of Nāgārjuna the doctrine of dependent arising was no longer fulfilling its function as ‘non-being’ became conceptualised as an affirmation of being.⁷⁷ Again, the significance of emptiness is to avoid both nihilism and reification, to conflate the two does not solve the problem as already in their individual modes they are co-entailing. Dealing with individual entities, if one holds that an apparent entity does not exist (*nihilo*) then its non-existence is reified and this conflicts with its influence in the world. If one maintains that an entity does exist *intrinsically* then it cannot change, cannot interact and its position in interdependent reality is nihilated. The same is true when positing at the ‘ultimate’ level. To claim ‘all is emptiness’ or that ‘nothingness is at the base of all reality’ is to reify the concept of non-existence into an existent. The inverse holds similarly. If emptiness performs a key function in Buddhist soteriology then to reify at any level would negate this function. If this trend has been repeated much later in East Asian developments in Buddhism, then they would equally fall to Nāgārjuna’s critique of the extreme views.

The elimination of extreme views must be extended to the concept ‘emptiness’ itself.

‘Emptiness’ is not a universal truth independent of any instance of emptiness, rather what we are considering here is a mere concept that describes the contingency of those instances that make up the world. Emptiness itself is empty. The nature ‘emptiness’ describes in the world is merely an absence, a pedagogical tool to eliminate false views. If emptiness is

⁷⁷ Tachikawa, M., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, p.115.

reified and clung to as some metaphysical reality then the pedagogical function of the concept is lost and no sense can be made of the Buddhist path. This is the understanding of Nāgārjuna, “if someone believes in *śūnyatā* you [have declared that] he is lost!”⁷⁸ If we wish to understand our reality, emptiness stands as an indicator to test our assumptions when engaging with apparently self-existent things in the world and ‘emptiness’ alone answers few questions. To follow the implications of emptiness one must turn to dependent arising. Speaking strictly of the possibility of metaphysics from interdependence, the philosopher who balks at the proposition of empty things interacting (to ask “what then interacts?”) is really indicating the limitations of a metaphysical framework of inquiry, the language of which holds places only for existent things. Following Nāgārjuna, it makes no sense at all to speak of intrinsically existent things interacting, if we are to proceed it is best to accept the limitations of such frameworks.

It is important to concede that I am not following Nāgārjuna when I propose a metaphysical understanding of interdependence. Anything approaching metaphysical speculation would certainly be shunned by Nāgārjuna, as it was by the Buddha, while apparently metaphysical concepts such as ‘emptiness’ or ‘interdependence’ were adopted for their pedagogical function rather than ontological reality. Nāgārjuna employs a *reductio ad absurdum* in order to reveal the functional extent of such systems and exactly where they fail through their own logic.⁷⁹ As Tachikawa notes, “by faithfully applying the mechanisms of logic to their utmost limits, he brought about the breakdown of the application of language.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Lokātītastava 23 in Lindtner, *Master of Wisdom*, p.9.

⁷⁹ As I have suggested, Nāgārjuna’s critiques are not only applicable to his contemporaries but are a present concern. See Garfield, J. and Priest, G., ‘Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought’, *Philosophy East & West*, Vol. 53, Num. 1 (Jan 2003), p.18 - “The air of irrationalism and laissez faire mysticism is thus dissipated once and for all. If Nāgārjuna is beyond the pale, then so, too, are Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger.”

⁸⁰ Tachikawa, M., *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, p 151.

However the use of language conventionally must not be discarded, as it can be considered true in some sense due to the results of the use of language.⁸¹ Here the delicate interplay between conventional and ultimate modes is again revealed.

It has been claimed that since the language Mādhyamikas use has no referent, rather characterising everything as empty, they do not have to defend any particular philosophical view⁸², though this is still subject to scholarly debate⁸³ as it has been for as long as there have been Mādhyamikas. Mādhyamikas are still Buddhists however, and as such they believe in the Buddha, in enlightenment and the teachings of the Buddha such as the Four Noble Truths. While the language and structures used by the Buddha may only be convenient designations used out of pedagogical necessity on this account, a Mādhyamika is still concerned with the Buddhist soteriological project. As previously discussed, ‘emptiness’ plays a strong part in the explanation and experience of this project. Holding ‘no view’, depends upon the lack of referent of convenient designations, which is to say that those ‘things’ to which we refer do not exist in reality, they *really* are empty. This poses two immediate considerations; the first being metaphysical, which is examined later in the thesis, and the second existential. For the latter consideration, that is to ask what it would be like to experience emptiness, the positioning of ‘self’ is critical.

According to the Buddhist framework, the self is, like all things, dependent upon causes and conditions for its existence. When these conditions cease to hold an individual ‘dies’ and when these conditions are met an individual is ‘born’. Ignoring for the moment questions

⁸¹ Kalupahana, D., *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna*, p.19.

⁸² Huntington, C., *The Emptiness of Emptiness*, p.57.

⁸³ See Garfield, J., *Empty Words*, particularly papers 3 and 5 (with Priest, G.).

about what metaphysical basis reincarnation may claim,⁸⁴ there is a recognisable principle in karma in which the positive is manifest in positive circumstances and the negative in negative circumstances. The nature of cause and effect is not merely physical but also moral according to the doctrine of karma. In this way beings are understood to be born into a realm depending upon their past actions, towards the highest heavenly realms for positive actions and the lowest realms of hell for negative with human beings situated somewhere in between. More immediately, from moment to moment, the seeds and fruits of karma are sewn and won as cause and effect. This is a natural law and it is important to point out that there are no judgements being made.

An enlightened being, one who realises emptiness, is no longer conditioned by karmic influences. There is no longer any 'gap' between their perception of the world and the way they live. As a practitioner attains realisation they become "a spontaneous expression of the Bodhisattva's deep compassion for all living beings."⁸⁵ This claim is of fundamental interest for the present thesis. From the existential angle, the difference between acting immediately due to causal conditions and acting spontaneously as an expression of absolute freedom is an intriguing one. From the metaphysical angle we may ask after the origin of this compassion which arises spontaneously. In either case the connection between emptiness and its experiential result is not immediately clear, nor is the difference between 'ignorant' and 'enlightened' modes of understanding, even though these are clearly connected to the *realisation* of emptiness in the world. Furthermore, while an enlightened being is certainly able to make use of empty words and systems as pedagogical tools, hence convenient designations, it is not immediately clear how reality would appear to an

⁸⁴ That is to ask 'what *is* the seed of rebirth that can account for a continuity across lifetimes?'

⁸⁵ Huntington, C., *The Emptiness of Emptiness*, p.89.

enlightened being, since it would seem that no expression could ever relate to reality as such because while reality is empty of intrinsic existence every instance of explanation is necessarily reified. To make use of language is to fall into this problem, with the only 'solution' being to make any reference to ultimate truth deliberately self-refuting in order to at least point out the conventional limitations of language.

It is a challenge to avoid reified thought, particularly in philosophy, and it is not clear if reification can be avoided altogether. To accept the divide of conventional and ultimate truths will certainly cause problems for a metaphysical interpretation, through which both truths must somehow be related, though it should at least numb the sting of nihilism as a merely conventional realisation. Ultimately, on this reading, nihilism cannot hold because the sceptical logic which brought it to light cannot apply to ultimate reality. Even so, since these systems still function conventionally, we may assume that nihilism remains a conventionally real problem. This assumption depends upon the modes of conventional and ultimate being independent - that this is not so is particularly clear in the case of nihilism. The problem of nihilism refers to the ultimate reality, that there is no meaning ultimately; however since the system which presents nihilism is shown to be faulty at the ultimate level, as it plays on the impossibility of absolute reification, then the conventional reality of nihilism, from the mode of the ultimate, is shown to be false. In this manner nihilism works through both aspects to undermine itself. That the problem of nihilism is only apparent through analysis of its position in *both* modes indicates something of the connection between the 'two truths'.

The Great Doubt

As the existential realisation of nihilism, and the problems that result, are not isolated to Western philosophy, it is insightful to consider the responses of Zen practitioners to the realisation of this 'nothingness' at the heart of Zen. Throughout Zen literature there is reference made to a 'sickness' which arises through extended periods of meditation. This was certainly in part due to the tremendous physical stress placed upon the body, while the transformation of the conscious mind towards extreme doubt transforms the practitioner's awareness to one of despair. Such a psychosomatic malaise overcame Hakuin⁸⁶ early in his practice, for which a master prescribed a visualisation technique whereby he was able to correct the physical imbalances he felt.⁸⁷ The other side of the sickness is the 'Great Doubt', a relentless nihilation of essentialism into emptiness, leaving nothing but an existential void. This may well be a symptom of Zen reduced to philosophy, investigating Buddhist *śūnyatā* subjectively, a *kōan* without solution. What is revealed through such reflection is *nothingness*, though, as we shall see, a limited *nothingness* characterised as nihilism. The experience of impenetrable nihilism is a possible station of the Great Doubt, and will underpin this philosophical investigation of Zen.

For Nishitani Keiji, nihilism is not only an existential dilemma but also akin to the means by which one breaks through to enlightenment. He explains:

Essentially, nihilism and Existence break down the standpoint of the observing self in which the self that sees and the self that is seen are separated. When the existence of the self becomes a question mark, an unknown X, and when nihility is experienced behind the

⁸⁶ Zen master Hakuin Ekaku, 1685-1768.

⁸⁷ Recounted in Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, Vol.2, pp.376-379.

existence of the self or at its ground, one can no longer afford to have two separate selves – the questioning self and the self that is questioned.⁸⁸

The result of nihilism then, according to Nishitani, is to realise one's *true self* by reducing the field of awareness to the origin of nihilism – non-dualistic *nothingness*.⁸⁹ This is a resolution that depends upon the disillusion of the ego, to the realisation of *no-self* (*anātman*).

Nishitani is able to draw upon the epistemological foundation Descartes sets out in his *Meditations*, as a scepticism akin to Buddhist deconstruction of phenomena. Descartes conclusion, that of the irreducible thinking subject, is here seen as a mere pause before the process of doubting must penetrate still further, of self doubting itself – a progression apparently absurd from a Cartesian standpoint. This further penetration of the 'self' is possible due to the separation of the subjective self into doubt and doubter – an artificial dichotomy – inherent in Cartesianism and still throughout much of contemporary philosophy.

Concerning Zen, to directly experience reality as it is, the nihilistic self must be overcome.

This possibility is opened up through repeatedly deepening doubt, not to merely draw upon an existential logic but to question the essential existence of that doubting ego. It is to ask:

"who is it that doubts?" Nishitani refers to this as the "self-presentation of the Great Doubt".⁹⁰ This deepening of nihilism reveals the 'nothingness' behind the self, which

"...signals nothing less than the bankruptcy of the Cartesian ego."⁹¹ The process of doubt

⁸⁸ Nishitani, K., *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, p.2.

⁸⁹ Bret Davis explains that Nishitani "saw philosophy's rational pursuit of wisdom and Zen's embodied 'investigation into the self' as mutually supportive endeavours" (Davis, B., foreword to 'Nishitani Keiji's "The Standpoint of Zen: Directly Pointing to the Mind"', in Edelglass and Garfield, *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, p.93.) – this position is also adopted in the present thesis.

⁹⁰ Nishitani, K., *Religion and Nothingness*, pp.20-21.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.33.

which brought the thinking subject into focus destroys the validity of the position, according to Nishitani.

This is a radical distinction to the position of subjectivity adopted in contemporary philosophy, particularly existentialist modes of thought (including those who would not label themselves as such). Where the existentialist places the subjective at the heart of experience and meaning, Nishitani presents a view developed from the emptiness of this very position. Nevertheless, the subjective experience remains as an important staging post, for both modes of thought, allowing the concerns of various traditions to come together in addressing the common problem of nihilism.

Nishitani is in agreement with the preliminaries of Nietzsche's perspective on nihilism. Nihilism *is* always present, but it must be experienced before it may be overcome.⁹² While Nietzsche saw nihilism as something to be affirmed, many who followed attempted to reevaluate the experience of nihilism in order to express that want of positivity that lies behind the drive for affirmation. As mentioned in the first section, the positive side to nihilistic realisation is the absolute (and potentially terrifying) freedom this leaves open to the individual. Sartre's *ek-stasis*, as 'nothingness', acts as a continual springboard of nihilism, affirming the transcendence of the self against this impossible backdrop. Nishitani's position exposes the function of the ego in such a philosophical mode, as it reveals a ground of 'nothingness', which becomes a barrier to freedom. Here a distinction must be made of (mere) 'nothingness' (Jp. *mu*) contrasted with 'absolute nothingness' (Jp. *zettai mu*), which is representative of having no ground. According to Nishitani, it is only absolute nothingness that can deliver the kind of freedom Sartre's existential mode aspires to affirm.

⁹² *ibid.*, p.44.

Nishitani (and the Kyōto school generally) also substantially breaks away from the atheistic existential mode through a strong focus on 'religion'. Nishitani claims that the modern malaise of subjective atheism must be broken through to the world of religion. The familiar term is relatively transformed in this context however. As it is the state of separating the reality of oneself from everyday life, which has led to nihilism, it is this separation that must be overcome,⁹³ and the realisation of the 'true self' is a religious experience in this sense. Much is made by Kyōto scholars of the connections between Christian thought and Zen in this vein, but these discussions will not be covered here. For the present study it is important just to recognise the significance of the term 'religion' to Nishitani's thought and to hint at how this affects his interpretation of the existential mode.

As the experience of nihilism becomes the force through which the 'true self' is uncovered, it is in turn this realisation that overcomes the problem of nihilism. Once again the 'true self' will only function in this capacity if it is not reified, for if intrinsically existent, nihilism is immediately invoked. With no separation between the questioning self and the self questioned, the only possibility is to abandon systematic reduction and live, as the existentialist ideal, immanently, in the moment. That this is an experienced reality and not merely a conceptual conclusion is of key importance for Nishitani's project. After breaking through to the groundless ground of the 'true self', how one relates to the world beyond nihilism at first appears as uncertain as the absolute freedom garnered from the existentialists. For nihilism is not then washed from the mind without lingering effect; conventional views are still problematically relativised and there remains a lack of any 'ultimate' meaning or morality. While this may not matter to one immersed in their own

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.36.

non-dual subjectivity, the question of 'what it is that motivates' is raised as soon as they move to interact with others in the world.

Finally there is the claim made by Zen scholars that Zen is a kind of distillation of Buddhist philosophy. Abe remarks, "Zen is not merely one form of Buddhism, but rather, in its fundamental nature, is the basic source of all forms of Buddhism."⁹⁴ If Abe's claim were correct then all Buddhism would have nihilism at its base, and so the problems of meaning and morality encountered by the existentialists are similarly applicable. So while the subjective experience of the self may be revealed in its 'true' nature as the breakthrough from nihilist doubt, it is not clear what implications, if any, this has for guiding an individual's actions in the world.

Conclusion

Nihilism is a concern not easily dismissed, particularly when ones' concern is in determining the core of metaphysics, as ours is here. Our apparent inability to make any meaningful statements about the nature of ultimate truth, at the conventional level, presents a philosophical impasse. One must either qualify the issue as 'ineffable' and resolve oneself to quietude,⁹⁵ or determine to endlessly fight against this meaninglessness by forging one's own meaning, as Nietzsche proposes, which is instantly self-refuted - only to be forged again.

⁹⁴ Abe, M., *Zen and Western Thought*, p.235.

⁹⁵ Underlying such a position is the 'ineffable' as an absolute end rather than (as under the definition of epistemological 'transcendence' adopted in this thesis) a developing indication of the need to modify one's system of understanding. This 'quietude' does not accord with the Buddhist soteriological project and any attempt to reconcile this will fall afoul of a self-referential paradox. (As pointed out by Graham Priest in *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, p.211 – regarding a proposition being 'literally ineffable')

The next chapter will pick up this problem in order to determine the nature of the 'Zen moral problem' and establish the limits of the current study. The problem is made more difficult by the separation of levels of meaning, specifically here between ultimate and conventional truths.

Chapter 2: Transcendence

The previous chapter set out the problem of nihilism and proposed that this is symptomatic of a system overreaching its bounds. The alternative to either reification or nihilism, which are co-entailing, would appear to be a middle way between the two extremes. Nishitani proposes that nihilism is a feature of a reductively rationalised world and so, in order to overcome the problem, nihilism must be engaged with and followed through, rather than avoided. Here the problem of nihilism as meaninglessness reappears. If Nishitani is correct, then any correct understanding of reality will have 'nothingness' at its base. What kind of creature will arise from nothingness? Will it be the Mahāyāna Buddhist Bodhisattva, or Nietzsche's Übermensch, or a capitalist pleasure-seeker? Initially the lack of intrinsic self in Buddhist metaphysics would seem to eliminate any selfish or self-directed agency, yet with the emphasis placed upon the subject in existentialist reactions to nihilism the no-self doctrine appears to reaffirm this 'western' nihilism. The assertion that Zen is amoral only reinforces this interpretation, especially when considered in conjunction with some of the 'enlightened' actions of Zen masters recorded historically.

In this chapter I will propose that 'the Zen moral problem' is a result of transcendent justification. In order to explain this, two definitions of transcendence must be identified: ontological and epistemological. While ontological transcendence appears in primary conflict with interdependence, epistemological transcendence is necessary for the Buddhist soteriological project. Put simply, the enlightened perspective transcends the conventional (or ignorant). To make sense of this transcendence without succumbing to the Zen moral problem is the purpose of this chapter.

For Nietzsche, transcendence is a problem due to the necessary separation of the immanent reality of this world from values based in it. As discussed in the previous chapter, the reification of otherworldly values leads to nihilism. This chapter will argue that making a justification based on a transcendent position oversteps the limits of the system in which the justification is applied. This is of significant impact when the overriding truth being considered is 'emptiness' or 'nothingness', in which case a transcendent justification attempts to nihilate the validity of *any* particular mundane event. This is how the Zen moral problem arises.

This chapter is divided into four sections:

The first section, *Zen amorality*, sets up the Zen moral problem. The problem is derived from historic examples displaying an apparent discontinuity between the characteristics of Zen enlightenment and the Buddhist connection of wisdom and compassion to this state of being. I claim that the moral problem arises due to transcendent justification, and that this must be avoided if Zen is to be understood as consistent philosophically *and* soteriologically.

The second section, *Buddhist Soteriology*, expounds the aims of the Buddhist project and its suppositions in order to examine the critique that Zen is not Buddhism. The requirement of epistemic transcendence is elaborated and enlightenment is considered in relation to the 'perfection' of virtue as a possible alternative to transcendence.

The third section, *Daoist Naturalism*, pursues the question of transcendence through early Daoist philosophy, which is intimately connected with Zen thought and the development of the concept of 'Buddha-nature'. The unique implications of transcendence coupled with

immanence as ‘thusness’ are examined, as are the consequences of Dao understood as a functional prime nature.

Finally, the project of the thesis proper is established in *Metaphysics of the Four Noble Truths*. This marks a return to Buddhist soteriology and examines the metaphysical implication of the truth of suffering in the light of nothing transcended.

Zen Amorality

Following the discussion from the previous chapter we now turn to the search for a middle way between the co-entailing extremes of nihilism and reification. Thus far the problem of nihilism has been explained but not overcome. The significance of nihilism again appears when we consider the ‘two truths’ elaborated from Buddhist philosophy. These are, according to Nāgārjuna, the ultimate truth of emptiness (śūnyatā - as elaborated previously) and the conventional truth of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda - to be examined in the next chapter). Nāgārjuna maintains that these truths are self-referential (each entails and is explained by the other) and ontologically identical.⁹⁶ The problem of nihilism returns when ‘ultimate truth’, as emptiness, is taken as overriding conventional truth such that all conventionally maintained values are nullified in relation to an absolute nothingness. When examining the perspective from enlightenment conceptually this outcome is difficult to avoid, yet if this were actually the case then the wider concerns of compassion and the Buddhist project as a whole would fail based on these principles. A focus on Zen allows the implications of these base principles in isolation to be examined.

⁹⁶ See MK 24: 18 (definitely connecting dependent arising and emptiness) and MK 25: 19-20 (on the non-distinction of samsara and nirvana).

Chao-chou (Jp. Joshu) asked his teacher Nan-ch'uan (Jp. Nansen) about the way:

The Way does not belong to knowing or not knowing. To know is to have a concept; to not know is to be ignorant. If you truly realize the Way of no doubt, it is like the sky: wide open and vast emptiness. How can you say 'yes' or 'no' to it?⁹⁷

In the above passage 'the Way' refers to the privileged enlightened perspective, adopted from a Daoist metaphysic⁹⁸. 'To have a concept' is the problem of reification which is self-refuting and so cannot hold ultimately, and 'not knowing' is similarly tied up as the negation of this position. More must be said on the relationship of enlightenment to conceptual thought, however a more pertinent issue is disclosed in the remainder of the passage: 'how can you say *yes* or *no* to it?' In the context of the passage, as a pedagogical tool to remove discursive thought, the statement is affirmative; the failure of conventional reason is set-out as a characteristic of the ultimate truth. Ultimately, discriminative conceptualisation cannot take place as the ultimate truth is the *emptiness* of all such conceptions. In this manner morality is explained to be merely conventionally true. Following Nansen, it would seem that when an enlightened being acts in the world, from their position of 'ultimate truth', we cannot say '*right*' or '*wrong*' to it.

Being outside the limits of moral discourse, the enlightened being is 'beyond good and evil' in Nietzsche's sense. If we are to follow Nietzsche's diagnosis then an enlightened being would be free to forge their own meaning/values/actions, which could be judged by nothing more than their effectiveness at meeting those self-proposed ends. This appears to conflict with the Buddhist ideal that to be enlightened is the *perfection* of virtues, and this perfection is in accord with those virtues conventionally understood.

⁹⁷ Joshu, *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, p.11.

⁹⁸ This is examined in the third section of this chapter.

While conceptually we may be able to dismiss the significance of reified 'morality' and ethical principles, from the perspective of enlightened awareness, it is more difficult to dismiss the pragmatic concerns that these conventions overlay. Hirata Seiko summarises the problem; "Zen's position that the adept's world of *satori* can be reached only through transcendence of dualistic notions of good and evil is one that leaves no ground for distinguishing the socially beneficial from the socially harmful."⁹⁹ If this is also true of what is beneficial or harmful to oneself, as it appears to be from the standpoint of 'nothingness', then the Buddhist soteriological project is nullified. Furthermore, as a political standpoint it would appear that Zen has little to offer, and yet extreme actions *have* been justified for their religiously significant results. A master can teach a student through violence, a Samurai warrior can dwell in a state of 'no-mind' and lop off his opponents head in the name of loyalty and honour, and a national army can invade another country in the name of a Buddhist super-state. Historically these circumstances have come to pass and the justification of some 'higher', transcendent, position of enlightened authority has been sustained. The purpose of this section is to show that transcendent justification is the basis of the Zen moral problem.

Nāgārjuna warns that to misunderstand emptiness (*sūnyāta*) is to fall into the extremes of nihilism or reification. But if enlightenment is simply the understanding of emptiness and Zen is the distillation of this understanding, then how can a swordsman dwell in a Zen state of 'no-mind' and lop off his opponent's head? What appears to be missing from this understanding of emptiness is a characteristic Buddhist morality. The same openness that allowed Nietzsche's reaction from nihilism, the 'will to power', to be appropriated by the Nazis appears to be present in the distilled Zen philosophy too. Indeed modern

⁹⁹ Hirata Seiko, in *Rude Awakenings*, p.12.

commentators have targeted the Kyōto school regarding Japanese Nationalism as just such an example. The focus for this chapter is neither nationalism nor systems of morality specifically, but rather the underlying philosophical problem; the apparent openness of Zen and how this fits with wider Buddhist philosophy.

Other than the well recorded adherence of Samurai warriors to Zen and the connection of Zen philosophy to the way of the sword¹⁰⁰, the recorded history of Zen is filled with actions that appear morally problematic. A dramatic example is of Master Nansen, who, in order to teach arguing monks a lesson cuts a cat in two.¹⁰¹ Instead of being shunned as a negative action, breaking the precept of not killing, these actions are attributed philosophical validity in Zen. While many argue that this is due to specifically Japanese cultural influences,¹⁰² the Zen moral problem, being based on a philosophical distillation of Buddhism, has much farther-reaching significance.¹⁰³ The problem is that one can seemingly justify immoral actions by reference to the ultimate nature of that action, which is *empty* of moral considerations. If this were carried through, an enlightened being, in full knowledge of reality and free from karmic effects and conventions such as morality, would have no inclination towards moral action. They would appear as Nietzsche's Übermensch; absolutely free to create their own values according to the manifestation of their own will to power. This should not be the case in Zen, according to the goals of Buddhism, however to

¹⁰⁰ Of particular interest is Takuan's collected writings, *The Unfettered Mind*.

¹⁰¹ *Mumonkan*, 14. Dōgen has a response to Nansen's Cat Kōan which will be examined in detail in chapter 6.

¹⁰² The distinction between Chinese Ch'an and Japanese Zen in this respect is emphasised by Hakamaya, in his Critique of the Zen School, Quoted in Swanson 'Zen is Not Buddhism', *Numen*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May, 1993), p.135. The development of Zen is explored by Robert Sharf in 'Zen of Japanese Nationalism', *History of Religions*, vol.33, no.1 (Aug., 1993), pp. 1-43.

¹⁰³ Indeed, if we follow the commentators above, that 'Western' influence on Japanese thought in the Meiji Era (emphasising scientific method) led to the position presented by philosophers of Zen in the 20th Century, then the moral problem encountered in Zen can also be seen to signify a problem with such emphasis more widely.

explain how Nietzsche's conclusion can be avoided these apparently immoral actions need to be explained.

By far the greatest historical interest in the Zen moral problem has stemmed from the question of nationalism, relating to the support of the Japanese military in the early 20th Century by much of the Zen establishment¹⁰⁴. These concerns were brought to the mainstream by Brian Victoria in the provocative *Zen at War* and its sequel *Zen War Stories*. While certain biases appear in the works¹⁰⁵ the impact on the philosophical study of Zen given the wartime actions of well respected, and in many cases purportedly enlightened, individuals should not be underestimated. Victoria concludes *Zen at War* with the invitation to investigate how such actions have been falsely justified as being in accordance with Zen. According to Victoria, this is primarily down to "the longstanding subjugation of Buddha-Dharma to the state"¹⁰⁶. Victoria would prefer to preserve Zen, but admits that we cannot do so in ignorance of the historical facts. We must ask if these characteristics of the Zen moral problem are philosophically allowable.

One possible response is that we are being overly critical of Zen as a tradition. After all various atrocities throughout human history were instigated by individuals belonging to a great many religious, cultural, philosophical or various polemic traditions and it is usually the case that the instance of those individual's actions are differentiated from the tradition as a whole. Indeed, their actions are often portrayed as heretical and clearly not representative of their tradition of origin. Hirata Seiko remarks; "The Zen priesthood is

¹⁰⁴ A collection of academic essays on the issue, *Rude Awakenings*, is of particular interest given the philosophical import of the Zen moral problem and the significance of these allegations to the Kyōto School. Also see Jerryson, M. & Juergensmeyer, M., *Buddhist Warfare*, for the wider picture of Buddhism and violence.

¹⁰⁵ One example is exposed in Satō's essay, *Suzuki and War*, defending D.T. Suzuki, who is the subject of a significant portion of Victoria's criticism, which will be examined in Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁶ Victoria, B., *Zen at War*, Epilogue, pp.232-4.

made up of individuals, and as in any religion during times of war, there were among them many who appear to have abandoned the ideals of their faith to embrace the narrower ideals of their country.”¹⁰⁷

This is certainly true, however, according to Victoria, there is a more general distinction that was recognised by Japanese scholars at the time; “In general it can be said that Chinese Buddhists believe that war should be avoided no matter what the reason. Japanese Buddhists, on the other hand, believe that war conducted for a [good] reason is in accord with the great benevolence and compassion of Buddhism.”¹⁰⁸ This justification for war refers to the transcendent ‘greater good’, the promise of a Buddhist super-state, the value of which overrides the violent means undertaken to achieve it. There are references made in Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures to the overwhelming value of enlightenment and the Buddhist teachings, “more than the grains of sand in the Ganges”¹⁰⁹, so we may well assume that any means would justify an end whereby the correct Buddhist teachings are propagated. Indeed, it would make sense along these lines for people or animals to be sacrificed in order to sustain a monk who is working towards the liberation of all sentient beings. But we do not find this in the Buddhist texts. Instead monks are recorded as going out of their way to help others, even sacrificing themselves.¹¹⁰ There is an emphasis on compassion, non-violence, on not eating meat where possible, and certainly on the avoidance of warfare at all costs.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Hirata Seiko in *Rude Awakenings*, p.11.

¹⁰⁸ Victoria, B., *Zen at War*, p.87.

¹⁰⁹ Diamond Sutra, 15; in Price, A. & Wong., M. (Trans.), *The Diamond Sutra & The Sutra of Hui-neng*, p.35.

¹¹⁰ For instance, tales of monks giving their own bodies as food for starving villagers or even a tiger; See Kieschnick, J., *The eminent monk: Buddhist ideals in medieval Chinese hagiography*, p.40.

¹¹¹ “Abandoning the taking of life, the ascetic Gotama dwells refraining from taking life, without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings” - *Dīgha-nikāya* 1.8 68; quoted in

There is something about *enlightenment* specifically that gives the Zen problem its philosophical impact. An enlightened being is supposed to be wiser than a conventionally disposed (ignorant) individual. They have a comprehensive understanding of reality. Moreover, they are supposed to be compassionate. The dilemma is presented by Christopher Ives as follows: either wartime *roshi* were not enlightened or enlightenment does not entail wisdom and compassion.¹¹² Robert Sharf proposes that Zen enlightenment is a culturally (monastic) entity that does not relate to any transcendental truth, thus avoiding any such philosophical problems.¹¹³ For the Zen tradition either outcome is problematic and both have wider reaching philosophical implications for Buddhism generally. Whether this can be avoided depends upon how Zen differs philosophically from other forms of Buddhism.

As a distinct form of Buddhism Ch'an (Zen) marks a shift in the emphasis of practice from its Mahāyāna Buddhist foundations. That is from a focus on the cultivation of virtue, to a direct realisation through meditation. This is not to imply that other forms of Buddhism do not use meditation, nor that Zen has no cultivation of virtue, only that the emphasis is placed firmly on meditation in Zen. This focus, while also emphasising experiential awareness, means that the connection between wisdom and compassion has a less robust pedagogical foundation. Philosophically this places focus on the ultimate truth; emptiness, which in the Zen moral problem appears to override conventional considerations akin to nihilism. This is certainly a misapplication of emptiness, but the emphasis on ultimate truth remains valid.

Stewart, J., 'The Question of Vegetarianism and Diet in Pāli Buddhism', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.17, 2010, p.102.

¹¹² Christopher Ives in *Rude Awakenings*, p.30.

¹¹³ Sharf, R., *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition*, p.68.

Bodhidharma, the founder of Ch'an, when asked about the meaning of Dharma is reported to have said, "Vast emptiness, nothing sacred".¹¹⁴

The disarmament of conventional truth in Zen discourse is characteristic of a significant philosophical shift undertaken in this tradition, founded on a transmission outside of the scriptures. Signifying this, the sixth patriarch Huineng is credited with tearing up the scriptures, and while the historical credibility of such an event is dubious, the story is decidedly symbolic. Expressing the more traditional view, Huineng's contemporary Shen Hsiu wrote;

Our body is the *bodhi* tree,
And our mind a mirror bright.
Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,
And let no dust alight.

To this Huineng replied;

There is no *bodhi* tree,
Nor stand of mirror bright.
Since all is void,
Where can the dust alight?¹¹⁵

The superiority of Huineng's response is credited with his being named successor of the tradition. While Shen Hsiu's position was still valid¹¹⁶, it was considered inferior to Huineng's demonstrated understanding. This is an expression of the ultimate truth of 'nothingness'.

¹¹⁴ Dumoulin, H., *Zen Buddhism: A History, India and China*, P.91.

¹¹⁵ *The Diamond Sutra & The Sutra of Hui-neng*, Trans. Price & Wong; Autobiography of Huineng, pp.70 & 72.

¹¹⁶ The metaphor of the dusty mirror is actually another Daoist aspect, taken from Laozi. See Roth, H., *Original Tao*, p.151.

This basis, rather than resulting in utter aloofness, as one may expect given the reading towards nihilism as proposed by the Zen moral problem, is characterised in Zen by the exact opposite. The mode of expressing this ultimate truth, is done through the history of Zen, by focus on immediate experience. “Eat when hungry, sleep when tired.”¹¹⁷ Due to this focus on the immanence of immediate experience “Zen makes no distinction between “is” and “ought””¹¹⁸. One merely reflects upon the world, free of judgements. This is not peculiar to Zen, as mere reflection is the basis of insight meditation (*vipāśyanā*) essential to early Buddhist practice.¹¹⁹ If this immanent reflection indicates something of the enlightened experience, this would certainly avoid the co-entailing extremes of nihilism and reification while revealing the problem of morality, “for when their aim is accomplished and the problem of reifying thought disappears, the content and form of propositions are entirely inconsequential.”¹²⁰ While this does not explain how apparently immoral actions can be justified in this way, it does express the conceptual problem that conventional truths are invalid across transcendent bounds.

The problem of transcendent justification has several facets, the first to be examined is derived from the discussion in Chapter 1 on the limits of systems. In the examples used to propose the Zen moral problem there appears a conflict between a moral judgement and the alleged ‘amorality’ of the ultimate reality of Zen, from which a Zen master is said to act.

¹¹⁷ This common expression is found throughout Zen and Daoist traditions.

¹¹⁸ Ives, C., in *Rude Awakenings*, p.25.

¹¹⁹ For meditation in the Pāli canon, see Swearer, D.K., ‘Control and Freedom: The Structure of Buddhist Meditation in the Pāli Suttas’, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.23, No.4 (Oct. 1973), pp.435-455. It should be noted that while the method of insight meditation is a common factor, the philosophical interpretation of the results of this method adopted by the early Buddhists (realizing the substantial nature of states of consciousness) are not acceptable under the Zen interpretation. Robert Sharf notes: “While all teachers readily concede that the aim of vipassana exercises is to develop “mindfulness” (*satī*), there is much disagreement concerning the precise meaning of mindfulness and the procedures most conducive to fostering it.” – Sharf, R., ‘Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience’, *Numen*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Oct., 1995), P.260.

¹²⁰ Huntington, C., *The Emptiness of Emptiness*, p.57.

Zen is termed 'amoral' since morality is recognised conventionally but not ultimately. To assume moral values to hold ultimately would be to reify those values, contradicting emptiness, resulting in metaphysical conflict and nihilism. Thus when an enlightened being's actions are subjected to moral judgement they are said to be acting 'beyond good and evil'. Labelling Zen 'amoral' is the only solution to a question (moral valuation) which has no referent *ultimately*. Epistemically, the limits of 'morality' have been exceeded and the conventional implications are invalid at the ultimate level.

Arguments to this effect are common in philosophical studies of Zen¹²¹, however, rather than presenting a solution to the Zen moral problem, the above rationale for moral transcendence becomes the root of the problem when the rationale is reversed. A transcendent justification is made in which an apparently immoral action is justified as 'ultimately amoral', and thus the action itself is said to be 'beyond good and evil'. For an enlightened being, from the perspective of the ultimate, this is true, however the judgement of immorality is made conventionally, not ultimately. Indeed 'immorality' makes no sense ultimately, and the judgement could not arise from that position. That the judgement has been made indicates that the action is subject to *conventional* analysis, which is true of any action regardless of its origin. Hence both enlightened and unenlightened actions are actualised at the mundane level and are only *judged* conventionally. Ultimately the action is recognised, but no judgement takes place.

Just as conventional morality cannot be applied to ultimate reality, so too does the application of ultimate 'amorality' overstep the limits of ultimate analysis and so cannot

¹²¹ One critic of such moves is James Whitehill, who has called this tendency 'the transcendence trap' - "The trap misleads them and us into portraying the perfected moral life as a non-rational expressiveness, something natural, spontaneous, non-linguistic, and uncalculating." (Whitehill, J., 'Buddhist Ethics in Western Context: The 'Virtues' Approach', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.1, 1994, p.6.)

override conventional morality.¹²² This is the consequence of recognising epistemic transcendence. The two truths apply to the same phenomenon, such as a mundane action, but respond with distinct interpretations. One interpretation, or level-specific schema, cannot be used to justify implications to a schema set within the other. To this extent one level transcends the other. Metaphysically, a connection through ontic interdependence must be maintained, which will eventually affect the extent to which the two truths are seen as exclusive. For the present chapter it is sufficient to say that there is a problem with transcendent justification.

A major complication with denying transcendent justification is that this method appears to be in common practice. In ethical discourse, for example, the view of a 'limited' individual may be superseded with reference to a position of greater knowledge, greater rationality or some transformative valuation. For example, appealing to an authoritative position of greater knowledge we may say that "she would not have acted in such a base way *if she had known* that its effects are ultimately harmful to herself." Such moves can be understood as a transcendent justification given my epistemic qualification (that 'transcendence' is a radical transformation of mental outlook). Other examples include cross-disciplinary interpretation derived from the sciences, such as the reduction of thoughts to brain states; or the conflict of ideologies resulting in each subsuming the other into their paradigm; or the market value of some unit differing between divergent economic frameworks. In each example there is the potential to override one systematic interpretation through justification from the authority of a second, allegedly superior and epistemically

¹²² See Brear, A.D., 'The Nature and Status of Moral Behavior in Zen Buddhist Tradition', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.24, No.4 (Oct. 1974), p.436 - "They are not relative truths about the world, they cannot be taken as injunctions to amoral behavior, as watchwords for action. The Zen master, in reality, has no 'position' on the subject of moral behavior, because he sees through it, recognizes it as fruitless"

transcendent system. If the problem of transcendent justification is to be maintained these instances must also be problematic. While ultimate reality is a peculiar case, the argument problematising transcendent justification (outlined previously) is also applicable to these common cases. The dissimilarity however, is that epistemic transcendence between conventional modes *can* potentially be reconciled through reference to common systematic origins, but this recourse is unavailable when considering ultimate truth. In short, in any instance of transcendent justification the limits of the relevant systems must be taken into account so that where possible debate can be focussed upon, and built up from, some common ground. In any instance, if these limits and commonalities are not taken into account, transcendent justifications will be invalid when considered from within the bounds of the competing system.

Simply put, morality does not hold at the ultimate level so the ultimate level cannot be used to justify apparently immoral mundane action. On this reading, ignoring for now the pragmatic differences between the two modes, enlightenment is not intrinsically 'better than' conventional understanding, it is 'other than' it. At this point there is a danger that the epistemological distinction slides back into an ontological distinction, which was previously dismissed. Enlightenment must have some bearing on the conventional world if it is to be made sense of in an interdependent metaphysics and if we are to make sense of the actions of the Buddha, Arhats or Bodhisattvas throughout Buddhist history.

If transcendent justification is the cause of the Zen moral problem, and Zen is accurately characterised as a distillation of Buddhist philosophy, then it should be possible to elaborate a position on 'enlightenment from the direct realisation of reality as it is' that is compatible with the Buddhist conception of an enlightened being who is both wise and compassionate.

I propose that such a subject is best examined metaphysically. Undertaking this consideration requires both a coherent metaphysical construct (undertaken in the next chapter) and further elaboration on the soteriological foundations of this connection. These foundations further problematise the denial of transcendent justification, since historically such justifications have been maintained in Zen.

If this problem cannot be resolved then there would appear to be some credibility to the distinction between Zen and Buddhism 'proper'. Alternatively, if the Zen Buddhist claim that Zen distils the fundamentals of Buddhism is maintained, then the Zen moral problem is of equal concern to all forms of Buddhism. To better determine the position to be taken up here the principles of the Buddhist soteriological project should be examined.

The Buddhist Soteriological Project

While we can approach a reading which does away with ontological transcendence, it remains important to recognise the role of epistemic transcendence. This is critical if the Buddhist project is to remain viable. Without such a radical transformation of knowing, the karmic effects that bind individuals to samsaric existence could not be overcome. Enlightenment would not be possible.

At the root of what became Buddhist philosophy is a recognition of the significance of suffering (*duḥkha*). While this focus suggests a pessimistic world-view,¹²³ it is suffering which provides the soteriological focus of Buddhist practice. Unlike the Abrahamic religions, from which the Greek term soteriology is adapted, the view of salvation to be taken up here

¹²³ The work of Schopenhauer being particularly significant due to the influence upon Nietzsche. See for instance Bhikkhu Ñāṇājīvako, *Schopenhauer and Buddhism*.

is not ontologically transcendent but necessarily bound up with the mundane world. That said, given that the world is intimately interconnected with experiential awareness, the character of epistemological transcendence to be elaborated here entails not only a radically different subjective experience for one who attains enlightenment, but also a radically different way of acting in the world.

The realisation of suffering is both an existential awareness and a philosophical elucidation that serves as the foundation of Buddhism in the sense of its core drive and also as its historical inception. The historical Buddha's elucidation of his realisation is presented in the 'four noble truths'. Succinctly; there is suffering, suffering has a cause, there is a way to end suffering and the Dharma is the path to this realisation. It is interesting to note that no normative claim is made in this plan. The invitation is that one need only wish to end suffering, in which case the path will satisfy this desire. The path itself is certainly directive, however the decision to follow the path is left open.

The Heart Sutra characterises the enlightened being as follows, "in the absence of thought coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana."¹²⁴ According to the Mahāyāna Buddhists, it is the realisation of emptiness which allows this soteriological change and allows one to see reality as it is, in the absence of (ultimately false) conceptual overlays. It is also this realisation which ultimately frees one from karma, rebirth and the conditioned suffering that is a necessary result of cyclic existence. The very experience of being upset indicates some discontinuity between either an expectation or a desire and the actual realised unfolding of events. Existentially, this is suffering and can be recognised as symptoms of the negative afflictions of

¹²⁴ *Heart Sutra* in Conze, E., (trans.), *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.163.

attachment, craving and ignorance. Analysed philosophically, this is the result of unwittingly extending the validity of a system beyond its limits – the application of a static overlay upon a dynamic world. Thus construed, the Buddhist project appears to present an attempt to find an unlimited system, or more properly, given the problem of a systematic interpretation of the ultimate truth, a way of engaging in the world which does not overstep the validity of any particular system. If the limits of discourse are kept in mind, there need be no conflict between the experiential engagement of such a way and a philosophical interpretation thereof.

Indeed the Buddhist path proposes just such a *way to* enlightenment, rather than attempting to explain some inexplicable metaphysical ‘truth’. Even so, an experientially focussed pedagogy should be metaphysically consistent. The path should not lead one to contradict ultimate reality. For this reason the teachings themselves should not be reified, for this would only act as a sticking point for a practitioner and undermine the overall purpose. The practical aspects of the Dharma are set out to allow one to reach a realisation that is ultimately empty. Morally, one is told to be compassionate, one’s epistemological focus is directed towards non-clinging and metaphysical understanding is guided by emptiness. In this way reified understanding should be avoided, one will be less likely to be caught up in negative influences as a result of *karma* and one’s perspective should remain open to reality *as it is*, free of the limitations of any system.

There is an implicit paradox in the soteriological project which is shared by the present thesis’ focus on a metaphysics of interdependence; specifically that a schema is elaborated which proposes the abolition of all conceptual schemas in order to portray (in the latter case, or simply realise in the former) reality as it is. Hopkins states the problem thus; “In

order to leave cyclic existence, we must directly cognize emptiness; in order to do that it is necessary to generate an inference of emptiness, which is a type of conceptual consciousness.”¹²⁵ For the current project the only recourse is to adopt the Prāsaṅgika consistent referential of the ‘emptiness of emptiness’ and thus avoid any potential reifying of ‘emptiness’ as ultimate truth. Rather, ‘emptiness’ is understood as a conventional designation of the contingent characteristic of reality as it is, and thus understood it is *useful* for understanding conventionally realised phenomena. ‘Emptiness’ here functions as a conceptual negation of *any* implied intrinsic or independent existence, including ‘emptiness’ itself.

The concept of ‘emptiness’ “is primarily a soteriological device for purifying the mind so that one may be empty of emotional and intellectual attachment to objects of desire and knowledge.”¹²⁶ Emptiness can be considered independently of any metaphysical analysis in order to make use of it soteriologically. Commonly this is done whenever Buddhism is described as simply ‘philosophy’ or ‘psychology’, a particular cosmology need not be assumed in order for the Buddhist critique of intrinsic existence to be existentially applied. The problem is that at this superficial level, emptiness appears to imply a lack of grounding which has previously been interpreted nihilistically. The soteriological project is not to reject conventional phenomena outright, but to reveal their ultimate nature, which includes a lack of intrinsic existence. In this manner emptiness *does* indicate particular characteristics of reality as it is ultimately. Further investigation of these implications to metaphysics should overcome nihilism if it can connect the conventional and ultimate truths

¹²⁵ Hopkins, J., *Emptiness Yoga*, p.92.

¹²⁶ Cheng, H., *Empty Logic*, p 33.

without transcendent nihilation.¹²⁷ The basis of this connection is not found in ‘emptiness’, but rather the nature of metaphysical interactions that lie behind impermanent phenomena and prompt an enlightened being to declare that “things are empty”.

With ‘emptiness’ as ultimate truth denoted as a mere directive schema, the foundation of metaphysical analysis is found in the related conventional truth of interdependence. As noted earlier, for Nāgārjuna since conventional and ultimate truths are ontologically identical, “samsara and nirvana are not distinct. The understanding of samsara is itself posited as nirvana.”¹²⁸ The nature of the difference of expression is dependent upon the epistemic perspective held and not on any metaphysical causal distinction *other than this*. Sonam Thakchoe writes that, “Ultimate truth is described as ultimate; not because it is absolute or higher than conventional truth, but simply because of its consistent character – it’s mode of appearance and mode of being are the same.”¹²⁹ The state of ‘Nirvāṇa’ and ‘Ultimate truth’ designate a metaphysical coherence between a subjective epistemic and ‘reality as it is’.

An alternative, though not incompatible, interpretation is developed from an understanding of enlightenment as perfection. On this reading there need be no reference to metaphysics, only the cultivation of a particular engagement with the world. The implication that one ‘follows a path’ to practice Buddhism indicates a progression, namely from ignorance (and *duḥkha*) to enlightenment (and Nirvāṇa) through adherence to beneficial practices and moral precepts. Keown states that “Nirvana is the perfection of these virtues and not an

¹²⁷ That is without the ‘truth’ of one level overriding the validity of the other by overstepping its own epistemic bounds.

¹²⁸ Nāgārjuna, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*, quoted in Thakchoe, S., *The Two Truths Debate*, p.113. See also, Priest, G., ‘Two Truths: Two Models, in The Cowherds, *Moonshadows*, p.215 – “[ultimate reality’s] ontological status is no different from that of conventional reality.”

¹²⁹ Thakchoe, S., *The Two Truths Debate*, p.34.

ontological or soteriological quantum leap.”¹³⁰ That there is a smooth transition between ignorance and enlightenment and not a sudden jump¹³¹ is also found in the Zen literature, including that of Zen master Dōgen, to whom discussion will turn in later chapters. This also opens the ‘sudden’ versus ‘gradual’ debate regarding enlightenment, prominent in the history of Zen and in contemporary philosophical studies.¹³² For the present thesis this debate over the qualification of enlightenment is not relevant, since the criterion for our metaphysical study does not allow for the possibility of absolute (ontic) difference. What is of interest is the relation of enlightenment to ‘reality as it is’ and the implication of enlightenment as perfection. That is the implication of epistemology and natural virtue respectively.

The connection of wisdom and compassion is a key concern when considering the Zen moral problem in relation to wider Buddhist theory, and I have proposed that if such a connection cannot be established then the moral problem is not limited to Zen. Generally conceived, “The basic teaching of the Buddha can be expressed by two words: wisdom and compassion.”¹³³ As a teaching, as the path towards right-living and enlightenment, the cultivation of both wisdom and compassion appears to be philosophically warranted. Without wisdom one is prone to make mistakes that will inevitably lead to the failure of any undertaking. Without compassion one would remain entangled in the effects of negative karma. In such a state, apart from being thwarted by undesirable physical and emotional consequences, it would also be impossible to sustain the level of equanimous meditative

¹³⁰ Keown, D., *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, p.107.

¹³¹ Interpreting ‘quantum leap’ in the colloquial sense, since as a metaphor taken from the scientific phenomena a ‘quantum leap’ as a radical yet miniscule change may actually support Keown’s position.

¹³² See for instance the compilation; Gregory, P.N. (Ed.), *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*.

¹³³ Kornfield, J., *Living Buddhist Masters*, p.14.

concentration required to experience reality as the Buddhists understand it.

Metaphysically, the problem remains that if wisdom and compassion need to be proposed independently, with corresponding programs, are they ultimately (metaphysically) connected or are they only pragmatically related? If compassion is not necessary for wisdom then an enlightened being would not necessarily be compassionate. If compassion does not arise from an understanding of reality as it is, and is rather a habit cultivated only through specific paths to enlightenment, then wisdom and compassion are not necessarily co-dependent.

The most immediate connection of these two depends upon Buddhist cosmology, specifically the function of karma and the consequence of rebirth. The seed of rebirth and what keeps the wheel of saṃsāra turning is said to be craving.¹³⁴ In Buddhist cosmology there is something privileged about the human realm; only in human form is a being far enough removed from a life of unprovoked and unthinking bliss (in higher realms) and also free of all-consuming pain (in lower-realms), just enough that enlightenment is attainable. The motivation to free ourselves from suffering allows us to see the folly of impermanent pleasure, and ideally the Buddhist aims to temper both positive and negative affects. Naturally this is very rarely the case since we are compelled to avoid the negative aspects of existence and seek out pleasurable ones, and since craving is active in both respects the causal loop continues. In this manner saṃsāra functions as a self-sustaining causal network. The radical shift, Nirvāṇa, proposed by the Buddha, is the escape from a seemingly closed causal loop. By eliminating the causes, the effects cease.

¹³⁴This was stated in the Buddha's first discourse, *Dharmachakra Pravartana Sūtra*.

The affect of pleasure seeking and pain avoidance on the world is obviously widely recognised, and is taken as the prime force in naturalised systems. This is extended across all modes of thought, including commerce, politics, science and philosophy generally. Consider Darwin's principle of 'natural selection', as fundamental to his theory of evolution and speciation. In terms of 'selection', the inheritance of conditions for pleasure, and thus to seek out situations which will affect one's survival and perpetuate their biological species, an organism increases in 'fitness' and is pragmatically better adapted to survive in the world.¹³⁵ The explanatory power of this simple theory is immense; almost every characteristic can be interpreted as having originated through its practical merits, which at our conscious level becomes the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. The political force of popular opinion and commercial fluctuations in the stock market due to supply and demand can be similarly construed as being subject to a principle of the drive for personal benefit by a 'rational actor' (within the free market of *laissez-faire* capitalism).¹³⁶ Pragmatically, if one does not compete in these fields they will be selected against and so the struggle of one individual places a force upon all others, which in turn reinforces the pressure on that individual. The feedback from this causal loop prevents any escape that is not fatal in relation to the system.

¹³⁵ This is not to say that the pursuit of the experience of 'pleasure' is always pragmatically fruitful – indeed this is the point made by Buddhist philosophy. Darwin himself, in *The Descent of Man*, also noted that while the development of these experiences can be understood to have developed through forces of inheritance, it is habit or instinct which dominates such inherited behaviours. Though in the weaker sense of 'pleasure' akin to the Buddhist sense of *sukka*, Darwin writes, "Although a habit may be blindly and implicitly followed, independently of any pleasure or pain felt at the moment, yet if it be forcibly and abruptly checked, a vague sense of dissatisfaction is generally experienced." (Darwin, C., *The Descent of Man*, p.92.)

¹³⁶ Assumptions in the standard model of economics, generalised here as a self-correcting market based on the 'free' competition for wealth, have been (rightfully) questioned. The standard model, assuming 'rational' (and fully informed) individuals, acting in balanced markets, with only short-term 'profits' (defined in monetary terms) accounted for, is certainly not compatible with *interdependence*. For problems with the model, see Stiglitz, J., *Freefall: Free Markets and the Sinking of the Global Economy*- particularly chapters 9 and 10.

Darwin's work, among others,¹³⁷ no doubt influenced Nietzsche's development of his theory of 'Will to Power', as discussed in the last chapter. Nietzsche follows the philosophical ideal search for some essential truth, some basic principle that governs all interactions, and bases it on our common desire for gain. That principle of struggle that shapes the natural world from an evolutionary perspective, and is recognised as the cause of existence as affected by karma for the Buddhist, albeit in quite a different manner, is for Nietzsche the only pursuit. The Buddhist project presents an alternative. Rather than failing in the struggle for power when one ignores the competing interactions of worldly reality, the Dharma claims that it is possible to act for the benefit of others without detriment to oneself. Moreover, by altering one's perspective it is possible to break out of the struggle for power altogether and ultimately get free of saṃsāra. Nietzsche himself strongly connects 'freedom' to 'power',¹³⁸ though it is clear that any individual within the struggle for power is conditioned by their predicament, and so cannot be free. The ultimate power, the ultimate freedom, is then total escape from the struggle, both towards pleasure and away from pain. This is the promise of Buddhism that so starkly contrasts with one's natural drive and existential experience.

If, monks, there were no gratification in the world, beings would not become enamoured with the world. But because there is gratification in the world, beings become enamoured with it.

If there were no danger in the world, beings would not become disenchanted with the world. But because there is danger in the world, beings become disenchanted with it.

¹³⁷ Along these lines Herbert Spencer was certainly an influence, though the positions of both thinkers were later explicitly rejected by Nietzsche. (For two interpretations see Johnson, D., *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism*; and Richardson, J., *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*).

¹³⁸ Specifically the freedom of the will. See Mandalios, J., 'Nietzsche, Freedom and Power', in *European Journal of Social Theory*, (May 2003) vol. 6 no. 2, pp.191-208.

If there were no escape from the world, beings could not escape from it. But there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from it.¹³⁹

This quotation sums up the motivations, and so too the limitations, that make up most of human experience. The final sentences relay the promise of Buddhism, that there is a way that is not determined by the world, that it is possible to be free from karmic causation. To be completely free does not imply that a physical being can be uncaused or will somehow be isolated and not have any affect in the world (this would be an ontological separation); rather escape entails a change of perspective (an epistemic change), a way of 'seeing' the world without being compelled to crave or struggle within it.

Daoist Naturalism

The previous section set up the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy, in this section these principles will be contrasted with the philosophical impact of Daoism on the development of Zen – specifically with regard to the position of 'transcendence' in Daoist thought. To this extent there are several principles that must be brought to the fore. First, a distinction with regard to nature and escape for the follower of 'the way' and the relation of this to the theory of 'Buddha-nature' must be examined. Second, the implication of immediacy, 'thusness', for Zen and the consequences of this focus for elaboration of the Zen moral problem will be explored. The problem of transcendent justification is reaffirmed in the light of 'thusness' as can be found in the expression of Daoist '*wu-wei*' (non-action).

While I have characterised Buddhism as founded upon the soteriological path away from suffering, there is a focus on 'the way', *Dao* (Jp. *do*), in Chinese Buddhism and those schools

¹³⁹ *Anguttara Nikaya*, in Bodhi, B., *In the Buddha's Words*, p.193.

derived from it, including Japanese Zen, which developed a naturalistic account of an innate 'Buddha-nature'. Basing 'the good' in 'the natural' presents a normative dilemma for explanation as to how actions could ever be other than good/natural.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the already problematic distinction between immanent phenomenon (conventional truth) and transcendent realisation (ultimate truth) is further entangled, as the expression of Dao is already manifest as individual instances. These are both issues that arise from naturalism and are present in Zen. As the philosophical content of Zen tends to be difficult to extract from the recorded tradition it is useful to examine the concept of 'the way' with reference to Daoist thought. The similarities and differences with Buddhist thought, where these are not explained away as cross-cultural influences, offer an insight into the character of Zen which can be brought to bear on the question of the uniqueness of the Zen moral problem.¹⁴¹

First something must be said of the distinction between Buddhist 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*) and Daoist 'nothingness' (*k'ung*), each functioning as the respective 'ultimate truth'. The ultimate functions similarly in both traditions, and certain interpretations of *śūnyatā* would be in accord with 'nothingness', but the elaboration of emptiness discussed thus far has particular metaphysical limitations that leads to a conflict with Daoist cosmology. The previous chapter presented the Prāsaṅgika emphasis on the emptiness of emptiness, implicating the rejection of any reified understanding of *śūnyatā*. Dao is characterised as 'no-thing-ness', an absolute other to existence, despite its manifest action making up myriad existent things. Nothingness is also the primary cause of existent things, existing before

¹⁴⁰ This point will be picked up in chapter 6, where I claim that Buddhism is in fact fundamentally *anti-natural*.

¹⁴¹ Significantly, Jay Garfield suggests that the transition of Buddhism into the Chinese context allowed for the dissolution of historical (Indian) problems in addition to the development of new problems (such as those addressed by Dōgen - see Chapter 5 of this thesis. (See Garfield, J., 'Why did Bodhidharma Go to the East? Buddhism's Struggle with the Mind in the World', *Sophia*, Vol.45, No.2 (Oct. 2006), pp.61-80.)

worldly phenomena in the cosmological order (see below). Thus understood, Dao, as ‘nothing’, is intrinsically existent and cannot be ‘empty’ in the Prāsaṅgika sense. Importantly there is a focus on *unity* in Dao for the Daoist tradition that is at least problematic for the current project, given the understanding of emptiness as the absence of reification (including the final reification of a total ‘unity’).¹⁴² Using this approach to make sense of Zen is further complicated by the historical intermingling of the two traditions, wherein unity and emptiness are taken up together and the language and arguments of each become borrowed and placed into new contexts.¹⁴³ While such cross-cultural complications may seem to be an unprofitable sideline given this thesis’ focus on the philosophical, historically this is the collision from which Ch’an (and Zen in turn) arose.

This synthetic connection has not been ignored in relation to the Zen moral problem. In Swanson’s provocatively titled paper *Zen is not Buddhism*,¹⁴⁴ following the development of the Critical Buddhist movement, the position of the metaphysical concept ‘Buddha-nature’ (*Buddha-dhātu*)¹⁴⁵ is questioned as a deviant form of Buddhism, owing more to Daoist influences. The motivation behind such accusations is to show that if Buddha-nature is at fault and is derived from misappropriated Daoist philosophy, then the rest of Buddhism may be saved from accusations of amorality. This may be established if Daoism proposes essentialised, transcendent valuation, resulting in conventionally expressed nihilism, and

¹⁴² Evidence suggests that the concept of ‘the one’ was developed in the fourth century, from the evolution of the primordial Dao to worldly phenomenon, through insight meditation (adopted from Buddhism), signifying the unity of oneself with the universe. See Kohn, L., *The Taoist Experience*, P.191.

¹⁴³ The outcome of this collision was that “Chinese Buddhists could exercise their own genius in defining their own unique form of Buddhism that was at once thoroughly Chinese and authentically Buddhist.” (Gregory, P.N., *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, p.110.), allowing the development of redeveloped concepts and an entirely new philosophical discourse.

¹⁴⁴ Swanson, *Zen is not Buddhism*, Numen, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May, 1993), pp. 115-149 – this takes after Hakayama’s claim that Zen is not Buddhism.

¹⁴⁵ Note that interpretations of Buddha-nature are quite subtle and not necessarily in conflict with the understanding of emptiness established thus far. For this discussion see chapter 4.

traditional Buddhism does not.¹⁴⁶ Such a heavily hermeneutic based approach is unfortunately overly dependent upon subjective interpretation, particularly in cases such as this where there is a convoluted history. By way of contrast, Hansen's understanding reverses the influential link saying "Daoism inherited Buddhism's mysticism of the one, permanent, ineffable Buddha-nature."¹⁴⁷ Historically the direction of influence is unclear. While Chinese Buddhism adopted native terminology and concepts to explain its doctrine, in turn Daoism developed its philosophy along Buddhist lines.¹⁴⁸ Knowledge of the direction of influence would certainly help identify the development of philosophical themes but this is secondary to the investigation of distinctly identifiable philosophical modes themselves.

A major feature of Ch'an not emphasised in earlier Indian Buddhism is a focus on immanence, not as a revelation of impermanence, but as revealing the 'thusness' of mundane experience. The 'transcendence' of enlightenment is then a return to a realisation of the natural state of existence, behind deluded overlays. The naturalism associated with Daoism can be understood as a reaction against Confucianism.¹⁴⁹ The Daoist's viewed the systematic interpretation and engagement with the world, characteristic of Confucianism, as an artificial enterprise of valuation which ruins natural harmony, causing suffering and creating cosmic discord.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, Buddhism was originally posited as a

¹⁴⁶ This characterisation cannot be followed through since in fact the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha* originated in India. See Dumoulin, H., *Zen Buddhism: A History, India and China*, p.33.

¹⁴⁷ Hansen, C., *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p.27.

¹⁴⁸ See Dumoulin, H., *Zen Buddhism: A History – India and China*, pp.64-68; Maspero, H., Trans. Kierman, F., *Taoism and Chinese Religion* (1981), p.46; Prebish, C., *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective* (1975), p.192.

¹⁴⁹ Daoists claim their tradition predates Confucianism, irrespective of the validity of this claim Daoism certainly developed to oppose the Confucian world-view.

¹⁵⁰ A passage in the *Zhuangzi*, called 'Confucius and the madman of Ch'u', captures the sentiment- "approaching men with lessons of your virtue! You are in peril!... All men know the advantage of being useful; but no one knows the advantage of being useless." - *Zhuangzi*, Book 4, in *Chuang Tzu: Genius of the Absurd*, pp.78-9.

rejection of a Brahmanic metaphysical view that posited an intrinsically existent self.¹⁵¹ The idea of the 'natural' progression of events was, at least superficially, the wheel of samsaric existence from which Buddhism proposed a radical break. Natural karmic consequentialism - *the way of nature* - for the Buddhist, is exactly what must be overcome. The Daoist soteriological goal in relation to 'the natural' is fundamentally divergent from the Buddhist, and yet the two are reconciled in Ch'an. Of course the commonality can be established through identifying an underlying nature to which Buddhism aspires, hence 'Buddha-nature'. Furthermore, in both accounts, I maintain that enlightenment is the antithesis of habit. This point will be developed later, for now the details of Daoism must be expanded.

In contrast to the Confucian ideal of order through rules, good governance and the meticulous naming of things (the categorising that enables us to achieve this), the Daoists present an apparently anarchic alternative. For the Daoist harmony is achieved, not through adherence to human laws, but by recognition of the natural way of the world. Human kingdoms and systems of understanding rise and fall and are subject to change. Thus understood, to adhere to a particular name is to attach oneself to the fate of this system when it ceases to be relevant. 'The way' (*Dao*) on the other hand is '*permanent*', and always underlies any particular interpretation of the world. Because it is not dependent upon particular systems, it is unnameable, and so it is not subject to dismissal when situations change. The best form of governance for the Daoist is to, effectively, do nothing (this is known as *wu-wei* or non-action¹⁵²). In this way a kingdom ruled by *Dao* governs itself, for the people are following the same influence as their leader.

¹⁵¹ With regard to the Buddhist philosophical debate, the quintessential expression of the substantialist position can be found in the Indian Nyāya schools (though this was developed centuries after the Buddhist position). For a good overview see Siderits, M., *Buddhism as Philosophy*, pp.85-104.

¹⁵² This concept became very important to Ch'an and is a major focus for the second half of this thesis.

Despite their different characterisations, the chord of ‘the Way’ runs through both traditions, providing a point of entry to consider the common Chinese proverb that Confucianism and Daoism are ‘two paths to one truth’.¹⁵³ Daoism is concerned with personal development towards an ideal; Confucianism is focused on the structure of society and, one could say, more practical or immediate results. Indeed, a ruler could use a set of rules in order to govern by the *Dao*, like a good judge in our law courts could function justly within a framework of laws by working in the spaces between them. Independent of ideologies, human beings find themselves involuntarily placed in the phenomenal world, between heaven and earth, and subject to the greater rules of causation. Both Daoism and Confucianism hold that even at the level of heaven the functioning of *Dao* is still evident, as the way of the universe, but their interpretations differ.¹⁵⁴ The *Dao De Jing* states:

*Man models himself on earth,
Earth on heaven,
Heaven on the way,
And the way on that which is naturally so.*¹⁵⁵

By way of contrast, the *Analects* state that “Human beings can broaden the Way – It is not the Way that broadens human beings.”¹⁵⁶ The hierarchy of influence is reversed. The Confucian builds up to a system of practical functionality, the Daoist breaks down to the function of nature. For the Daoist personal cultivation cuts through cultural formalities, while for the Confucian it refines them, nevertheless both extend their philosophical

¹⁵³ ‘Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are one’ – See Bary, T. (ed.), *Sources of Chinese Tradition* vol.1, p.266.

¹⁵⁴ It should be noted that, like many religious texts, the key texts here including the *Analects*, *Dao De Jing*, and the record of *Chuang tzu* (the *Zhuangzi*) are now recognised to be collections of fragments compiled over time rather than the work of a single author. The authorship of Kongzi has been questioned since Qing dynasty (Slingerland, *Analects*, p.xiii) while in Daoist studies many commentators now believe that historically no Laozi ever existed (see for example Hansen, *A Taoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p.210).

¹⁵⁵ Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ *Confucius Analects* 15:29, Trans. Slingerland, p.185.

concerns to the public and private realms with the goal of harmonisation.¹⁵⁷ The Daoist emphasis is important to note here as it is (arguably) taken up by the Ch'an schools (see discussion below) which directly leads to the moral problem – where enlightenment is considered the 'natural state'.

The principle that represents the great Dao, as the 'Way', in individual situations is *li*.

Related to this is the principle of virtue, the characteristic of being able to follow *li*; *De*. *De*, in Daoism, as in the title of Laozi's work the *Dao De Jing*, 'book of the Way and Virtue', is taken up as one of the two interconnected themes therein. Talk of *De* then is a naturalised, anthropocentric functioning of *Dao*; in other words how a human being should act in the world. While talk of *Dao* tends towards the metaphysical, the two concepts are fundamentally connected. Earlier translations of the *Dao De Jing*, interpreted the title as 'The Book of the Way and its Power'¹⁵⁸, managing to capture something of the relationship between *Dao* and *De*, but the significance of understanding *De* as 'virtue' in combination with being recognised as the 'power' of *Dao* should not be overlooked.

In characterising the *Dao* at least two aspects can be identified. First there is the way actualised, that is manifest in each individual event or situation, *li*. As examples, there is a 'way' of woodcutting or a 'way' of playing a musical instrument. Obviously what the 'way' entails in each instance is going to depend upon all the elements that make up that situation. For instance, what tools are at your disposal while cutting wood, the characteristics of the wood, your own physical disposition and, most interestingly, what

¹⁵⁷ As Slingerland's commentary (*Analects*, p.133) explains – it is about harmonisation, only human action can make this possible as the *Dao* itself does not act. The Daoist distinction is that only *wu-wei* (non-action) is capable of achieving this. Taylor (*The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism*, p.133) argues for a soteriological aspect to Confucianism as 'the recognition of the Way of Heaven as an Absolute and the provision for the ultimate transformation of humanity'.

¹⁵⁸ Arthur Waley's translation, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*, (1934).

your objective happens to be. We shall return to this last point in a moment. Confucius also credits *De* with a universal validity; “If you govern with the power of your virtue, you will be like the North Star. It just stays in its place while all the other stars position themselves around it.”¹⁵⁹ Virtue here is playing the governing role through deliberate manifestation, which the Daoist would only want to credit to the spontaneous expression of Dao. Where ‘virtue’ is understood as an accord with Dao, the two traditions see no conflict.

The second, and related, aspect of *Dao* is the transcendent Way; the unchanging ‘mother’ of the universe.¹⁶⁰ In Daoist cosmology the Dao precedes the One (which precedes the two, etc, and finally the multitude of things) in the order of creation. This should not be understood simply as an explanation of the origin of the world, for creation here is a constant undertaking; the *Dao* is active in the world. The Great *Dao* can be understood as that which allows things to be, though should not be confused with ‘Being’ as such.¹⁶¹ Dao is expressed as both being *from* emptiness *and* being the *mother* of emptiness (via non-being). It is also the source of all things as well as the state of enlightenment reached by the sage.¹⁶² Like the Buddhist emphasis on ‘no-self’, focus on the base of ‘nothingness’, far from being nihilistic, is also the basis of compassion.¹⁶³ “[The sage] makes sure never to act from a motivation of desires or love. Love here is defined as an ego-centered impulse; it is the

¹⁵⁹ Confucius, *Analects*, 2:1.

¹⁶⁰ “[Dao] is the mother of all things” – *Dao De Jing*, 1.

¹⁶¹ “Even though the Tao of transcendence is everywhere generating... it is certainly not identical with the object generated.” – Saso, M., ‘Buddhist and Taoist Ideas of Transcendence’, in Saso and Chappell (Eds.), *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I*, p.5.

¹⁶² Kohn, L., *Taoist Mystical Philosophy*, p.87.

¹⁶³ Daoism can certainly be seen to be ‘amoral’ and anarchistic, by the same reasoning as Zen is found to be so, however the Daoist Sage is ‘governed’ by the working of Dao itself – not of artificial virtue, but natural *harmony*. Consider chapter 20 of *Zhuangzi*, “May the Tao and Te be your only refuge.” (Quoted in Kaltenmark, M., *Lao Tzu and Taoism*, p.104.) Also, *Dao De Jing*, 49, “The sage has no mind of his own. He takes as his own the mind of the people.”

opposite of compassion. It is concerned only with egoistic self-preservation, while compassion means to support others in their efforts towards the Dao.”¹⁶⁴

This brings us back to the question of an individual objective in relation to Dao. Any system of understanding which has a naturalised morality, direction or universal way, must somehow account for the discrepancy which allows for individuals (primarily humans) to function against it. Of course the problem could be denied by saying there is never any discrepancy, but then discussion will turn to arguments on free-will and determinism which is best avoided for the time being. On the Daoist account it is certainly possible to go against the *Dao*, even though we are ultimately a function of it. The Ultimate Way is not deterministic, at least not at our subjective level, rather it is the way that all things naturally fall into, and for us discerning humans it tends to be the path of least resistance provided we are not embedded in some artificial structure. Hence the Daoist emphasis on *wu-wei* (non-action); since through ceasing to act for oneself, one functions through the *Dao* and so ‘leaves nothing undone’.¹⁶⁵ In this way one would not find conflict, at least not within nature.

In any situation, at every moment, one can follow the *Dao*. There is certainly a wrong way of doing things on this account, and for those who go against *Dao* their ensuing struggle is taken as immediate evidence of this.¹⁶⁶ However, there appear to be many instances that this naturalistic account must find exception with. Pursuit of selfish gains or human-inflicted order, for instance, may have immediate benefits and to follow such paths, while easy, is

¹⁶⁴ Kohn, L., *Taoist Mystical Philosophy*, p.206. See also *Dao De Jing*, 33, on the non existence of self.

¹⁶⁵ *Dao De Jing*, 38.

¹⁶⁶ The alternative to such struggle is the sage; “one who knows heavenly joy isn't curtailed by Nature, isn't condemned by people, isn't strained by things, and isn't punished by demons.” (*Zhuangzi*, Book 13, Trans. Correa, N.)

certainly not in accordance with Dao. Ultimately, the Daoist must maintain, there is a difference between acting in accordance with Dao and following a mere limited way, for in many instances the immediately easy path is not virtuous.

If our previous discussion on the limits of systems is considered in this context, an answer may be posed that saves the Daoist pragmatic emphasis and allows differentiation of virtuous action. Just as the limits of a conceptual system cannot be overstepped if its conclusions are to remain valid, so too can pragmatic modes be understood as limited. Spatially; one can only walk between walls and not through them, wood can only be chopped provided some wood remains, and the content of a cup can only be added to until it is full. Temporally; hunger does not persist once the belly is full, taxation is only effective provided workers can sustain themselves, and no selfish end outlasts the death of the individual. To be in accord with Dao one's actions cannot be focussed on such limited outcomes, for Dao is permanently valid. While it is necessary to adapt to the particularities of the situation at hand (all mundane action is necessarily contingent) to realise Dao is to be unrestrained by limited modes. Only that which is manifest locally yet valid eternally could be considered *The Way*. All that is needed to reveal abstract pursuits as folly is time.

So how does one become attuned to the *Dao* if in each situation the correct 'way' is different and the most beneficial path may not be immediately evident? Zhuangzi's interpretation of the Daoist path is not immediately helpful. Unlike the Buddhist path, where emphasis is placed on wisdom (that to understand reality is the foundation of correct action) the Daoist emphasis is characterised as the pursuit of ignorance. As well as variations in translation, the emphasis here is placed against the Confucian ideal, since to characterise the world intellectually would further separate us from nature. The Confucian

path, by contrast, celebrates the naming of things, abstracting from the world as an attempt to place timeless characteristics upon the changing world. From the Daoist perspective, considered from pragmatic limits, this is a system that will ultimately be forced to collapse. The 'ignorance' which the Daoist sages of old preached should likely be understood along the lines of *wu-wei*. Just as the individual who practices *wu-wei* still acts, the sage may be understood to continue to think, to use language and even write great tomes on 'the way that cannot be expressed in words'¹⁶⁷ – the difference is that these modes of expression are not used in opposition to *Dao*.

Then there is the problem of interpreting Dao itself. "Dao is obscured when men understand only one pair of opposites, or concentrate only on a partial aspect of being. Then clear expression also becomes muddled by mere wordplay, affirming this one aspect and denying all the rest."¹⁶⁸ Thus, when engaging with Dao philosophically one is forced to first admit its ineffability before, ironically, continuing to systematically dissect this indivisible unity. Yet even here there is something to be picked up. Hansen insightfully remarks that "If language cannot express *dao* it must be due to something about *dao* and something about language."¹⁶⁹ Indeed, something about the combination of these two results in the apparent ineffability, a similar predicament already noted with regard to Buddhist ultimate truth. Limited expression cannot capture the unlimited, though it is possible to indicate towards it, and in this manner reach enlightenment.

Evidently there is a commonality with this interpretation of Daoism and Buddhist emptiness. Enlightenment is freedom from suffering through an elimination of the causes of suffering.

¹⁶⁷ Referring to chapter 1 of *Dao De Jing*; "The way that can be named is not the eternal Way."

¹⁶⁸ Zhuangzi, Trans. Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, p.59.

¹⁶⁹ Hansen, C., *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, p.27.

For the Daoist this is akin to ‘knowing *Dao*’. If one knows the true way then they will not fall into paths which conflict with the universal *Dao*. In this way the sage is like the virtuoso or master artist who acts spontaneously, without thinking, because the relevant mode of action has been internalised. The principle difference though is that the Daoist sage has not learnt one specific way of acting, in one specific field, but is said to have become attuned to the nature which underlies all fields.¹⁷⁰ In Buddhism the nature of existence as emptiness is quite a different truth, for although all things are empty there is no transcendent thing ‘emptiness’ which empties things of intrinsic existence. The Dao however is understood as that which functions behind things in the world. The Dao thus appears as a metaphysically reified concept, albeit reified as the ‘non-thing’.

It should also be pointed out that emptiness is not an unfamiliar concept to the Daoist. The *Dao De Jing* speaks of the space that is the hub of a wheel or the emptiness of a jar being the useful aspect of each object.¹⁷¹ A thing is utilised through the ‘nothing’ it creates, by virtue of the characteristic of its existence. Also pragmatically, for a Daoist accordance with Dao is achieved through non-action, through non-discernment rather than active striving. As an aesthetic principle, this emphasis on the negative is adapted to painting in Zen, and sees emphasis placed on the space between the ink rather than the brushstrokes themselves.¹⁷² Just as in Zhuangzi’s characterisation of Butcher Ting,¹⁷³ who’s mastery of finding the empty spaces between the bones and sinews, keeps his blade perpetually sharp, the individual who recognises Dao sees the space into which one can move without effort.

¹⁷⁰ Consider Miyamoto Musashi’s statement, “When I apply the principle of strategy to the ways of different arts and crafts, I no longer have need for a teacher in any domain.” - *Gorin no sho*, in Tokitsu K., *Miyamoto Musashi: His Life and Writings*, p.138.

¹⁷¹ *Dao De Jing*, 11.

¹⁷² See Hisamatsu, S., *Zen and the Fine Arts*, p.67; Toshimitsu, “this all-embracing background”, *Zen in Japanese Art*, p.20. See also, Odin, on the significance of ‘ma’, *The social self in Zen and American pragmatism*, p.58.

¹⁷³ Zhuangzi, book 3, in Chuang Tzu: *Genius of the Absurd*, pp.61-62.

The relationship between *Dao* (the universal) and *li* (the way in a specific circumstance) can be interpreted in at least two ways. The first is to claim that the way in each specific instance is nothing more than the manifestation of the universal Way. This is to say that there is a direction which exists on the level of universal unity, and each instance is merely a fulfilment of that directedness. In other words each instance is functioning as part of the whole. There is nothing in the instance itself which necessitates a certain course of action; it is dependent upon the universal *Dao*. The second interpretation is to reverse the relationship and say that the universal *Dao* is produced by the combination of all individual 'ways'. This is certainly not an accepted interpretation, as the order of influence is quite clear – for the Daoist it is the *Dao* that manifests the myriad things and their interactions, the myriad things do not create the *Dao*. However if the first interpretation is accepted, that the universal *Dao* is simply played out through the myriad interactions, then a problem emerges: how is it possible that we can (and do) make sense of events in specific circumstances without knowledge of the *Dao*? Angus Graham suggests that, "Grasping the Way is a matter of 'knowing how', not of 'knowing that'."¹⁷⁴ It appears that despite the apparent 'transcendence' of *Dao* from the manifest world, the expression of *Dao* is existentially realised as indistinct from the functioning of things in the world and implies a form of pragmatism specifically related to our own existential position.

It would seem that *Dao* itself needs to be both unchanging *and* dependent upon the universe for its existence. Yet these states seem logically incompatible. On the other hand, if the immanent and transcendent aspects of *Dao* are separated the Daoist project would be undermined. *Wu-wei* could not function, as *li* would have no relation to *Dao*. The correct

¹⁷⁴ Graham, A.C., 'Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of "Is" and "Ought"', in Mair, V.H. (Ed.), *Experimental essays on Chuang-tzu*, p.8.

way of action in one situation would have no relationship to the correct way of action in another situation, and so the possibility of enlightenment would also be denied. For the Daoist project to succeed the immanence and transcendence of Dao must be understood concurrently.¹⁷⁵ If it is possible to make sense of this, then a solution to the problem of transcendent justification may be revealed.

Metaphysics of the Four Noble Truths

The Buddha presented the four noble truths as an outline and explanation of the Buddhist soteriological goal. The four truths express the purpose of Buddhism, its motivation and methodology, and its clear claim is that if one follows the noble eightfold path the experience of suffering can be overcome. As a path, the initial state of suffering and the final state of non-suffering obviously differ, as there has been a change from start to finish. Specifically the cause of suffering has been eliminated through practice in accordance with the realisation that suffering does not exist intrinsically. The conventional experience of suffering has been replaced with the ultimate truth of non-suffering.¹⁷⁶

Conventionally suffering beings are ignorant of the ultimate truth of suffering, and so they continue to suffer. Ignoring the necessity of practice, from the investigation of the content of wisdom, to achieve enlightenment, according to the interpretation of the noble truths as a mere pedagogical tool, one must realise the emptiness of suffering. In this way non-suffering replaces suffering. Here a soteriological complication arises. In order for compassion to function, an enlightened being must be able to recognise the conventional

¹⁷⁵ "the Enlightened man is capable of perceiving both unity and multiplicity without the least contradiction between them!" – John Blofeld, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, pp.20-21.

¹⁷⁶ The origins and philosophical implications of this problem, arising from the Mādhyamika identification of the two truths, is examined by Gregory, P.N., 'The Problem of Theodicy in the "Awakening of Faith"', *Religious Studies*, Vol.22, No.1 (Mar. 1986), pp.63-78.

suffering of others, while simultaneously recognising the ultimate reality of non-suffering. If ultimate truth overrides the conventional epistemically (to say that there is absolutely no suffering), then compassion would not function. An enlightened being could not recognise or be motivated by the suffering of others, since ultimately it is not suffering - and this leads to a nihilistic response. If on the other hand the conventional overrides the ultimate (to say that there absolutely is suffering), then enlightenment would not be possible. Ultimate truth would be nothing more than sophistry, only immanent phenomenon are worthy of consideration.

This existential distinction, between suffering and non-suffering, is transformed into a soteriological problem and thus becomes a metaphysical complication. The difference between the two states is one of 'ignorance' and 'enlightenment' respectively – but how can we make sense of these states metaphysically?¹⁷⁷ If the soteriological project is to be validated, it must be possible to make sense of 'suffering' and 'non-suffering' both being 'truths' and referring to the same reality. The truth of suffering is essential for compassion and the truth of the cessation of suffering is essential for wisdom.

In claiming there is a conflict between these two truths I am obviously forcing an artificial distinction which is not present in the original Buddhist proposition. 'Suffering' and 'non-suffering' refer to different 'levels' of reality, they are different positions on a path. The conflict I am drawing out requests a metaphysical consistency behind the epistemological transformation. Perhaps if the nature of the epistemological difference can be established

¹⁷⁷ Peter Gregory notes that "The question of the origin of ignorance is, in fact, *the* central philosophical problem for the *tathāgatagarbha* tradition." (Gregory, P.N., 'The Problem of Theodicy in the "Awakening of Faith"', *Religious Studies*, Vol.22, No.1 (Mar. 1986), p.71) The problem is considered in chapter 5 of this thesis.

then the project of establishing metaphysical continuity between the two perspectives could then be undertaken.

The first distinction to be considered is the psychological difference. The difference between the two understandings of suffering is dependent upon the state of mind of the individual in question. Specifically, their progress on the path is equivalent to their respective understanding, such that: the novice experiences suffering and comes to recognise its existence, the experienced practitioner comes to realise the emptiness of suffering and hence discovers its cessation. Finally, and more mysteriously, according to the Mahāyāna account of the Bodhisattva, the enlightened being simultaneously realises the emptiness of suffering (and so does not suffer) while also recognising the suffering of others (and so is compassionate).¹⁷⁸ The actions of the enlightened being would then not be motivated purely by the short-term alleviation of suffering in others, to make them temporarily more comfortable, but ultimately to lead them to personal emancipation from suffering.

The second distinction to be considered is the logical difference. ‘Suffering’ can be understood as being used in two different senses with two competing definitions. Many versions of this explanation could be constructed, all being based on the logical ground that one thing cannot both exist and not exist simultaneously, and thus the ‘suffering’ which exists and the ‘suffering’ which is empty each represent separate entities (in the loosest sense). For example, ‘suffering’ refers to something undesired (this is already problematic as desire is the cause of suffering) while its ‘emptiness’ refers to the cause of that which is undesired. Without an empirical reference this explanation does not present a conflict as in

¹⁷⁸ The Bodhisattva is said to be both wise and compassionate, the concern is that this wisdom appears to remove the basis of empathy, conventionally considered necessary for compassion.

the previous explanation, however this same lack leaves the explanation without active application. Devoid of pragmatic function this form of explanation misses the core of Buddhism.

The third distinction may be considered an existential difference. The reality of suffering is directly experienced while the 'emptiness' of suffering is an analytic truth realised through reductive reasoning which is unable to find any 'essential existence' applicable to the experience of suffering. This is a specific variation of the logical difference (and one that is important to Nāgārjuna) since 'suffering' in this case has two distinct reference points – one phenomenal, the other rational. Alone, this explanation creates a conflict between experience and understanding which must then be overcome.

Finally we should consider what the distinction as an epistemological difference entails. Since the realisation of emptiness (in Mahāyāna) *is* the realisation of Nirvāna, then a fundamental epistemic change has taken place between the original experience of suffering and this new mode of being. There has been no change in ontological state. This explains how an ordinary being and an enlightened individual can, on the one hand, move in the same place and time while experiencing and existing in this world in completely different ways. Saṃsāra and Nirvāna thus overlap but are epistemically different existences of the same world. Beings in the state of saṃsāra suffer while those in Nirvāna realise emptiness, and do not. Being dependent upon a change in the foundations of knowledge, this explanation can be used in conjunction with any of the other forms of explanation. Altering a mode of understanding has dramatic consequences for one's worldly interactions and also effects the construction of any metaphysical system.

Now, for the sake of the current thesis, this must be tied in with the problem that 'metaphysics' is just such an epistemological system of explanation. Consider how one may decide between various competing metaphysical explanations. Surely one will select, or simply adhere to, a principle if it affects them in what they feel is a positive way or that they witness such affects as positive in others who have previously adhered to this principle. The principle itself acts as a type of keystone, an explanation that becomes the core premise, holding up a metaphysical framework. Also, while the principle 'supports' further metaphysical or worldly explanations, it is itself without foundation and must be accepted purely on faith, or, more progressively, upon the explanatory power of the system of metaphysics it provides a basis for. There are two major objections to this explanation. First, each keystone principle may entail a different supporting/supported system but it is possible that each could be understood as functional. One may be led to relativism along these lines since each principle appears metaphysically valid. Second, while the principle itself can be adopted without contradicting reality, since it is metaphysical and hence in some sense transcendent of worldly phenomena, the systems it supports and which support it subtly infuse reality to the point whereby the principle is accepted as 'real', while what is apparent is dismissed as unreal or illusory. A world in which many of these systems, or even many interpretations of the same system, are present produces individuals sharing the same world yet experiencing this world in conflicting ways. In this manner, individuals themselves are led into conflict.

To avoid this outcome, yet still engage metaphysically, our only recourse is to move either entirely into the abstract or use metaphysics only as a description of the principles of immanent interactions. While an abstract system, like mathematics, may be self-consistent

it must be applied in order to be functional, in which case the application of the system becomes the sight of potential conflict. As a functional engagement, in order to explain a soteriology, metaphysics cannot be transcendent.

If metaphysics must be understood immanently, then conventional and ultimate truths must be understood concurrently.¹⁷⁹ That a change in epistemology presents a change in pragmatic engagement is readily apparent. That such a change can affect the subjective experience of suffering does not necessitate an ontological change, and thus a non-suffering enlightened being shares a world with suffering ignorant beings. One subjective epistemic experience cannot override another, even where one truth is metaphysically consistent, while the other is not. "Those who realize Void [people of prajna] know that ultimate ignorance (avidya) and ultimate wisdom (vidya) do not exist as two."¹⁸⁰

Conclusion

The unique historical background of Zen presents a philosophical question; how can the truth of suffering (mundane experience) and the truth of no-suffering (enlightened experience) be metaphysically connected? One solution may well be a re-interpretation of the concept of enlightenment itself. It may be possible that rather than transcendent 'extinction', "We can achieve... a nirvana not found in escape from the world but in an enlightened and awakened engagement with it."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ This complication is significant for both Nāgārjuna and Dōgen, both key thinkers in this thesis, as "They are committed to the claim that the objects of awakening and ignorance are both distinct and identical." (Garfield, J. and Priest, G., 'Mountains are Just Mountains' in D'Amato et al (eds.), *Pointing at the Moon*, p.81.)

¹⁸⁰ *Nirvana Sutra*, quoted in Tokiwa G., 'Chan (Zen) View of Suffering', *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 5 (1985), p.113.

¹⁸¹ Garfield, J., *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p.341.

Transcendent justification falls down when an absolute separation is not maintained and focus is turned to the immanence of events. Consider the valuation of soteriology ultimately. If all sentient beings must be saved at any cost then we must posit another, 'higher', reality to warrant this. Otherwise, one may wonder what kind of world they are being saved for. If we make no distinction between the ultimate and conventional realities then 'at any cost' is ridiculous. Salvation is not found beyond the means used to attain it. To sacrifice some virtuous aspect of reality for the sake of allowing a being to see reality as it is would be akin to saving a being at the expense of condemning them. Transcendent justification must then fail because every instance, in its 'thusness', must be considered an end in itself. There is nothing 'beyond' by which to justify an event as insignificant, only epistemic interpretations of what is immediately apparent.

Transcendent justification fails. Instead we must understand the two truths concurrently. Here the term 'concurrent' is used to make sense of the mind of an 'enlightened being', following Nāgārjuna, both truths must be recognised as valid in the same moment, in the same entity, together in a coherent mental process. How this is possible presents a metaphysical problem. If a soteriological project can function towards an ultimate understanding, entailing both wisdom and compassion, in a world wherein reified systematisations are necessarily limited, then we must be able to make sense of the relatively mundane and transcendent truths together, without one overriding the other. To reach such compatibility, the implications of interdependence must be followed through.

Chapter 3: Interdependent Entities

The previous chapter concluded by claiming that the two truths must be understood concurrently if both wisdom and compassion are to function. If uncovering the nature of this connection is to be tackled as a metaphysical problem then the extremes of reification and nihilism must be avoided. It would seem however, given the limits of systems explored in Chapter 1, that any proposed metaphysical system would not be able to express the kind of universality expected of metaphysics, since no system is unlimited. The keystone of this project is ‘the standpoint of śūnyatā’, metaphysically rendered through the concept of ‘interdependence’.

This chapter will begin the extrapolation of a metaphysics of interdependence proper through the examination of entities. Chapter 4 will continue the project by examining the implications of ‘reverse causation’ and levelled frameworks, focussing on the phenomenon of mind. The fundamentals of this metaphysics will then be completed in chapter 5, *Interpenetration*.

It is clear that enlightened and unenlightened individuals share one reality, since they are historically recorded as interacting, indicating that they are metaphysically connected. That they experience this reality differently indicates an epistemological separation between the two. Given the problems of ‘transcendent justification’ examined in the preceding chapter, even this epistemological separation cannot be absolute. To assume separation absolutely would not allow the transition from ignorance to enlightenment, while to absolutely deny separation would not allow for any distinction between the two. Both are identified in

relation to their shared reality, as states of ignorance and wisdom respectively. The nature of this reality, the Zennists claim, is 'absolute nothingness'.

Following the Zen model, what does it *mean* to have 'nothingness' at the base of reality?

There are two interpretations that arose from the study of *Dao* in the previous chapter.

Either this 'nothingness' is absolutely other (the 'no-thing') or it is a characteristic of our attempt to engage with the world, which is to say that 'nothingness' just *is* immanent reality. The former interpretation appears to be incompatible with non-reification, if it is understood metaphysically. The latter may also be problematic if, as a characteristic, 'nothingness' is again reified as a systematised understanding of reality. The metaphysics to be elaborated in this chapter is a system, and so is still necessarily limited, but aims to be self-referentially so. This system is to be *absolutely contingent*. In fact this characteristic is the fundamental nature of the system itself: that is, that *every*-thing is absolutely contingent; interdependent. Where the necessary referents of a system are not present, the system does not exist in limbo as some potential of the world and it certainly does not stand 'behind' the world causing it to *be* as it is.

This antifoundationalist system of metaphysics is proposed as an alternative to a purely reductive method. While reduction is a useful conceptual tool, if it is followed through to its limits it is found to conflict with interdependence, and, I suggest, denies the possibility of enlightenment. In a reductive model all phenomena are reduced to a fundamental base, which is necessarily irreducible and essentially existent, though this is often left unexamined. Furthermore there is an inherent assumption of a hierarchy of epistemic 'levels' of reality. In contrast, interdependence presents an alternative metaphysical

framework which is within the bounds of its own assessment while retaining functional application.

This chapter is divided into three sections:

The first section, *Nāgārjuna's Dependent Origination*, elaborates upon the concept of śūnyatā as explained by Nāgārjuna, here focussing on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.¹⁸² As reification and implications of 'intrinsic existence' lead to nihilism, and the collapse of a metaphysical understanding, the only metaphysical principles that can be drawn must avoid these extremes. Following Nāgārjuna, emptiness is presented as the only plausible explanation of reality as we experience it.

The second section, *Metaphysical Framework*, sets out the function and implications of 'interdependence' as a metaphysical principle. Chiefly the identification of emptiness and dependent arising is established as an epistemological qualifier; a pedagogical device for examining claims made about the world. Here, a metaphysical examination is undertaken in order to determine the structure and validity of a universe 'empty' of intrinsic existence(s). Regarding the Buddhist soteriological project, this 'empty reality' is explained as the basis of the possibility of enlightenment. Furthermore, these principles are examined in relation to the metaphysical foundations of contemporary science and the implications of this examination are followed through.

The final section, *Bootstrap Universe*, briefly outlines the implications of a metaphysical system of absolute contingency and responds to possible criticisms of this account. It is

¹⁸² Henceforth referenced as *MK*.

important to note that at this point the metaphysical system described still cannot explain the Zen position. This project will be completed in chapter 5.

Nāgārjuna's Dependent Origination

Nāgārjuna is recognised as the 14th patriarch in the Zen tradition and the texts attributed to him are given canonical status. Given the significant philosophical distinctions found in Zen and the development of the moral problem, much has been made of the deviation of Zen from Buddhism proper. If the development of śūnyatā taken up within the Zen tradition can be shown to be in accord with Nāgārjuna then, once again, either the accusations of immorality should not apply to Zen, or else these problems are even more widely applicable to Mahāyāna Buddhism (or if we accept Nāgārjuna's position, all Buddhism, and in fact any method of approaching reality, is thus implicated). From the previous chapters the problem arises from a nihilistic reading of śūnyatā and the reification of systems of interpretation leading to the failure of transcendent justification. As Nāgārjuna is credited with having established śūnyatā as a foundation of Buddhist philosophy, his understanding of the implications this holds for the functioning of reality, and one's manner of interpreting it, should be properly examined.

The idea of dependent arising was present in early Buddhism but only identified with emptiness as a philosophical doctrine under Nāgārjuna.¹⁸³ Historically, the conception of emptiness was in part a reaction against essentialist schools and the metaphysical assumptions their views entailed. The characteristic opponent of the Mādhyamikas maintained that there was some essentially existent entity that was *independently existent*,

¹⁸³ Tachikawa M., *An Introduction to the philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, p.35.

permanent and *uncaused*.¹⁸⁴ The responses to such claims apply both to physical atomists and cognitive realists; so that, according to this view, to posit ‘self-existence’ at any level denies interdependence. This contravenes emptiness and thus cannot explain the world apparent. This is the claim which will now be examined.

Firstly, to build upon the discussion of emptiness in chapter 1, we will now analyse how *śūnyatā* (‘emptiness’) is explained to be synonymous with *pratītya-samutpāda* (‘co-dependent arising’) and the relevance of this to the Buddhist project. Nāgārjuna directly connects these three in the following passage;

Whatever is dependently co-arisen
That is explained to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation
Is itself the middle way.¹⁸⁵

All phenomena are empty of essence because they are dependently arisen. They do not contain within themselves the cause of their own existence. This indicates that an examination of any phenomenon necessitates an examination of those phenomena on which it depends. Furthermore the recognition of emptiness as interdependent (and interdependence as empty) becomes the ‘middle way’ between extremes of essentialist reification and nihilism. In order to pursue the middle way, the examination of *śūnyatā* in chapter 1 will now serve as a guideline for interpreting interdependence.

¹⁸⁴ Early Buddhist opposition was in the form of the Sarvāstivāda school; maintaining that dharmas existed independently and were both impermanent and uncaused. (See Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, Chapter 9; also Williams and Tribe, *Buddhist Thought*, pp112-115). For the wider early Indian context see the description of Nyāya atomism in Siderits, M., *Buddhism as Philosophy*, p.88.

¹⁸⁵ Nāgārjuna, (MK) 24.18.; Garfield (Trans.) *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*.

The connection made above gives opportunity to again recall the famous passage from the *Heart Sutra*: “whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form.”¹⁸⁶

The passage has been variously translated¹⁸⁷ but a common recognition of the appearance of form as empty is maintained, and, as the sutra continues, this further applies to all aggregates. While I will pursue an antifoundationalist reading it should be recognised that this not common to all Mahāyāna schools, in fact Zen is usually connected to the ‘mind-only’ school of Yogācāra, which metaphysically presents mind as a foundation. The ‘mind-only’ reading is justified as recognition of the emptiness of *external* phenomena and can be found in such common Zen passages as “directly pointing to the human mind.”¹⁸⁸ I will argue in the next chapter that such readings are metaphysically incomplete as revealed through illustrations taken from Huineng and Dōgen, among others, recalling that mind too is empty.

It would appear, at least for soteriological purposes, that any systematised understanding of reality must have some principles at its base and the selection of these principles tend to be reified by that system, hence the admission that all systems are necessarily limited and merely conventionally true. The problem of addressing a metaphysical explanation of reality appears to be backed up by the Buddha’s refusal to provide answers to metaphysical questions, such as whether the universe is infinite or finite.¹⁸⁹ However this is not necessarily a refutation of metaphysics as such, but a reasonable response to a non-question which is ultimately misleading.¹⁹⁰ If the Buddha affirmed or denied either position, then the essential assumption in the propositions, of an essentially existent universe, would

¹⁸⁶ *Heart Sutra* in Conze, p.163.

¹⁸⁷ This includes using “concrete” in place of “form” in the Nishijima/Cross translation in their translation of Dōgen’s *Shobogenzo* Book 1, which is problematic given the metaphysical reading presented here and indicates further translation issues that, of necessity, will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

¹⁸⁸ Bodhidharma quoted in Dumoulin, (2005) p.85.

¹⁸⁹ *Majjhima Nikāya*, Sutta 63.

¹⁹⁰ The unanswered questions are examined by Nāgārjuna in *MK* 27.20-28.

be affirmed.¹⁹¹ Neither position makes sense, both are defined by alternate reified systems which are presented as directly conflicting with emptiness.

Now, if we are to address and hopefully overcome the nihilistic implications of Zen 'nothingness' in order to explain the position of an enlightened being, we must ask if it is possible to develop a metaphysics, in the principle sense, which is based upon 'emptiness'. Inasmuch as Nāgārjuna is labelled 'metaphysician'¹⁹² it is the connection of emptiness to interdependence that makes this possible. While śūnyatā can be considered an epistemological principle which is used to examine metaphysics, it is expressed metaphysically through interdependent phenomena. Rather than being nihilistic, and simply proposing that nothing exists, an 'empty metaphysics' must be capable of explaining our perceived reality as a 'metaphysics of interdependence'. Interdependence as a metaphysical principle is a description of the connection phenomena must have in order to appear; act and be acted upon in the world, but, in accordance with emptiness, interdependence does not itself exist beyond the phenomena described. In this manner interdependence is presented as a metaphysical principle that is not reified – it is an element of understanding reality, merely part of a metaphysical system and not of reality itself. In other words, interdependence, like emptiness, is not a real thing in the world, but an abstract principle used to comprehend the world. Following Nāgārjuna, this is the *only* understanding that can account for our reality without inherent contradiction in the system of explanation.

¹⁹¹ A similar situation with an alternate and problematic response can be found in the kōan "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" which is examined in chapter 5.

¹⁹² Garfield's clarification on this characterisation is helpful here, as Nāgārjuna's project is primarily soteriological and would reject a classical metaphysical definition, "Nāgārjuna's text is aimed primarily against philosophy. But its soteriological goal is the extirpation of the very root of suffering." - Garfield, J., *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p.88 fn.2.

As interdependence is a guide for correctly understanding phenomena, the significance of this metaphysical understanding to the Buddhist stereological project must be stressed. Enlightenment as the perfection of wisdom, or ‘seeing reality as it is’, is paramount to Zen practice, and according to the elaborations on Dharma made by Nāgārjuna, this amounts to recognising the interdependence of all phenomena. As noted in the previous chapter, the four noble truths relate two aspects of suffering according to the two truths, which, if they are to be understood concurrently at the metaphysical level, must be reconciled. Nāgārjuna states, “Whoever sees dependent arising/ also sees suffering”.¹⁹³ The apparent conflict between the truth of suffering and the cessation of suffering is due to the reification of the concept inherent in the proposition of the problem. The desire to hold onto impermanent phenomena as though they existed inherently is the cause of suffering. As previously explained, reification is immediately incompatible with emptiness. Nāgārjuna, in elaborating interdependence, explains the (dys)functional origin of this incompatibility:

To say “it exists” is to reify.

To say “it does not exist” is to adopt the view of nihilism.

Therefore a wise person

Does not subscribe to “it exists” or “it does not exist.”¹⁹⁴

A concise example of interdependence is given by the Buddha in the *Śālistambasūtra*,¹⁹⁵ whereby the Buddha explains the causal origins of a sprout. Coarsely imagined, a seed can be identified as the cause of a sprout and the resulting plant. In order to sprout, a seed must experience the right conditions. It requires soil with appropriate nutrients, water, sunlight and temperature all within a comfortable range, and so on. This is explained as the

¹⁹³ Nāgārjuna, MK 24.40, in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.512.

¹⁹⁴ Nāgārjuna, MK 15.10, *ibid.*, p.324.

¹⁹⁵ Reat, N., (Trans.), *The Śālistambha Sūtra*.

dependence upon sufficient causes and conditions.¹⁹⁶ To limit one's understanding of causation to the seed alone fails to comprehend the interdependent nature of the functioning of the sprout, as revealed when the simple cause does not produce its expected effect. The inability of such a limited reified system to explain its own failure indicates that the system of explanation is incomplete. The principle of interdependence indicates that any essentialised understanding of causation will always remain incomplete, as in reality there are no simple 'causes and effects' that can ignore conditions.

Despite the obvious significance of conditions to the validity of positing causes and effects, conditions are commonly dropped from such discussion in favour of the brevity of generalised causation. A generalised expression of causation simply assumes the correct conditions in order for the described connection to actually carry out (i.e. the 'conditions' are assumed to be an aspect of the cause). Nevertheless, simply describing causes and effects as if they were complete gives the impression that causation could function in isolation of a wider environment and that when a described causal connection is not manifested, this is due to the presence of intervening factors; which is to say the *incorrect* conditions. In this manner the idealisation of casual connections obscures the wider interdependence of these interactions. By reducing the commonly presented position, the conventional, to its necessary components, the accuracy of the convention can be assessed. Emptiness maintains that such methods will never reveal a substantial essence by which to validate the reification of any conventional phenomena, such that any phenomenon can only be made sense of as interdependent.

Nāgārjuna's method involved the use of reduction in order to prove the impossibility of essentialised positions – a *reductio ad absurdum*. This leads to two further consequences.

¹⁹⁶ See Hopkins, *Emptiness Yoga*, p.314.

Firstly, this method can be used to disprove the *substantial* solution of any such reduction.

Secondly, and this is my elaboration from Nāgārjuna's work, the validity of the method of reduction itself is brought into question. It is for this purpose that śūnyatā is taken as a guiding principle when setting up the groundwork for this metaphysics. The outcome of this line of enquiry will be a coherent metaphysical framework that avoids reification.¹⁹⁷

However, this is only possible if śūnyatā is not understood as an ontological existent. This statement is derived from the discussion in chapter 1. While empty *things* exist conventionally, 'emptiness' itself cannot. Any positing of existence risks reifying that entity and thus falling into the nihilism that results from essentialism. As Nāgārjuna posits śūnyatā as the middle way between reification and nihilism, we must avoid placing the concept in either category.

Nāgārjuna explains that "emptiness is the elimination of all views",¹⁹⁸ although there is still contemporary scholarly debate over the philosophical status of the viewpoint of the Mādhyamikas.¹⁹⁹ It appears that one would only be able to hold a position, however this is defined, if the position itself can avoid reification. Whether this is possible is at the root of the debate.²⁰⁰ For the present thesis, it is enough to focus on Nāgārjuna's method of examination, not to arrive at a characteristic 'view' but in order to reveal what he understood to be the limitations of epistemological engagement with the world.

¹⁹⁷ To be at all coherent this relies upon a specific reading of 'metaphysics', as outlined in the introduction chapter – the result is an anti-foundational metaphysics.

¹⁹⁸ Nāgārjuna, *MK* 13.8, in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.298.

¹⁹⁹ This is true today as it was historically, as seen in the discourses of Bhāvaviveka and Buddhapālita. See Hopkins, J., *Meditation on Emptiness*, pp.455-468.

²⁰⁰ Since the elimination of all views appears self-contradictory, it would appear that the positing of 'views' is what must be abandoned, leading to a position where one has 'no place to stand'. This will be examined later.

Nāgārjuna's use of the tetralemma (*catuskoti*), to dismiss all possible logical positions, is a readily identifiable feature of his work. This method is repeated throughout the *MK*.

Nāgārjuna begins the 'examination of conditions' in the *MK* with the following passage:

Neither from itself nor from another
Nor from both,
Nor without a cause
Does anything, anywhere, ever arise.²⁰¹

The purpose of the above examination is to overlay the apparent arising of phenomenon, which we regularly witness, to the impossibility of locating a logical basis of this arising. The negation process denies essentially existent arising *and*, at the meta level, revokes the possibility of essential existence applied to the system which brought this understanding about through the negation of the propositions of 'itself', 'another' and 'without cause' as essentially existent. This method is applied to the concepts of causes and effects, to the possibility of change, to motion, to aggregates of entities, of the (in)distinction between agent and action and to the elements of the Buddhist path including the four noble truths.²⁰² As already stated, the purpose of Nāgārjuna's project is not to deny the conventional meaning of such tools as cause and effect, but to throw light on their ultimate nature, which is emptiness.

As emptiness is a reaction against a permanent, essential existence, the universe entailed by interdependence must be entirely devoid of essentially existent entities. While one may be persuaded to accept the emptiness of a single entity or phenomenon following a convincing case argument, such as those presented by Nāgārjuna, to follow this through to a universe

²⁰¹ *MK* 1.1., in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.47.

²⁰² Cause and effect *MK* 1, 7 & 20; change *MK* 2, 10 & 21; motion *MK* 2; aggregates *MK* 4; agent and action *MK* 8; four noble truths specifically *MK* 24, but regarding the Buddhist path *MK* 22-25.

without any instance of essential existence will be distasteful to those who see essentialism as the basis of existence. In order to go on to explain the coherency of such a universe, we must first examine the function of emptiness according to Nāgārjuna, which he presents in opposition to the artificial impracticability of essentialism.

To physically, conceptually or metaphysically posit some entity as permanent does not allow for its interaction with other worldly things, since on this account it cannot change²⁰³ and interaction is understood as a relational change. Furthermore the identity of any effect is tied up with its cause²⁰⁴, and as this connection requires that neither cause nor effect be essentially identified if causation is to take place. An essentially existent cause could not relate to, and thus give rise to, its effect and, in the case of transitional causation, could certainly not give way to an effect since it cannot cease to be what it is essentially. In order for activity to take place, in order for anything to change, that which makes up an activity must be capable of change. Only empty, dependently arisen phenomena are thus capable of explaining the dynamic world we perceive.

One may respond to this ultimatum that the conception of 'essence' used in Nāgārjuna's critique is antiquated and relevant only to those ancient Indian essentialists with little bearing on contemporary use of the term, developed from the ancient Greek tradition. We may, for instance, have no problem understanding 'essence' as a dynamic and engaged ground of existent things, rather than as a permanent and isolated ground. In this sense 'essence' need only logically relate to that without which that entity would not exist (in its presented state). As 'essence', like 'emptiness', is merely a convenient designation,

²⁰³ Being permanent requires that *no* change take place. In fact a conception of relational change becomes the most significant when considering the implications of interdependence as it appears that the only change possible would be relational.

²⁰⁴ MK 8.2 on the necessary interdependence of agent and action. Permanence denies change required for action to take place and thus also denies agency.

modifying its definition presents no problem so long as the implications of the proposed qualities are followed through. I maintain that if 'essence' is modified in this way then the additional implications of interdependence must also be attributed. The 'essence' of an interdependent entity is nothing more than the connection it holds to all those phenomenon on which it depends. Metaphysically this would implicate the entire universe, since no thing exists in isolation (that is independently). Analytically, the counterfactual definition of essence applies trivially to the definition of a 'form' (in the traditional Greek sense), which too must be subject to the principle of interdependence and is thus found to be empty. A 'form' in this sense is dependent upon those phenomenon it describes and ones perception of an instance of form is just as dependent upon the conception of that form.²⁰⁵ The concepts are not as important as the principles they define.

Without recognition of interdependence no sense could be made of the world and this includes understanding the origins and function of conventional systems. Nāgārjuna states;

If dependent arising is denied
Emptiness itself is rejected.
This would contradict
All of the worldly conventions.²⁰⁶

Putting aside those physical considerations, if the universe were non-empty, there could be no such thing as moral causes or effects,²⁰⁷ no normative direction, and no self.²⁰⁸ The consequences of a proposal of essential meaning are familiar to existential thought,²⁰⁹ though here are required to be further connected rather than utterly disconnected from the

²⁰⁵ Though this presents an epistemological problem resulting in delusion, which will be examined later.

²⁰⁶ *MK* 24.36.

²⁰⁷ Referring to karmic actions and their fruits, see *MK* 24.35, the two must be connected.

²⁰⁸ This is the nihilistic sense of negating self, not to be confused with the 'no-self' Buddhist doctrine, which is self explained as a functional conventional designation; empty and interdependent.

²⁰⁹ See chapter 1; one is free to rebel so any proposition of essential meaning or direction is self-destructive.

self. The self exists non-essentially, dependently, or else not at all. This presents an inversion of the problem from a reductive standpoint. Reductively we postulate a solid metaphysical reality beyond our perceptions and then attempt to derive a normative value from these existent properties. Nāgārjuna begins by rejecting non-emptiness since it would deny values we *already* have. The purpose here is not to take conventions as the starting point and, through circularity, explain their necessary validity. On the contrary, conventions are considered ultimately empty. However, since we aim to explain the appearance of conventional reality then we cannot reject such conceptions outright. That there is no 'self' to be found ultimately does not replace the conventional recognition of some continuity through a physical body that is recognised as such. To simply deny a conventional self fails to explain our experience of the world. In order to explain the convention of self, it has to be shown to arise dependently and that it is nothing more than this.

The self is composed of the five aggregates and each aggregate is made up only of the instances of that aggregate, thus presenting a reductive model of self. Nāgārjuna examines the nature of consciousness in dependent relation to the instances of consciousness.

If it can endure
Without such things as seeing,
Then, without a doubt they also
Can exist without it.²¹⁰

However, when examined, we can never identify a 'seer' without an instance of 'seeing' being necessarily implemented. Nāgārjuna then examines the opposite position;

If the seer itself is the hearer itself,
And the feeler, then

²¹⁰ Nāgārjuna, MK 9.4, in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.239.

For it to exist prior to each of these
Would make no sense.²¹¹

Consciousness is nothing beyond the instances of consciousness, and there is nothing that exists before (or after) each instance. This is true of all dependently arisen entities, and thus all experienced phenomena.

Tsong Khapa, in his commentary, draws upon Āryadeva's explanation found in the *Catuhśataka*;

Whatever is dependently arisen
Cannot be independent.
None of this is independent.
So all of it is selfless.²¹²

Recall that interdependence isn't merely a metaphysical principle, but is for Nāgārjuna "itself the middle way".²¹³ Interdependence is entrenched in the Buddhist soteriological project. Nāgārjuna remarks that "[The view of] existence does not achieve liberation from becoming, nor does [the view of] non-existence. The Great Person is freed through the complete understanding of [the interdependence of] existence and non-existence."²¹⁴ As we have seen, emptiness entails both a conventional recognition of existence and an ultimate recognition of non-existence. I reiterate: the two truths must be understood concurrently. Nāgārjuna states:

Those who do not understand
The distinction between these two truths
Do not understand

²¹¹ Nāgārjuna, *MK* 9.8, in *ibid.*, p.241.

²¹² Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka* XIV: 23, quoted in *ibid.*, p.307.

²¹³ Nāgārjuna, *MK* 24.18

²¹⁴ Nāgārjuna, *Sixty Stanzas* – 4, in Santina, P., *Causality and Emptiness*, p.74.

The Buddha's profound teaching.²¹⁵

To understand the two truths 'concurrently' here requires that we recognise each truth through its own aspect, uniquely, and also realise that in isolation either one is incomplete. In order to validate the Buddhist soteriological project through 'interdependence' the distinction between ultimate and conventional modes of being and the nature of the reality to which they refer will be examined metaphysically.

Metaphysical Framework

There is an assumption from the 'objective' standpoint of absolute connection, which is reduced to an ontological ground. There is also an assumption from the 'subjective' standpoint of absolute separation, which is reduced to the subject. Both standpoints are conventional systematisations, limited by the logic inherent in the structure.

Comprehending the problem of suffering in the Buddhist project requires both standpoints to be understood together. Suffering is only experienced as such subjectively, and as enlightened beings do not experience suffering as such, we may further categorise the experience of suffering as a naive standpoint. Correct understanding, we are told, is the realisation that suffering does not essentially exist, however this realisation is not equivalent to 'objectivity' in the abovementioned sense. Both the experience of suffering and the experience of non-suffering are existentially realised. Nevertheless, the 'objective' standpoint proposes a common ground to diversely realised subjective states. The project of metaphysics is to find just such a common ground, but this cannot be limited to the 'objective'.

²¹⁵ Nāgārjuna, MK 24.9, in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.497.

This metaphysical framework is proposed in order to address the fact that enlightened beings share a world with the unenlightened. The previous chapter concluded with a denial of transcendent justification, indicating that those acting through ultimate truth must engage at the conventional level. Furthermore, in order for *compassion* to function, the conventional cannot simply be overridden by the ultimate truth, lest the truth of non-suffering nihilate the truth of suffering. The subjective realisation of a conventional being is valid in the same reality as the ultimate realisation of an enlightened being, and the latter must recognise this if the Buddhist project (implying compassion) is to be metaphysically explained. Nāgārjuna, in connecting emptiness and dependent arising, prompts this metaphysical project as a means of understanding the two truths concurrently. I claim that following through the implications of interdependence leads us to accept an antifoundationalist metaphysics.

Emphasis of the functional validity of conventional truth should deter us from a nihilistic reading of Nāgārjuna and give some indication as to the purpose of proposing ‘interdependence’ as a metaphysical concept. That empty entities exist means they exist dependently and are *nothing other* than that dependence. This alone gives credence to a reductive metaphysics whereby entities are reduced to more fundamental entities which are in turn embedded in some kind of wholistic universal ‘real’.²¹⁶ This is a common reading of both Zen and Daoist metaphysics and will not be pursued here. On the contrary, I claim that such a reading is in direct conflict with *śūnyatā* and so too with interdependence. Any reduction that claims an essential existence, even at the most fundamental level, is non-empty and so cannot exist interdependently.

²¹⁶ Attempts at this kind of metaphysics are common; from Spinoza’s theism (in the *Ethics*), to Brian Greene’s ‘superstrings’ (*The Fabric of the Cosmos*).

Conventionally speaking, it does not seem absurd to suggest that there are *things* in the world- a chair, a rock, one's own hand, and so forth. In addition one may maintain that immaterial entities also exist – a soul, a number, an idea of a chair, and so on. For now let us consider the possibility that entities do actually exist (hopefully not a controversial position). We deal with physical entities in the world, we work with entities in our logical calculations and we see the fruits of our interactions with entities. It would seem ridiculous to doubt their existence, and yet our almost unconscious positing of entities is not without complications. Whenever we attempt to define an object of our intuition, we are forced to rely upon its relationship to other objects or to leave its fundamentals undefined. The necessity of interdependence to epistemology is evident. Alternately, if we attempt to place the reified entities proposed within systematic frameworks upon the world we discover the limits of these definitions rather quickly.²¹⁷ When this occurs it can be identified either as a problem of our conceptions of the world or of the nature of the world external. But if there can be a distinction made between conception and physical extension then we must favour one over the other if the two are found to conflict. The basis of this favouring will be grounded in either the primacy of the 'subjective' (mental perception) or for the potential universality of the 'objective' (metaphysical existence).

Another problem with our intuited entities is their limitations in space or time. Ultimately we cannot say that a changing physical entity remains the same over time (like a ship which gradually has all of its constituent pieces replaced in repairs), nor that a specific area *is* separately identifiable from its surroundings (like a shades of green from shades of yellow on a progressive colour cline). This is *not* true of the representative objects we conceive, they tend to stay true to their definitions and so come into conflict with their dynamic

²¹⁷ See discussion on the Sorites paradox below.

counterparts.²¹⁸ Thus, usually when being a pedantic philosopher, we can come to realise the limits of reified entities. Although our objects are useful, they have no definite inherent identity beyond our own necessarily static, and thus, limited conceptions of them.

However, recognising the necessity of change in identity, and the impossibility of identifying an object in isolation, we accept these limitations and continue to utilise a conception of 'entities' to work in the world. A great deal of analytic philosophy has set its sights on these problems, attempting to save our systemised understanding of the world or, in more radical moves, taking the opposing position and revoking it entirely with little to propose in return. As we have seen, Nāgārjuna's interdependence proposes an alternative, a possible 'middle way'.

First a metaphysical issue must be resolved, since it appears that we require an idea of individual entities to make sense of 'interdependence'. Such an assumption would ultimately undermine the project. The argument runs that only if objects and/or individuals are recognised as such (that is, individual) can they be understood to be somehow related to one another, if there were no individuals there could be no relations. However, it is a very different thing to say that an entity is dependent upon others for its existence than simply stating that no entities exist. The latter position provokes two likely interpretations; the first, which I will immediately dismiss, is that there is nothing. Apart from being in conflict with our perceptions to the contrary it also denies the possibility of consideration within its conception (since this would also not exist). Call this position extreme nihilism. The second possibility is more akin to the universal flux idea; that there are no individual entities, only a single constantly changing whole. There may initially appear to be no

²¹⁸ 'Impermanence' (*anitya*) is of key concern in early Buddhism as one of the three characteristics of all conditioned reality, and is (arguably) the key principle responsible for the development of 'emptiness' in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

conflict with the idea of interdependency yet there is a major complication. Universal flux, without entities, is counterintuitive. All our conventional interactions involve 'things' and to hold that they simply do not exist does not help us understand our conventional reality. Epistemologically this dismisses the existence of the entities we depend upon. Of course to preserve the universal flux idea we could say that the entities we interpret are functional, in that they have a use and they do in fact represent something 'real' in that sense, but at the same time what they represent is not an individual 'thing', but merely a distinct part of a larger whole. This only leaves the question of the nature of this 'whole', which is to seek the nature of existence, at which point all tools have been exhausted. Rather than being a solution to the nature of existence, the ultimate function of interdependence has merely been misplaced. Any such understanding must still be compatible with emptiness, since to reify the whole would present the most severe form of nihilism. Before jumping to the nature of the universe, the relationship of everyday phenomena must be better understood.

Empty phenomena are understood as such due to their dependence upon causes and conditions. Nāgārjuna argues that these phenomena are neither identical to nor distinct from their causes and conditions and we have seen various methods of interpreting this. As an explanatory method, emptiness implies that we cannot make sense of an entity without reference to its causes and conditions (to claim the entity as meaningful itself is actually shorthand for those causes and conditions). But as we have seen, causes and conditions do not simply precede an entity or event (as in 'cause' and 'effect'), they are co-synchronous with the event. Thus we cannot explain a phenomenon without reference to its

environment. In the same manner, the explanation of an environment will remain incomplete without a description of all phenomena that make it up.²¹⁹

‘Environment’ is here introduced as a technical term which indicates the surrounding influences, amounting to the collected causes and conditions, upon which a selected phenomenon or entity depends. The limits of an environment are conventionally defined by the system used to address the focal entity. This could be seen to be following a ‘principle of sufficient reason’, as championed by Leibniz,²²⁰ leaving ‘sufficiency’ defined by the limits of the examining system. It is important to note that due to the direct implications of interdependence, non-independence specifically, the environment of any focal entity needs ultimately be extended to the entire universe.

One final point regarding environment is that, as previously stated, an environment is only complete when all effective phenomena are taken into consideration and this includes the focal entity. The significance of this inclusion is immediately apparent when an environment and its focus are related in a feedback loop.²²¹ When feedback is identified one cannot predict the future state of an environment without taking into account the effect of interaction with the focal entity (or entities), which in turn require an understanding of the effect of the environment upon it. From the principle of interdependence we can conclude that if this ever occurs, in any environment, then it is a contributing factor to every environment ultimately (that is extended to include all entities). Furthermore, it is a condition of every entity as empty and dependent that such feedback is

²¹⁹ Investigating emergent phenomenon, Paul Davies states that “a reductive account of that phenomenon is still adequate, so long as the environment is included within the system.” (Clayton, P. & Davies, P. (eds.), *The Re-Emergence of Emergence*, p.37)

²²⁰ Though also evident in the much earlier Buddhist account of ‘arising and cessation’ as dependent on ‘causes and conditions’, as previously cited.

²²¹ What Scott Kelso calls “circular causality.” (Kelso, J.A.S., *Dynamic Patterns*, p.16)

a necessary aspect of interdependence at the metaphysical level. This will be followed up in the next chapter concerning the nature of mind.

Now attention must be turned once again to the limits of systems of interpretation in order to dismiss the possibility of a reductive metaphysical framework in opposition to absolute interdependence. If a reductive framework is accepted then an environment can be defined by the phenomenon that make it up and complications of feedback and prediction need not apply. At the outset I eliminated the possibility of reduction to an essential base as it contradicts emptiness and would fail Nāgārjuna's metaphysics.²²² The process of reductive evaluation cannot be discarded however, after all Nāgārjuna used this method in order to establish interdependence, so the limits of reduction as a method must be evaluated.

A theme of this thesis, in establishing interdependence, is to reveal the limitations of evaluative systems due to the reification of proposed entities. Examined generally, the reductive method results in certain self-relational logical paradoxes, which demonstrate the limits of the system itself.²²³ In addition to those conflicts highlighted by Nāgārjuna, consider the *Sorites* paradox²²⁴ which entails a conclusion that, while syllogistically valid, is undeniably false. The paradox is formed when adding or removing a small quantity from a subject, the heap, at a constant rate until the initial subject no longer exists. The original

²²² It is important to keep in mind that reduction proposes a hierarchy that favours the simpler over the more complex but does not necessarily presuppose a *direction* or preference of scale. So a phenomenon such as a person buying an ice-cream can be reductively explained as a biological system relating to chemical changes or even the interaction of sub-atomic particles. It could also be reductively explained as a response to an idea of hunger or depression or as part of a larger retail system of supply and demand. In both cases a complex phenomenon is explained by means of a simpler one and of course the selection of *direction* will depend upon the criteria being examined in that instance.

²²³ While Nāgārjuna's acceptance of paradox may be contended (See for instance: In support of paraconsistency (rather than *irrationality*); Garfield, J. and Priest, G., 'Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought', *Philosophy East & West*, Vol. 53, Num. 1 (Jan 2003), pp.1-21 – and against; Tillemans, T., 'How Do Mādhyamikas Think?: Notes on Jay Garfield, Graham Priest, and Paraconsistency', in D'Amato, M., *Pointing at the Moon*, pp.83-100.) the use of intentional paradox is undeniable in the record of the Zen tradition.

²²⁴ 'Sorites' from the Greek, 'heap'.

example is taking away grains of sand from a pile one by one. Removing a single grain does not revoke its 'pile-ness', nor does removing a further grain from that resultant pile, however the end result of this progression is an empty space that we are forced to admit is a 'pile'. This problem cannot be solved using the logic that created it, except by asserting a sharp 'cut-off' point between states (i.e. 1000 grains is a 'pile' and anything less is 'some' until there are no grains left). The reason the paradox remains valid is because it plays on an inherent limitation in our logic, specifically the reification and segmented identity of objects and properties. This is a limitation necessary for the functioning of any categorical system (including standard mathematics) but it is not a feature of reality as such. *Sorites* is but one of a family of such paradoxes, all hanging on this system limitation.²²⁵

Pointing out the enduring validity of paradoxes is not intended to be a rebuttal of logic. Stating that the reification of objects does not exist in reality is not to say that simple logic is erroneous or useless, but that the process by which we interpret the world into an abstract logical framework is necessarily limited. If we make a prediction based on a logical sequence and we find that our prediction does not come to be, we do not assume that logic is flawed, nor that the world must be broken, rather we have missed something in our calculations. The world does appear to consistently fulfil our logical expectations. We can understand that certain effects spring from certain causes and that, for example, certain forces will affect the trajectory of a body in motion. These are conventional truths. Yet even here, the demarcations of 'cause' and 'effect' are merely relative qualifiers and, further, we can identify no such thing as a 'force' outside of the problem it is calculated for.

²²⁵ Also consider Quine's indeterminacy of translation in *Word and Object* as well as Wittgenstein and Kripke's, critiques of other minds (Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*). As a counter to such paradoxes, consider Gödel's theorem; whereby a system remains functional while necessarily incomplete.

We can understand the healthy human body as a functioning network of mechanical, electrical and chemical pathways but we could also interpret obstructions in a flow of energy around the body as a cause for sickness. The latter explanation may seem oversimplified (if not completely incorrect) to most 'western medicine', yet such a concept, *Chi*, is still used in traditional Chinese medicine. If we evaluate the two interpretations of the body based on their various practical applications the 'simpler' version may be able to account for disruptions and cures that the historically western version cannot (and vice-versa). This medical example glosses over issues of scientific rigour and criticisms of traditional modes, and such controversy will always obscure a philosophical point. In this example it is certainly difficult for one working within the paradigm of one mode of understanding to consider the alternate possibility; that, in the first instance, 'energies' may explain anything more than a combination of what could be understood as an interaction of the various bodily systems or, alternatively, that these interactions can do away with said energy. This difficulty, I hope, is less prominent in the following example, considering interpretations of light. Depending upon the problems we are facing we may choose between looking at the contrast or tone of patches of colour or we may understand these colours as the separation of various wavelengths of white light. It doesn't matter how accurately we understand the interactions of frequencies of light, we would still need to work with the level of the experience of colours in order to design a painting or construct camouflage. Our reified understanding would have to be converted to a broader level to tackle these problems.

There is a tendency in popular literature to set up such examples to show the contrast between 'western' reified interpretations of the world to contrast with the predominantly

‘eastern’ modes, which work at a more holistic level.²²⁶ This overly simplified view overlooks the fact that both modes represent reifications. Whether we call it colour or a certain light frequency, whether it is an obstruction of energy or a set of neurons firing out of sync, we are still labelling and breaking up reality into workable pieces. Conventionally realised, these are pieces which interact with each other in a coherent manner and are thus practical and valid interpretations. Only at the edges of these systems do we recognise the limits of these interpretations, and only then does emptiness become a serious consideration.

As a method of studying and classifying phenomena, contemporary science has proven overwhelmingly successful, allowing us to identify connections and tendencies correlated to theories presenting predictable future results. However the accepted boundaries of the scientific method, and extreme examples such as the logical positivist’s abolition of metaphysics,²²⁷ tends to obscure, or prevent critique of, the metaphysical presumptions inherent in these theories. As a description of reality certain conceptual factors, which sustain the overall structure and situate experimental results, persist beyond the reach of empirical investigation. These foundations remain philosophical, yet the extrapolation of results into grander contexts presents epistemological consequences, altering the interpretation of experimental data, and so too the interpretation of the world based upon this.

Paul Davies expresses the popular opinion that “The belief that the underlying order of the world can be expressed in mathematical form lies at the very heart of science, and is rarely

²²⁶ “The organic, ‘ecological’ world view of the Eastern philosophies”, noted in Capra, F., *The Tao of Physics*, p.30.

²²⁷ Though this mode of thinking may now be outdated the ‘taboo’ of metaphysics in philosophical discourse lingers on.

questioned.”²²⁸ While Davies goes on to side with a mathematical foundation, it would appear that, while a commonly held belief, such a foundation is not essential to the continued function of science. It is true that the development of mathematics as the ‘language’ of scientific descriptions of the universe, hand in hand with the development of empirical experimentation, radically transformed the modern world-view, however this should not be considered as the end-point of our theoretical development.²²⁹ Elaborate projects such as Harty Field’s *Science Without Numbers*, which undertook a nominalist explanation of mathematics, have brought into question this dependence upon the ontological existence of mathematical entities.

The position of mathematics in contemporary (often undisclosed) metaphysics is a fascinating topic, however to return to our focus on the implications of interdependence as a metaphysical principle, the nature of mathematics becomes a secondary concern. If a mathematical entity (or system) exists, it can only do so interdependently. That mathematics functions as a vocabulary for describing the physical universe, even if it is recognised as indispensable,²³⁰ does not necessitate that mathematics itself is somehow ontologically fundamental. Rather, it is primarily identified as a relation of a mind to the universe – that is to say that the existence of a mathematical system *depends upon* the expression of that system by an individual or culture within the universe it describes. Physicist Lee Smolin agrees, “Fundamental properties in physics, such as space and time, have something in common with biological properties: they are all about relationships, not

²²⁸ Davies, P., *The Mind of God*, p.140.

²²⁹ See Burt, E.A., *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*. One should note that the new developments Burt alludes to in his conclusion are still yet to settle on a new paradigm regarding the metaphysical basis of science (*ibid*, p.304).

²³⁰ Al Quine, ‘Epistemology Naturalized’, in Quine, W.V.O., *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, pp. 69–90.

absolutes.”²³¹ The nature of reality itself, on this reading, is not determined by the overlay of mathematics.

The tendency towards reductionism that dominates scientific method may allow parallels to be drawn with Buddhist emptiness, since at any level a phenomenon is recognised as no more than its constituent, lower-level, parts. However, somewhere down the chain of reduction, where it is assumed that there is a fundamental unit of existence which is considered irreducible - a foundation; be it atom, quanta, superstring or mathematical formula – such a foundation is incompatible with Nāgārjuna’s emptiness. The foundation too must be critically examined and further broken down. The critique of emptiness must be levelled against the apparent essentialism inherent in a reduction to some fundamental level,²³² where that level is understood as essentially and necessarily existent.

It should be noted that the above dismissal of any essential foundation could be criticised as leaving open the question of what it is to exist, or why there is ‘something rather than nothing’, but so does the positing of an essential foundation. Attributing some essential existence is not a solution and only defers this question. If, for instance, we determine that our best theories indicate that there *is* some fundamental mathematical basis for reality, our enquiry then turns to the nature and origin of this basis. I would argue that this basis must also be *dependent*. While we are not yet ready to examine the problem of existence, I would like to highlight it and indicate that the metaphysics developed in this thesis hopes to do away with such deferrals.

²³¹ Smolin, L., ‘The Self-Organization of Space and Time’, in *Philosophical Transactions* Vol. 361, No. 1807, (Jun. 15, 2003), P.1084.

²³² Called ‘greedy reductionism’ by Daniel Dennett in *Dawrin’s Dangerous Idea* (1995), p.82.

Another basic position directly affected by the principle of interdependence is the ideal in physics of a particle in isolation. The essential properties of a particle are posited as the natural state free of external influences. This is the mean state from which all interactions are measured as deviances. This is accepted only as an ideal since it is impossible to *observe* anything in perfect isolation.²³³ We hold that an entity will interact differently when it is in some kind of contact with other entities than if it were in isolation. But according to the principle of interdependence any entity is defined by its contact with other entities; its causes and conditions. Without these interactions an empty entity has no properties, so according to interdependence a particle in isolation is not only unobservable, it cannot exist. The properties of any entity are determined in dependence upon its environment, and in each different instance of relation the effect on the entity similarly differs. So the state of an entity (in effect, what it *is*) is determined by the entities it is in contact with.

Notice that denying the possibility of existence in isolation does not affect the validity of a scientific system which accepts isolation as an *ideal* since, being unobservable, it cannot be physically posited. Where the implications of interdependence become significant is in the further postulation of metaphysics. As the properties of an entity are a result of its environment, and since this applies to every entity, and further, that no entity exists (in this world) in isolation, then the state of any entity is dependent upon the state of every other. This does mean, in one sense, that to change any minute detail of the world will affect everything. However everything is not affected directly. There are groups of closely related causal networks, feedback loops and phenomena such as event horizons which, while their sources of influence are grouped or 'chunked' in the world, are still all ultimately interdependent (otherwise they could not exist). In this manner temporal and spatial

²³³ Since the two points of observer and observed interact relationally, neither can be considered in isolation.

separation become recognisably manifest as the delay/distance between one action and another, as, for example, cause and effect.²³⁴ Physically, this separation creates intense localised interactions, decreasing in strength with distance as the effect disperses, culminating in the development of focal environments. Epistemically, one is thus able to recognise difference and identify ‘individual’ entities; objects which hold their shape and patterns which recur. In everyday interactions it is important to recognise that it is this apparent separation that is often of most use to us. Philosophically, if one is to discover reality as such, one must see through what is apparent.

The complication of connection and separation is expressed by Nāgārjuna as follows;

One different thing depends upon another for its difference.

Without a different thing, another would not be different.

It is not tenable for that which depends on something else

To be different from it.²³⁵

A categorically identified difference is not an inherent difference. Metaphysically, nothing is independent. No entity can exist in isolation. Though we can *conceive* of such an entity, we can never *perceive* it (by its very definition) nor any of its affects. Such an object is necessarily of a different world.²³⁶ The coherent extension of a single world is assumed in order to define the limits of enquiry. Someone’s first reaction to such a limit may be to say that this isn’t a metaphysical rule, but an epistemological one. They would be right, it is an

²³⁴ While some contemporary physicists now attribute ‘action at a distance’ to so-called ‘entanglement effects’ I do not consider this a legitimate counterpoint – though there is not room to enter the discussion here. Suffice to say, due to the method and apparatus used to derive this position, the ‘entanglement’ is not causal, rather it is a logical inference – which is to say, not a physical but an epistemological ‘effect’.

²³⁵ MK 14.5, in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.306.

²³⁶ Note that this is a definition which does not allow for physical isolation, unlike, for instance, the position accepted by Siderits, M., ‘Is Everything Connected to Everything Else? What The Gopīs Know’ in *The Cowherds, Moonshadows*, pp.167-180 – who uses a similar physical analogy to that of the ‘event horizon’ (below) to draw the opposite conclusion (i.e. that separation is feasible). Furthermore, I argue that the *conventional* acceptance of something like essence is not necessary for the pragmatic function of contemporary science, and in fact this uncritical acceptance is detrimental to the advancement of our common knowledge.

epistemological rule, however metaphysics is necessarily bound up with epistemology.

What we can know, and hence what we can theorise about, is physically limited. A simple example is that one may not have knowledge of the contents of a sealed box, since they cannot (directly) perceive any contents, but these contents are still a part of the same physical world as the (non-)observer. In more complex examples the 'laws of nature' can also be understood as metaphysically limited and here the 'world' definition breaks down.

There is some confusion here and the result can be seen in the physical limits of 'light cones', as expressed for example, in the idea of an 'event horizon' in astrophysics. The 'event horizon', or boundary of the region surrounding a black hole, is defined by the point at which light cannot escape its gravitational pull. We theorise that time 'stops' and space becomes infinitely elongated. Epistemologically, beyond this point we cannot perceive anything since nothing can escape the horizon to interact with us. The limits of our thought and the limits of our perceptions (and interactions) are related. (Of course you can think of something you cannot perceive but the opposite is not true.)

The black hole is an awkward example for my purposes here as it is based upon a temporal instant and spatially essential view of the universe (the very thing I aim to do away with).

More importantly, regarding the premise that nothing can be independent, consider what it would mean for something to be wholly independent. This independent thing could not interact with the world in any way (whether or not we are aware of it is unimportant, as our epistemological awareness already requires some basic metaphysical interaction – and even *whether or not it affects us directly* is unimportant as the principle of interdependence implies that we *must* at some point interact with something which has been influenced by this thing. If we are completely isolated from a 'thing' then it is not a part of our world.)

Something that is not a part of our world, does not interact with us or anything with which we interact with, that is to say does not affect our world in any way, is not something we need be concerned about – in a purely pragmatic sense. In a logical sense it is impossible for us to know such a thing anyway.

To continue this discussion I will make the assertion that the function of seeing 'reality as it is' is itself interdependent and thus dependent upon the metaphysical position of the being that 'sees'.²³⁷ Regarding the nature of the experience itself, I believe there is an additional quality that enlightenment must possess (and the argument for this position dominates the next chapter) - enlightened realisation cannot be reductive. By this I mean that the wisdom an enlightened individual has cannot be contained purely in one 'level' of thought for the reality that is to be understood is made up of multiple 'levels'. That is to say that reality isn't simply a universal flux of sub-atomic energy – reality is also thoughts, sensations, organisms, cultures, and so on. It would seem that this has just made enlightened wisdom so much more complex, since it has to include multiple levels of understanding which are often either partially or wholly contradictory, but let us consider the alternative. If we are to understand reality on a single level then all other levels of understanding must be reducible to (or extrapolated from) this single level. As mentioned previously, this is generally assumed to be the case in science; that if we knew the most basic level of reality (the most basic form of reality, its state at a specific instant in time, and had a computer powerful enough to crunch the numbers that would correspond with the 'laws' of the universe) then we would understand and could explain everything. There are many

²³⁷ In so doing I am severely limiting the mystical attributes of enlightened beings, but since these are not discernable philosophically, the present discussion should remain fruitful.

directions in which we could take this discussion²³⁸ but here our interest lies with the possibility of ‘enlightenment’.

Firstly, I propose that it is impossible for a human mind to comprehend such calculations as would be necessary to understand the universe on this model. Nevertheless we can meaningfully and intelligently interpret the world. Our mistake is to project the implications of a model, which is an interpreted piece of reality, beyond its scope.²³⁹ We try to hold onto the distinctions we create at one level and thus come into conflict with the groundwork of a different level of interpretation. Whatever enlightenment is it should not suffer this confusion. If it is possible to understand reality directly then this understanding would not be based on any epistemological level, it would be an understanding of the reality that underlies all levels simultaneously. The realisation itself must be free of interpretation.

A final criticism of the basic premises in constructing this metaphysical framework is the obvious contradiction, mentioned in chapter 1, that the principles of ‘interdependence’, ‘emptiness’, ‘environment’, and so on, appear to have been reified. Here I must reiterate, this framework is inherently empty and so cannot be considered as metaphysics in the conventional sense as it denies fundamental ontological reality. These principles, such as interdependence, are themselves interdependent. They only acquire meaning in dependence upon appropriate conditions (without there being two or more ‘entities’

²³⁸ Both objecting to this crude description and about the implications of this idea (the consequences of following Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle for example). One could argue, for instance, that the complete model could only at best produce probable outcomes, though this is metaphysically problematic.

²³⁹ This follows from the discussion of ‘transcendent justification’ in chapter 2. Here the recognition of the ‘limits of systems’ is applied specifically to scientific models. In the present thesis the ontological status of such models can only be interpreted as ultimately ‘empty’ and thus, as we have seen, problematising the move to ‘universal laws’. Regarding the desire to universally apply locally interpreted laws, Nancy Cartwright writes, “I urge us to resist fundamentalism. Reality may well be just a patchwork of laws.” (Cartwright, N., *The Dappled World*, p.34.) Bas van Fraassen, while rejecting metaphysics (as such), also explores the possibility that law-like regularities are restricted to the models from which they are derived. (van Fraassen, B.C., *Laws and Symmetry*.)

interdependence cannot arise, for example), without which they would only theoretically retain their counterfactual validity.²⁴⁰ The validity of such a metaphysical principle further depends upon the nature of the mind from which it is conceived, which presupposes the conditions necessary for that mind's existence. The actual embeddedness of epistemology in metaphysics and vice versa should be a major concern for both fields of thought. This, in relation to interdependence, is the focus of the next chapter.

Bootstrap Universe

Taking interdependence as a fundamental metaphysical principle leads us to adopt specific positions in disputed areas within the philosophy of science. If the basic premises of interdependence are readily accepted as part of commonly accepted scientific method then some credence is given to the further adoption of the implications of interdependence. Alternatively, an outright rejection of interdependence must answer to Nāgārjuna's tetralemmas – without recourse to an alternative it would appear that a reified discourse will be unable to explain the nature of causation, identity, or indeed salvation, since no intrinsically existent element can be found at any level. Yet to propose an antifoundationalist metaphysics would still appear to remove all explanatory power from the system; for if there is no fundamental basis to reduce reality to, how can it be made sense of? Here I will argue that interdependence is compatible with a 'bootstrap universe' model – a universe which is entirely self-referential and self-defining, with no essentially existent parts or wholes at any level.

²⁴⁰ These are taken as principles precisely because situations in which they do not occur are actually impossible – theoretically however the problem of 'universals' and 'laws' independent of phenomenon, in which we find them actualised, arises and causes philosophical havoc.

To begin the bootstrapping a radical claim is required. There are no laws of the universe, nor are there any constants.²⁴¹ This follows from a denial of essential existence and the universal application of impermanence. An explanation of *why* the universe is can be found in *how* the universe is. Since each and every entity can be understood by its environment, what it is made up of and influenced by, rather than saying that there are laws a thing will follow '*in isolation*' (which is impossible), we could say that the interactions of an entity are restricted and directed by its place in the universe. Rather than being deterministic these influences are just that, influential.

A law, after all, describes, in the most general terms, the regular occurrence of events given set parameters.²⁴² In order to be deterministic, to be capable of describing the state of the world as it appears, a law also requires the starting conditions of the physical system.²⁴³ To problematise the universal application of the law model, Steven Hawking has proposed that the starting conditions of the universe are potentially unknowable as the frameworks used to understand the early universe, including time, reach their limits just *after* the initial event, so the event itself is beyond our potential epistemic scope.²⁴⁴ If the purpose of the law-method is to dispel metaphysical speculation, an essential limit to investigations could contra-wisely force the adoption of classical metaphysical explanation – the 'unmoved mover'. While the validity of such a (classical) metaphysical conclusion will not be

²⁴¹ Such a claim is given credence in contemporary debates in the philosophy of science. See for instance, Giere, R.N., *Science without Laws*, p.86 – "On my interpretation there are both regularities and necessities in nature, but there are no laws of nature."

²⁴² 'Best Systems Analysis', to cite an approach which waives essentiality, is the proposition that laws are nothing more than explanations of regularities. See Earman (*A Primer on Determinism*, pp.101-105).

²⁴³ Davies, P., *The Mind of God*, p.87.

²⁴⁴ Hawking, S., *A Brief History of Time*, p.129. In contrast to the position developed here, Hawking has suggested that the conditions of the universe can be understood as derivative of a multiverse theory. See Hawking & Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, p.165.

addressed in this thesis, I propose that a metaphysics of interdependence eliminates the need to turn to such positing in order to explain the world as it appears to us.

As this thesis is philosophical we are not here concerned with the specifics of theories of physics, or debates thereof, it is rather the metaphysical assumptions and implications which are of concern. So when I propose a 'bootstrap universe', this should be understood as distinct from developments of various field theories in physics.²⁴⁵ At most we can describe the principles these theories must abide by. The *usefulness* of a system does not entail the metaphysical existence of the entities it describes. However, positing a metaphysical element will dramatically affect the interpretation of any system and its results. In addition, if the principles proposed refer to the nature of physical interactions, then the theoretical framework should present opportunities of testing the validity of the system. In other words, the metaphysics of interdependence will prove fruitful if it is able to describe phenomena that a purely reductive method is not capable of.

A key characteristic of this metaphysics of interdependence, as we have seen, is the maintenance of all entities as empty. In effect this presents a metaphysics without a fundamental ontology, or rather, since phenomena are conventionally identified, a fundamentally empty ontology. David Chalmers is not a fan of this idea. "One might be attracted to the view of the world as pure causal flux, with no further properties for the causation to relate, but this would lead to a strangely insubstantial view of the physical world."²⁴⁶ He continues, criticising Shoemaker's position, "It would contain only causal and nomic relations between empty placeholders with no properties of their own. Intuitively, it

²⁴⁵ Such as the s-matrix, or the holographic principle, or even the standard model. Specifically, the failure of Geoffery Chew's 'bootstrap' theory was due to the explanatory limitations of the specifically applied theory, rather than the philosophical limits of the underlying metaphysics.

²⁴⁶ Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, p.153.

is more reasonable to suppose that the basic entities that all this causation relates have some internal nature of their own, some *intrinsic* properties, so that the world has some substance to it.” Furthermore he claims that “such a world is arguably logically impossible, as there is nothing in such a world for causation to relate.”²⁴⁷ Certainly, a world of pure causal flux is not a common idea,²⁴⁸ but the argument for its ‘logical impossibility’ is difficult to maintain. Considering the limitations of systems from chapter 1, to dismiss the possibility of an anti-essential interpretation on the grounds of a logic that assumes essential substance is question begging as it cannot address the difference at stake.

In order to better express the significance of a non-essentialist approach, here we should highlight the possibility of the unity of thought or ‘enlightenment’. In Buddhism enlightenment is an undeniably important possibility. If the world can only be understood through some basic principle - say some underlying, simple metaphysical reality - that we arrive at through reduction, then unless we completely understand this ‘simple’ level of reality, in its full complexity so that it can explain all other levels, any attempt at understanding the world must be incomplete. This is equally true if the explanation of the universe is placed in ‘the mind of God’ or some such transcendent explanation. Whichever way reduction directs us we will be impossibly removed from the source of that wisdom for which all science, philosophy and spiritual endeavour seeks. However, and as an apparently self-undermining aspect of this project, I want to show that enlightenment without any need for a metaphysical ground (in the classical sense) is possible. Denying reduction without denying understanding opens up the possibility of enlightenment, allowing for the possibility of discovery without positing some fundamental formula of existence.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.154.

²⁴⁸ Such philosophical interpretations have been attempted, noting Heraclitus, though also in more contemporary thought, for instance; Capra, F. (*The Tao of Physics*) and Smolin (*The Life of the Cosmos*).

Recall the discussion of 'ideal states', wherein we assume within a small margin of error, the characteristics of an entity *in isolation*. We say that the entity changes or acts in a certain way due to the additional influences to this basic state, the effect of its environment. So we equate this state *in isolation* with our best interpretation of the ontological *reality* of that entity. But at the same time we realise that nothing exists in isolation. Everything *is* interconnected. If there is an entity which never affects the universe and is never affected by the universe, then this entity, for the extent of our reality, does not exist. This is not merely an epistemological truth about what we can know, it is a metaphysical reality. If something does not interact,²⁴⁹ then it is not a part of our reality as a whole and thus cannot come into our considerations when I ask the question "can we directly realise reality?" Only those interactions that form the universe and function within it are important for understanding the form and function of the universe. So nothing exists in isolation.

Following on from this point we can make the stronger claim that an entity, in both how it is composed and how it interacts, is *dependent* upon the influences of its environment. An entity will be fundamentally different depending upon its situation. From this we leap to the proposal that an entity is *completely dependent* upon its environment, and that this environment is made up of nothing but similarly interdependent entities. This allows the further proposition that there are no laws of the universe, nor are there constants, only contingent tendencies. In other words, if the universe were different, the way the parts of the universe tend to interact would similarly be altered. Understanding a 'law' is only useful so long as its border limitations are not breached, and there are situations within our universe where the application of accepted 'laws' reach their limits and need to be

²⁴⁹ This is meant in the loosest possible sense, so that even if it has some minor influence on the edge of a causal chain somewhere in the *future* it is considered to be interacting.

modified.²⁵⁰ Simply put, if the extent of a 'law' is limited, then it too can be considered dependent. Interdependence can be used as a base metaphysical principle that stands to set up an interpretation of 'laws' and does not require them (or any transcendental influence) in order to make sense of the universe. Rather, to understand the universe is to understand those tendencies which lead us to identify 'laws', which is identical to understanding the rules or 'laws' into which these tendencies are abstracted.

If this holds up it can alter our understanding of the universe in two ways. Firstly, rather than searching for the basic cause of the universe we could understand the universe as being the cause of itself – there's nothing external making it what it is. An explanation of how the universe works and why it is like it is should be evident in the universe immediate.²⁵¹ The second major implication of the removal of constants is that we would not necessarily be subject to the laws of the universe. This is not to say that one would be free to act however they choose (ignoring gravity for example), only that one's existence could not be identified as completely predetermined. Understanding that laws are dependent upon the state of the universe should rather let us realise that there are things we cannot do, and why we cannot do them at this point in time and space. Physical laws remain effectively 'concrete', as far as laws go within the world to which we bear witness and the implications for us regarding where the laws break down are likely not within easy intellectual grasp. As a more pliable example consider a social norm. Suppose that you lived in a carnivorous society and that for some reason you wanted to make the society in which you live completely vegetarian. Initially it would be a constant struggle against those

²⁵⁰ Between 'levels' of science, such as physics and chemistry for example, or within one field, such as the relation to gravity and time in special relativity.

²⁵¹ Note that I am not dismissing those possible things that belief may hold 'beyond' the mundane understanding of the world. All I claim is that anything that exists cannot be *beyond* for it too must be interdependent and thus be a part of this world.

around you, against the institutions that already exist working on the old mandate (of eating meat) and there may even be an internal struggle. Eventually, after prolonged effort, it may become easier as people change their perspective to accept a different possibility and your world slowly alters and helps you along (new institutions form, and so on). Now we would never call the tendency to eat meat in the original situation a ‘law’, but it would certainly require some force of effort to move against a social norm, and if we stopped making that effort we would not follow our desires, but would naturally follow the norm.²⁵² As a more physical example, imagine being caught in a rip in the ocean or being swept along by the current of a river. Common wisdom advises not to swim against it, but rather (if we assume you don’t like where it is taking you) to swim across it. The pull of the current, or of society, is always going to affect and become a part of your trajectory, but the norm will only effect and not determine where you will end up.

There have been attempts to develop a type of ‘universal Darwinism’ to explain the ‘evolution’ of laws and general dispositions of physical systems.²⁵³ Generally, the theories utilise the epistemological reversal, as noted above, to maintain that laws are a description of tendencies and tendencies are not determined by laws. These theories hold that systematic stability, like those tendencies we observe, are the inevitable result of the interactions within the substrate of the material universe over time. These laws are not necessary but contingent.

Through the framework of interdependence we have seen that the state of an entity is dependent upon its environmental causes and conditions. The effect of a ‘law’ on an entity

²⁵² Moreover, in that situation an individual who took the stance “Don’t eat meat”, in direct opposition to the norm would tend to be crushed by all but the most tolerant societies.

²⁵³ For example: Smolin, L., *The Life of the Cosmos*.

is simply the tendencies of interactions placed within its environment. As interdependence revokes the status of materiality, the entities themselves are recognised to be nothing more than a similar abstraction, an identification of stability within the network of interactions which is ultimately impermanent. A metaphysics of interdependence not only entails the absolute emptiness of entities, it also presents the possibility of understanding the development of the laws of the universe interdependently with the phenomena we readily observe. A phenomenon can be pragmatically interpreted as the result of laws and can also be understood, metaphysically, to be the joint cause of those laws.

Rather than seeing the universe as self-creating, Paul Davies prefers to see the universe as “internally consistent and self-contained”²⁵⁴ yet he believes this does not address the fundamental questions of existence and specifically does not remove the need for some external initiating factor. Davies believes the laws are there to be discovered, like solving a cross-word puzzle, “The links do not evolve, they are simply there, in the underlying laws.”²⁵⁵ Davies concludes *The Mind of God* stating, “I have tried to make a case that the existence of an orderly, coherent universe containing stable, organised, complex structures requires laws and conditions of a very special kind. All the evidence suggests that this is not just any old universe, but one which is remarkably well adjusted.”²⁵⁶

This belief is widely expressed in contemporary metaphysics, with theories citing the strength of gravity being just right for the formation of planets and stars, of the peculiar characteristics of water and so forth, often tied to the anthropic principle – that an explanation of the universe must account for the development of the consciousness which

²⁵⁴ Davies, P., *The Mind of God*, p.68.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.213.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.198.

is capable of asking this question. That an explanation of reality must account for all that is apparent to us seems obvious, and it is a point I emphasise throughout this thesis. That there is some *telos* which makes the set-up of the universe such that the arising of a conscious human being is *necessary*, cannot be assumed. That stability tends to result from chaotic systems, that complex systems develop and provide structural advantages achieving consistency and stability, does not entail that whatever stability happens to result is the necessary result. Nor does this entail that *any* stability necessarily results. To say that one must exist and be capable of asking the question in order to ask the question is a tautology and does not add anything to the investigation. The dismissal of 'universal Darwinism' appears here to take the same form as the dismissal of Darwinian evolution by creationists, an outright denial of which Davies would find absurd. As before I must stress, apparently evolutionary tendencies are not independent laws, but are themselves the abstraction of such observations into an explanatory framework and are thus part of the interdependent universe.

Conclusion

If interdependence is taken as a basic principle the metaphysical universe it entails has interesting characteristics. No wholes, no parts, no levels, no laws, just absolute contingency which appears entirely dynamic and specifically indeterminate. The bootstrap model is proposed as an alternative to complete reductionism and its essentialised foundation. These are philosophical points which are already present in contemporary scientific theories, though their extent is obscured by reliance upon substantialist logical foundations.

The next chapter will examine the implication of *two directions* of understanding (top-down and bottom-up) in order to expand this possibility, every instance of the universe (anything we care to call a thing) is not merely a result of some original equation, but is an expression of the current world we live in. Indeed, chapter 5, examining Dōgen, suggests that you can look at any instance of the universe and see how it fits into the wider universe, and in fact *see* the entire universe expressed *in that very instant*.

The combination of these aspects develops a framework of interdependence which provides a metaphysical explanation of the possibility of enlightenment. Implicated in this framework is the inevitable entanglement of 'other minds' with the enlightened realisation of reality as it is, of which 'others' and oneself are parts. This is the basis of compassion through the connection of suffering and non-suffering which will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Interdependent Minds

Following on from the previous chapter, which examined the interdependence of entities, this chapter further elaborates upon the metaphysics of interdependence through an examination of mind. This is achieved through analysis of the levelled structure of epistemology, proposing 'downward' causation as an equally valid source of interpretation to its 'upward' (and standardly reductive) counterpart. Integrated into the framework of interdependence, this presents two significant results. First, there is the existential realisation of groundlessness inherent in the framework which must be distinguished from nihilism. Second, the possibility of enlightenment is revealed through the antifoundational connection of epistemology and metaphysics.

Making sense of the apparent separation of subjective minds is key to metaphysically reconciling the conventional experience of suffering with the enlightened realisation of non-suffering and thus dispelling the nihilistic reading of emptiness.

This chapter is divided into three sections:

The first section, *The Nature of Mind*, utilises modern theories of emergence and supervenience²⁵⁷ to develop an understanding of mental affects in the world, compatible with interdependence. The apparent separation of subjective experiences is metaphysically connected and this is related to the Buddhist conceptions of mind.

²⁵⁷ Such theories came to prominence in the first half of the 20th Century.

The second section, *Groundlessness*, examines contemporary theories of emergence in order to again bring into question reductionist tendencies, this time on the grounds of the possibility of knowledge. If the epistemological investigation reveals that no 'level' of explanation has priority, according to the scientific standard, then any (empty) level can be explained with reference to any other. The attack on reification/ substance also extends to holism, such that the wholly contingent, antifoundational universe , as proposed in the previous chapter, is presented as the alternative. Furthermore, antifoundationalism is connected to the Zen model as the mode of coming to 'see reality as it is. In the words of Hisamatsu, to "*stand exactly where there is no place to stand*".²⁵⁸

The third section, *Inverted Metaphysics*, briefly proposes a metaphysical basis for the possibility of enlightenment through the inversion of classical metaphysics. This represents a culmination of the metaphysics of interdependence developed in this and the previous chapter and is the groundwork for interpreting Dōgen in the next chapter. This in turn will allow for the dissolution of the Zen problem, allowing for a direct realisation of reality *as it is*.

The Nature of Mind

At the root of reality there appears to be a connection that contradicts our apparent separation from one another. If everything is interdependent, given my interpretation of the limits of reality, we are all connected. This is easy enough to comprehend, for it is not

²⁵⁸ Recalled in Fredericks, J., 'Masao Abe: A Bodhisattva's Vow', in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Volume 28, 2008, p.116.

our physical connection that is at issue.²⁵⁹ What provokes an idea of separation is our apparent mental isolation. The simple rendering of this issue of ‘private minds’ is that one can only think one’s own thoughts, not somebody else’s. However, as stated earlier in relation to meta-morality, we are strongly influenced by the world, not just physically but mentally also, and we in turn make a strong impact upon the world. Our mental and physical aspects of being are not as distinct as our classical categorisations may lead us to believe. Our minds are distinct from one another, this is true, but the distinction is similar to the way this chair is distinct from the ground on which it stands. Although mind is just what you might call a ‘higher level’ distinction since what apparently separates our minds is more complex than what separates the chair and ground, but it is a difference in *degree* and not *kind*. The more complex the level, the more drastic the perceived isolation becomes. Apparent separation is an emergent phenomenon.

The concept of emergence is useful when attempting to reductively connect various ‘levels’ of interpretation, whereby properties may appear to exist at a ‘higher’ or more complex level when they do not appear at a ‘lower’ level, even though, reductively, the higher level is identified as wholly made up of this lower level. This is simply conceived in the ‘wholist’ principle “the whole is more than the sum of its parts”. When these lower phenomenon interact together something new ‘emerges’ that we did not recognise in the potentiality of these lower phenomena. In these cases we have plainly attributed two interpretations to one aspect of reality and are now forced to explain how they may be connected. Speaking in terms of emergence is still segmenting the world into reified parts, and so descriptions from various systems of interpretation are found to conflict.

²⁵⁹ It is simple enough to reach out and touch someone, or failing that, you can at least touch part of the same material framework of which you are both a part – like touching the bars of your cell.

Emergent properties, most importantly for us, are qualitatively different from our interpretation of what makes them up, but they are not separate from them. The distinction between these higher and lower levels is purely a result of our interpretation, they both refer to the same aspect of reality. In such distinctions the use of counterfactuals to determine priority amounts to a ‘chicken and egg’ tautology; to say for example that without a particular chemical makeup a particular organism won’t function. Both aspects refer to the same occurrence and neither can take precedence. For just as the state of the organism emerges from the chemical makeup, the chemical makeup is defined by its environment (being the interactions of its neighbouring constituents), in other words the chemical makeup is dependent upon the functional state of the organism itself. Along similar lines, the debate between the relationship of mind and brain can be addressed, and the consequences for epistemology explored. When analysing Buddhist positions, it should be noted that the problem of ‘mind’ takes a distinctive turn.

Śāntideva elaborates upon the familiar theme of the nature of the two truths:

The conventional and the ultimate
Are explained to be the two truths
The ultimate is not grasped as an object of thought;
Thought is explained to be merely conventional.²⁶⁰

The two truths and the mistake of reifying the ultimate, from the perspective of the Mādhyamikas, should already be clear. The metaphysical puzzle that must now be drawn out is how it is possible to have a distinction between the two truths. Specifically, what it is about reified objects of thought that allows them to conflict with the reality that they are proposed to represent. This puzzle, along with the problem of the embeddedness of

²⁶⁰ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 10.

metaphysics and epistemology, will only be fully resolved in the next chapter where this separation is connected to its purported solution - enlightenment. The present concern is to establish the nature of mind within a metaphysics of interdependence in order to explain the phenomenon of separation.

The experience of separation is accepted as a characteristic of subjective awareness. While two individuals can, to some extent, admit of a shared external world, it happens that I am aware of my mind but not yours. In exploring a metaphysical explanation of this separation we must here sidestep much of the history of philosophy in order to limit the present discussion. Since a thorough examination of this issue would require the inclusion of every metaphysical theory ever devised,²⁶¹ it is fortunate that most of these systems of metaphysics are incompatible with interdependence. Also, given the parameters of the Buddhist project, the problem itself is quite specific.

The question of the possible dualism of mind and body is not here a concern. There can be no absolute separation of mind and matter, since, as we have seen, for both to persist together they must be interdependent. This is further enforced by the Buddhist theory of no-self, that the self is composed of aggregates being both 'mental' and 'physical'.

Nevertheless there is an apparent (perceived) separation. The puzzle is this: given the metaphysical connection of mind and body, why are minds experienced separately?

Connecting mind and body resembles the baseline of contemporary reductive physicalism, though I have proposed problems with this method and interdependence is put forth as an alternative to reductionism. This is further complicated by the different uses of 'mind' in

²⁶¹ As our focus is turned to 'first philosophy', seeking after the logical ground of epistemology in order to explain the phenomenal world, this being the inspiration for traditional metaphysics.

Buddhist thought, critically for this project the rift between Mādhyamaka and Yogācāra, on which Zen stands.

These two distinct Mahāyāna positions, the Yogācāra and Mādhyamaka, present a conflict for the systematic interpretation of Zen. The former holds that mind only fundamentally exists, whereas the latter (through non-affirming negation) maintains that there is no fundamental existent. Paul Williams sums up the difference through use of the dream simile, “In Yogācāra the dream simile is used to show how experiences can occur without there being anything external to the cognizing mind. In Mādhyamaka *all things* are said to be ‘like a dream’, including the mind itself.”²⁶² The Yogācāra focus on mind is attacked as essentialism by Mādhyamika philosophers.²⁶³ Where meditation focuses on the mind, it will be argued, we can still maintain the ultimate emptiness of the mind.²⁶⁴ The application of this idea to Zen, through an empty ‘Buddha-nature’, will be examined in the next chapter.

Inasmuch as mind is considered an independent phenomenon, it will be rejected through the metaphysics of interdependence. Candrakīrti, commenting on the *Lankavatārasūtra*, wrote; “At [the stage called] ‘The Directly Facing’, the bodhisattva who is turned toward [the truth of highest meaning] realizes that ‘the triple world is mind alone.’ [This teaching] is intended to refute [philosophical views of the conventional] agent as an eternal self by demonstrating that the agent is mind alone.”²⁶⁵ The emphasis presented is in opposition to the positing of an essentially existent person. Furthermore; “...mind alone is produced from

²⁶² Williams, P., *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The doctrinal foundations*, P.307, fn.26.

²⁶³ As found in Tsong Khapa’s Commentary, as well as Bhāvaviveka, Śāntideva, Candrakīrti and Śāntarakṣita – Williams, P., *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, p.307, fn.31.

²⁶⁴ I will argue that this is compatible with both the priority of ‘mind’ and ultimate emptiness. The trend in the traditional literature *not* to follow this line is arguably due to the narrower perspectives their traditions allowed. See for instance, Harris, I., *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p.57.

²⁶⁵ Huntington, C., *The Emptiness of Emptiness*, p.167, section 84.

delusion (*moha*) and volitional action". Thus mind is presented as a phenomenon dependent upon causes and condition in accordance with the cosmology of karma.

As a precursor to the examination of Buddha-nature, the other enduring distinction is between mind as a universal principle and mind as a merely materially manifest phenomenon. A manifest mind refers to subjective awareness as specific to each sentient individual, whereas mind as a universal principle indicates a primal nature lying behind all such instances. We have already determined that such a principle, if it existed, could not exist independently, yet this does not in itself deny the possibility of such as a principle.²⁶⁶ The distinction depends upon a difference between a principle and a (mere) manifestation of that principle, and here the identification of such principles becomes limited. Just as we have seen that emptiness (*śūnyatā*) cannot be posited independently of instances of emptiness (*śūnya*), but can be exploited as a metaphysical principle, similarly we cannot propose some 'meta-mind' behind all instances of mind. We should consider what use 'meta-mind' (or any meta- concept for that matter) would be. Since, reductively, a primary principle is the foundation of all manifest phenomena, in this case 'all is mind alone', then the principle must be of a different kind to manifest mind, which would only acquire its specific characteristics dependent upon the environment in each instance. The metaphysical nature of a primal principle may just as well be called pure matter or energy as pure mind since it is devoid of all the specific manifest characteristics of any of these categories. Reductively, the foundation of all phenomena in 'mind alone' is meaningless. But we have already criticised the reductive method.

²⁶⁶ Since interdependence and emptiness could also be considered as such.

The emphasis on 'mind' is common to all Buddhist thought, historically originating with the meditative method undertaken by Gautama Buddha and correspondingly emphasised in the later meditation schools including Zen. The significance of meditation to this philosophical investigation is the focus of the next section. For now it is enough to connect 'mind' to the Buddhist soteriological project through the possibility of enlightenment. On this reading we must assume that somehow the manifest mind is capable of directly experiencing its underlying, 'ultimate' nature, which is unobscured reality itself. With this in mind we now turn to contemporary accounts of the nature of mind which can aid in detailing the metaphysical framework of interdependence.

As a starting position, from interdependence, we can determine that an aware subject is restricted epistemologically by the conditions of its metaphysical state. This is to say that the manifest characteristics of mind, and hence what this mind is capable of perceiving/conceiving, is dependent upon the nature of its environment. This environment is, in significant part, the mind's embodiment. This is not to hold the position that mind is simply (reducible to) the physical processes which make up the body, since the mind, being interdependent with its environment, must also fashion the nature of the body, as mind is a part of the body's environmental factors. This marks a deviation from the physicalist position, and indicates the technical distinction of the term environment, here used to include factors commonly taken to be subsumed under a more fundamental category (in this case mind under matter). However we must also eliminate the idealist position, that the body (and indeed the physical world by extension) is nothing more than (deducible from) the mental processes of the mind.

The inseparability of metaphysics and epistemology could be interpreted in various ways, however elaborations along these lines often hinder the project of epistemology, rather than clarifying it. First, the hard determinist view,²⁶⁷ which basically holds that, epistemically, we cannot know the nature of a perspective without knowing the origin of that perspective (usually in physicalist terms), which implies that every aspect of its causal makeup must first be understood. Second, what we may term the hard hermeneutic view,²⁶⁸ which holds that every perspective is only understandable in terms of its complete historical / cultural environment. Of course adherents to such views maintain a distinction between 'total understanding' and what we might call 'practical' or workable understanding, the latter being much less restrictive and, hence, actually attainable. Note that if this distinction is maintained then direct and unobtrusive or 'absolute' knowledge is made practically impossible. This may appear to challenge the possibility of enlightenment however the real target here is the question of 'objectivity'.

The validity of an epistemological standpoint is dependent upon its accuracy in reference to reality as such, described as 'metaphysics'. However, if we assume that 'metaphysics', as the description of reality as such, is dependent upon epistemology for its creation then the prior consideration of validity becomes self-referential and vacuous. This would entail that the limits of a subject's knowledge results in the construction of a metaphysical framework which reflects these limits. This would explain the appearance of competing 'objective' metaphysical frameworks – a shared reality interpreted as different worlds - as the product of distinct social paradigmatic assumptions. The grounds of these frameworks are forced to

²⁶⁷ Though not a common philosophical view, it was adopted as a basis of particular social science movements, including the work of Sigmund Freud and Burrhus Frederic Skinner.

²⁶⁸ This would be an extension of what Hans-Georg Gadamer limits to 'individuality' in his *Truth and Method*, whereby no (intersubjective) meaning could ever be reached.

change in reaction to 'tests' in the form of alternate world-views or the arising of unexplainable phenomenon. To accommodate such occurrences two avenues are open; either the metaphysical framework is altered to take it into account or the subjective perspective, which is in part responsible for the arising of this phenomenon, is reassessed. Neither option approaches something akin to 'objectivity'.

The problem is created through a self-referential loop. A metaphysical system is created by a subject, or multiple subjects through consensus, and so is dependent upon the epistemological limitations of their subjectivity. Furthermore, a subject is dependent upon its metaphysical position (makeup) and this will define its epistemological limitations, and hence what it can know or theorise about metaphysics will also be limited.²⁶⁹ These are two oppositely posed positions but they are not incompatible, in fact they are the continuation of the same self-referential loop. The major conflict appears to be based on the postulation of an independent metaphysics in the latter, which is lacking in the former. In fact this connection is present in both views via the 'subject', so the latter view actually contains *two* references to this reality, since there is no distinction to be made between the subject and its metaphysical position. The statement 'metaphysics is created by the subject' is obviously used in a different sense to 'a subject is defined by its metaphysical position'. The former refers to a theoretical framework (entity *of* the mind) while the latter refers to the foundation of the subject (base *to* the mind). In both cases the functioning of mind is regarded as an aspect of reality, and one which we may assume is more directly accessible

²⁶⁹ These could be compared to the two 'hard' views above. Also consider the role of language in the formation of systems, even those purported to describe or lead to enlightenment – "the experience of 'sudden awakening' in Zen is immediate, but only in the sense that it is not mediated by self-conscious reflection on the part of the experiencer. It is, however, thoroughly interpenetrated by the forces of linguistic shaping that are communicated through the institutions, practices, and beliefs of the community and its underlying tradition." (Wright, D.S., 'Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.42, No.1 (Jan. 1992), P.131.)

than either the postulated or foundational metaphysics. The limitations on the subject and the consequent framework it constructs are not identical, but are related. The common ground of this relation is then the subject itself.

The subjective experience of mental entities, their interaction and their apparent affect on the material world via our respective bodies is recognised as categorically distinct from our interpretation of the physical world as it exists in its (apparent) objectivity beyond our personal perceptions of it. We are faced with an epistemological restriction based on our position as an embodied being. We are culturally biased towards 'objectivity' and perspectively restricted to 'subjectivity'. Hence we have a division between objectivist metaphysics and subjectivist phenomenology. Our pragmatic methods and theories which allow us to examine and interpret the world, science and philosophy, are forced to acknowledge the apparent conflict between these motivations and so factor in our relative subjective viewpoints in order to present a disembodied, objective interpretation of 'the real'. What we come to call 'the real' is recognised to be the most useful, or even the most entertaining from the myriad of possible explanations we are capable of constructing. But these criteria do not imply reality. It would seem that reality *as it is* must remain unreachable by such methods. If this were so, the division between the physicalists and mental idealists would forever render an impossible divide between the principles of mind and matter.

Contemporary thought is dominated by the physicalist account, which rejects dualism, claiming that all mental events can be reduced to, and thus explained by, physical events. Yet the unique character of subjective mind is not explained away, leading some to propose

mind as an emergent phenomenon in an effort to maintain subjectivity without dualism.²⁷⁰

This developed in two opposing modes: epiphenomenalism – maintaining that mental entities have no causal influence; and strong emergence - that mental events are uniquely manifest and exert a ‘downward’ causal influence. Currently there is an increasing interest in the concept of ‘emergence’ amongst philosophers of science, though, divorcing themselves from ontological dualism, they tend to emphasise supervenience upon the physical.²⁷¹ The development of this view supports the position that all ‘emergent’ phenomenon are describable in physical terms and so have no unique influence. Influences described as either local or environmental are *both* understood as aspects of the same physical function. As Davies observes, “we do not need to discuss two sorts of forces”.²⁷²

The metaphysics of interdependence requires that mind and matter share the same reality, indicating that their distinction can be dissolved. The reductive physicalist paradigm would grant the nature of this shared reality to matter. I believe this conclusion creates more problems than it solves. To begin with mind, or consciousness, appears to be an almost accidental effect when conventionally we recognise mind as a major driving force in the world. Related to this, morality would be dismissed as an abstractive illusion,²⁷³ and personal goals, feelings and experiences are rendered objectively void. Regarding our common epistemological project, predominantly scientifically based, the findings at macro-

²⁷⁰ See Chalmers D., ‘Strong and Weak Emergence’ in Clayton & Davies (eds.), *The Re-emergence of Emergence*, pp.244-255. As an alternate position, Chalmers supports a radical version of dualism, whereby consciousness is absolutely distinct to physical interactions.

²⁷¹ ‘Nonreductive physicalism’ is emerging as the popular philosophical position (Kim, J., *Mind in a Physical World*, p.8.); though this is now questioned by one-time supporter Jaegwon Kim (through, for example, the problem of dualism - *ibid.* P.48). The issue is deepened by further critical evaluations; for instance Brown and Ladyman investigate the possibility that physicalism could be considered without assuming a fundamental level (Brown, R. & Ladyman, J., ‘Physicalism, Supervenience and the Fundamental Level’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.59, No.234 (Jan, 2009), pp.20-38.).

²⁷² Davies, P., ‘The Physics of Downwards Causation’, in Clayton, P. & Davies, P. (eds.), *The Re-Emergence of Emergence*, p.38.

²⁷³ As morality under the physicalist paradigm must be a mere aspect of mind and so falls to the same reduction.

cosmic levels of description (for example: economics, biology, climatology, even chemistry) are demoted in ontological status to 'merely useful' in the absence of bridging laws to some more fundamental level. Hence, this is a major issue for the philosophy of science. Finally, given our position as 'human being in the world', the physical reductionist account of reality does not aid us in any direct experiential understanding of reality, and hence cannot guide the actions of a creature living in the shadows of a mentally manifested world. The reductionist account points to something 'out there' while being unable to define its borders by exploring 'in here'. The nature of the subject cannot be ignored when the world we posit is a subjectively realised one.

This is not to say that the reductionist account is not useful, it certainly is, however upon examining the working reductionist system it is apparent that there are many aspects of a multi-level description of reality already taking place in the reductionist account and, I claim, this is evidence that we *need* such interpolations to be able to understand any of the reductionist outcomes. As the problem here is an epistemological one, the ability to describe phenomena intelligently is of key concern.

Let us again consider a physicalist account of the motion of a particle. The interaction of an atomic particle with another is determined by, firstly, the field structure of the atom which is a result of the properties of the sub-atomic particles and, secondly, the relative movement of these particles. The movement of each particle is determined by the interaction with those immediately in contact with it - its 'environment'. This must be further expanded to include effects produced at a distance, such as radiation, thus

admitting a wider source of effect - expanding 'environment'.²⁷⁴ As the continually expanding explanation becomes more complex, its ease of comprehension and predictive power become more limited. Consider the effect if water molecules, whose low-level motion has been described, happen to be inside a bottle which is in the process of falling down a flight of stairs. The localised description of particles is still valid, but is now 'trivial' and must be expanded to include the mass effect of the entire volume of water, moving as part of a higher level system, if the movement of a single particle is to be sufficiently explained. Of course we can add more explanations, based at the elementary level, which rapidly increases the complexity of the problem at this scale - though by changing the scale of explanation the problem becomes 'simpler'.

'Simpler' here corresponds to our particular epistemological limits, since it is generally true that explanations at coarser ('higher') levels become more generalised explanations of what has happened or predictions of what will happen in a given situation. The accuracy of prediction decreases with the amount of time elapsed and with increasing numbers of influences. This is true at *any level*. Reductionism increases the complexity of problems and, as the threshold of comprehension (relative to our position, embodied in the world) is passed, predictions become probabilistic.²⁷⁵ The extension of explanation from our position becomes generalised, probabilistic and more complex through extension to higher levels of interpretation *and through reduction* to lower levels. If our epistemological limits are a factor in the usefulness of a predictive theory then the further we venture, in our

²⁷⁴ Such as the interaction observed in the continuous and apparently random movement of particles in a fluid medium, described as Brownian motion, which was attributed by Einstein to the influence of kinetic movement of the particles in the medium resulting from their own extended interactions.

²⁷⁵ It is important to note that being 'probabilistic' does not make a prediction less valid. On the contrary, contemporary research now favours probabilistic interpretations. The point being made in this section is *epistemological* – the assumptions of what can be known and what characteristics are thus attributed to metaphysics. Rather than claiming that the nature of reality *as such* is probabilistic, I maintain that this reading is due to our particular epistemic position and levelled interpretation of phenomenon.

explanations from our existential ground, the more dependent on probabilities our results will become. So whether our theory aims to describe the interaction of galaxies or quantum level 'super-strings', the relation to phenomena at our level will become increasingly vague. Given the symmetry of epistemological uncertainty, on what grounds should we favour reduction in one direction over the other?

The basic assumption and driving force behind reductionism is to explain complex phenomenon by reference to the properties and interactions of the simpler parts which actually make them up. The influence of higher level, 'environmental' effects, should also be reducible to these lower level interactions and does not have any unique 'emergent' influence. Hence higher level phenomena are said to supervene on lower level phenomena.

²⁷⁶ There can be no change in the higher level without a corresponding change at the lower level.

Supervenience is taken, in accordance with reductionism, to imply that an explanation at one level is a sufficient explanation of reality in its totality. Usually the level of explanation chosen is physical, the most 'fundamental' level of understanding available (for example physics), such that other explanations (for example chemistry, biology or mental events) are said to be merely a result of the interactions at this fundamental level. A change in the fundamental level necessitates a corresponding alteration in the manifest, supervenient, level.

So, are mental entities merely epiphenomenal? To entertain that idea we must first throw out our commonsense view of the world, and this is not necessarily a bad thing (though we

²⁷⁶ Supervenience was specifically introduced to the philosophy of mind by Davidson, D., in his 1970 paper 'Mental Events' (Chapter five in Block, N. (Ed.), *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, pp.107-119).

will come to revise this particular position). For the moment we must think of ourselves not as autonomous agents but as automated, determined, events of matter. If this is followed through we should find that the mass interaction of elementary 'bits'²⁷⁷ which make up the phenomenon of a mental event may just as effectively be described as the direct influence upon an elementary 'bit' by its environment. The environment, you will recall, is just the interaction of this focus 'bit' with its surrounding 'bits'. In other words; a 'bit' can be described by its position as part of a mental event.

The validity of interdependence should be equally apparent from either direction of interpretation, regardless of the starting position, if the implications are followed far enough. So called 'emergent' factors are not a problem for this framework as they are already accounted for. The complexity of an environment results in the possibility of more varied and context specific influences. Furthermore, since the metaphysics of interdependence has no reductive hierarchy the identification of emergence is purely relative to the explanatory model used. Thus emergence, in this model, is merely a further consequence of the limitations of systems.

That emergence is utilised as an effective modelling or explanatory method is known as 'weak emergence'.²⁷⁸ 'Strong emergence', on the other hand, would require the identification of actual physical causation of an environment upon constituent parts that is not recognisable at the local level of those parts. In the previous chapter we explored the problems associated with defining entities and environments in isolation and as such the levelled approach has been brought into question. Supporting the 'weak' interpretation,

²⁷⁷ The word 'bit' here stands in place for the attribution of a basic unit of either the 'mental' or 'physical'.

²⁷⁸ See Chalmers, D., 'Strong and Weak Emergence' in Clayton & Davies (eds.), *The Re-emergence of Emergence*, pp.244-255.

Gell-Mann recognises the importance of a top-down approach in addition to bottom-up, since our ability to explain the world increases as we examine phenomena from multiple angles.²⁷⁹ Douglas Hofstadter also notes the significance of the anthropocentric sphere of any such an enquiry, “In any case, we humans evolved to perceive and describe ourselves in high-level mentalistic terms... and not in low-level physicalistic terms”.²⁸⁰ I have previously explained the apparent epistemic limits for the possibility of enlightenment, which are strongly connected to one’s conceptual and embodied limitations and the area specific limits of systems of enquiry.

Talk of emergence is particularly prominent in contemporary debates about the nature of mind. Despite the epistemic usefulness of emergence, scientific reductive theory tends to concede that such factors are ultimately supervenient upon their substrates. Gell-Mann writes, “it must be a rare contemporary scientist who believes that there exist special ‘mental forces’ that are not biological, and ultimately physiochemical, in nature. Again, virtually all of us are, in this sense, reductionists.”²⁸¹ In order to address the issue of supervenience we must examine the implications of interdependence on the positing of levels of metaphysical explanation.

If the state of an entity *is* dependent upon the state of those around it, in other words if in order to explain a single phenomena we must make reference to its environment, then we are making use of phenomena on the same level of explanation as the focal entity. This group of phenomena will then interact in such a way as to demonstrate their particular environmental characteristic. In other words, a ‘higher-level’ phenomenon is manifest.

²⁷⁹ Gell-Mann, M., *The Quark and the Jaguar*, p.119.

²⁸⁰ Hofstadter, D., *I am a Strange Loop*, p.174.

²⁸¹ Gell-Mann, M., *The Quark and the Jaguar*, p.116.

Thus our current theory can already be seen to contain an unstated reliance on the interaction of 'higher-level' entities in order to explain the 'state' of a single 'lower-level' entity.

Now we turn to the distinction between mind and brain, which is the most common and idealistic application of 'emergence' in the abandonment of dualism.²⁸² A key motivating factor in these applications is the effect of determinism denying individual free-will by identifying mind with the (allegedly) mechanistic physical brain. Applying emergence in this case opens the possibility that instead of a single direction of causation through the levels from the bottom up, there is additionally a second level of influence from the top down. This downward causation opens the possibility that the mind actually influences the brain, and thus the physical world, without being impossibly independent from it.²⁸³ However, to avoid supervenience and provide evidence of 'strong emergence', the processes and interactions of mental forces would need to be shown to be irreducible to the physical brain. Only then could emergence, possibly, counter determinism.

The assumption is that if every mental state had an equivalent brain state reductionism would surely hold and determinism may well follow, or even if not determinism, certainly free will would be a conceptual problem. The possibility of a second direction of influence still requires an explanation of the origin of this causal efficacy, if we follow the reductive model. If the reductive hierarchy is discarded then the positing of determinism or freedom is not as simple. There is an important factor which prevents us from simply flipping the priority of levels, so that since every brain state has an equivalent mental state we could

²⁸² For a more contemporary revaluation of materialism see Brown, R. & Ladyman, J., 'Physicalism, Supervenience and the Fundamental Level', *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 59, No. 234, (Jan 2009), pp.20-38.

²⁸³ For a good discussion on the concept of downward causation and its implications see Kim, J., "Downward Causation' in Emergentism and Nonreductive Physicalism', in Beckermann, A. (Ed.), *Emergence or reduction?: essays on the prospects of nonreductive physicalism*, pp.119-138.

reduce the physical to the mental. Priority is given to the level with the widest explanatory power, and mind still remains apparently isolated to a single subject. Absolute isolation should not follow from interdependence.

If the state of a 'higher-level' entity is built up by its 'lower-level' constituents then, from the earlier discussion, the *way* the 'lower-level' entities interact is a matter of influence from the 'higher-level' down. From this, it can be said that without an understanding of downward causation, that is causation *from* the higher *to* the lower level, the reductive model is incomplete. The significance of this aspect of the reductive framework has not been sufficiently explored, for if it had, 'reduction' would be considered a methodological *choice* and not an inherent feature of the metaphysical system. The apparent separation of mental realms, reductively restrained by their immediate physical makeup (embodiment), is a consequence of the system of interpretation, which posits the mental as 'emergent'. The addition of 'downward causation' to the reductive model falls within the metaphysics of interdependence. Identifying causation, either from the 'top down' or 'bottom up', is a description of the same interdependent interaction. The selection of levels of description is a pragmatically necessary but limited overlay which cannot capture reality as it is.

Buddhist philosophy connects mind and action as interdependent, one does not exist without the other,²⁸⁴ since all action in this sense is volitional action. The nature of mind is empty, as it is dependently arisen, it does not essentially exist apart from its contributing factors. The particularities of a manifest mind arise from prior karmic dispositions and continuing effects of ignorance.²⁸⁵ Thus Candrakīrti's description of the illusion of mind, it exists when the necessary conditions are there to create the perception, but ultimately

²⁸⁴ Huntington, *The Emptiness of Emptiness*, p.249, fn.120.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.248 fn.118 – *Dasabhumikasutra* (31.30-31)

there is no independent consistency which radically isolates one mind from another. The Buddhists are alert to the misleading application of a system of understanding to a metaphysical explanation, hence Gautama Buddha's refusal to speculate on metaphysical issues.

Returning to our core concern, if metaphysically mind is manifest from a common reality how can ignorance arise? This concern mirrors that of the young Dōgen, who sought to reconcile the foundation of a universal Buddha-nature with the ignorance of conventional beings.²⁸⁶ In order to be a valid metaphysical framework we must be able to reconcile the ignorance, and associated suffering, apparent in the world with the principle of interdependence and, following the possibility of enlightenment, the entailment of both wisdom and compassion.

Ignorance is to be unaware of the actual state of some aspect of reality, often due to the overlay of a misguided interpretation of that reality. Individuals mentally limit a great deal of what their senses take in based on their preconceived concepts and beliefs. Additionally, part of the function of cognition is to expand upon what little direct sensations of the world come to it. Sentient subjects intuit the makeup of their world far beyond the details of their direct perceptions. Consider one's ability to recognise patterns, to acknowledge the influences of 'unseen bodies' to explain phenomena, the positing of idealised elementary particles, and so on. This is the origin of both the power of 'mind' and also its major folly: *illusion*.

To determine the function of illusion consider the implications of evolutionary theory on the development of the imagination. The development of a mind to think in the abstract can be

²⁸⁶ See the next chapter for a discussion on Dōgen's dilemma.

seen to have developed as a problem solving tool. Being able to imagine the outcome of a potentially fatal enterprise, and then avoid that outcome, is an obvious advantage for survival and would flourish through natural selection. The other side of this ability is the development of a rift between what is experienced in thought and what is actually present before the observer. This not only applies to assumptions leading to delusion regarding external phenomena, such as seeing a mirage or the classic 'blind men and the elephant' example, but also enforces the development of the *idea of 'self'* in the mind,²⁸⁷ separate to the reality of self. This 'gap' becomes the foundation of existential ignorance.

The other metaphysically significant aspect when explaining ignorance directly relates to the limits of embodiment. In conventional experience there are physical states which an individual is not conscious of. Indeed there are many examples of bodily processes that take place, of which we are completely unaware. At the same time, as a non-dualist, we would not like to say that there can be conscious mental states which have no physical correspondence. This is purely due to the levels of manifestation at which the relative investigations of interactions take place. Hence the trend of explaining the 'cause' of consciousness to be the interaction of material parts which 'make it up'. By this understanding it would appear that consciousness requires the complex interactions of matter, but matter does not require consciousness to function. On the contrary, according to interdependence, the complex functioning of matter *is* consciousness.

To elaborate on this point I will first draw attention to David Chalmers spin on dualism. Chalmers maintains that consciousness is irreducible, positing phenomenological

²⁸⁷ That is, the image of oneself who acts in one's imagination.

subjectivity and physicalist functionalism as two distinct and *independent* realities.²⁸⁸

According to this view, consciousness is dependent upon but not a necessary result of a specifically complex type of functional organisation. His twin worlds thought experiment proposes a physically identical world to ours which exists without any arising of consciousness, a zombie world.

Searle attacks what he claims is panpsychism in Chalmers which he calls absurd.²⁸⁹

Furthermore, consciousness becomes explanatorily irrelevant according to Searle since the same events would take place with a purely physical makeup devoid of consciousness. This is a fine addition to the previous discussion on the validity of 'weak' emergence, but appears to miss Chalmers' point, which is the peculiar nature of conscious experience. Chalmers recognises that the zombie world is not our world, the laws of our universe *do* give rise to consciousness. Our zombie doppelgangers carry on in their world in an identical fashion to our conscious selves in this world, so the causal efficacy of consciousness does appear to be denied. The difference between the two worlds is the experience that is consciousness which absolutely cannot be identified outside of the experience itself. According to Chalmers we cannot have a method of verifying if a complex digital system has developed consciousness, nor can we determine whether the person in the next room is a zombie (even though we will make assumptions extended from our own experience and shared world).

The unique subjective position of consciousness is important to understanding philosophical developments in Zen, yet this should not be considered independently of the metaphysical

²⁸⁸ Chalmers, D., *The Conscious Mind*.

²⁸⁹ Searle, *The Mystery of Consciousness*, p.156. Interestingly "a kind of panpsychism" is just how Norimoto Iino describes Dōgen's metaphysics, however in this case the tone is positive. (Norimoto I., 'Dōgen's Zen View of Interdependence', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Apr. 1962), p.54.)

implications of interdependence elaborated thus far. Any form of dualism is problematic. Hofstadter exclaims that “consciousness is not a power moonroof”,²⁹⁰ implying an added extra on top of the physicality of a complex entity. Consciousness is a dependent arising; it arises automatically when the causes and conditions are appropriate. Two identical worlds, on this reading, must present identical conscious states. Given two directions of causal influence, the effect of the arising of consciousness in the world is the radical alteration of the physical environment of which the mind is a part. A change in physical matter can lead to a change in mind, a change in mind can lead to a change in physical matter. Mind is causally efficacious, and interacts with matter interdependently.

This metaphysical description of the nature of mind allows for an explanation as to how an enlightened being can recognise conventional suffering. Nishida Kitarō recalls, “Over time I came to realise that it is not that experience exists because there is an individual, but that an individual exists because there is experience.”²⁹¹ The metaphysical influences on the ‘self’ provide the conditions of experience; and the ‘self’, as interdependent and causally efficacious, has the ability to alter its conditions. The experiences of an enlightened being are significantly different to those of an unenlightened individual and are subjectively separated from them. However, one of the characteristics of enlightenment is wisdom, which entails an understanding of the interdependent interactions which make up reality, and this must include the causes upon, and effects of, the minds of other beings. Suffering does not ultimately exist, but it is experienced conventionally and the effects of suffering upon the world are mentally and physically manifest. Interdependence stipulates that the suffering of a single being is universally relevant.

²⁹⁰ Hofstadter, D., *I am a Strange Loop*, p.325.

²⁹¹ Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, Preface, xxx.

For this grand conclusion of interdependence to hold we must make sense of the complimentary reading of the interdependence of mind: that the mind is empty of intrinsic existence. Ultimately, to maintain the emptiness of all phenomena, including mind, presents us with an utterly empty universe - a groundless metaphysics. The proposition of such a framework once again risks a fall into nihilism as the epistemic outlook of an individual is potentially seen as devoid of content. Here the significance of this position to the Zen tradition should be examined, with the fundamental nature of reality expressed as 'absolute nothingness'.

Groundlessness

In 1951, distressed at the inability of his Zazen practice to find some ground by which to escape nihilism, Abe Masao suddenly confronted his teacher. "Abe rose from his meditation pillow and lunged toward Hisamatsu screaming, 'Is this the true self?' He was restrained briefly and then left the room. Later, Abe said in despair, 'I cannot find any place where I can stand,' and Hisamatsu answered him straight away: 'Stand right at that place where there is no place to stand.' This is what Abe Sensei called 'the standpoint of emptiness.'"²⁹² This standpoint is presented as an existential position, directly affirming the groundlessness that leads to the apparent nihilism at the heart of being. This also became a key concept for Nishitani. By learning to stand 'where there is no place to stand', nihilism ceases to be a problem and the practice of Zen is opened up. If the Zen project is to function, 'the standpoint of śūnyatā' must be the foundation of both wisdom and compassion. This groundlessness relates to both something about reality and our engagement with it.

²⁹² Recalled in Fredericks, J., Masao Abe: A Bodhisattva's Vow, in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Volume 28, 2008, p.116.

Following Nāgārjuna, we have pursued a ‘middle way’ between reification and nihilism, examining the metaphysical implications of interdependence in order to make sense of levels of separation and connection. This alone is just another conventional and limited system of interpretation, even as it attempts to provide justification for the possibility of enlightenment, if it is not reintegrated into everyday experience. An empty metaphysics does little to allay the emotional response to the nothingness at its heart. It is for this reason that avoidance of the reification of any static position, including ‘nothingness’, has been emphasised. Thus we are told “The wise should not abide even in the middle.”²⁹³

How does one make sense of standing ‘where there is no place to stand’? Nāgārjuna recommends that one should meditate on the meaning of “the conditioned which is profound and without a support.”²⁹⁴ It is this understanding of the nature of reality which the metaphysical framework of interdependence and the bootstrap model of the universe have been set up to describe. To make use of the framework one finds themselves posed in the position of emptiness, since there is no foundation for phenomenon in this model, they are completely and interdependently manifest. Clearly, since all intrinsic existence has been denied, we can conclude that “nothing at all originates and nothing at all ceases”.²⁹⁵ This presents an interesting metaphysical position since now it is clear that “the dependently originated does not originate.”²⁹⁶ The challenge becomes to interpret this non-nihilistically, which would not be possible under a reductive essentialist model.

If such an understanding is to be useful it must be able to explain metaphysical functionality in light of the four noble truths. Specifically, there is an epistemological duality, and hence a

²⁹³ *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, quoted by Tsong Khapa in *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.22.

²⁹⁴ Nāgārjuna, *Sixty Stanzas* 1, in Santina, P., *Causality and Emptiness*, p.74.

²⁹⁵ Nāgārjuna, *Sixty Stanzas* 21, in *ibid.*, p.76.

²⁹⁶ Nāgārjuna, *Sixty Stanzas* 48, in *ibid.*, p.79.

phenomenal one, between suffering and the cessation of suffering. These are united along the path through recognition of the root cause of suffering, to complete the four noble truths. I have identified this connection as a metaphysical one. To both connect suffering and the cessation of suffering as well as differentiate the two modes which give rise to these distinct realities means to differentiate between the conventional and ultimate realms, or *saṃsāra* and *Nirvāṇa* respectively.

To make the transition from conventional to ultimate understanding, in addition to requiring karmic good standing and behaving correctly, one must focus the mind through meditation. To understand the world metaphysical speculation is unhelpful, instead one is encouraged to direct one's focus inward to that aspect where reality is most directly accessible. While Buddhist sutras refer to the 'other shore' of enlightenment, it is one's own mind; that is that immediately present, yet conceptually distant, point, where enlightened understanding can occur. This is what Nishitani calls the "absolute near side".²⁹⁷ This is where 'reality as it is', *tathātā* (thusness), may be realised by an individual. To explain how this can occur requires further investigation.

We can identify two aspects to wisdom; introspection and expansion.²⁹⁸ With respect to the external world, *expansion* entails the perception of changes in the world which are then adopted into some kind of conceptual framework. Scientifically, the accuracy of these objects is measured by their continued applicability or explanatory validity, which replaces any search for metaphysical truth; since what is considered 'true' is just what is currently explanatorily useful. To further complicate matters there is the mystic claim of the

²⁹⁷ Nishitani K., *Religion and Nothingness*, p.99.

²⁹⁸ Following the non-hierarchical reading of interdependence here there is no essential difference between these two aspects, they simply represent alternate starting points that must, metaphysically, discover the same position.

ineffability of ultimate reality. This view maintains that language, due to its limited logic and referential indirectness, is incapable of grasping the nature of ultimate reality. If metaphysics is taken to be merely a tool, rather than a direct description of ultimate truth, then metaphysics is similarly limited and so devalued. Hence, since all systems are limited, including metaphysical systems, we are forced to distinguish then between metaphysics and the functioning of reality itself that metaphysics is supposed to be the (incomplete) representation of.

The recognition of the epistemological divide between metaphysics and the reality it is supposed to represent takes various forms, depending upon the definition of metaphysics that has been adopted. An empiricist, for example, will posit the separation of direct perception from the metaphysical explanation.²⁹⁹ Various subjectivists may cite relativism as the impossibility of completing a comprehensively cross-subjective metaphysical framework.³⁰⁰ An idealist metaphysics of pure Platonic forms should face the same ineffability issues as its naturalised cousins, whereby 'ultimate reality', either 'above' or 'below', is absolutely separate and cannot be translated into a complete metaphysical system. To sum up, the problem of metaphysics versus reality is defined by the chosen interpretation of metaphysics, which paradoxically must be distinct to reality. If we take the realist interpretation of metaphysics then we must either claim that this metaphysical framework *is* reality itself or that it *resembles* reality itself. In an absolutist sense the former is ridiculous, since when a system of interpretation is changed the universe is directly changed, and the latter is vague and falls to the same problems as the idealist position.

²⁹⁹ The position of Logical Positivism is the prime example; See Carnap, R., 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology', reprinted in Kim, J. & Sosa, E. (Eds.), *Metaphysics: An Anthology*, p.13.

³⁰⁰ See for instance Levi Strauss' criticism of (what he sees as) the impossible relativism inherent in Isaiah Berlin's liberalism; Strauss, L., 'Relativism', in Schoeck, H. & Wiggins, J. (Eds.), *Relativism and the Study of Man*, p.143.

Introspection too is a form of cognitive expansion, however in each case, differing depending on our chosen mode of metaphysics. The act of introspection draws on the basis of the metaphysic rather than moving towards the outer limit and beyond to examine 'reality' itself. Thus the empiricist focuses on direct perception, the subjectivist on the origin of the subject, while those I have bundled as holding the 'ineffability' hypothesis are forced to focus on the embodied self, which entails moving to an investigation of epistemology rather than speculative metaphysics. There are actually two possibilities here, however the second possibility is dropped immediately due to impracticality; one must either focus on the immediate subject or focus on the unobtainable absolute. Provided one is not a dualist (or pluralist) then to focus on one aspect rather than another makes only practical difference since all are ultimately interconnected.

The connection of epistemology and metaphysics is crucial to this thesis as it specifically implicates why morality, or mind more generally, should be taken seriously from a metaphysical perspective. The metaphysical position presented thus far is that mind and body are two interpretations of the same segment of reality, without depending upon essentialised physicality. The hope of this position is to avoid the problems of dualism and reductionism. Rather than take epistemology as a justification or definition of what it is to be a metaphysical entity, I will instead claim, given interdependence, that: *all metaphysical statements are metaphysically empty*. This does not mean that an empty metaphysics is meaningless. While there are many explanations which can be adopted as functioning metaphysics, they are only valid within a limited range. An empty metaphysics of interdependence is (self-)referentially dependent upon the reality it describes, and as such it

cannot be seen to posit additional entities or relationships and hence it is a limited system with *unlimited* scope.

If levels of interpretation are found to be equally valid then we may consider the aspect of a human being looking out upon the world to be as important as the world building the human being. Both explain the outcome of events in the world. Mind matters because matter 'minds'; matter manifests mind which in turn directs matter. The significance of the level of 'mind' is that at this level matter is 'aware'. Consciousness is capable of recognising its position, its makeup, its situation and so informed it can direct its awareness. In various fields, for various purposes we can speak of 'higher-level' directive phenomena such as pragmatic considerations, rules and regulations, and morality in its various forms. Each instance of pragmatic application is grounded in its specific circumstances and selected virtues.

The process of becoming aware of one's position alters the selection of values and the assessment of one's situation. Ultimately, following the metaphysics of interdependence, all values come to be seen as 'empty' and all situations as absolutely contingent.³⁰¹ What is important for considerations of morality here, though at this level 'compassion' may be a more accurate term, is not the lack of self existence alone, but it is the truth of no-self in combination with the illusion of self in others. These contradictory aspects together are the true makeup of reality and are the driving force behind the metaphysical basis of morality in interdependence.

³⁰¹ Parallels could be drawn with Kuki Shūzō's concept of determinism, though, as will be seen, I opt for a different approach. Kuki writes, "The character of the absolute as 'necessary-contingency' takes the appearance of fate as 'necessary and contingent being'" – Quoted in Miyano M., 'The Individual in Kuki's Philosophy', in Heisig, J. (ed.) *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, p.45.

Unlike the reductive model which indicates the levels of difference between the fundamental substrate and the emergence of the phenomenon, the interdependent framework allows for the comprehension of a phenomenon conceptually *in situ* by reference to *both* its internal state and the affect of its environment. This thesis proposes that an empty metaphysics is philosophically more accurate than an essentialist model and has greater explanatory power through the admission of multiple directions of causal influence. This is a 'groundless', self-defining system of metaphysics. Parallels can be seen in recent developments in the philosophy of science, which has seen the emergence of Systems Theory across a variety of fields, proposing a shift in focus from a purely reductive model.³⁰² These new theories admit the significance of 'top-down' feedback systems in addition to 'bottom-up' causal explanations.

Consider the following statement from an article in *Science*,

The reductionist approach has successfully identified most of the components and many of the interactions but, unfortunately, offers no convincing concepts or methods to understand how system properties emerge... the pluralism of causes and effects in biological networks is better addressed by observing, through quantitative measures, multiple components simultaneously and by rigorous data integration with mathematical models³⁰³

The philosophical development is the admission that there could be a variety of macroscopic patterns having an impact on the world, some of which would be able to control the particles they were made of, rather than exclusively the other way around. This is what Nancy Cartwright has called a "dappled world".³⁰⁴ In addition to describing a complex web of interactions and significantly modifying the potential to model phenomena,

³⁰² See the discussion on Systems Biology in Noble, D., *The Music of Life: Biology Beyond the Genome*, p.21.

³⁰³ Sauer, U., et al. 'Genetics: Getting Closer to the Whole Picture'. *Science* 316: 550, (27 April 2007).

³⁰⁴ Cartwright, N., *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science*, 1999.

the philosophical scope is also altered such that metaphysical problems such as ‘free will versus determinism’ are radically transformed.

It is encouraging to note the progress made through developments in Systems Theory and research which should lead one to question the validity of a simplistic reductive interpretation of all macrocosmic phenomena, particularly in relation to the impoverished interpretative power of restrictive ‘levels’ of reality.³⁰⁵ The identification of multi-stability, for example, gives credence to the necessary inclusion of what I have termed environmental makeup for explanation. I believe research along these lines will prove increasingly fruitful with regard to explaining, predicting and designing complex systems with applications from social cybernetics to interfaced robotics and artificial intelligence. The implications of such developments upon theories relating to the philosophy of mind are profound and have yet to be extensively explored.

Returning to metaphysical considerations, the groundless universe may cause one to ask after the ontological status of the universe itself. I have said the universe is empty, but it seems absurd to say there is absolutely nothing as this would contradict our experience of the world, which appears to be very much existent. Even if our experience of the world is illusory, it is still *something*. Nishitani believed that “Ontology needs to pass through nihility and shift to an entirely new field, different from what it has known hitherto.”³⁰⁶ To further complicate matters, concerning the present thesis, popular culture abounds with statements from Zen masters to the effect that “All is One”. If this is the Zen stance then

³⁰⁵ See for instance, Roth, C., ‘Reconstruction failure: questioning level design’, *Epistemological Aspects of Computer Simulation in the Social Sciences*, Vol. 5466 (2009), p.94: “Most importantly, some phenomena cannot be rebuilt from some given lower level descriptions - not because of higher level irreducibility but because of an essential deficiency of the lower level description. Put differently, it is not that the whole is more than its parts, it is that the whole we are observing at a higher level is more than these parts we focused on.”

³⁰⁶ Nishitani, K., *Religion and Nothingness*, pp.112.

surely I should claim a universal unity. Here I want to point out the distinction between 'one' as an individual among the multitude and 'one' as the unity of this multitude. This same debate and confusion was addressed in discussions of 'emptiness' and 'the empty', so following on from this the first important point to make is to dismiss the possibility of 'one' as unity. There is no 'whole' to the universe, as strange as this sounds, there can be no absolute oneness, rather all is absolute subjectivity. The apparent unity is a conceptual speculation which does not describe any-thing.³⁰⁷ This discussion is extended to all things, since a 'whole' is only relatively different to a 'part', dependent upon which conceptual level the whole is posited. At any level a 'whole' is assumed, but this whole is always dependent and hence empty.

To say that the whole does not exist certainly poses a critical problem for our understanding of the world, not to mention my framework through which interconnectedness implies unity. However there is no unit that is universalisable. Everything only exists by virtue of its dependence on its causes and conditions, and 'absolute nothingness', which is identified with the ultimate unity in Zen, does not and cannot exist. Nothingness is non-dependent and uncaused. To make sense of the Zen position one must recognise that absolute nothingness *is* existence, without revoking those negative characteristics. Nothingness is not negative, nor positive, in effect it is nihilistic but only inasmuch as we attempt to project ourselves onto it. Really it is *nothing* and the Zen emphasis on nothingness is to reveal that reality is ultimately nothing, which is to say interdependent. From this standpoint of

³⁰⁷ One could argue that what is described is a conceptual unity, and hence an existent has been identified – but I must stress, following the earlier discussions concerning 'emptiness', that this identity is merely conventional. To maintain this identity, as one does when speaking of 'the whole universe', and expand this discussion beyond the limits of its original postulation leads to grave conceptual errors. The point being expressed here is that there is no universe other than the interactions of the parts which 'make up this conceptual identity' and it is to those interactions we should focus.

emptiness, where there is no place to stand, one is forced to engage with worldly phenomena in the absence of metaphysical essences. Nishitani writes,

Emptiness in the sense of śūnyatā is emptiness only when it empties itself even of the standpoint that represents it as some 'thing' that is emptiness. It is, in its original Form, self-emptying. In this meaning, true emptiness is not to be posited as something outside of and other than 'being'. Rather, it is to be realized as something united to and self-identical with being.³⁰⁸

Ultimate reality can be interpreted as transcendental but the interpretation does not then characterise ultimate reality. This is particularly apparent if we address ourselves to the Prasaṅgika Mādhyamika recognition of saṃsāra and Nirvāna together. Metaphysically, ultimate reality is not transcendent but immanent. While simultaneously, ultimate reality is epistemologically removed so that practice (transformation) is required for realisation. While later developments of Mahāyāna, along the lines of 'Buddha-nature', speak of 'original enlightenment'; this is to reverse the direction of practice, from building up to uncovering, while leaving the conventional/ ultimate relationship unchanged. All of this is only possible if the characteristic of ultimate reality, or the characteristic of the realisation of reality *as it is*, is empty. Hence, there is no characteristic to be uncovered or built up to. The epistemological realisation of ultimate reality is absolutely contingent, thus it relates to whatever *is*, and in this way can be conventionally characterised as '*emptiness*' or '*nothingness*'.

Finally, if in the end metaphysics is found to be empty, and existence is identified with nothingness, what is the purpose of building up a metaphysical framework? The first answer is simply that participating in the process of following the metaphysical analysis of interdependence through to its limits allows one to make sense of the final position. The

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, pp.96-7.

continuation of this point, since 'nothingness' *is nothing*, is that the final position is not a metaphysical endpoint at all, rather it implies the constant recognition of the processes of interdependence, and elucidating this is the purpose of such a metaphysical enterprise. Additionally there is the 'soterio-epistemological' justification. Even though enlightened understanding is attributed to the 'elimination of all views', the metaphysics of interdependence provides a philosophical bridge to allow the rejection of systematic overlays.

Not only are we disposed to break the world down reductively, due to current social norms, but also have, at a more basic level, the habitual nature of 'clinging'. The reason our theories of the world conflict, or that 'levels' are irreconcilable, is due to their essential bases. It is not that they actually say something about the world such that ontological levels actually conflict since they cannot be seen to conflict without us positing them. The origin of this conflict is that we believe the essential bases to *be* the world. Static entities are characteristic of our fleeting minds, not of the world. Hence all identifications of permanence, being necessarily maintained by a momentary mind, are impermanent. Emptiness is an epistemological correction tool, a method of identifying falsely reified beliefs, prompting their abandonment in favour of an interdependent understanding, and thus ending the conflict of essentially posited grounds. Rather than a limited mode, finding that your explanation or world-view doesn't hold in this instance, groundless metaphysics allows one to experience the world without restraints.

I have attempted to illustrate the pragmatic consequences of avoiding the ignorance resulting from the metaphysical acceptance of limited reified systematisations in order to suggest engagement with a wholly contingent understanding of interdependence.

Nāgārjuna states, “Those who hold that dependent entities are like the moon's reflection in water, neither true nor false, are not attracted to a view.”³⁰⁹ The soteriological purpose of this groundlessness is summed up in the *Heart Sutra*’s description of the Bodhisattva; “in the absence of thought coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana.”³¹⁰

Inverted Metaphysics

The possibility of enlightenment has been flagged throughout the thesis and now the metaphysical framework has reached a point capable of entertaining such a possibility. Here I propose that the problem of the possibility of supreme wisdom (that is, omniscience) may be overcome through a conceptual inversion³¹¹ of conventional modes of understanding. This inversion is proposed as an alternative to the conventional identification and inclusion of indefinitely extended dependent interactions that define a focal entity – a complicated web which would appear to hinder *direct* realisation. By connecting manifest existence and nothingness, through the framework of interdependence, any moment of experience can come to be recognised as the expression of ultimate reality. Elaborating this point will allow for a detailed reading of the work of

³⁰⁹ Nāgārjuna, *Sixty Stanzas* 45, in Santina, P., *Causality and Emptiness*, p.79.

³¹⁰ *Heart Sutra* in Conze (trans.), *Buddhist Scriptures*, p.163.

³¹¹ Historically the term ‘inverted’ has been used to describe a reversal of the process of focus in metaphysics (For example, the overturning of a Hegelian metaphysics by Marx; see Haifeng, Y., ‘The Marxist Negation of Metaphysics’ in Shipeng, Z. & Xuegong, Y. (eds.), *Rethinking Marx*, p.73). Rather here I am using the term to describe an inversion of what we conventionally see to be reality – in effect an inversion of definition; from the convention of ‘an object represented in the world’ to ‘the world represented as an object’.

Dōgen, who is the focus of the next chapter. Regarding this mode of direct realisation, Dōgen tells us that “the ten thousand things advance and confirm the self”.³¹²

If we accept that everything is empty, that is to say that no thing exists in and of itself - that everything is interdependent, then it is possible to make an interesting interpretational change. If things in the world are empty of essence, for they exist purely through interaction with other things (their environment, which is also empty), then it may be possible for us to do away with the concept of ‘thing’ altogether. If we take the entities out of our metaphysical worldview we are left with a universe of interactions. Our proposed ontology has not changed. We are still referring to the same phenomenon, event, or pocket of flux. However, by removing its individual identity we are left with no illusions of an exhaustive causal situation whereby one object affects its neighbour *and that is all*. Any interaction is affected by and affects its environment. Understanding the significance of this point is crucial to becoming a moral being.

You will recall that this understanding does not require some radical holism, which proposes that we cannot understand anything without understanding the entire system. Models do work. We can understand pieces of our world and apply that understanding in the working universe. Indeed, it is pragmatically useful to do so. My emphasis here is on morality and ignorance. We make no mistake in making use of models as conventionally functional. As we have seen, a mistake is made when we take these models, in their isolated frameworks, to reflect the *interactions* in reality *as a limited thing*, which is the composite result of positing essentially existent entities or systems. When an interaction takes place its effects

³¹² Dōgen, ‘Genjo-Koan’, *Shobogenzo*. Note that ‘the self’ here indicates the complete understanding of self, or the ‘formless self’, which is to say ‘no-self’ – an expression of the emptiness of oneself as arisen through interdependence.

are not isolated to the particular system of interpretation we identified it through. Our epistemic limits are not necessarily causal limits.

Having said this, in contrast to a web of interactions, talk of 'empty' *things* actually has the additional benefit of allowing dialogue to continue between those who believe in 'things' and those who believe in a 'flux' of interdependence, and I believe this to be very important. To strongly break with traditional understanding gives the impression of radical distinction when in fact the two are compatible. The benefits of talking of a world without 'things' is that this alternate understanding may open an avenue for the possibility of enlightenment that, even if emptiness is understood, an idea of a world of interacting 'things' tends to obscure. David Shaner remarks that,

Zazen awareness is not unobtainable or undefinable because it transcends spatial and temporal distinctions and entails some other-worldly mystic experience. Rather, zazen awareness is undefinable because it undercuts the thetic positing of a privileged standard by which temporal and spatial change is measured.³¹³

If all there are are interactions, then what we perceive when we look at an object can be inversely identified as not being the object at all. For the object is merely a phenomenon dependent upon the interaction with its constituent causes and conditions, its environment, which is in turn an interaction from its neighbouring interactions and so on. Following the ultimate extent of interdependence, what we are experiencing when we observe an object, is really the absence of this object. We experience the entire universe culminating on this point, which is empty in itself, giving the object form and function, past and future. It is created by reality of interdependence and in turn it functions to create reality. The implication of this inverted model is that if we were to experience this object, to understand

³¹³ Shaner, D., *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism*, p.177

its unique characteristics as a function of interdependence, then the nature of the universe is revealed at that point. Like the jewels in Indra's net, we could experience the universe reflected in a single atom.

Some of the characteristics of enlightenment are said to be creativity, spontaneity, happiness, moral virtue, *freedom* from spiritual afflictions (*karma*), as well as being mentally and emotionally free from cause and effect. This may sound a bit fanciful, but it should be noted that all of these characteristics may be simply attributed to overcoming that gap between oneself and reality. It is in the misunderstanding of our place in the universe, which is a result of this gap, that existentially traps us, leading to reification and nihilistic despair. With the appearance of nihility "all things appear isolated from one another by an abyss. Each thing has its being as a one-and-only, a solitariness absolutely shut up within itself."³¹⁴ We keep perpetuating emotional states, even though we don't like them, we follow social norms we may not agree with, we take the words of scientists and philosophers we may not understand, and we believe that we are isolated in the world when we are truly all interconnected.

However, there are moments in our lives, some may be more familiar with these experiences than others, when the mind is quiet and an individual experiences peace; a glimpse of emptiness. One could interpret this experience as nothing more than the mind relaxing, ceasing conceptualisation, and the rest is our old interpretive awareness trying to fit it into our conception of the world again, defining the experience in contrast to conventions. Meditators are credited with commonly achieving states of mind like this, but also consider the artist, virtuoso musician or master craftsman who lose themselves in the

³¹⁴ Nishitani, K., *Religion and Nothingness*, p.145.

act of creation. The discriminating mind seems to stop functioning for a time, so the sensation cannot be directly *assessed*, except to reflectively say that in that moment the individual becomes aware not of themselves but of the process being undertaken. For Dōgen this is not surprising as “the Buddha Dharma has always maintained the oneness of body and mind.”³¹⁵

Even if we accept the possibility of the dispersal of ignorance through a direct realisation of interdependence, there still remains the existential separation between thought and action to be overcome. Thus enlightenment may be metaphysically possible under this account but this does not solve the existential problem of nihilism: why should an enlightened being act compassionately? For if enlightenment is ‘seeing reality as it is’ there is nothing in this realisation that would lead one to a moral conclusion. As Dōgen said, “We should remember there are dogs who bark at good people.”³¹⁶

Conclusion

The significance of this chapter is to draw out problems inherent in the assumption of a reductive model of metaphysics and offer a viable alternative. A non-reductive model not only offers an explanation of two truths understood concurrently at the metaphysical level, it also reveals the validity of separated experiential awareness and the variously revealed ‘worlds’ that ensue. This provides grounds for a more detailed elaboration of transcendent justification undertaken in chapter 2 and sets up the solution to the Zen moral problem which will be addressed in chapter 6. Specifically, the aspect of relation to reality identified as nihilistic in chapter 1 is revealed to be the source of existential creativity.

³¹⁵ Dōgen, ‘Bendōwa’, in *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, Trans. Waddell, N. & Abe M., pp.146-147.

³¹⁶ Dōgen, ‘Keisei-sanshiki’, *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, p.78.

I have argued that this framework is compatible with both contemporary thought and the Buddhist soteriological project. The next chapter will further elaborate upon the disintegration of 'levels' of interpretation and the implications this holds for immediate experience. This move is essential for reconciling this metaphysics with Zen, as Zen must be experientially realised.³¹⁷

³¹⁷ Consider this reflection on the founder of the Kyoto school of thought; "It seems to be typical of Nishida that after a long series of often complicated arguments he usually leads to a place which cannot be expressed any further or to an experience to be undergone rather than spoken about." – Waldenfels, H., 'Absolute Nothingness. Preliminary Considerations on a Central Notion in the Philosophy of Nishida Kitaro and the Kyoto School', *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol.21, No.3/4 (1996), pp.356-357.

Chapter 5: Interpenetration

Since ‘morality’ does not hold ultimately, the alleged ‘amoralism’ of enlightened beings has been revealed to be a logical triviality. However one should not then move to dismiss the question of the origin of *compassion*. That enlightened beings are traditionally recognised as acting for the benefit of others must be accounted for if this thesis is to provide a metaphysical account of Buddhist soteriology and resolve the full extent of the Zen moral problem. To this end the ‘interpenetration’ of phenomena, derived from the work of Zen Master Eihei Dōgen (1200-1253), will be examined and, in the following chapters, will be brought to bear upon the various applications and interpretations of Zen.

The preceding chapters developed a metaphysical framework from the principle of interdependence resulting in an antifoundational explanation of both the necessary connection and apparent separation of phenomena. This framework revealed the subjective differentiation of minds, and the epistemic limits this entails, including the relative experience of suffering. Furthermore, conscious ‘mind’ was identified as a causally efficacious aspect of a wider inter-causal network of environmental effects, indicating that the influences *upon*, and effects *of* mind are understated conventionally. I propose that this framework is compatible with, and helps to elucidate Dōgen’s position, which in turn informs the implications of interdependence, completing the metaphysical interpretation of Zen in this thesis.

The recorded thought of Zen Master Dōgen has become immensely popular in academic circles over the last century, both in his native Japan and increasingly worldwide. The notorious difficulty of interpreting Dōgen’s works, and in turn providing accurate

translations, may in fact help to spur on this interest in such a unique figure in Japanese and, indeed, Buddhist literature. Linguistic hurdles include his unorthodox use of the Japanese language, the inclusion of citations in antiquated Chinese and the grammatical reconstruction of well-recognised textual passages. The more significant complication is how these linguistic peculiarities are used by Dōgen as a pedagogical tool to illustrate his understanding of Dharma, and in all cases to draw attention to, in tune with his predecessors, the limitations of language and of discriminative thought.³¹⁸

There are some important points to keep in mind when examining Dōgen's thought.

Although throughout the *Shobogenzo* and *Eihei Kōroku* distinctions are made between schools of Buddhist thought and their exponents, Dōgen maintained the belief in a single Buddhist truth.³¹⁹ Even so, one must take into consideration the influences of his particular time and place. In various passages Dōgen is damning of Japanese, Chinese and Indian schools of Buddhism, indicating the independent significance he placed on an accurate Buddhist teaching. As Dōgen's education began in the Tendai school, this can be seen as a strong influence on his development, even though he ultimately dismissed their position.³²⁰

Dōgen's dialogical method involves connecting stories from the history of Zen, drawing together apparently disparate statements by emphasising the shared nature of the truths they express. Taken altogether a matrix of understanding seems to be woven, with no explicit external basis, yet entirely internally consistent. While some of Dōgen's lectures and fascicles in the *Shobogenzo* are targeted towards a general lay audience, most of his

³¹⁸ David Putney also points out the inconsistencies in the early and later writings of Dōgen, including his turn against the 'original nature' position prominent in Chinese Buddhism. See Putney, D., 'Some Problems in Interpretation: The Early and Late Writings of Dōgen', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Oct., 1996), pp. 497-531.

³¹⁹ See fascicle 49 of Dōgen's *Shobogenzo* – 'Butsūdo'.

³²⁰ See Kim, H., *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist*, pp.22-23 on the Tendai position of original enlightenment and p.57 for Dōgen's opposition

explanations are in aid of the monks and as such should not be expected to stand independently, but rather build up in conjunction with each lecture provided, gradually deepening the practitioner's understanding. Oftentimes Dōgen uses the words and deeds of the patriarchs to express some understanding, and in most cases two historical anecdotes will be played off against each other. In virtually every case Dōgen will add his own potentially divergent perspective on the matter, often criticising the patriarchs, all the while revering the Dharma lineage.

This should not be unexpected if we are to make sense of one of the dominant themes in Dōgen's thought – the unity of practice and attainment. By understanding Dōgen's position, the possibility of recognising the two truths together is revealed and the Zen moral problem can be overcome.

This chapter is divided into four sections.

The first section, *The Problem of Ignorance*, examines the origins of Dōgen's soteriological drive and draws parallels with the implications of interdependence developed in the last chapter. The limitations of such parallels are also addressed. The main themes to be drawn from Dōgen are introduced and the nature of Zen 'nothingness' is set-up.

The second section, *Dōgen's Metaphysics*, explores Dōgen's metaphysical influences which led to his particular confrontation with the problem of ignorance. Following this, the principles Dōgen developed in response to the problem are examined, further expanding upon the metaphysics of interdependence through the implication of the 'interpenetration' of phenomena.

The third section, *An Empty Buddha-nature*, is a specific reading of Dōgen's use of 'Buddha-nature' based on the implications of the metaphysical framework of interdependence developed thus far and is a response to the concerns of 'Critical Buddhism'. Supporting this position is Dōgen's scathing critique of the concept of 'original nature' derived from Chinese Daoism and an examination of the subtleties of interpretations of 'non-dualism'. The 'not-two-ness' of reality as such presents the entanglement of conventional and ultimate modes.

The fourth section, *Flowers in the Sky*, focuses on the *Kuge* fascicle in Dōgen's *Shobogenzo*. The concept of 'sky flowers', usually functioning as a simple example of delusion in Buddhist literature, is here used to illustrate the direct implications interpenetration has for understanding Buddhist soteriology and Zen practice in particular. For Dōgen, the significance of delusion is to be found in the realisation of enlightened beings, and not simply as the folly of the ignorant.

The Problem of Ignorance

Early in his spiritual development, Dōgen was motivated to find a resolution to a troublesome dilemma, "Both exoteric and esoteric teachings explain that a person in essence has true dharma nature and is originally a body of 'Buddha nature'. If so, why do all buddhas in the past, present, and future arouse the wish for and seek enlightenment?"³²¹ Both the motivation and the metaphysical position of beings is brought into question, as the ultimate nature of reality in the East Asian Buddhist cosmology appears to conflict with the appearance of ignorance in the world. If all is Buddha-nature, then practice would not be necessary and we would take a position similar to that of the Daoists, wherein one does

³²¹ From *Eihei Kisan Gyōjō Kenzei-ki*, cited in Dōgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, Tanahashi K. (ed.), P.4.

nothing and 'leaves nothing undone'. Dōgen did not accept this as an option, however,³²² as he found the necessity of practice evident.³²³ The problem of ignorance is really a reversal of the core epistemological question, 'how can we come to know anything about the world?' The question posed from the foundation of innate Buddha-nature is instead, 'how can we not know?'

Here the question leads one to search after the nature of the divide between our individual selves and the world, and by extension an explanation of our separation from one another. This parallels the problem of necessary metaphysical connection and existentially realised separation examined in the previous chapter. The metaphysical extension of interdependence was shown to implicate a proximal separation due to delay across temporal and spatial distance, resulting in localised environments and the subjective experience of identifiable (as differentiated) segments of reality. While any such identification is necessarily limited in scope, and thus impermanent, the ultimate emptiness of conventionally real entities has been obscured by the functional role they play in worldly interactions. In this manner the illusion of imagination and conceptual overlays comes into conflict with reality as it is, to the point where the function of 'mind' obscures mind itself. Thus, while all individuals are metaphysically connected, *apparent* separation is shown to arise from the metaphysics of interdependence.

Such parallels can only reasonably be taken so far, since Dōgen would not have addressed the nature of reality as set out through a metaphysical framework. This should not matter,

³²² In fact Dōgen maintained that the (popular Chinese) belief that Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism formed a triumvirate of a singular religious expression was "the wrongest doctrine among wrong doctrines." – *Shobogenzo*, 90 *Shizen-biku*, Book 4, p.181.

³²³ Gregory notes, following Tsung-mi, that from the enlightened perspective cultivation is not relevant. However, "For one who has not yet reached such a state facilely to conclude that there is therefore no reason to cultivate Buddhahood is a grave error." (Gregory, P.N., *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, p.238.) It is clear that Dōgen's connection of practice and attainment complicates this.

however, if the framework is a valid method of elucidating the nature of cause and effect.

“Students of the way cannot dismiss cause and effect. If you discard cause and effect, you will ultimately deviate from practice-realisation.”³²⁴ Nishijima and Cross note that Dōgen was concerned with combating the idea that Mahāyāna transcends ‘cause and effect’, a problematic interpretation which was widespread among Zennists in Dōgen’s time,³²⁵ and one which has troublesome consequences. Dōgen quotes Master Genkaku: “‘Emptiness’ run wild negates cause and effect; and in a morass of looseness, invites misfortune and mistakes.”³²⁶ Unfortunately we have seen that the mistaken interpretation of emptiness is still prominent, and I connected this to the problem of transcendent justification in chapter 2. For this purpose we have undertaken a detailed investigation of the nature of interdependence. In this vein we should continue, by now investigating Dōgen’s understanding of cause and effect and the significant implications he draws through ‘interpenetration’.

Dōgen’s understanding of interpenetration adds a more complex layer to the metaphysical framework than the implications of interdependence examined thus far. This complexity will allow for a recognition of the concurrent validity of the two truths. Dōgen writes, “When we look at atoms that does not mean we fail to see the world of Dharma. When we are experiencing the world of Dharma, that does not mean we fail to experience atoms.”³²⁷ The conventional reality of ‘atoms’ is not superseded by the Buddhist truth, nor is the latter necessarily obscured by the former – both levels of interpretation can be simultaneously realised. Thus, metaphysically, the phenomenal aspect of entities interpenetrate one

³²⁴ Dōgen, *Eihei Kōroku*, v.7 510, 454.

³²⁵ Nishijima and Cross (trans.), Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, 89, p.165.

³²⁶ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, 89, p.169.

³²⁷ *ibid.*, Book 1, 17 – ‘Hokke-ten-hokke’, p.182.

another without interference, while the causal nature of empty entities, according to the framework, *is* that interference. The metaphysical link between these two aspects is the nature of mind. The phenomenal is existentially realised, while causation is epistemically identified, and while either mode can encompass the other, the distinct characteristics of the alternative mode is then lost.

The existential expression, while adding to the complete implications of interdependence, is found within the framework, albeit posited metaphysically. An individual mind is subject to experience and the causal flux of interdependence can thus be read relative to the unique position of the mind in question. The problem is that this metaphysical explanation of subjectivity obviously loses the character of subjective experience, what Chalmers identified as the ‘hard problem of consciousness’, and without an existentially vivid account of subjectivity the thought of Dōgen cannot be fathomed. For Dōgen explains that the appearance and disappearance of dharmas, which accounts for all phenomena, is not the appearance and disappearance of the self.³²⁸ The experience of *samadhi*³²⁹ is the mutual realisation of both subjective and objective sides of reality.

Confusion need not arise between the impossible separatedness of expressed ‘dharmas’ and ‘Dharma’ in reality, where the latter is akin to ‘reality as such’. Dōgen’s understanding appears to return to the mutual ground of this distinction. Expressed dharmas *are* Dharma, if they are not reified. Thus presenting the apparent paradox, dharmas are only ‘true’, that is express reality, if they are not taken as Dharma.³³⁰ This would remain an epistemological puzzle, if it were not for the fact that dharmas, like all such expressions, are causally

³²⁸ *ibid.*, Book 2, 31 – *Kai-in-zanmai*, p.158.

³²⁹ Insight meditation, here specifically connected to zazen practice.

³³⁰ A statement about the ultimate nature of reality is only true if it is accepted as *representing* ultimate reality and is not taken as ultimate reality itself.

efficacious. As an expressed dharma only exists by virtue of mind, the interdependent characteristics of mind are realised in the application of dharma. The expression of a true dharma, rather than a mere conceptual entity, is directly manifest in the application of the realisation which is in accord with the world and, for Dōgen, corresponds to the spiritual realm of the Buddhas and Zen Patriarchs.

At the physical level interpenetration can be intuited from the consequences of metaphysical interdependence, since every environment must be connected to, and thus, ultimately, contain every other. But this interpenetration is indirect as extension plays a part in the separation of phenomena in time and space. The other aspect of interpenetration is the direct and immediate consequences of ‘mind’, and this is how an explanation is formed as to the perpetuation of empty phenomena and how enlightenment can occur. Hee-Jin Kim states, “Dōgen’s interpretation of mind inherited the best elements of Hua-yen, *tathāgata-garbha*, and Zen traditions, yet overcame some vulnerabilities inherent in them, and went beyond them by being deeply practical and existentialist.”³³¹

A statement made by Dōgen, alluded to in the previous chapter, states that “the ten-thousand things advance and confirm the self”.³³² Recognised through inverted metaphysics, the ten-thousand things *are* the self, providing an affirmative, though unorthodox, interpretation of the “the triple world is mind only” found in the *Lankavatara*

³³¹ Kim, H., *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist*, p.116.

³³² Note that this translation is no longer used in studies of Dōgen, though it has been used as a ‘catch phrase’ of his thought. Dōgen, *Genjo-Kōan*, in *Moon in a Dewdrop*, (p.69) reads: “To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening.” The emphasis on ‘self’ is clearly changed, though under Nishitani’s reading of ‘true self’ and the position of inverted metaphysics developed in the previous chapter this distinction is of little metaphysical concern.

Sutra.³³³ This is a reading from an explanation of causal interpenetration. The existential interpretation, regarding dharmas (above), directly seeks an expression of reality itself.

Following the analysis from Chapter 2, alternative interpretations must be sought which do not rely upon the positing of essential nature and can thoroughly implement the implications of interdependence. As a Mahāyāna Buddhist, Dōgen can be recognised as following Nāgārjuna and adopting his critique of emptiness when examining the reality of phenomena. This apparently simplistic connection is problematised as Dōgen also develops Kegon notions of interpenetration, as infinitesimal repetitions of the same, and the Ch'an concepts of 'true self' and 'Buddha-nature', which appear to be essentialised concepts.

Dōgen himself did not see a conflict between Nāgārjunian emptiness and these concepts, any more than Nāgārjuna saw a conflict between ultimate and conventional modes of expression. Dōgen examines the claim that "*to penetrate one dharma is to penetrate myriad dharmas*" and, expressing the validity of emptiness, says that this "...is not to make one dharma relative to another, and is not to make one dharma absolute – to make [something] absolute is to hinder it and be hindered by it."³³⁴ This expresses both the causal ineptitude of a non-empty entity, as we have examined, and introduces the stopping of the mind as a consequence of the false ideality.

Returning to the problem of interpenetration, whereby if all things have identical nature, then the differentiation that is evident to us in the world must be explained. Explanations can be granted, enabling differentiation at a less subtle level than that of original nature, in which case our examination should turn to the nature of these differentiations. For it is at

³³³ "the world which is no more than the Mind itself" – trans. Suzuki, D.T., *Studies in the Laṅkāvatāra sūtra*, p.97. For further discussion on Dōgen's position, see Dōgen, 'Sangai-yuishin', *Shobogenzo*. 89

³³⁴ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 2, 40 – *Gabyo*, p.235.

this level which individuates distinct objects or phenomena and so constitutes each individual's identifiable essence. I will go on to use the term 'interpenetration' with the proviso that this is used in an incomplete constructive sense, whereby the phenomena in question is not identified as having any essential nature, shared or independent, and that each phenomenon's relation to every other is of empty interdependence.

For Dōgen neither epistemology nor metaphysics are a concern, as this would be to draw a distinction between mind and world and thus remove oneself from the actuality of both. Commentators have put this down to his 'non-dualism' and, as mentioned previously, his desire to avoid reified concepts.³³⁵ However Dōgen intentionally made use of reified concepts in his writings and sermons. This being his mode, forcing a distinction between the equivalent of epistemology and metaphysics would undermine his project. As far as non-dualism holds, one could not make sense of the passage "the blue mountains walk"³³⁶ if such a distinction between mind and world were maintained. This is not a subjective existential description either, 'mountains' and 'walking' can only be brought together in this context when subjective relativism is removed.

A dualistic interpretive framework requires the admission of two parts; the expressed and its opposition.³³⁷ Non-dualistic thinking cannot fit this model of logic, so when examining a 'non-dualistic' understanding one must decide whether to develop a new logical framework to account for the additional possibilities it allows (or removes) or accept the inevitable paradoxes which result from examining such a position within a binary framework. As I have claimed that all systems are necessarily limited then the adoption of such a logical

³³⁵ See Kasulis, *Zen Action, Zen Person*, p.61, on non-reification in Zen; and, on his reading of an anti-metaphysical stance taken by Dōgen specifically - Kasulis, 'The Zen Philosopher', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Jul., 1978), p.359. Also Kim, Eihei Dōgen: *Mystical Realist*, p.XVIII.

³³⁶ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, 14 *Sansuigo*, p.141. This statement is examined in more detail below.

³³⁷ Succinctly notated: 'A' and 'not-A'.

framework, while certainly fruitful in other inquiries, does not serve the scope of the current thesis. The metaphysical framework of interdependence, while limited, has the advantage of being a mere extrapolation from principles directed towards realising reality itself. A possible escape from the dualist limitation can be found through an elaboration of the nature of reality, understood as 'nothingness'.

If we consider 'reality', the opposite 'un-reality' completes the duality, but if we remove what is not real from our consideration we are left with *nothing* on the other side. This is where interpretation creates the limits of reified systems and is the point from which the Zen sense of 'nothing' can be found to arise. 'Nothing' is not 'un-reality', it is a null-proxy for a system that requires an entry where none are available. This is why 'nothing' refers back to the other side, 'reality', and in doing so something is revealed about reality itself: *there is no other side*. There is no 'nothing' which exists independent of some opposition to reality, as this would be a reified 'nothingness'. 'Nothing' does not transcend reality, in fact any statement of 'nothing' imposes the very opposite. As we have seen, this reified nothing is the root of nihilism. Nishitani connects this directly to ignorance, stating that "man cannot escape that perversion so long as he takes a stand on nihility, because it was precisely through that perversion that nihility came to light: the pit that lies open at the bottom of that perversion is nothing other than nihility itself."³³⁸ The alternative is to turn to a radicalised 'Absolute Nothingness' which is nothing other than 'nothing' as the empty place holder, turned back onto reality as it is. As every reified position entails nihilism, the only escape is to 'transcend nothing' by taking the middle-path and recognising interdependence.

³³⁸ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p.88.

Dōgen's Metaphysics

While I have taken interdependence to be a necessary principle in the development of a Buddhist metaphysics, historically the implications of contingent existence have been interpreted in varying ways. The metaphysical principles of *Kegon* (Ch. *Huayan*) Buddhism, particularly interpenetration as 'simultaneous interfusion and non-imposed mutual penetration', are recognised as a major influence on Dōgen's thought.³³⁹ At least one aspect of the philosophical ground of interpenetration can be found in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and the essays of Fa-tsang, 'on the gold lion' and 'on a mote of dust'. "The basic idea is one of unity in plurality: All in One, One in All. The All melts into a single whole."³⁴⁰ The notion is addressed by Dōgen whenever he describes the universe as 'one bright pearl' in a similar manner to 'Indra's net', wherein phenomenon manifest within macrocosmic entirety, *ad infinitum*. "Each and every phenomenon is not only seen to contain each and every other phenomenon, but all phenomena are also seen to contain the totality of the unobstructed interpenetration of all phenomena."³⁴¹

However, there is an *essentiality* in the *Kegon* understanding; that the ultimate nature of reality is 'embryo-like', infinitely repeated, across layers of levelled metaphysic; and there does remain a core to this reality which is not maintained by Dōgen where he addresses interpenetration. In the *Genjo-kōan*, Dōgen writes, "The whole moon and the whole sky are reflected in a dew-drop in a blade of grass and are reflected in a single drop of water."³⁴²

³³⁹ See Kim, H., *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist*, p.116.

³⁴⁰ Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History vol.1*, pp.46-7.

³⁴¹ Gregory, P.N., *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, p.7. Note that this 'perfect interfusion' (is only identified at the fourth Dharmadhātu, wherein all phenomena are understood as perfectly non-obstructive and co-entailing. The identification of discrete 'phenomena' (*shi*) marks the first level), while the identification of 'principle' (*li*) marks the second. The third level recognises the non-obstruction of *li* and *shi*.

³⁴² Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, p.28.

The realised states of either moon or dewdrop do not hinder one another and it is in this manner that the moon and dewdrop are said to interpenetrate. There are parallels here with the metaphysics of interdependence developed in the last chapter. Significantly, this is only possible when all aspects of reality are recognised as 'empty'.

What I called 'inverted metaphysics', in the previous chapter, illustrates the always ready inversion of epistemic understanding. Following inverted metaphysics, the nature of any empty 'thing' can be recognised as the effect of the universe, minus what we would usually identify as that 'thing', acting on that point. The question can be asked from either direction, even though both can be identified as interdependent. To emphasise separation, one speaks of the interaction of (empty) entities, whereas to focus on connection one may speak of dependent causation.

As recorded in numerous examples of Zen literature, the apparently random and seemingly irrelevant answers given by Zen masters to questions can be understood (though not predicted) as the intentional reversal of the focal direction of the question. A Zen master, holding up his staff, says: "If you have one, I give you mine; if you have none, I will take it away from you."³⁴³ As attachment to a specific level of interpretation is just as dangerous to a student's development as reified fixation on some object of thought, the alternative and incompatible position is posed to reveal the ultimately false nature of the statement or position expressed by the student. If someone were to emphasise separation, by identifying some specific object, then a master may respond by stressing its interdependent connection. If someone were to emphasise connection, then they may stress the significance of differentiation. In either case, interruption through direct action can be

³⁴³ Suzuki, D.T., *Zen and Japanese Culture*, p.7. Suzuki notes that "There is no rationalism in this."

applied; such as calling for a response, forcing a pragmatic reaction or simply striking the questioner.³⁴⁴ This is a crucial point concerning Zen – in action the dualism of connection and separation cannot be maintained. Any conceptualisation at such a point is false, which is plainly manifest in the conflict between the concept and the action itself. An enlightened being's thoughts and actions are 'not two'.³⁴⁵

The effect of modifying the ground of focus is particularly stark when the distinction is between causation 'out there' in the world, and the same phenomena expressed as an aspect of mind. For example, Huineng's response to monks debating positions on the movement of a flag: "*Not the wind, not the flag; mind is moving.*"³⁴⁶ Every object or event is potentially the centre of focus as the metaphysical nature of epistemic identity is formless. Furthermore, since every different position adopted has different epistemic results, the nature of the experienced world, and so too one's reaction to the world, is dependent on the position held. At least, this is true conventionally. Ultimately, it should make no difference which position is currently being used, since from the direct experience of reality, every position is subject to the interpenetration of dependent arising.

Consider the Kōan of Baizhang and the fox,³⁴⁷ wherein an old Zen teacher states that 'persons of great cultivation' are "not subject to cause and effect" and is consequently reborn as a fox for five-hundred lifetimes. Identifying the error in the old teacher's statement, Baizhang resolves the chain of rebirth by stating that "a greatly cultivated person does not ignore cause and effect." Dōgen, holding up his whisk, as the Buddha once held up

³⁴⁴ For example, *Eihei Kōroku*, 479, p.427 – Concerning the question: "where does ignorance abide?", "Even if you cannot recognise what ignorance depends on, you cannot escape Eihei's whisk."

³⁴⁵ 'Not two' is used here as an alternative to 'non-dual'. The significance of this distinction is explained below.

³⁴⁶ *Mumonkan*, case 29, in Reps, P., *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, p.117.

³⁴⁷ *Mumonkan*, case 2, in *ibid.*, pp.96-97.

a flower on Vulture Peak, simply remarks “Cause and effect are clear.”³⁴⁸ As the Buddha stated, “This arising, that *arises*. When this is not, that is not. This *ceasing*, that *ceases*.”³⁴⁹ This is cause and effect, and understanding cause and effect is the meaning of interdependence. This is only possible as all phenomena, all entities and all events; are *empty*. All phenomena are produced by empty phenomena and produce empty phenomena.

This again raises the peculiar position, derived from emptiness, that none of the entities we describe exist. You will recall Nāgārjuna’s statement that ‘nothing whatsoever arises’ is seen to be a consequence of interdependence. To answer the parallel questions: ‘how is separation possible?’ and ‘how does ignorance arise?’ – *it doesn’t*. It is an illusion. The question is derived from the delusion it is inquiring into, thus, from the ground on which it is posited, a solution cannot be found. This is also true of the nihilism problem, which has been described as the Zen moral problem. This ‘nothing’ of nihilism must be radically epistemically ‘*transcended*’ which entails abandoning the question. This ‘transcendence’ should not be understood as a removal from the world of the conventional, rather it is a return to the reality that conventional overlays conceal.

There is no separation without connection, no ignorance without enlightenment. Wisdom is not gaining something, but destroying falsities to reveal an *underlying reality*. In this manner, it is said that once enlightenment is achieved it cannot be undone. “A broken mirror does not illuminate or reflect. A fallen flower does not jump back onto the branch.”³⁵⁰ While this describes the metaphysical position of the state of enlightenment,

³⁴⁸ Dōgen, *Eihei Kōroku*, v.1, 62. P.119.

³⁴⁹ *Majjhima-nikāya*, III, in Rāhula, W., *What the Buddha Taught*, p. 53.

³⁵⁰ Attributed to Baoji Xiujing, in Dōgen, *Eihei Kōroku*, v.4, 332. P.302.

that it is already behind our conventional perceptions, it should not lead us to belief in an 'original nature'. The *underlying reality* should not be considered as driving our conventionally apparent actions from an ontologically different ground, as this would only reinforce Dōgen's original dilemma. The transcendent Buddha does not act through an enlightened being. Every individual is responsible for their own actions. As Dōgen tells us, "even in the state of attainment of the truth, we should practice."³⁵¹

The maintenance of a concept of Buddha-nature which does not nihilate the necessity of practice can only be established if the metaphysical ground of this understanding is not divided into transcendent levels of 'truth'. While Dōgen emphasises the dualism of opposites which are co-entailing throughout his examination of kōans, he simultaneously affirms non-dualism, or better: an understanding of "not two".³⁵² The solution to this apparently conflicted position is not to confuse the finger for the moon it is pointing to.³⁵³ Dōgen's use of reified opposites and maintenance of 'not two', together, emphasise immanent reality. In this manner Zen masters continually refer to 'concrete' examples in the world, such as "this monk's staff"³⁵⁴ and so forth. Dōgen's emphasis on zazen can also be understood as such an expression. Zazen, however, is a unique instance of immanence, with specific implications, which are addressed in the next section.

Before moving on it is helpful to consider the distinctions of Dōgen's position to the developments in modern 'western' philosophy, which have been likened to the various extrapolations of 'interdependence' in Buddhist thought. As my framework of interdependence potentially falls into the same category we should be careful not to lose

³⁵¹ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, 1- *Bendowa*, p.11.

³⁵² See *ibid.*, p.12. - "because the body and mind are originally one reality, the saying that essence and form are not two [is true]."

³⁵³ Suzuki, D.T, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, p.19.

³⁵⁴ See, for example, Dōgen, *Eihei Kōroku*, 96, 174, 177, 232, 262, 343 and 510.

the subtleties of Zen thought in favour of preserving the conceptual schema. 'Process philosophy' can be considered a key example of such a parallel framework. Not dissimilar to the framework developed from the metaphysics of interdependence here, Whitehead maintained that 'to exist is to exert causal influence'.³⁵⁵ This simple proposition presents a necessarily complete universe picture, in that any entity that exists is necessarily causally connected (directly or indirectly) to every other entity.

Whitehead's method of elaborating 'process metaphysics' involves a transition from talk of static 'objects' to that of processes; so that rather than speak of a 'chair' we would describe the phenomena by the process it undertakes in conjunction with its environment. In this manner when somebody sits on a chair we are confronted with the interdependently arisen event 'chair-ing'. While this move is bold and opens up many possibilities for engaging with and understanding our world, in particular making evident the interconnectedness of reality, it cannot overcome the limitations of language and reified thought more generally. Whitehead did not see his 'process' mode as conflicting with the 'objectified', traditional view of reality, but rather as a complimentary understanding.³⁵⁶ From the perspective of objectified thought, a process can more easily be recognised as impermanent and is necessarily made up of multiple 'objects' and so is seen to be in accord with the Buddhist understanding of impermanence and interdependence, drawing widespread comparisons.³⁵⁷ Significantly, Whitehead was a determined theist and saw the essential

³⁵⁵ Whitehead, A., *Process and Reality*, p.176 – in opposition to Hume's apparent 'inversion' and thus priority of presentational immediacy over causal efficacy.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.23 – "That two descriptions are required for an actual entity: (a) one which is analytical of its potentiality for 'objectification' in the becoming of other actual entities, and (b) another which is analytical of the process which constitutes its own becoming."

³⁵⁷ For example: Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism*; Sarkar, *Buddhism and Whitehead's Process Philosophy*; Abe, 'Mahayana Buddhism and Whitehead' in *Zen and Western Thought*, pp.152-170; Hartstone, 'Whitehead's differences from Buddhism' In *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1975), pp. 407-413;

nature of the flux of reality having ultimately originated from God and that this innate essence remains and is passed on through various manifestations of reality.³⁵⁸ Steve Odin's work, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-Yen Buddhism*, draws on the commonality between the 'core' in Kegon metaphysics and Whitehead's flowing essence, while this is exactly the point from which my investigation of Dōgen must depart.

Dōgen deviates from the Kegon metaphysics dramatically, as he did not maintain the existence of an essential 'core' (of Buddha-nature), instead making recourse to Nāgārjunian emptiness. On striving for being without the Buddha-nature, Dōgen refers to the fifth patriarch, stating "The Buddha-nature is emptiness, so we call it being without."³⁵⁹ The formless reality of Buddha-nature is necessary to implicate its function in manifest reality, since, returning to Nāgārjuna, a non-empty thing cannot interact. The practice of Zen, as actively approaching a realisation of reality 'as it is', cannot be distinguished from the 'ultimate state' of that reality. Metaphysically understood as 'groundless', the formless Buddha-nature is absolutely self-reliant but acquires existential content in relation to immanent events. In this manner, practice and attainment are two aspects of the same reality, separated by a subjective (epistemic) distinction. The practice itself, *ala zazen*, becomes the 'ultimate' practice *and expression* of the Buddhist soteriological project.

As the Sōtō school is classed as 'gradualist', to contrast its doctrine with that of the 'sudden enlightenment' of the Rinzai school, one may expect that Dōgen, who is credited with founding the Sōtō school, should conform to this distinction. Besides stressing the importance of practice, Dōgen makes extensive use of kōans in his teaching. The

Inada, 'The Metaphysics of Buddhist Experience and the Whiteheadian Encounter' in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1975), pp. 465-488.

³⁵⁸ See Whitehead, A., *Process and Reality*, Chapter II: 'God and the World'.

³⁵⁹ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 2, 22- *Bussho*, p.8.

‘sudden’/‘gradual’ distinction does not approach the depth at which Dōgen’s metaphysics necessitates the inseparability of practice and attainment, as this is a more fundamental critique of action which applies equally to conventionally situated and enlightened beings. Discussion on ‘sudden’ or ‘gradual’ schools, on enlightenment, is interesting and perhaps fruitful in terms of pedagogy, but cannot be applicable to a metaphysical analysis of Dōgen’s thought.

Buddhism for Dōgen is not something which can be factored out into different schools – either it is an expression of the Buddhist truth or it is not.³⁶⁰ Abe notes that Dōgen “strictly refused to speak of a ‘Zen sect’, to say nothing of a ‘Sōtō sect’, which he was later credited with founding.”³⁶¹ At times Dōgen seems to take the harshest critical view of the masters of the past, all the while attributing the utmost respect to the transmission of the teaching through the patriarchs. To understand this properly it is important to examine the position of ‘Buddha-nature’ in Dōgen. Like the transmission, being temporally enacted yet eternally occurring, Buddha-nature is universally applicable. For this reason the distinction between ‘conventional’ and ‘ultimate’ truths is not favoured in Dōgen. The distinction itself misses the point. It is everyday things which express Buddha (which *are* Buddha) although Buddha is not exhausted in any instance. When ‘oneness’ appears, it is not as a unity or final reduction, the ‘not-two-ness’ is common reality. This unity is the unchanging teaching, both subject and object, both conventional and ultimate.

Dōgen’s position is bound to cause confusion; he does not propose anything beyond *this* world and yet directs our attention to the function of causation and interpenetration, appearing to indicate an elaborate metaphysics. While this would make the current project

³⁶⁰ Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History, Japan*, p.67.

³⁶¹ Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, p.25.

much simpler, it would certainly be a misinterpretation of Dōgen. There should be nothing more normal than the ‘blue mountains walking’ or every instance of zazen being enlightenment itself.³⁶² To clarify Dōgen’s position, we should include an analysis of the nature of time, which results in the overturning of any apparent metaphysical overlays of separation. The immanence of experiential reality is affirmed by focussing on the unique instance of each moment, which is impermanent and utterly interdependent. By focussing on the experience of time the metaphysical principles developed thus far begin to find direct practical application.

While examinations of Dōgen’s metaphysics are increasingly common, it is interesting to note that the implications of interpenetration have been avoided in favour of focusing on his conception of ‘being-time’ (*Uji*), allowing connections to the work of Heidegger to be drawn out.³⁶³ The Kyōto school’s fascination with Dōgen, coupled with their western existential bent, is at least partially responsible for this. The other major focus in ‘western’ Dōgen studies is philosophy of language. It is certainly possible to draw comparisons of other thinkers to Dōgen, but any such comparison would be extremely limited, even among other Buddhists. Dōgen moves from metaphor to myth to pedagogy to pragmatics within a single passage. I fear that the superficial level at which Dōgen’s work could be so compared would be applicable to most Buddhist thinkers and often reveals little of Dōgen’s particular expression. The obvious philosophical position that can be extracted from his work is his use of *uji*, though here it will be considered in conjunction with the wider implications of interpenetration in Dōgen’s thought.

³⁶² These statements, by Dōgen, are explored in detail in the next section.

³⁶³ For example: Heine, S., *Existential and ontological dimensions of time in Heidegger and Dōgen*; Glass, N. R., *Working Emptiness*; Stambaugh, J., *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature*.

The division of moments of time (past, present, future relations) occurs within conventional limits. *Uji*, however, denotes a ‘passageless passage’ which denies the validity of such conventional designations.³⁶⁴ Time, for Dōgen, cannot be broken into moments as this reductive essentialisation leads to a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is the *experience* of time rather than the demarcation of temporality which is of key concern for Dōgen. To elaborate upon this point, one finds every moment of time as instantaneously arising, and every such instant of time subject to the stream of causes and conditions leading up to it. On the other hand Nirvāṇa is held to be ‘timeless’, beyond such discriminations, and metaphysically applicable across all times.³⁶⁵ Usually, the moment of enlightenment is considered to be unique in the general temporal schema due to the position (held by many Zennists though not by Dōgen) that ‘original mind’ has always existed. According to this understanding, enlightenment was akin to a re-alignment with one’s true nature, indicating a genuine metaphysical distinction, which, as we have seen, cannot be maintained through interdependence. For Dōgen enlightenment is the exercise of that which is already present, a continual activity that *is* enlightenment itself.

From this point it is easy to jump to conclusions, that Dōgen is proposing some form of monism, which would provide a simple solution to non-dualism. I claim this is a mistake, and is in fact a tendency derived from dualistic thinking, whereby ‘nothingness’ in Zen comes to the fore as a reified concept. Instead, as we have seen, this ‘nothing’ should not be proposed in opposition to being, nor simply identified with it. Dōgen addresses this issue to some extent wherever he discusses ‘Buddha-nature’.

³⁶⁴ Dōgen, Shobogenzo, 11 – *Uji*, p.95.

³⁶⁵ “When there is no death, there is the Eternal. Due to this, we say that Nirvana is Eternal” - *Nirvana Sutra*, Chapter 36 – Yamamoto, K. (Trans.), *The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, p.367.

An empty Buddha-Nature

Dōgen's unique place in the history of Japanese Zen has much to do with his studies in China, bringing back a wealth of Chinese Buddhist philosophy to bear on Japanese Buddhist culture, including an extensive collection of kōans.³⁶⁶ As examined previously, the impact of Chinese thought on Buddhist philosophy in China was extensive, so we find in Dōgen a reappraisal of particular ideas which had either not filtered through to Japan, or had been adopted as an incomplete reading. Chief among these, and in addition to Kegon 'Interpenetration', is the Daoist-influenced notion of 'Buddha-nature'.³⁶⁷ It is upon the state of this concept that the accusation 'Zen is not Buddhism'³⁶⁸ has been levelled. Dōgen's response offers a possible admission and reappraisal of Zen.

The potential of sentient beings to become enlightened united with the concept of the universal way of nature, *Dao*, is radically extended by Dōgen. In response to Master Sai-an, who stated that, "All living beings have the Buddha-nature",³⁶⁹ Dōgen says we should drop 'have', thus correlating all living beings to Buddha-nature. Further than this, Dōgen universalises Buddha-nature to *all existence*, and not merely sentient beings.³⁷⁰

This is not to propose a single universal entity, 'Buddha-nature', akin to *Dao*. As Hee-jin Kim remarks, "Buddha-nature is more than the defacto sum of all beings and more than the naive identity of the Absolute and the relative, or of the necessary and the contingent."³⁷¹

³⁶⁶ The *Shinji Shobogenzo* - which he began compiling prior to leaving Japan.

³⁶⁷ The Chinese concept took quite a different form to Indian *Tathagata-gharba* doctrines. See Robert Sharf's essay, 'On the Buddha-nature of Insentient Things', for a good overview of the development.

³⁶⁸ See the Introduction in this thesis on Critical Buddhism; also Swanson, 'Why they Say Zen is not Buddhism', in Hubbard & Swanson (eds.), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*.

³⁶⁹ Dōgen. *Shobogenzo*, Book 2, 22- *Busho*, p.18.

³⁷⁰ Kim, H., *Mystical Realist*, p.126.

³⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.129.

Kim suggests this could be considered a discrete form of panentheism. The argument runs; since all sentient beings are mind and interdependence is mutual co-creation, all things are mind. Thus we conclude that all things are sentient.

This reading certainly allows for easier comprehension of statements such as ‘blue mountains walking’, but the panentheistic interpretation runs afoul of emptiness. As indicated by Nāgārjuna, the function of interdependence is only possible as all entities considered thus are empty of intrinsic existence. The concept of ‘mind’ required to accept the panentheistic reading, while commonly found in Zen, cannot be considered empty. Ignoring the connection of theism with ‘mind’, the real problem stems from the underlying connection of ‘emptiness’ as ‘*tathātā*’ (thusness). To maintain that conventional entities ‘are just as they are’ is to go against the purpose of emptiness, which is to break through mere appearances to undermine conventional phenomena and arrive at reality as it is.

Dōgen goes on to examine the statement made by Master Dai-en, which appears, superficially, to present the opposite position, “All living beings are without the Buddha-nature”.³⁷² Dōgen finds no conflict between the statements made by Master Dai-en and that of Master Sai-an. He states, “Just see that karmic consciousness is totally boundless. All living beings are without Buddha nature.”³⁷³ The two apparently conflicting positions are recognised by Dōgen as interpenetrating interpretations of manifest reality, each reveals a different side of Buddha-nature. “Buddha nature does not have Buddha nature as a nature”,³⁷⁴ since the ground of being is intrinsically empty. Yet, interpreted from

³⁷² Dōgen. *Shobogenzo*, Book 2, 22- *Busscho*, p.19. Also the case in the *Shinji Shobogenzo*, 2.15.

³⁷³ Dōgen, *Eihei Kōroku*, 71, P.124.

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 395, P.353.

interdependence, “see how Buddha nature produces the conditions for Buddha nature.”³⁷⁵

Once again the connection between emptiness and interdependence is stressed.

Ultimately, the connection of these two should be revealed as ‘not two’, and only in that realisation can phenomena be accorded *tathātā*. The dualism of ‘everything is Buddha-nature’ versus ‘everything is not Buddha-nature’ must be overcome.

The sixth patriarch of Zen, Huineng (Jp. Daikan Enō) features prominently throughout Zen literature, and extensively in Dōgen. Renowned for ‘tearing up the scriptures’, Huineng was the last in the direct lineage of Zen masters in China, beginning with Bodhidharma, to symbolically transmit the robe and bowl as symbols of attainment. Huineng cited Bodhidharma himself as the explanation for his deviation from tradition, as Zen is described as “a special transmission outside the scriptures, not founded upon words and letters, directly pointing to one’s mind.”³⁷⁶

One section in the Shobogenzo finds Dōgen attacking the validity of the Platform Sutra, specifically the passage “seeing one’s nature”.³⁷⁷ “The Sixth Patriarch’s *Platform Sutra* contains the words *seeing the nature*, but that text is a fake text; it is not the writing of one whom the Dharma-treasury was transmitted, and it is not the words of Sokei.”³⁷⁸ It is important to note that Dōgen does not reject the validity of the 6th patriarch, only that particular written record.³⁷⁹ Of philosophical importance is Dōgen’s utter rejection of the concept of ‘original nature’. This alone should serve as a warning to anyone contemplating

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 439, p.395.

³⁷⁶ Attributed to Bodhidharma (though historical evidence suggests it was formulated later), in Dumoulin, H., *Zen Buddhism: A History: India and China*, p.85.

³⁷⁷ “*prajñā* is inherent in their own nature.” *Platform Sutra*, in Price & Wong (Trans.), *The Diamond Sutra and The Sutra of Hui-neng*, p.79.

³⁷⁸ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 4, 90– *Shizen-biku*, p.178

³⁷⁹ Kim suggests that Dōgen’s particular translation was an obscure *Sung* copy of the Sutra, which is now lost - Kim, H., *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist*, p.56

a simple 'holistic', universal reading of Dōgen. Dōgen's dislike of the concept of 'original nature', and the Daoist philosophy which may have helped influence Buddhist thought towards such a reading, stems from the fundamental role of practice accorded by Dōgen.

The problem for Dōgen is the duality inherent in the statement 'to see one's original nature', implicating a necessary separation between the 'seer' and the 'original nature' which is seen. The complication here is Dōgen's constant reference to 'Buddha-nature', which when connected to the metaphysical idea of a 'primordial Buddha', that the Buddha lies inherent in the 'system' of the universe, presents us with a position resembling that 'original nature'. For Dōgen though, one cannot 'see' this nature, instead one must come to realise they *are* that nature. To take the panentheistic reading, it would in fact be this *nature* asking the questions, enacting everyday feats and connecting one's existential reality with walking mountains. Considered in this way, it is each unique instance of reality as well as their connection which must be recognised in order to see reality as it is, which is problematised by admitting multiple interpretations of single phenomena as interconnected and equally valid (or equally invalid). In order to solve this problem and its intricacies I claim we must come to the realisation that there is no underlying, essential nature separate from the functioning of conventional reality.

In developing a 'naturalisation' of Dōgen's 'mystical realism', Kim emphasises the *tathātā* element of revealed reality as a means of expanding upon the non-dualistic nature of Dōgen's thought. Kim proposes Dōgen's distinction between 'ultimate water' (primordial) and ordinary water as an example of this immanence.³⁸⁰ He says the mode of the 'ultimate' just *is* normal water in "the radicalisation of it in its total exertion". However, from within

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.200.

an apparently flowing stream, the movement of water cannot be seen to flow. Only from an external standpoint can water be understood to flow downwards. The radicalisation reveals the removal of all standpoints to reveal undivided reality.

As noted earlier, the term 'non-dualism' is often used in the literature on Zen, and Dōgen in particular, indicating the overturning of a dualist framework. Considering the pedagogical focus in Zen exegesis, I avoid using this term for two reasons: first, the negation of dualism implies a dualism to be negated, which is the creation of a dualism of 'dualism and non-dualism'. Often this is seen to be the case, where two apparent opposites are forced together, their opposing nature is recognised before it is overturned, there does exist a duality in the rationale that raised the issue. As a derivative concept 'non-dualism' fails to nominate that metaphysical underpinning which constitutes reality 'as it is', unless 'non-dual' is taken to imply monism, but I have previously dismissed this possibility. Indeed we could coin a term such as 'pre-dualistic' in attempting to rectify this, but this again implies that dualism arises from something and now denies that our present argument does in fact stem from a dualistic position.

The second reason for avoiding 'non-dualism' is due to the exclusivity of the term.

Metaphysically there cannot be two positions, nor multiple positions, implying that there exists only a holistic unity. The proposition of a unity is untenable. To the expression 'not two' we may add 'not one either'. This problem highlights the intricacies of Dōgen's position and the implications of interdependence understood metaphysically. It is not enough to recognise the apparent separation of one phenomenon from another, one must also realise its connection – and it is not enough to simply reduce the myriad things into one universal 'whole', separateness must not be forgotten. Recall the fox kōan, the learned

being is *not ignorant* of cause and effect. The distinction between conventional and ultimate reality also functions in this way.

Nishitani picks up the intricacies of the 'non-dual' position, stating that,

we do not presuppose a separation of subject and object and then work towards their unification. The unity of the absolute near side is not the result of a process but rather the original identity of absolute openness and absolute emptiness. Its standpoint is neither monism nor dualism of any sort. It is the absolute one, the absolute self-identity of the absolutely two.³⁸¹

Zazen is a unique instance of the 'not-two-ness' of mind and world as action. Dōgen tells us that it is from this position that we must realise that "the blue mountains walk".³⁸²

Considering this statement metaphysically, through an understanding of emptiness, "The whole Universe is utterly without objective molecules: here and now there is no second person at all."³⁸³ Indeed from this perspective one can understand that, due to interdependence, there is ultimately no distinction to be made between individuals, nor between the anthropic particulars of sentient humans and the 'inanimate' environment in which they exist. To experience the reality of interdependence is to experience the nature of every action interpenetrating with every interconnected phenomenon, including the walking of mountains.

Furthermore, Dōgen states that sitting in zazen the whole world is enlightened.³⁸⁴ Kim posits that "To Dōgen zazen-only was at once metaphor and reality."³⁸⁵ Given Dōgen's method of intentional contradictory positions and, what Kim describes as, 'mysticism', the distinction between metaphor and reality does seem to have been blurred. Since I maintain

³⁸¹ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p.107.

³⁸² Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, 14- *Sansuigo*, p.141.

³⁸³ *ibid.*, Book 2, 22- *Bussho*, p.2.

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*, Book 1, 1- *Bendowa*, pp.4-5.

³⁸⁵ Kim, H., *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist*, p.67.

that all systems of interpretation are necessarily limited, then any description of reality could easily be described as a metaphor without undermining the functional validity of the framework.³⁸⁶

That all phenomena, even rocks, have Buddha-nature, I see to be a consequence of causal feedback (of mind) in total interdependence. Here there are only ever manifest instances (an entity, a mind) which are impermanent; empty. As consciousness approaches the absolute it ceases to function as a subjectively separated mind. The absolute is Nothing; it is not other than the inversion of all worldly things. While this inversion is identical with the manifest instances focused on, in this inversion the epistemic mode of realisation is dramatically altered. A realisation of the emptiness of phenomenon in total interdependence, modifies the actions of a being towards these empty phenomenon. Understood as the inversion of metaphysical causation, the mind of an individual being in *satori* is actually the action of the whole universe *minus that individual*. Thus, in zazen, 'body and mind drop away' and the world is enlightened.

In response to the Kōan 'Does a dog have Buddha-nature?',³⁸⁷ Dōgen tells us that this can be derived from the understanding of the necessary emptiness at the heart of being, and is consistent with the statement that 'Buddhas are without buddhas'. "Remember, it is a springing free from the whole body of self-entanglement."³⁸⁸ In this manner all things affirm the 'True self'. The two truths identify the core nature of the true self conversely: conventionally the myriad, ultimately nothing; conventionally ignorance, ultimately enlightenment; conventionally *samsāra*, ultimately *Nirvāṇa*. To investigate either side

³⁸⁶ Matsumoto Shirō denies that Dōgen's criticism of 'Buddha-nature' is sustained throughout his work; see his "Comments on Critical Buddhism", in Hubbard, J & Swanson, P. (Eds.), *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, p.161.

³⁸⁷ Case 1 ('Joshū's Dog') in *Mumonkan*, (Reps, P., *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, p.95), and Koan 14 in Book 2 of Dōgen's *Shinji Shobogenzo*,

³⁸⁸ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 4, 73– *Sanjushichi-bon-bodai-bunpo*, p.4.

leaves the other obscured, and yet the investigation actually takes place on the ground of its opposite. The true nature of mind is always already ultimate truth. This is Nishitani's 'absolute near side'. This is why Dōgen so strongly emphasises zazen, as it is both the 'closest point' (one's own mind) and the event in which the duality of discrimination dissolves.

As we have seen, this can be intellectually explained as inverted metaphysics, however, the *practice* of zazen is essential for Dōgen. "This Dharma is abundantly present in each human being, but if we do not practice it, it does not maintain itself, and if we do not experience it, it cannot be realised."³⁸⁹ This fits with the connection of practice and attainment. Yet, not to let a simple distinction go by, Dōgen also tells us "zazen is not movement or stillness, not practice and realisation".³⁹⁰ Every statement can be reversed by emphasising either connection or separation. To focus on either falls into reification and nihilism.³⁹¹ The true nature of Zen is to 'see reality as it is', which can only be realised 'where there is no place to stand'. This is the complete 'middle-way' and is only possible through realisation of the interpenetration of dualistic extremes. It is only from this groundless position whereby the truth of conventionally experienced suffering and the truth of the ultimate reality of non-suffering are reconciled.

Flowers in the Sky

Finally we will turn our focus to a concept that reveals the extent of interpenetration which I believe has not been emphasised enough in contemporary studies of Dōgen. For this

³⁸⁹ *ibid.*, Book 1, 1- *Bendowa*, p.1

³⁹⁰ Dōgen, *Eihei Kōroku*, v.4, 343. p.308.

³⁹¹ Thus a focus on either is the way of a demon – appears well-meaning, but persecutes from an egoistic standpoint. The disillusion of such positions is addressed in chapter 7.

purpose we will now focus on the *Kuge* ('sky flowers') fascicle of Dōgen's *Shobogenzo*. The significance of this section, and the phenomena of 'sky flowers' as interpreted by Dōgen, is the dual sense of dharma as an expression of the world, or delusion, and Dharma as representative of the Buddha's teaching, or reality. Dōgen affirms both, and in so doing directly connects enlightened realisation to conventional ignorance and suffering.

The term *kuge* "is usually used in Buddhism as an image for illusions or hallucinations, but Dōgen takes them as the flowering of Dharma."³⁹² Dōgen writes, "when stupid people hear the tathagata's words that '*what is seen by clouded eyes is flowers in space*', they imagine that '*clouded eyes*' means the upset eyes of ordinary beings."³⁹³ Thus they conclude that all Buddhist teachings are unreal. And yet, Dōgen continues; this is exactly how patriarchs teach. The emptiness of dharmas is necessary for Buddhism to function. This is recognised as the positive expression of emptiness.

In chapter 2 I addressed the problem of the nihilation of one level of reality through transcendent justification, claiming that this was the basis of the Zen moral problem. Dōgen's understanding of interpenetration removes the possibility of deference to some transcendent level. Specifically, one cannot nullify the experience of ignorance by the 'ultimate truth' of Buddha-nature and thus ignore the conventional problem. He writes, "Do not stupidly see cloudedness as delusion and learn that true reality exists elsewhere." 'Cloudedness' is a manifestation of reality and the ultimate nature of delusion is not separate from the presentation of that delusion. "If both [subject and object] were delusion, there would be no possibility of establishing any truth. There being no truth to

³⁹² Leighton and Okumura, *Eihei Kōroku*, Fn.112, on v.2, 163. P.188.

³⁹³ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo Book 3*, 43 *Kuge*, p.9.

establish, [to assert] that cloudedness and flowers are delusion would be impossible.”³⁹⁴

The interpenetrating nature of truth and delusion are co-entailing.

Dōgen tells us that Buddhas cultivate ‘flowers in the sky’ and thus attain enlightenment.³⁹⁵

A Buddha must teach and understand reality through the recognition of saṃsāra, which is to recognise the function of interdependence as cause and effect. “After seeing the *flowers in the sky*, one should also see *the flowers perish in the sky*. To think that once the *flowers in the sky* cease they should not exist anymore is the view of a small vehicle.” As the intercausal nature of empty entities necessitates, all phenomena are impermanent, and so arise and perish in dependence upon causes and conditions, and they in turn become the causes and conditions for subsequent phenomena. With enlightened realisation the foundations of empty causation is broken and, as Buddhist soteriology maintains, the enlightened being realises the reality of non-suffering. Here Dōgen reminds the philosophers, who speculate beyond their direct insight, that this does not revoke the reality of conventionally realised *kuge*, nor does it override conventional suffering. This relates both to the nature of consciousness unrestricted by duality and the origin of the compassion of the Bodhisattva through wisdom. In Dōgen’s poetics, “they develop a plurality of cataracts.” Rather than destroying ‘sky flowers’ through enlightenment, they are affirmed and realised in their total interpenetrating extension.

Dōgen writes, “To turn one’s back on the Truth is wrong, and to approach the Truth is also wrong. The Truth is the approaching and the turning away, which, in each instance of approaching or turning away, are the Truth itself. Is there anyone who knows that this

³⁹⁴ *ibid.* p.11.

³⁹⁵ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, ‘Flowers in the Sky’, Cleary (trans.), p.68

*wrong is also the Truth?*³⁹⁶ The interpenetration of phenomena, subjectively realised, cannot in the first place sustain the essential identity of 'right' and 'wrong'. Such assertions are only meaningful within the context of their proposition, and even then a skilful Zen master can reverse the duality, drawing attention to the inherent emptiness of all positions. The resulting groundlessness should not be taken as meaningless however, as the metaphysical framework of interdependence should make clear. There are distinctions to be made concerning reality, and while the interpretive direction these distinctions take will always be conceptually limited, the application and direct realisation of reality '*as it is*' entails that an utterance made from the base of Zen nothingness *is* reality itself.

With direct implications for our consideration of the truths of suffering and non-suffering, Dōgen examines the explanation of the Sanron Sect that the two truths are 'affirmation and negation'.³⁹⁷ They assert that, of the four noble truths, the first two are conventional and the latter two are ultimate. In other words they connect the truth of suffering with its cause, and the truth of the cessation of suffering with the eightfold path. The same division was made in chapter 2 when setting up the problem resulting from the nihilation of conventional suffering. Dōgen asserts that this division is mistaken. For Dōgen as all four truths are Buddha-nature.

The symbolic significance of the flower in Zen, from triggering Mahākāśyapa's smile to the falling blossoms of Haiku, presents something of the ephemeral immediacy of reality.

Consider Nishitani's use of the example;

³⁹⁶ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo Book 3*, p.14.

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*, Book 2, *Bukkyo*, p.51. Also fn.21.

Take the tiny flower blooming away out in my garden. It grew from a single seed and will one day return to the earth, never again to return so long as this world exists. Yet we do not know where its pretty little face appeared from nor where it will disappear to.³⁹⁸

We are existentially confronted with the incomprehension of how the flower, in all its beauty and unique *tathātā*, can come to exist and then cease. The motivation behind the proposition of impermanence and the connection to emptiness should not be disregarded; it is a response to our confrontation with change in the world. The *kōan* “What was your original face before you were born?”³⁹⁹ directly addresses this existential impasse. What it is that comes and disappears only exists as subjectively realised. Beyond this there is no problem, as there is only the flux of interdependence. Beyond this emptiness and impermanence make no sense.

Dōgen recognises the reality of Zen in the existential, emphasising causation and the interpenetrative nature of perspective. The purpose of the Buddhist project, in its simplicity, is to unravel the conceptual dilemmas which bind us, karmically, to *saṃsāra*. Coming to realise the nature of reality, behind our conflictive conceptions, allows one to end the suffering associated with attachment to false views. Dōgen sums up the entire understanding by returning to the root motivations of the Buddhist project. In the end, he says, “it is only that flowers, while loved, fall; and weeds while hated, flourish.”⁴⁰⁰

Conclusion

Dōgen’s understanding of interpenetration modifies the metaphysics of interdependence in two main ways. First, the focus of the project is necessarily shifted from an abstract

³⁹⁸ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p.101.

³⁹⁹ Attributed to Huineng - See Yampolsky, P., (Trans.), *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, p.110.

⁴⁰⁰ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, 3 *Genjōkōan*, p.27.

metaphysical enquiry and returned to the basis of the Buddhist soteriological project; which is to address the existential confrontation of change in the world, conventionally realised as suffering. This accords with the connection of epistemology and metaphysics in the previous chapter, and entangles these aspects to suggest the reality of a groundless immanence that is beyond the scope of any systematic conception.

The second, and related, major modification stems from Dōgen's emphasis on practice. The only way to approach reality 'as it is', is through a direct engagement with the reality that is oneself. Dōgen recognises that this 'true self', free of conceptual overlays, does not exist. This accords with emptiness and interdependence. The inverted metaphysics developed in the previous chapter serves as a limited illustration of this point. The action of 'no-self' in the world, directly realised, is the manifestation of the reality of Zen.

With this framework at our disposal, the next chapter will re-examine the Zen position and draw meta-moral principles in order to resolve the Zen moral problem.

Chapter 6: Moral Implications

This chapter returns to the problem of nihilism as revealed in Zen philosophy. Historical records of Zen present us with actions of supposedly enlightened individuals, actions which directly conflict with Buddhist moral precepts. The Zen moral problem has been identified as a consequence of justifying conventional actions by allusion to a ‘transcendent’ amoral state of being. Such transcendence has been shown to be metaphysically fallacious and ultimately incompatible with the Buddhist soteriological project. In order to make sense of the compassion of enlightened beings metaphysically, we *must* understand the two truths concurrently. Without recognition of conventional suffering, compassion could not arise; and without recognition of ultimate non-suffering, enlightenment would not arise.

The metaphysical framework of interdependence, which has been developed in this thesis, will now be used to draw moral implications from the principle of interdependence. The interpenetration of phenomena, examined in the previous chapter, allows us to recognise the uniqueness of conventionally realised positions while uniting them in a ‘groundless’ metaphysic. This necessitates a reappraisal of key concepts in the philosophy of Zen, including ‘no-mind’ and spontaneity, recognising the full scope of enlightened realisation and hence revoking the possibility of a nihilistic interpretation by emphasising the immanent effect of moral action.

This chapter is divided into four sections.

The first section, *Nansen’s Cat*, focuses on a specific kōan which epitomises the Zen moral problem. Dōgen’s response to the kōan presents us with a dramatic re-appraisal of the

conventional moral position of enlightened beings. Dōgen suggests, putting aside the semantics of enlightened ‘transcendence’, that Nansen *could have done otherwise* and indeed it would have been *better* if he had.

The second section, *No-mind*, reveals the misappropriation of the concept of ‘no-mind’ in Zen philosophy. Huineng clearly connects ‘no-mind’ and ‘mindfulness’, presenting them together as a complete concept (one aspect requires the other); via a recognition of emptiness and the very antithesis of a mere mode of ‘not thinking’. An individual acting with ‘no-mind’ does not merely react, but moves with recognition of the particularities of their dynamic environment. In this manner, natural spontaneity is only a valid expression of the realisation of ‘reality as it is’ if it is coupled with a self-reflexive awareness which is empty of ‘self’.

The third section, *The Arising of compassion*, directly connects wisdom and compassion to the realisation and embodiment of ultimate truth. Implementing the above reading of ‘no-mind’, the non-suffering of ‘true self’ is overlayed with the recognition of the conventional suffering of other beings. Rather than a natural, purely metaphysical, basis for ethics, I propose that enlightened morality is radically unnatural at the conventional level, in accordance with Buddhist soteriology and enlightened spontaneity.

In the fourth section, *Meta-Moral Principles*, I present the metaphysical principles, developed from interdependence, which have direct ramifications for moral considerations. From this basis I conclude that every action is morally relevant and every question is a moral question. From the enlightened perspective, recognising the necessary limitation of systems of interpretation, ‘skilful means’ are necessary to select how to answer any inquiry.

Nansen's Cat

The Zen Canon is filled with tales of masters violently attacking their students; yelling, using verbal abuse, punching, kicking and even cutting off fingers. It is common to hear stories of the stick being used as a meditation aid in contemporary Zen practice.⁴⁰¹ The simple explanation usually given is that each case of violence is aimed at forcing students to bridge that impossible mental gap between conventional understanding and enlightenment through a shock or direct confrontation with impermanence and mortality. If this explanation is accepted as the whole story regarding Zen teaching, then we find ourselves on a dangerous path. If even the most violent methods are heuristically valid, we conclude that the end justifies the means. It is difficult to argue against this point, since as we have seen the attainment of enlightenment is worth immeasurably more than conventional experience.⁴⁰² However, I believe Buddhism also forces us to take the 'means' into account in a very significant way.

Here we will consider the following well-known kōan:

Nansen⁴⁰³ saw the monks of the eastern and western halls fighting over a cat. He seized the cat and told the monks: "If any of you say a good word, you can save the cat."

No one answered. So Nansen boldly cut the cat in two pieces.

That evening Joshu⁴⁰⁴ returned and Nansen told him about this. Joshu removed his sandals and, placing them on his head, walked out.

⁴⁰¹ Such things as striking are used as a form of *Katsu* (traditionally a 'shout' to awaken practitioner) – Historically Rinzai was quite fond of this practice, often punching and kicking his students. (A great many of the passages in the *Record of Rinzai* follow the lines of I.5; "The monk hesitated. The master hit him." - *The Zen Teaching of Rinzai*, p.16.

⁴⁰² See chapter 1. This is expressed in *The Diamond Sutra*, Chapter 11 (Pine, R., (trans.), p.187)

⁴⁰³ Ch. Nanquan Puyuan

Nansen said: "If you had been there, you could have saved the cat."⁴⁰⁵

There has been considerable debate on the meaning of this passage. The core of the kōan is the conflict between Nansen's immoral act of killing the cat and his moral act of teaching the monks in the very same action. Joshu responds to the contradiction with a demonstration of his own, which Nansen commends, yet deciding where to stand on the issue is left to the students of Zen. Simply repeating here that 'there is no place to stand' will not resolve the moral problem. Immediate action is required. Whether the event ever really took place is irrelevant, as Nansen demands we speak the truth of Zen if the cat is to be saved.

Dōgen is recorded as presenting two related insights regarding this particular kōan, presenting a distinct way of addressing the puzzle.⁴⁰⁶ First he reiterated the standard perspective, akin to transcendent amorality'; that the actions of an enlightened being cannot be assessed as 'right' or 'wrong'. As we have seen, from the position of ultimate truth, such conventional discriminations are rendered invalid. The privileged position of an enlightened being, beyond good and evil, is both a consequence of the epistemic position of ultimate truth and is maintained as an aspect of Dharma in the Buddhist sutras, and so remains a valid point.

Secondly, and most significantly, Dōgen gave two replies to the kōan; one from the perspective of a bystander and one as an alternative to the perspective of Nansen himself.

"If I had been there I would have said: Certainly, you know how to cut the cat in two, but can you cut the cat in one?" Thus Dōgen presents his own conceptual conflict in direct reply

⁴⁰⁴ Ch. Zhaozhou Congshen

⁴⁰⁵ *Mumonkan 14 - The Gateless Gate*, Trans. Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps (1934), also case 181 in Dōgen's *Shinji Shobogenzo*.

⁴⁰⁶ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, Okumura (trans.) pp.28-30.

to Nansen's ultimatum. The immanent reality of the cat is presented as one piece originally, and if Nansen's action is really to 'cut' the minds of the monks to see this reality directly, he is presented with the challenge of cutting the cat in one. If the ultimate and conventional truths are considered separate, as this kōan is usually interpreted, then the ultimate truth towards which Nansen's action is supposed to direct the monks, *does not necessitate any particular immanent act*. If Nansen's act is directed towards enlightened realisation then it would be possible to cut the cat in one or two and achieve the same end.

Next, Dōgen tells us that if he had been in Nansen's position he would have spared the cat, since the cat's death was not necessary to convey the teaching. Furthermore, in killing the cat Nansen still acted through a self-inflicted dichotomy and not with the complete freedom expected from a Zen master. The implication of freedom to the enlightened perspective has significant ramifications for our discussion. If more than one possibility is open to an enlightened being, surely they would select the 'best' outcome, taking into consideration their own perspective on interdependent reality and the perspectives of conventional beings that their actions will affect. Yet this is complicated by the 'transcendence' of moral values from the enlightened position. Positing the 'best' action is a conventional discriminative act and once again would remove the freedom of an enlightened being. I will return to this point presently.

First we should recall the implications of interpenetration from the last chapter. For Dōgen there was not some enlightenment separate from the practice of Zen, he saw them as one and the same. In this way, even though we cannot critically analyse the moral nature of enlightened action, we are still able to assess the consequences of such actions conventionally. Dōgen tells us that there are two actions occurring in the same instant in

the same physical space when Nansen cuts the cat. One is the enlightened act with no karmic consequences, while the other (spatio-temporally identical to it) is the immoral action of taking the life of a sentient being.

Since there is no transcendent reality to be attained, the method of practice and teaching engaged in *are*, in every instance, the constituents of ultimate reality. To ‘see reality as it is’ the enlightened individual must be directly aware of, and take into consideration, conventional experience. In concluding chapter 2, I suggested that “salvation is not found beyond the means used to attain it.” Here I will reiterate the naturalistic reading of karma and suggest that the necessity of following the Buddhist precepts to attain enlightenment is not due to the influence of some supernatural credit system but is rather derived from what following the precepts entails. Dōgen connects practice and attainment because correct practice frees one from delusion and thus, just *is* seeing ‘reality as it is’. In this manner, “Awakening does not free one *from* the world; it frees one *for* the world.”⁴⁰⁷

The distinction being overturned here is the ‘difference’ between the different worlds stemming from one’s perspective upon the world: as enlightened or conventional modes. These two perspectives, which are metaphysically a multitude of individual views, co-exist. They are perspectives of the same space and time. This means that to live in the conventional world, that is to have an every-day perspective, is to live in the enlightened world. Hence to change between modes is a change of perspective.⁴⁰⁸ Thus to overcome suffering is to realise that ultimate actuality, that suffering does not exist. However, in the same instance to live in the enlightened world is to live in the conventional world, and this, I

⁴⁰⁷ Garfield, J. and Priest, G., ‘Mountains Are Just Mountains’ in D’Amato, M., et al (eds.), *Pointing at the Moon*, (2009), p.76.

⁴⁰⁸ This is not to imply that the process of changing perspective in this manner is easy or trivial!

claim, is the foundation of *compassion*. Even though enlightened beings themselves do not experience suffering, as the root of suffering is undermined through enlightened awareness, it is because enlightened beings are aware of the suffering experienced by non-enlightened beings, that enlightened individuals assist all other beings. This, I believe, also has consequences concerning the evaluation of morality conventionally as applicable to enlightened beings – and this includes the cutting of cats.

This entanglement of the conventional and ultimate modes necessitates a radical reassessment of those ‘basic’ principles of Zen which have been adopted and consequently connected to the Zen moral problem. Relative ‘nothingness’ becomes nihilism in opposition to the conventionally real, such that when this ‘ultimate’ truth is prioritised, conventional truth is reduced to nothing. Rather than being mutually exclusive, ‘absolute nothingness’ and immanent reality should be synonymous. ‘Nothingness’ as ultimate truth reveals conventional truths in their *thusness*, so it should affirm and contextualise conventionality. As the ‘Fox Kōan’ suggests, an enlightened being should not be ‘unaware of cause and effect’; they cannot ignore conventional reality. Where Zen philosophy has been adopted this entanglement has been ignored, and historical references to immanent everydayness are interpreted as mere instances of poetic licence in favour of the transcendency thesis of enlightenment. I have previously shown that maintaining a position of transcendence cannot sustain Buddhist soteriology and is incompatible with the heart of Zen. Nowhere is this problem more apparent than through the misappropriation of the concept of ‘no-mind’.

No-Mind

In recent times the term 'Zen' has become popularly associated with decontextualised aspects of Zen thought and applied to every field imaginable.⁴⁰⁹ Specifically, what is abstracted from Zen is the pragmatic application of the concept 'no-mind' (Jp. *mushin*, Ch. *wu hsin*), taken as a psychological tool of approaching any task and completing it 'without thinking'.⁴¹⁰ Most scholars pay little regard to such misappropriations in popular culture, other than stating that the concept has been taken out of its original context. When that same misappropriation is recognised at the level of the Japanese military, as noted in chapter 2, the Zen moral problem is taken more seriously. In order to solve the moral problem of the 'mindless' samurai warrior, or the self-interested business-type, the concept of 'no-mind' must be thoroughly elaborated from its original context.

'No-mind' can be recognised as a Chinese philosophical derivative of the Indian Buddhist 'no-self' (*Anātman*) doctrine, developed with the Daoist concept of *wu wei*. As discussed in chapter 2, the *Dao* as an essentialised and transcendent entity, which is also the origin and explanation of action as *wu wei*, is incompatible with interdependence. This is the reading Dōgen also rejects in the form of 'original nature', seen as implying a false dualism and problematically reifying Buddha-nature. Indeed, the very idea of *wu wei* appears counter to

⁴⁰⁹ Inspiration taken from the 'universal' aspect and title of Herrigal's *Zen and the Art of Archery*, adopted by Persig into *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, and from there "Zen and the Art of ...everything", many of these books having little to do with Zen thought.

⁴¹⁰ Dale Wright identifies two possibilities for 'no-mind' to take place in the moral domain: one either participates in a prevailing custom, or have cultivated sensitivity through prior reflection. (Wright, D., 'Satori and the Moral Dimension of Enlightenment', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.13 (2006), p.9.) I agree that these demarcations are philosophically problematic given the status of '*mushin*' in Zen. I go on, in chapter 6, to expand on the implications of spontaneity to open a third possibility in which the expression of compassion is immediate and, in accordance with the tradition, does not rely on discriminative thought.

Dōgen's emphasis on the necessity of practice. As he stated quite plainly; "If we do not practice it does not maintain itself".⁴¹¹

As an experience, no-mind is valid, which has led to its wide-ranging adoption. The pragmatic and psychological effects of the 'dropping off of mind' are well documented. To quote D.T. Suzuki, "The aim of all the artistic discipline in Japan gathers around self-appreciation of it, which is at once its own realisation. 'Muga' or 'Mushin' or effortlessness is thus the consummation of art."⁴¹² Philosophically, the investigation of this phenomenon has been generally limited to an understanding of no-mind as non-discrimination. The application of no-mind, both in Zen and the various fields into which the concept has been appropriated, does not end with the cessation of discrimination. Experientially, the 'perfection' of no-mind is attributed to the possibility of *wu wei*, entailing effortless action, or action without thinking.

For Huineng there is a big difference between 'acting and not thinking' and 'acting with no-mind'. In the first the mind aspect is nullified, in the second the distinction between mind and action is overcome. Thus, in the latter sense, every action is mindful, which is in effect the opposite position to not thinking. However, to complicate matters Dōgen reminds us that, "The 'mindfulness' of the common man and the mindfulness of the buddhas are far apart: never liken them."⁴¹³ So let us return to examine a philosophical explanation of the characteristics of the experience of no-mind.

There is a further characteristic related to the experience of no-mind, which is being completely 'in the moment', leading to an emphasis on everyday activities; "eat when

⁴¹¹ Dōgen, 1- 'Bendowa', *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, p.1.

⁴¹² Suzuki, D.T., *Zen Buddhism*, p.290. Note that Suzuki's generalisation to the characteristic of 'Japanese art' is a product of his project at the time and need not be of concern here, being focussed on the principle itself.

⁴¹³ Dōgen, *Shobogenzo*, Book 2, 23- *Gyobutsu-yuigi*, p.36.

hungry, rest when tired.”⁴¹⁴ The significance of such statements is summarised by Abe; “In this realisation you are no longer separated from yourself, but are just yourself, no more, no less.” ... “When you realise your own suchness you realise the suchness of everything at once.”⁴¹⁵ This is the sense of no-mind emphasised by Dōgen, and others,⁴¹⁶ directly guiding the overcoming of ‘self’ to become identical with the action being carried out. The ‘not-two-ness’ of no-mind denies the inherent separation attributed to individual ‘minds’ from the subjective standpoint, and thus mind approaches the metaphysical reality of the inherent non-existence of mind. This is what Dōgen called ‘the dropping off of body and mind’; Bankei adopted the phrase ‘the unborn’,⁴¹⁷ emphasising the ultimate non-arising of mind; Nishitani called it ‘the true self’⁴¹⁸; and Hisamatsu ‘the formless self’⁴¹⁹, drawing attention to the existential relation to reality as such which is groundless, utterly devoid of self-nature. In every description, the mode of attaining such insight is attributed to no-mind.

The misappropriation of no-mind can be seen to stem from a misunderstanding of the distinction between two closely related metaphysical possibilities. The predominant view can be associated with the attribution of ‘other-power’. The distinction I am about to draw is distinctly problematic, as many of those thinkers I have referred to from the Kyōto school do adhere to the principles of ‘other power’ as espoused by Hōnen and Shinran and

⁴¹⁴ Attributed to adherents of the (‘false-view’) *Daruma-shū* by Eisai, quoted in Dumoulin, H., *Zen Buddhism: A History. Vol.2: Japan*, p.9. Capra, F. Attributes this statement to Po-Chang in *The Tao of Physics*, p.134.

⁴¹⁵ Abe M., *Zen and Western Thought*, p.226.

⁴¹⁶ Including Huineng, as championed by D.T. Suzuki in *The Zen Doctrine of No Mind*.

⁴¹⁷ Bankei, in Haskel, P., *Bankei Zen*, p.6 – the Unborn – “the Buddha Mind which is truly unborn and marvellously illuminating.” The significance of ‘unborn’, and its popularity as descriptive of ultimate reality, is firstly found in its relation to one’s existential mortality (the alternative, Buddhism teaches, is to recognise that one never born never dies) and secondly, by extension, to *all* phenomenon as ultimately non-arising – which is to say *interdependent*. The unborn is thus that which is dynamically manifest, without beginning or end.

⁴¹⁸ Nishitani K., *Religion and Nothingness*, p.106; also, Nishitani K., *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, p.91. – the True Self - “It is not the product of learning or instruction but a self come to light through itself.”

⁴¹⁹ Hisamatsu S., *Zen and the Fine Arts*, p.19 – the Formless Self - “fundamental in human beings.”

developed as Shin Buddhism.⁴²⁰ According to this view, the self is disintegrated, allowing the universe to act through that agent (ala *Dao*). This is an attractive position as the metaphysical complexities and problems such as morality from the enlightened perspective dissolve into the usual mystic ineffability found in theistic traditions. The second possibility is that the individual overcomes the self (habits) and becomes an agent able to act universally.

As I noted, the distinction between these two positions is very fine and, if carefully examined, one should find that they need not conflict.⁴²¹ Considered from interpenetration and a perspective shift as inverted metaphysics, the universe acting through an empty agent is identical to the universal freedom of the actions of an empty agent. The positions only conflict when elaborations are made, whereby either the self or the universe (as 'original nature') become reified as essentially existent. This then entails a separation between the two modes of interpretation, each seen as incompatible from the perspective of the other, which also forces a distinction between action derived 'ultimately' and that derived merely 'conventionally'. One level is attributed priority, and the other is nihilated against it through a transcendent justification. The Zen moral problem is thus created.

To prevent the creation of the Zen moral problem, and the wider philosophical implications associated with it, the position of the 'self' must not stray from Nāgārjuna's 'middle way', avoiding reification and nihilism. For Huineng, no-mind cannot have an essential base, since the concept is precisely the negation of such essentiality of mind, and which, in its true

⁴²⁰ *Shinran Shonin* – Adherents include D.T. Suzuki, Abe Masao and Tanabe Hajime of the Kyoto School.

⁴²¹ "This distinction is, of course, merely for heuristic purposes, as the Truth is, ultimately, one and indivisible: Self-power is other-power, other-power is self-power." (Han-Shan T., *Pure Land of the Patriarchs*, Trans. Lok T., p.34.) See also Suzuki, D.T., 'The Development of the Pure Land Doctrine in Buddhism', *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol.3 No.4 (1925), pp. 285-326. For an examination of traditional Zen accounts of the inferiority of the Pure Land school, see Ingram, P., 'The Zen Critique of Pure Land Buddhism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol.41, No.2 (Jun. 1973), pp.184-200.

nature, *cannot be limited*. Mind is inherently empty, utterly contingent on the content and environmental context of thought. To realise no-mind is to remove the false overlay of inherent existence and thus, one of no-mind is able to harmonise with the great variation and impermanence of phenomena in the world. This is the manner in which Hisamatsu calls the nature of self 'formless'.

This presents an interesting issue, which again proves controversial. Any artificial limitation ultimately prevents the formless expression of no-self, which includes attributing and complying with a vow.⁴²² The vow of the Bodhisattva, to put off personal salvation until all sentient beings are released from suffering, is recognised as the supreme expression of compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism. With *any* focus there is an isolating bias that separates us from the world. This is like the other side of Nietzsche's '*Will to Power*', that we must actively *choose* something, and there are no limits on this other than the limits of the will. Rather than being completely unthinking, which would be to consciously annihilate oneself, the end seems to be an increase to a super-conscious mode of being. But every will, being necessarily limited, inevitably comes into conflict with the world. Instead, defying Nietzsche, the will must come to affirm its own emptiness, thus freeing 'will' from itself. The natural explanation of the Bodhisattva's compassion is not to be found in the expression of a vow, but in the character of the 'mind' this vow cultivates.

In Daoist arts the beginners mind is praised for its flexibility, spontaneity and lack of inhibitions, contrasted with a more 'developed' deliberating mind. These qualities are manifest too in the mind of an enlightened being. In this way the 'original nature' of the

⁴²² Note that I am deviating from the traditionally accepted view, that the Bodhisattva vow is compatible with Zen, indeed it is a necessary component of the Mahāyāna project, in order to draw the philosophical implications of 'formlessness' through to their ultimate metaphysical conclusions. Whitehill examines this conflict in 'Is There a Zen Ethic?', *The Eastern Buddhist*, v.20/1 (1987), p.25.

mind is praised while deliberation is derided. The problem with this simple dichotomy is that deliberation is equally a part of 'original nature'. The artificiality which constricts freedom and efficiency in the Daoist sense and is the root of suffering for the Buddhists is as much 'Buddha-nature' as the expression of no-mind is. However, there is a further distinction between the beginners mind and the mind of the enlightened master. This can be interpreted as their respective freedom or conditionality regarding their emergent position in the world. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, although there is an epistemological distinction, both states are rooted in the same metaphysical continuity. The difference is one of response, of relation to the world, which is intersubjectively distinct.

Recall that in Daoism the emphasis is on the synonymous nature of the original and enlightened modes of being. This correlates with the Daoist political stance, which is 'anarchistic' in a very general sense, whereby individuals are free to follow the natural Way of the universe which governs all harmoniously, provided individuals are not caught up in the adherence to artificially imposed rules and regulations. The sage is one who 'unlearns' in order to reach their natural state of accord with Dao. From this Daoist position, the 'no-mindedness' of a master craftsman is completely in accord with the sage's awareness of Dao – they both work in accordance with Dao which naturally runs through all existence. The only beings who struggle against Dao, and are thus ultimately unsuccessful, stressed and antagonistic, are the intellectual human beings; specifically the Confucian scholars whom Daoism reacted against.

From the Zen position, the problem of transcendence arises when we ask after what allows no-mind to take place. The Daoist examples of master craftsmen and virtuoso artists who express this state, the same types of examples cited by popular Zen literature, reach the

heights of their abilities by practicing and refining their actions. That individuals must develop their skills is not opposed by Zennists, after all Dōgen continually stressed the need for practice. What is problematic is that the ideal portrayed in these examples is an expression of *habitual* embodiment of the techniques restricted to a particular system. Even though, as we have seen, the key principle in Daoism that makes these instances remarkable is the claim that in mastering one system, all systems are mastered, every example is always within a single system, always dependent upon the development of technique. Characterised this way, creativity is muted; movement is *reaction*, conditioned from without. This makes a practitioner predictable, limited, and prone to conflict with the world extended beyond their limited mastery. The sage's universalisation of *Dao* is not identical to the limited mastery of individual modes. An additional step is required to transcend the limitations of habitual enterprise. A master must be spontaneously creative.⁴²³

If spontaneity is possible then what does this say about the individual and their position within the universe? Firstly we must address what spontaneity actually refers to. To be spontaneous one must act, and not merely think (this is important), without pre-consideration, that is to bypass deliberative consciousness. Only when conscious consideration is taken away from the act is it paradoxically possible to be entirely conscious in the moment of action.

If we explain this idea psychologically, and we would be tempted reductively to assume that, a spontaneous action is one removed from the thinking mind and thus based purely on

⁴²³ "The hands may move according to the technique given out to every student, but there is a certain spontaneity and personal creativity when the technique, conceptualised and universalised is handled by the master hand." - Suzuki, D.T., *Zen and Japanese Culture*, p.142, Fn.3 on 'Myōyū'.

reflexive responses. A reflexive action would apparently reduce us to nothing more than a physical automaton, hardly the epitome of human potentiality. But it is the freeing up of the mind which is primarily most important. Perhaps our physical self *is* reduced to nothing more than another natural mechanism, but how much of our existence is currently mechanised without our knowing it? Emotions, social interactions and pleasure/pain preferences often seem spontaneous to us along with physical reactions (such as a sneeze or a pain stimulated reflex action) and beyond our consideration of them we seem to have little or no control over them. Perhaps the first step is to remove our own illusion of control so that our considerations become disjointed and we find our physical selves in an environment which does not radically differ from these *selves*.

Spontaneous responses are sought after in Zen, in response to puzzles or practical exams. These answers reflect more than the ineffability of the puzzles - often dual, incompatible, necessarily intertwined positions. There is also an immediacy of reaction that is supposed to reflect a presence of dynamic mental awareness in this very moment. The 'reaction' here is not purely conditional on the environment, though this is a major part of it, instead it is a cry from the very heart of our conscious being, or non-being, and is that which differentiates us from pure automaton. It is easy to get lost just on the surface of this practical realisation; wherein 'no-mind' is left as an unthinking, emotionally devoid, automatic and dynamic response. Compassion will not arise here. Such a state is ideal for combat, as we will examine in the next chapter; unthinking, unfeeling, yet fast and completely situationally responsive. However an individual reacting on this level will advance no further, and upon reflection may even descend into nihilism.

One advantage of such an automatic state of being is that it is only sustained as long as the mind does not enter the act.⁴²⁴ As a result there can be no artificial separation of the conception of 'self' and the 'true self'.⁴²⁵ If the mind is freed up, unrestrained by emotions or egoistic calculations it may well come to a realisation of itself in the world. If one is not completely psychologically separated from their physical existence by this stage, one's physical actions may shift towards altruism. The existential problem is the same for a soldier as for a lounge-chair political philosopher; we separate our thoughts from our actions. One part of spontaneity is bringing these into one instance, which requires, after the simpler step of actions becoming 'unthinking', that one must become fully aware. The other aspect of being spontaneous, an extension of the first, is to act not upon our common physical/ emotional influences but to somehow transcend them. If, as I have suggested, becoming self-aware through no-mind is a key to enlightenment, then enlightenment can be considered an increase in awareness. It is certainly *not mindlessness*. No-mind is the *perfection* of 'mind';⁴²⁶ an increase, not decrease, achieved via *simplicity*.

If a Buddha or Bodhisattva is spontaneously compassionate, then these spontaneous responses must arise from something beyond simple conditioning, since compassion is necessarily a dynamic response. This creative force is not within the normal realm of determination. Indeed, for something to be truly creative it could not merely be a direct result of common influences. If one is to be creative, or spontaneous, or simply have the

⁴²⁴ Consider, for example, what happens when one is forced to think through something normally undertaken automatically – for example: explaining the steps in a dance, recalling the lyrics to a song, or teaching a learner to drive; in each case the 'expert' may momentarily stumble, be forced to systematically think through an internalised sequence, or possibly even crash.

⁴²⁵ See Nishitani, K., *Religion and Nothingness*, p.107 – "...we do not presuppose a separation of subject and object and then work towards their unification. The unity of the absolute near side is not the result of a process but rather the original identity of absolute openness and absolute emptiness. Its standpoint is neither monism nor dualism of any sort."

⁴²⁶ That is, to realise the true nature of 'mind' as empty; as expressed in the *Prajñāpāramitā* - 'the perfection of wisdom'.

potential to be disharmonious then there must be something about human consciousness that allows this disjunction.

There is a distinction between being in a state of 'no-mind' and being 'mindful', yet these two 'extremes' are not opposites. To be completely mindful without no-mind is to be fixated, and to hold false views. To have no-mind without being mindful is to be conditioned, and thus ignorant. So how could we possibly make sense of having no-mind while being mindful? It is possible to be focussed and open at the same time; one can be clever and creative, wise and free simultaneously. More than this, one does not 'wake up' from a state of no-mind (after the event), the state necessitates that one is absolutely *aware*. Only then is 'being in the moment' possible. More than being conscious, this is 'true self'-consciousness. Being removed from deliberation of the act, one is actually able to realise *where* in what position one is. Realised interdependently this entails *what* one is. This position frees up the mind which deliberates,⁴²⁷ destroys the illusory dichotomy of thought versus action and allows spontaneity without mere reaction. In this manner 'mindless' practice gives rise to mindful no-mindedness. Thoughtless action, through systematised repetition, promotes mind to 'true self'-awareness and allows systematised reaction to be dynamically transcended. This is not some radical transcendent state, it is coming to realise a characteristic of the human condition. No-mind is simply the silencing of deliberation so that focus is moved from past and future oriented thought⁴²⁸ to the immediate present.

⁴²⁷ Thus, an enlightened being is still able to make use of conceptualisation and language without succumbing to essentialisation of the objects of language. (See D'Amato, M., 'Why The Buddha Never Uttered A Word' in D'Amato et al (eds.), *Pointing at the Moon*; particularly pp.49-50.)

⁴²⁸ Such as: fears, desires, plans, regrets, etc.

The Arising of Compassion

So our main problem, concerning the human condition, is the discord between the world we experience and the world as it 'really' is. Morality is a form of discrimination, and as such is an aspect of the former and, moreover, is to be overcome if one's perception is to harmonise with and thus experience reality directly.⁴²⁹ This position can easily be misinterpreted to mean that, free from morality, we can act immorally. This is the nihilistic reading. Two points must be made here. Firstly, this misunderstanding is due to re-attribution of a discriminative stance to a non-discriminative individual, that is to say that the interpretation of moral or immoral must be attributed from *outside* an enlightened individual. The second and related point is that the historical Buddha and Bodhisattvas are always, externally, characterised as benevolent beings. They themselves are not deliberately acting morally; they are simply acting in accord with reality. So there is something about an existent enlightened being and the nature of their world that, at least partially, corresponds to our idea of what it is to be morality 'good'.

It is important to recognise that reality in itself cannot be considered 'either' good or 'evil', reality simply *is*. Good and evil remain in the domain of epistemology; specifically our interpretation of reality. In this sense 'morality' is relative both to the situation and to the observer. *However* it would be a mistake to assume that such discriminating morality is a necessary feature of any perspective. As I have just noted, it is such discrimination that isolates an individual from the world and prevents them from perceiving reality as it is. The problem, simply, is that to overlay values on a valueless world is to misread reality.

⁴²⁹ Though it is important to note that there is a difference between enlightenment and mere non-discrimination.

To begin our examination of the moral implications of interdependence, we must raise a further complication: morality cannot be examined through conventional metaphysics. At the metaphysical level there is no morality, there is only bare cause and effect. Morality requires a higher-level integration with some value system. For example, that this object is crushed is only a bad or good thing if this object is related by us into some wider context in which it plays a part.

According to the metaphysics of interdependence developed in this thesis, it is possible to make sense of a non-reductive conception of causation, specifically a 'top-down' effect in addition and interconnected with the commonly accepted 'bottom-up' effect. This presents an interesting metaphysical effect regarding morality. If it is 'bad' that this object may be crushed, and there is a moral agent, holding this value, who is capable and aware, then the object will not be crushed. Thus a conventional moral has a metaphysically identifiable causal effect. If the example seems crude then consider a wider example such as pollution through consumerism. It may be true that a large majority of people will compete with one another for some commodity despite its environmental consequences, and so we would expect pollution to increase. However if group consensus develops, whereby the undesirable end of these actions becomes prominent in the minds of those agents, then the motivation to prevent the trend proceeding *is* actively carried out. We could attribute this change to something occurring outside the system, which cannot be dismissed, but it is also important to recognise that this change has its origins *within* this very system.

Morality cannot be examined purely through metaphysics, but it does have a metaphysical basis. To summarise the core of the metaphysics of interdependence: *Everything is connected, though separated, and it is through this separation that existence occurs by*

means of the nature of its interconnectedness. ‘Good’ and ‘bad’, creation and destruction, self and other, are mutually interpenetrating occurrences. There is nothing ‘beyond’; the universe exists through the relation of various modes (levels) of itself. The ‘groundless’, self-contingent basis of this is the same as the basis of ‘pure mind’, which is the same as the basis of ‘pure matter’. From this understanding we may examine the metaphysical basis of our interaction with the world, the proper mode of which I am calling ‘morality’.

Immediately we should like to distinguish between two ‘moralities’ here. The first being conventional morality which is derived through consensus between individuals in a society or system of interpretation. The second being ‘ultimate’ morality or that which is held to be universally correct, irrespective of the particularities of any particular system. Despite the apparent simplicity of this distinction, following the Zen thinkers previously examined, I maintain that morality does not exist beyond its conventional underpinnings. In saying this I am not, however, dismissing the idea of some ‘ultimate’ morality in the sense of being universally applicable, though I am necessarily limiting it, for this ultimate form is only possible through conventional morality. In other words, a universally valid morality *is* just a form of conventional morality. So the problem now is how does this ‘ultimate’ mode relate to conventional, and necessarily limited, morality? The answer lies in that re-examination of philosophical ideas: morality is not a philosophy of theory; it is a philosophy of action and our relation to action.

Recalling the examination of no-mind in the previous section, we now turn to a more detailed examination of ‘skilful means’. For Dōgen, “all doctrines the Buddha gave are nothing but skilful means (*upāya*) used to achieve the goal of non-attachment.”⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ Cheng, H., *Empty Logic*, p.49.

Literature discussing the Buddhist concept of 'skillful means' focuses almost exclusively on the praxis of the Dharma.⁴³¹ The interpretation from praxis argues that these teachings are useful only for a specific individual (at a particular time, etc) and are not 'true' in any universal sense. This reading follows the consequences of emptiness.

As I have said elsewhere the most remarkable feature of this realisation is that while it *is* dependent upon the context (of the individual) for the realisation to be reached, the realisation itself is completely *transcendent* of the unenlightened perspective, *whatever that individual's particular instance of reality may be*. Enlightenment applies equally to a god-being as it does to a human or a hungry-ghost. The ultimate reality is identically valid in each case.

There cannot be any categorical determination of what is right or wrong, since every situation will be different and hence the moral emphasis, being a situated reality (not a transcendent one), will likewise change in each case. There is no morality from the enlightened state in and of itself. Asking questions about the ultimate understanding will only result in nonsense at the conventional level. However once this perspective is brought to bear on worldly situations the moral emphasis is immediately brought into view, at least for enlightened beings. For everyone else, particularly those who touch upon this ultimate reality (*satori*), they are still in and of the world, and so calculation is required before morality can be understood. The closer one comes to complete realisation the more their actions will immediately fall into 'harmony' with the universe,⁴³² however, this is where complete disruption may occur. Ordinarily, entering a state of not-thinking is possible due

⁴³¹ I see this as the next step after the development of the metaphysical framework from interdependence. Indeed, John Schroeder attributes praxis as more significant to reading Nāgārjuna than the common (purely) metaphysical interpretation. (See Schroeder, J., 'Nāgārjuna and the Doctrine of "Skillful Means"', Philosophy East and West, Vol.50, No.4 (Oct. 2000), pp.559-583.)

⁴³² This can be understood as finding *Dao* but only in a completely conditioned sense.

to habitual memory, to conditioning which is in effect simply 'going with the flow'. This notion goes against Buddhism. The entire Buddhist project is to escape the wheel of causation, the conditioning of the individual due to karma. If one were to just go along with karma they could never escape. Of course there is a certain value to quietism in Buddhism, since it is due to our striving against nature that we develop negative karma. Though this is not enough to make the jump to enlightenment. This jump requires the very thing which quietism impedes. Let's call it 'creativity'; the ability to skilfully modify one's actions in radical ways.

So what are the metaphysical implications of *upāya*? An enlightened being can see a destination for sentient beings, by virtue of having attained this position for themselves, and can see at least some of the possible means of benefiting said beings. They also possess the ability to select these means skilfully, as best fits the particular situation. This skill is not context specific (unlike the skill of a virtuoso pianist for example) though, since it leads towards enlightenment (seeing the world free from delusion) it is said to aid *every* undertaking. In this manner I maintain that an enlightened being may not necessarily be the most learned in any one field, but they are certainly the best *learner*.⁴³³

This idea returns to considerations of the conflict between 'self power' and 'other power' prominent in various Buddhist schools and in the debate between Buddhism and Daoism.

When someone is forced to rely solely on themselves the result can be a difficult struggle⁴³⁴ and yet, through 'faith', an individual may find solace and security in the belief of some

⁴³³ This could be seen to be the merit of philosophy. While philosophical enterprises may lack the soteriological drive expected of dharma (and a philosopher can get caught up in the construction of reified systems which lack practical means of testing or expression) philosophy can ideally lead to the open questioning of all things including, ultimately, philosophy itself. This is as opposed to a discipline that requires the memorisation of a system and rule-set, bereft of critical analysis.

⁴³⁴ This is often characterised as a struggle with Mara or 'the devil' – an expression taken up in the next chapter.

omnipotent being or force guiding their actions. It does not matter whether this greater force is understood to be ultimately 'good' or 'evil' as the affect is the same. The individual becomes confident in as far as their 'faith' allows, they feel directed and moreover; *blameless*. But there is no reason why such faith must be externalised. We seem predisposed to seek meaning in the world outside of ourselves and happily grasp onto 'meaning' even if it is not in coherence with our better judgement. It would seem that the difference between 'faith' in ourselves and 'faith' in others is no simple metaphysical predisposition, say as a result of our social evolution, but is strongly based on the experiential difference between these two modes. Our 'selves' are characterised most strongly by our dynamic and often wilful reactions to the world whereas the 'other' is objectified and made static. Given our desire for meaning we would much rather base it in the latter, static, realm rather than our fluctuating selves which gave rise to uncertainty in the first place. I propose that those individuals who claim to practice 'self power', more often than not, would be seen to objectify themselves in order to do so, thus making no difference between the two modes. However, the groundless metaphysical framework of interdependence provides an alternative possibility.

If we follow the concept of 'emptiness' accurately then we can find no place for objectification, neither in the 'other' nor of the 'self'. All that remains is this dynamic uncertainty. There is no actual difference, practical or otherwise, between interacting with ourselves or others. Both can be objectified, both are dynamic and baseless. If we wish to have a base for 'faith' it is pointless to find it outside ourselves for, given the metaphysics of interdependence, the same basis will exist in us. The opposite is also true.

From the Buddhist perspective morality is understood as moral *perfection* and is directly linked to perception of the world. One who is deluded cannot be a moral being.⁴³⁵ In this way to be 'moral' is to see the world as it really is *and* to be actively engaged in it. This active engagement is the important part and possibly the hardest to analyse philosophically. For this to work the dichotomy of thought and action, of mind and body, must be overcome. Even the tendency to avoid vices and abhor bad habits must be transcended. In this sense anger, for example, is not something you should aim to rid yourself of – you must first realise that anger *is* you.⁴³⁶

The solution to the Zen problem of transcendence is this: from the ground of 'nothingness' Zen has nothing to say about right and wrong, but this is misleading if it is taken to mean that Zen has nothing to do with reality. Zen *is* reality and every pursuit within it, and hence it *is* about right and wrong. However, Zen cannot act as a transcendent justification, a normative standpoint, because in itself it is *nothing*. It is *exactly* the means through which one engages with the world that can be considered right or wrong. Japanese militarism in the early 20th century is not because of Zen, success or failure in the business world is not because of Zen, the actions of a monk or samurai in 'no-mind' is not because of Zen.⁴³⁷ It is at this point, the impossible *openness* of Zen that led scholars like Christopher Ives to bring to

⁴³⁵ Though we can certainly assess their actions conventionally – for example someone who strictly follows some code of virtue may be conventionally 'better' than someone who is simply sadistic.

⁴³⁶ This affirmative move is made by Jiddu Krishnamurti in *The First and Last Freedom*, p.134 - See discussion in the next chapter.

⁴³⁷ Of course Zen *is* at fault if 'Zen' is understood as 'the historical practice of Zen' - following Robert Sharf, who maintains that "the most compelling arguments are not theoretical, but rather ethnographic." (Sharf, R., 'Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience', *Numen*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Oct., 1995), p.260.) This is in contrast with the alternate position, following D.T. Suzuki, that 'Zen' refers to the underlying religion/philosophy that the historical practices 'point towards'. (See Suzuki, D.T., 'Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Apr., 1953), p.25 - "he may know a great deal about history but nothing about the actor behind it.") Similarly, the principles developed here indicate towards the latter interpretation.

light the conflict, that “Zen has generally failed to criticize ideologies—and specific social and political conditions—that stand in tension with core Buddhist values.”⁴³⁸

Let me elaborate on that last point. The problem of morality attributed to Zen is not such an apparent issue for other Buddhist schools because they are steeped in doctrine which categorises right and wrong.⁴³⁹ It is simple enough to identify which actions violate Buddhist precepts. Zen, however, famously ‘burns the scriptures’ (Huineng) in order to return focus to the root of Buddhism. From this standpoint there is ultimately, philosophically, no doctrine to fall back on. However the religious practice of Zen is not presented as utterly groundless, since it is itself focussed on maintaining rituals and traditions.⁴⁴⁰ Pragmatically, some structure must be maintained in order to prevent students simply getting lost in emptiness. The enlightened mode of Zen cannot be isolated from conventional reality. One can’t talk about Zen as a moral thing, but one can talk about individual’s actions as moral. The basis for this discrimination is the teachings of the Buddha, serving as a template, as they do with all Buddhist schools. The problems enter the picture when one makes judgements based on some ‘higher’ value.⁴⁴¹

So what is the impetus for compassion? A simple answer can be derived from the metaphysics of interdependence. If there is no self identifiable from everything else in existence then the enlightened individual simply identifies themselves with all other beings

⁴³⁸ Ives, C., ‘Not buying into Words and Letters’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, V.13, 2006, p.1. In defence of Zen, Ives goes on to say “Recognizing that no critiques are free of ideologies of their own, Zen critics must acknowledge their own political and economic positioning.” – Ibid. P.8.

⁴³⁹ Though ultimately the issue of transcendence will remain a philosophical problem, Ives stresses that “the tradition fosters dynamic action” – Ives, C., *Zen Awakening and Society*, p.106.

⁴⁴⁰ Sharf states that “Classical Zen ranks among the most ritualistic forms of Buddhist monasticism.” (Sharf, R., ‘The Zen of Japanese Nationalism’, *History of Religions*, Vol. 33, No. 1. (Aug., 1993), p.2.) For the discussion at hand one should consider the development from the ‘unity of Zen and the precepts’ in Dōgen, to the development of ‘imperial way Zen’ at the close of the 19th Century. (In Ives, C., *Imperial Way Zen*, p.168.)

⁴⁴¹ For example, Nansen killing the cat.

and acts accordingly. The problem with this seemingly elegant solution is that emptiness undermines the ego, even a universally extended one. A universal extension of conventional subjectivity is simply impossible. An enlightened mind is unattached. Rather, instead of identifying with all individuals, I propose the enlightened perspective is recognition of the many modes of being and thinking just as they are. Tagore muses, “The true goodness is not the negation of badness, it is the mastery of it.”⁴⁴²

Philosophically speaking, there is no morality ultimately, as we earlier established, yet conventionally there is morality. Ultimately there is reality but all of the designations have fallen away. Interestingly, from within this mode the enlightened being is compassionate, not nihilistic. They aim to help sentient beings, rather than ‘smash left and right’.⁴⁴³ We have seen that an enlightened being is compassionate because, *conventionally*, suffering exists. If there were no conventional suffering there would be no Buddhist path, no philosophies, no religion. To simply say “everything is one”, nihilating the conventional by deference to the ultimate, is to deny our very existence and in the same blow to destroy the possibility of compassion.

No-mind is the annihilation of the subject as distinct from the situation of which it is a part. In this state there is no such thing as a mere ‘observer’. This is more significant than simply thinking without deliberation or calculation – the subject/object and mind/body distinctions are completely overcome. Calculation works by abstracting reality, creating an imaginary projection and then overlaying the results of this back onto perception of the world. While clever and useful this is fundamentally a delusive mode of being. No-mind does not necessarily deny calculation – to understand this is crucial to see the problem with the

⁴⁴² Tagore, R., *Creative Unity*, p.123.

⁴⁴³ From Pisarev, D., quoted in Clarkson, J., *A History of Russia*, p.323.

misappropriation of Zen: 'no-mind' is not 'not-thinking'. Calculation simply should not be mistaken for the world itself, moreover there can be no delay between thought and action. Critical thought can occur simultaneously but it can never deny the reality of the present moment. One cannot say, for example, that "this situation is wrong it *should* in fact be like this...." Action is spontaneous, allowing for actual creativity, but still deliberate.

Obviously the mode just described has no place for moral rule-like values. For morality to function at this level it must already be internalised. Compassion does not entail deliberation, instead one must already be able to see and react to the subjective reality of 'other' individuals in their immediate *tathātā*.

Meta-Moral Principles

Given the position of subjective activity within the metaphysics of interdependence, it should be possible to draw principles based on this framework by which to evaluate the assessment and limits of morality. The 'true self' is bereft of intrinsic existence, as a contingent aspect of interdependence, and as such is subject to the metaphysical effects of the conventional reality of suffering. Only when the conventional and ultimate modes are realised simultaneously and acted upon, through the state of 'no-mind', is the possibility of 'enlightened morality' opened up. While this antifoundationalist metaphysical framework cannot provide a concrete basis to establish a conventional system of morality, interdependence requires that certain limits be adhered to when interpreting the conventional if any such system is to avoid conflict and find fruitful application in the world. The possibility of a universalisable conventional morality is certainly a problematic assertion when faced with the proposition that every system is limited and every phenomenon is

impermanent. If the world *is* impermanent, and it does appear to be so, then morality is impossible since no morality can be permanently established. Even if moral values could be carved in 'metaphysical concrete', a permanent moral code could not possibly account for the dynamic nature of the world it aims to categorise. But morality indicates more than the conceptual categorisation of 'values' derived from generalised events. A system of morality aims to describe the implications of actions, morally assessed, as meta-principles relating to one's interaction with the world. Something is right or wrong because it has positive or negative implications *at some level*. Here we must be careful not to mistake the principles, which are required to be conceptually stable, with stability in reality beyond the systematisation of these principles.

So-called 'classical' morality is incompatible with Buddhist, Daoist, and particularly Zen philosophy, however this has not stopped interpretations and practices being structured along, what we could conceivably identify as, 'classical' lines. In these traditions there are strongly established characterisations of what is 'right action' and 'wrong action' and this is no mere arbitrary categorisation for the explanations are embedded in their philosophy. Most basically, philosophically, what is 'wrong' is anything that separates you from the truth, from enlightenment. And the most basic principle, practically, is to prevent suffering, not only for oneself but for others also such that one's mind, body and environment become free of distractions and ripe for realisation.

Although it is impossible to categorically establish what is 'right' or 'wrong' generally, so that it applies to every situation, since the world is dynamic and constantly changing, there are certain actions that can be undertaken that would prevent suffering and aid enlightened understanding and there are those which would have the opposite effect. Metaphysically

we can identify two aspects of the same conventional morality; 'morality' is spoken in words, but is found in the world.

To answer the Zen moral problem we must return to consider the dilemma of the four noble truths posed at the end of chapter 2. That there is an end to suffering is enlightenment.

That suffering exists conventionally, is intersubjective reality. The metaphysics of interdependence with interpenetration necessitates that we make sense of these "two truths" *together*. This is the *only* way to make sense of enlightened compassion. An enlightened being cannot look at the world without seeing the suffering of other beings.

From this position they know they cannot separate themselves (their no-self) from this suffering and to serve those beings' impermanent desires only fuels the problem. The absolute freedom that is enlightenment is absolutely bound up with the responsibility of compassion – not as a vow or restriction but as a direct consequence (or characteristic) of enlightened understanding. Without compassion enlightenment is not possible. The two are (ultimately) co-entailing, so both compassion and wisdom must be practiced in order to attain the final goal.

Whatever the 'right' mode of action may be, in any philosophy or belief system - with one exception, there is an assumption that it is not what comes easily to us. Most obviously this is expressed as prioritising some method of conscious consideration or a determined individualistic faith over one's more basic *passions*. The categorical exception to this is pure determinism where the 'is/ought' problem cannot arise since in this case there cannot be an 'ought' which is not. I find this exception, however, epistemologically absurd as, even if it were a matter of fact, it has no bearing on the human condition; that is we do not experience our existence as determinate.

This case and my objection is interesting as it points to (at least my understanding of) what 'ethics' entails. Where there is no 'is/ought' distinction morality does not make sense and (I claim) this is in contrast with the human condition which is essentially a moralising of the experienced world. It is the conflict between our experience of existence (moralised) and our inability to interpret meaning logically or scientifically from this same world that existentialism and doctrines of 'amoralism' are founded upon. When existence is posited before essence 'ought' becomes unreal, perpetually conflicting and unfounded upon what 'is', just as the opposing position (essence before existence) finds fault in what 'is' with respect to what is proposed as an innate 'ought'. In both cases morality is in contrast to what is given as existent; morality assumes an ability to act so as to alter determinate structure.

The steadiness of the enlightened perspective, an acceptance of whatever comes, presents a problem for morality. "In times of misfortune, misfortune is fine."⁴⁴⁴ Morality refers to reality (what ought to be). This implies action (ought). So a feeling that everything is 'right where it belongs' cannot be considered morality (of this type). In turn this appears to require *principles* of conduct. Explanation must give ramifications relating to the mundane; for example, this is 'good' or 'bad' because *this* will result. But now it would seem that any justification of a principle *which is consistent*⁴⁴⁵ is a *natural* principle explained as akin to 'cause and effect' (*karma*). But if it simply *happens*, there is no need for morality.

If morality could be explained wholly naturally, then why would morality be necessary? The immediate explanation stemming from the metaphysics of interdependence is the

⁴⁴⁴ Ryokan, quoted in Seikō, H., 'Zen Buddhist Attitudes to War' in Heisig, G. & Maraldo, J. (eds.), *Rude Awakenings*, p.11.

⁴⁴⁵ Indicating that every 'bad action' necessitates 'bad consequences'.

experience of separation. This can be related to the individual along the lines of Aristotle; that no man wittingly does bad for they harm themselves.⁴⁴⁶ Yet we individuals tend to be somewhat witless, we act for immediate gratification and find our desires continually thwarted by the changing world. The philosophical response to this predicament develops a preoccupation with 'enlightenment' – the more we know, the less likely we should be to harm ourselves. If the results of all *karma* were immediate, if the effect resulted only on the plane of the cause, then negative actions would be immediately limiting. If people were mindful, if we did not stop upon the limited definitions of conceptualisations in place of real-world objects; *then* right action would be easy. But this is not so.

So why shouldn't we all just do what makes us feel good right now? The implication of impermanence and the limitations of systems reveal that such thinking is a trap. Then there is the further implication of freedom, examined in the last section. If you can ask the question, then it is possible to select the outcome of such a confrontation. Recognising the implications of interdependent metaphysics would lead one to choose to become free of such demonic paths, since they are ultimately self-destructive. This doesn't just apply to moral considerations but any conceptual position. Since everything can be questioned, every position can be rebelled against. But human beings (like moral problems) are not a simple binary system – there are many options, many solutions and, according to a non-reified interpretation, nothing is created or destroyed in an instant.⁴⁴⁷

Morality is based on that very force that we mistakenly call the existence of self. It responds to the interest of self, and the selves of others. If there is no 'self' then what is this force? It cannot simply be denied. Also this force is the basis of all directed action. Under normal

⁴⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Ethics*, Trans. Smith, J., p.53.

⁴⁴⁷ Consider, for example, the proverbial 'straw that broke the camel's back'.

circumstances one simply extends this idea to encompass other beings or entities (other than themselves) – for example one’s family, community or some meta-principle or moral code. According to our understanding of *śūnyatā* these are all equally vacuous. Here is the principle; what is that force with no identification of self-identity (at any level)? This is to ask after the force of volition at the level of ‘Buddha-nature’.

From the enlightened perspective the question, ‘Why help another being?’ would never arise. As recognised in the metaphysics of interdependence, because ‘other beings’ exist interdependently with oneself, their suffering exists, so from the position of wisdom it must be recognised. Interdependently the content of the question concerning others is identical to the question concerning oneself.⁴⁴⁸ If one were to reply with the nihilistic reading, “But everything is empty!”, then the concept of emptiness must be properly followed through. Ultimately, suffering is empty, but so is action. This includes the arising and cessation of suffering. Non-action is also empty. No response is implied by the imposition of emptiness, and this includes not responding. So to take a nihilistic reading, whereby the emptiness of others suffering is taken as a reason to ignore its conventional manifestation, one is forced into the logical position where they cannot act and they cannot not act.

The nihilist / essentialist then seeks to overcome the apparent paradox by finding some way out of ‘emptiness’. If wisdom of ‘emptiness’ is seen to be insufficient for an individual to be moral it would seem that an additional factor must be added – one is tempted to posit a *necessary* leap of faith; to posit a ‘vow’ to escape nihilism. But if we accept that a ‘vow’ is necessary then we must determine upon what criteria one can be chosen. As we have seen variations on the implications of the identification of the emptiness of phenomena has

⁴⁴⁸ i.e. “Why help yourself?”

resulted in radically different positions being developed. Both the Bodhisattva and Nietzsche's Übermensch accept a lack of values in the world, the base of 'nothingness', and follow a self-imposed vow; compassion or 'Will to Power' respectively. The vow is an addition, the selection of which cannot be intersubjectively justified. If the criterion for selection of a vow is to be drawn from the worldly *results* of that vow, then these results must be deliberately differentiated, thus undermining the basis of the endeavour. Once again the problem of attempting to overlay a static principle upon a dynamic world arises. A vow cannot change if it must be systematically adhered to, and we have seen that in a dynamic world the relation of an individual to it must be responsively dynamic. Consider what happens when two individuals who share the same metaphysical basis, yet have selected divergent vows, come into contact. At some point conflict will result and the vow itself can *never* resolve such a conflict.

I will here make the definitive claim that we must do away with vows, and this includes the vow 'not to vow'. Everything is useful *provided* it is used only as far as its usefulness extends and is not carried on beyond this. This is the essence of 'right' and 'wrong', and this idea does not translate well into principles, except vague ones. In this way understanding impermanence, rather than *preventing* morality, is necessarily at the core of moral thinking. The way of reconciling reification and nihilism, of nothingness and the great myriad things, is emptiness. Things which are not essentially existent cannot be temporally existent. "This *is* a leaf. It *will* be dust. It *was* once part of a tree...."

Returning to the nihilistic reading of the emptiness of self, focussing on the necessity of embodiment one may level criticism at the conventional actions of individuals that are interpreted to be in conflict with the (nihilistic) reading of no-self: for example, a monk

versed in emptiness who cries out in pain. The criticism suggests that this indicates he has not 'transcended' worldly considerations. The problem of transcendence has been well covered, so within this context I would like to return our attention to the actions of the Buddha as a suggestion of what is wrong with this interpretation of Buddhist truth. While starving himself and meditating according to ascetic principles near to the point of death, Siddhartha accepted the help of a woman, in the form of food, to ease his own suffering. This event marked a realisation of the middle path between extreme asceticism and hedonism. It is a serious question to consider, how one can be compassionate towards others if they are not first compassionate to themselves? It is all the more serious when considered within the interdependent framework. To overcome suffering no instance of suffering can be ignored.

The metaphysics of interdependence necessarily connects all actions. If morality exists at any level, and it does – it exists conventionally, then it has universal ramifications. Even if conventional valuation is ultimately empty, because it is held by an individual, their actions are a manifestation of this view. Every action has a moral impact and as such nothing is insignificant. Call this the simple implication. The complicated implication must follow the origin of an 'ethic' through the epistemological limits, via an embodied mind, as a part of interdependent physicality, influenced by intersubjectivity. The final step is the most significant.

Following on from the discussion of skilful means in the last section, not only can every event be understood as morally relevant, but every *question* can be understood as a moral question. From the perspective of enlightenment, following the framework from interdependence, one is faced with the limitation of all systematic interpretations and the

utter groundlessness of metaphysics as a whole. Thus, when asked a question relating to the nature of reality, and ultimately every question will thus relate, an enlightened being must *skillfully create* an answer to fit the state of the questioner. This does not imply 'lying', as the answer must be a reflection of the meta-condition between the questioner and reality. As such a moral answer will be the one which accurately guides the questioner towards realising 'reality as it is'.

As presented in the *kōan* 'Nansen kills the cat', answering a question is as much an interdependent and morally relevant action as the interpenetrating act of killing. When speaking about ultimate reality, and speak we must, it is like 'hanging from a branch by one's teeth'.⁴⁴⁹ Dōgen extends the *kōan* along the lines of interpenetration, complicating where the branch ends and the individual begins.⁴⁵⁰ Like all *kōans*, there is not a single correct answer which can be learnt and repeated back. Whatever expression arises it must come directly from that 'absolute nothingness' synonymous with the realisation of ultimate reality, it is an expression which cannot be abstracted. All moral problems are based on a proposition of a *choice*. A necessary requisite may appear to be the ability to act one way or another, but this is not necessarily so. Even in the case where correct moral action is *impossible* there need not be the 'illusion of freedom of action' for *choice* to be possible. The most accessible and radical application of choice is modifying the 'level' at which one approaches a situation. If no solution is available one need only change perspective, transform, expand or contract the current limits of enquiry. In other words, in a losing situation one can change the rules of the game or the manner in which it is assessed.

⁴⁴⁹ Attributed to Kyogen Chikan; Case 5 of the *Mumonkan*, in Reps, P., *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, p.99 – Also Case 44, book 3 of Dōgen's *Shinji Shobogenzo*, p.313.

⁴⁵⁰ Dōgen, 'Soshi-Sairai-No-I', *Shobogenzo*, Book 3, pp.203-207.

I have described the 'morally right' from the metaphysical position as those actions which accord with reality 'as it is', in as much as these actions are harmonious with intersubjective reality, by taking into account the conventional experiences of other sentient beings. However, at the same time the metaphysical source of the possibility of morality is tension. Without a conflict there is no need for morality, in fact without conflict the consideration that is 'moral' makes no sense. In this manner, both the wisdom and compassion of enlightened beings are seen to be contingent. Just as coming to see 'reality as it is' is dependent upon the interdependently manifest content of reality, it is only due to the conventional existence of suffering that compassion exists. Placing enlightenment 'beyond good and evil' is comprehensible in so much as it presents the distinction between enlightened and conventional modes of being. However, these two modes should never be understood as incompatible. As we have seen, enlightened (epistemological) transcendence does not nullify conventional existence, nor revoke conventional 'morality'.

Here I would like to propose a related position, which has rather dramatic consequences. While justification unquestionably takes place at the conventional level, Ultimately nothing is justifiable. The direct implication of this is that from the standpoint of emptiness we are responsible for everything we do and every choice we make. The metaphysical base of 'justification', like morality, depends upon a conceptual tension, though in this case a difference in relation to what 'is' rather than what 'ought' be. The need for this difference can be seen when a justification is made concerning all or nothing, as in 'transcendent justification', we are left with nihilism. Justification not only looks at the causes of an event but, and more to the point, their outcome and how this outcome coheres or comes into conflict with a selected, projected worldview. A justification attempts to explain a point of

view, as to how it affects the world, through reference to itself. As I said, it points to difference in order to function, that difference being one of projected outcomes or interpretation and that difference comes down to a distinct change in the world. Any difference, if it is to be valid, can be explained but the focus of justification is looking at two or more possible outcomes and selecting one over another – and this selection is crucial. Whatever is selected, it *could* be otherwise. As an aside, which should be quite obvious by now, justification is not compatible with determinism. Justification relies on the need to elevate one outcome over another, in a world where alternatives are not possible nothing can be justified, everything simply *is*.

The emphasis here is clearly on justifying one's own actions through something external to oneself, this is what cannot be done, and the reason for this is precisely that we are *not* determined. Justification looks at two possible aspects; one being one's own action or desire, along with the projected other in conflict with it. Broken down in this way 'justification' requires an openness for these possibilities in the world, however if the other is removed the characteristic of the single, personal act becomes like that of the deterministic: *it simply is*. This is not because we cannot explain our interpretation to others, of course we can justify our actions in the conventional way, the complication arises when one tries to justify to oneself. Our present state certainly could be otherwise, however the justification is not an explanation of how we came to this point; the justification *is* how we came to this point. The process of justification *is* the process of forming a volitional will. The selections, oversights and interpretations that go on while 'justifying', all of which are only determined in as much as they are habitual, are the

expressions characteristic of our will. Justification breaks down because we *are* deterministic: we determine ourselves.

The problem of nihilism originates not in the outside world but in us. We have no problem creating meaning, we can justify practically any framework we choose to put forward, but we cannot compare these frameworks, since, from their own subjective foundations, they do not accept a common base. At the basis of every framework is the choice we make to pursue it and for this we can find no justification. The reason there is ultimately no reason to choose one framework, of morality for example, over any other is because ultimately that choice is open and we are each ultimately responsible for it.

In most cases we do not recognise the freedom of our choice since we are focussed on the outcomes and are habitually adjusting our worldview and selected interactions to accord with the 'best' outcomes. Where we do notice our intersubjective inner conflicts is when the choices we are making do not have any comparable worldly outcomes.⁴⁵¹ We may examine many various explanations of why people choose the frameworks they do (psychology, sociology, biology...) and these are intelligent and generally successful evaluations so long as the individuals in focus are influenced by their environment and history in a manner which I am calling 'habitual'. No explanation can account for the choice that appears for a free will, its actions can be guessed at based on the framework it has chosen, but it cannot be predicted.⁴⁵² Because this unknown is the origin of meaning, we contemplate nihilism and isolation in the world, and yet this is where spontaneous creativity arises. We could correctly call this origin meaningless, for meaning is its creation and thus cannot be attributed to it, though it is more accurate to describe this position as being

⁴⁵¹ For example different ideas of an afterlife, along with the different means for improving one's state in it.

⁴⁵² At least not given our current epistemological limits.

‘outside the domain of meaning’. Once again, from the ground of the origin of will, it simply *is*.

So both the world at large and our innermost ‘choice’ are outside of meaning and yet somewhere in the middle is our human experience, the realm of the human being and of meaningful existence. So are we free to choose anything we wish? The freedom of the will hints ‘yes’ while our embeddedness as part of the interdependent universe suggests the opposite. Each of us must act from within our context and so really the actualisation of any framework will be unique from these grounds. Yet, we have the ability to ‘see through’ our present state, to see the emptiness of the entities we interact with for example, and so our mental states are apparently able to ‘transcend’ our physical limitations. It is this phenomenon that creates the confusion of the apparent separation between body and mind, as we examined in chapter 4.

Conclusion

An understanding of the metaphysics of interdependence eliminates the Zen moral problem, finding the problem to be founded on false grounds. The complications of the concept of morality, at the level of the conventional and the ultimate, calls for a re-assessment of their mode of justification and redirects focus in pursuit of realisation of ‘reality as it is’. The interpenetration of mental causal effects results in an intersubjective mode in which an enlightened being is aware of entanglement with the beliefs and experiences of all sentient beings. The radical existential freedom at the ground of the ‘true self’ prevents the simple adherence to a ‘vow’ and results in every action being categorically moral, and every question posed as a request for a directive correction of the disjointed

mode which brought it about. The selection of such responses is down to the spontaneous creative potential from the state of 'no-self', which is *satori*.

The objective here is not to set up a new moral theory, but to indicate the principles which are directly implicated from an extended understanding of interdependence. Following the emphasis of Zen, these principles are merely empty placeholders and are utterly without merit, unless they are directly practically applicable. This is the focus of the next and final chapter, developing the principles of pragmatic application, culminating in the expression of meditation as daily life.

Chapter 7: Practical Application

Buddhism is fundamentally pragmatic, concerned with the cessation of suffering. The Zen tradition is filled with affirmations of everyday experiences and the practices involved in their mindful execution,⁴⁵³ yet the ‘transcendence’ distinction has resulted in widespread oversight of the relation of conventional and ultimate modes of being. While many Buddhist thinkers, including Gautama Buddha, shunned metaphysical speculation, this thesis promised fruitful results from this philosophical investigation. By establishing the necessity and implications of interdependence as a metaphysical principle, the relationship of the conventional experience of suffering to the ultimate nature of non-suffering can be metaphysically explained. From this foundation it is possible to establish both meta-moral principles and practical guidelines. Following the principles developed in the last chapter, we will now consider how it is possible to practically apply them.

Meditation in Zen is an affirmation of everyday action, and yet simply sitting is not sufficient to encompass zazen. To emphasise this point, the artist Sengai,⁴⁵⁴ complimenting his illustration of a sitting frog, wrote “If a man becomes a Buddha by practicing zazen...”; implying that to follow this logic through, all frogs must surely be enlightened owing simply to the maintenance of their postures. To complicate matters ‘just sitting’ is often exactly

⁴⁵³ Common examples are cited below, but also consider Dōgen’s statement; “I, Eihei, also have four foundations of mindfulness: contemplating the body as a skin-bag; contemplating sensation as eating bowls; contemplating mind as fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles; and contemplating phenomena as old man Zhang drinking wine, old mand Li getting drunk.” (Dōgen, *Eihei kōroku*, v.4, p.287) – referring to that aspect of perception expressed through these conclusions from Zen parables.

⁴⁵⁴ Sengai, in Capon, E., *Sengai, the Zen Master*, cat.45 ‘The Meditating Frog’.

how meditation is characterised in the Zen tradition.⁴⁵⁵ The quietude of Zen philosophy, for instance saying that Zen is simply “eat when hungry, sleep when tired”, obscures that significant aspect that Dōgen thoroughly emphasised: *practice*.⁴⁵⁶

Following on from the correlations drawn with Daoism in chapter 2, there become difficulties with distinguishing the ‘practice’ of a specific path (say that of the Bodhisattva) from the mode-specific goal of pragmatic success (such as in the art of archery). Indeed, Daoist ‘attainment of the Way’ can be read as championing the boundless perfection of pragmatic enterprise. Such a reading is taken up by Angus Graham in his paper ‘Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of “Is” and “Ought”’,⁴⁵⁷ however such perfection comes with an important proviso. “Presumably the Taoist should be aware of everything relevant to his intent. But he has no fixed ends, only fluid goals to which he spontaneously tends, which will accord with the Way to the extent that he is indeed aware of all factors relevant to them. The more aware he is, the more likely he is to obtain them”.⁴⁵⁸ Thus, according to Graham, ‘to respond with awareness’ becomes the Daoist mandate, based purely on the drive towards the fulfilment of immediate goals. This is the promise of attaining the Dao - success in any field - indicating that one’s awareness must (somehow) be extended across the relevant factors of *any field*. We may draw similar conclusions concerning Zen, though first we must address the relation of such a mandate to Buddhist soteriology.

⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, this is the common characterisation of the Sōtō school, contrasted with the Rinzai tradition of Kōan practice. Ummon famously said “If you walk just walk. If you sit, just sit. But don’t wobble.” – Quoted in Humphreys, C., *Zen Comes West*, p.33.

⁴⁵⁶ It should be noted that the point being approached here is denied by some scholars, who instead maintain that Zen is *simply* the ritual performance of ‘enlightened’ behaviour and has nothing to do with an enlightened ‘experience’. See for instance; Sharf, R., ‘Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience’, *Numen*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Oct., 1995), p.243.

⁴⁵⁷ In Mair, V.H. (Ed.), *Experimental essays on Chuang-tzu*, pp.3-23.

⁴⁵⁸ Graham, A.C., ‘Taoist Spontaneity and the Dichotomy of “Is” and “Ought”’, in Mair, V.H. (Ed.), *Experimental essays on Chuang-tzu*, p.11.

A return to pragmatism also resurrects the concerns of nihilism. If our sole concern is what is *useful* then Nietzsche's 'Will to Power' returns to nihilate all relative values. Here the purpose of basing this study in metaphysics becomes apparent; with nothingness as a metaphysical (baseless) base, the implicit consequences of interdependence must necessarily follow, *regardless of one's starting position* within this metaphysical framework. In order to succeed in any field, one must ultimately become aware of the metaphysical implications of interdependence. Furthermore, if one is to fulfil their purpose absolutely then their immediate goal must itself be brought into question.

In the previous chapter I claimed that when all vows and laws are rejected, rather than becoming nihilistic, every question becomes a moral one. Without transcendent justifications every position is opened up as an aspect of the web of intersubjective effects. A sentient being's response to reality, if it is non-habitual and genuinely aware, is capable of being spontaneously creative, *unnatural* and radically world-altering. This potential would allow the Buddhist soteriological project to function. Where this action is guided by wisdom, the realisation of the interdependence of all phenomenon leads one to work towards resolving the tension in the world, predominantly the suffering experienced by others. This interplay of immediacy and extended awareness presents the awakening individual with the necessary yet almost paradoxical mode of 'mindful no-mindedness'. This very expression is what is taken up in this chapter as the guiding principle of 'the formless'.

This chapter is divided into three sections.

The first section, *Way of the Demon*, examines the antithesis to the moral account put forth in the previous chapter. By showing the final failure of nihilism, and the limitation of any reified system, the implications of interdependence are shown to be universally applicable. Succinctly, the limits of the pragmatic principle established here determine that given any starting point, the extension of one's consideration to recognise interdependence necessitates moral interaction.

The second section, *The Martial Art*, critiques the application of Zen to various forms of art with special reference to the martial arts. This key example serves to illustrate the application of the pragmatic principle and the nature of interdependent action. It is shown that the goal of defeating an opponent in combat, expanded to the ultimate ideal, necessitates a reassessment of the mode of action from which the original goal emerged, resolved into the development of the moral principles of interdependence.

The final section, *Formlessness*, sets out the nature of the principle for a pragmatic engagement with the world which expresses the groundlessness of interdependent metaphysics. This final section marks a return to Daoist metaphysics, reconsidered in the light of Dōgen's critique and the concept of an 'empty Buddha-nature', examined in chapter 5. The result is a universally applicable, existential guiding principle that results in a dynamic epistemological stance - "where there is no place to stand".

Way of the Demon

I believe that the moral implications developed in the previous chapter are necessary consequences of an interdependent universe. Nevertheless, within the recorded history of this universe many modes of action have been developed and found to be pragmatically

fruitful. Given the rejection of transcendent justification, we cannot simply discriminate against an effective system simply because it appears to ignore some system of 'morality'. To justify the application of moral principles by reference to the metaphysical system that presented them is baseless question begging. For this reason, in this section the antithesis of this project will be re-examined. We must consider the consequences of rejecting all the moral principles of the last chapter by removing the concept of an interdependent 'self' from our understanding of the world. If we follow the nihilism presented by Nietzsche, as addressed in chapter 1, is it then possible to overcome our embeddedness in the world, to transcend it and become superhuman? If this antithesis is successful then the validity of interdependence, as a self-proclaimed baseless metaphysics, is brought into question.

This section will consider the antithesis of the position that has been pursued in this thesis: namely that wisdom entails compassion. The previous chapter noted that the realisation of the non-existence of 'self' should revoke the possibility of selfish motivation. However, as I went on to maintain that reality is fundamentally groundless and that conventional values must be recognised as a valid aspect of interdependent reality, one may feel that this emphasis on immanent reality is enough to posit relativistic justifications. Here we must deal with this last sliver of nihilism and consider what it would mean to be a demon. A demon is that which stands against the natural or divine will. It is the personification of a human vice or desire. It *is* a human who pursues a demonic end. A demon is power; a singular spike in the flux of existence. It is the antithesis of the slave; Nietzsche's Übermensch. A demon is focussed passion. It is the Capitalist hero, the ultimate warrior,

the pinnacle of individualism.⁴⁵⁹ The demon is what nature's 'individuals' strive for. The way of the demon is the pursuit of power.

In Nietzsche's *Daybreak* we find the following passage, titled 'the demon of power':

Not necessity, not desire - no, the love of power is the demon of men. Let them have everything - health, food, a place to live, entertainment - they are and remain unhappy and low-spirited: for the demon waits and waits and will be satisfied. Take everything from them and satisfy this, and they are almost happy - as happy as men and demons can be.⁴⁶⁰

Not only is the drive for power the strongest motivator of an individual, claims Nietzsche, it also nullifies the values of all other 'goods'. In the absence of power, one is willing to give everything up to satisfy this drive. In his irreverent manner, he adds:

But why do I repeat this? Luther has said it already, and better than I, in the verses: "Let them take from us our body, goods, honor, children, wife: let it all go - the kingdom [*Reich*] must yet remain to us!" Yes! Yes! The "*Reich*"!⁴⁶¹

Again Nietzsche suggests the subterfuge of theology, where the positing of some higher power is simply a means of curtailing the power of others, to bow before it, and consequently lifting one's own (the 'righteous') status. Interestingly, Martin Luther's theology of the 'two kingdoms'⁴⁶² epitomises what I have earlier termed the 'transcendancy thesis', whereby the kingdom of heaven (and its values) are necessarily separated and, as Nietzsche is indicating, maintained as superior to worldly values and the kingdom of men. Nietzsche, of course, claims that without this false overlay all there is, is will to power. In

⁴⁵⁹ 'Demon' here is a cipher for modes that appear profitable but are ultimately destructive; in the Buddhist sense it is what binds one to saṃsāra. Concerning the expression of 'demonic' influence, Stephen Batchelor writes; "A devil's circle is addictive. It raises you to dizzy heights of rapture only to bring you crashing down into troughs of despair. Yet I do not hesitate to start the diabolic cycle again." (Batchelor, S., *Living with the Devil*, p.60.)

⁴⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Daybreak* – 262, p.146.

⁴⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁶² See Martin Luther's 'On Secular Authority'; "Here we must divide Adam's children, all mankind, into two parts: the first belong to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world." - in Höpfl, H. (Ed.), *Luther and Calvin on secular authority*, p.8.

this natural struggle of the fittest Nietzsche claims only the *Übermensch* will triumph.⁴⁶³

Yet, this struggle is recognised in Buddhist *saṃsāra* as those very forces an enlightened being is liberated from. So how does a Bodhisattva compete with a ‘superman’?

What separates a Bodhisattva from a demon? The most obvious answer is compassion, but so simply stated this reveals little of the issue at stake. There seem to be many paths and modes of being that lead to expression as a demon, yet we are told that there is only one position of a Bodhisattva and that this ultimate stance is only achieved by the ‘middle way’. You will recall Nāgārjuna’s explanation that this ‘middle way’ is to avoid *falling* into the extremes of essentialism and nihilism. These extremes are co-entailing, while being presented as the negation of its opposite. In every case the mode of a demon is always limited – either essentialised, and falling into nihilism; or nihilistic, and dependent on essentialism. In developing the metaphysical framework in this thesis, it was shown that either position remains an incomplete representation of the phenomena it describes. If a demon wished to overcome this limitation, to become more powerful, it would have to recognise the function of the negation of its own position. The ultimate demon would be forced to take into account the existence of alternative modes, of other minds. Even if the individuality of the demon is stressed, this can only be established through reference to its wider situation, its environment, which as we have seen must include the dispositions of other individuals. Could the ultimate extent of the will to power be compassion? Must the *Übermensch* be moral?⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ See chapter 1.

⁴⁶⁴ Of course, following Nietzsche, this first requires that we radically redefine ‘morality’; here I follow the principles developed in chapter 6 connecting morality to pragmatics. Regarding this possibility, Solomon (*From Hegel to Existentialism*, P.117) suggests that the characteristics of the *Übermensch* do not deny that they could be as moral as anyone else, provided the conventions support their own ends.

Here I have made an assumption regarding the limitations of an individual that should be examined before jumping to the conclusion that compassion is somehow more powerful than an individual who is self-motivated. To briefly return to the debate between self and other power, it is crucial to recognise that *either* can be demonic. Our project in 'morality' is not found in this debate, but rather behind it, a meta- understanding. Whether this motivation to aid others comes from within the individual or from some outside source is irrelevant. A supernatural motivation could be divine or demonic – and the only measure for this is ourselves and those around us. Those around us may too be demonic or morally motivated, just as we ourselves are. How can one tell the difference between a positive motivation and a negative one? Can we feel the difference between being motivated by greed, for example, or a real desire to help?

In response to these questions I will avoid all discussion on the subject of altruism and instead make an explicit (and certainly problematic) claim in the vein of the Zen moral problem; neither is good or evil. *Every motivation*, the way I have described it, is demonic to some extent. This is the nature of a human being. We struggle within and against and along with the world, this is the nature of saṃsāra. In such a state Nietzsche tells us that only a demon can change the world. But the promise of enlightenment is not to become a demon but to be free of demonic motivations. Jiddu Krishnamurti wrote that only when one comes to terms with what one is can one become free of violence – “Then you are able to be what you are: a psychological *disturbance which is violence* itself.”⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ Krishnamurti, J., *The First and Last Freedom*, p.116. The similarities of this sentiment with the Buddhist thought examined here is evident, Tsung-mi, for instance, wrote, “Since evil is also the mind, one cannot use the mind to cut off the mind. One who neither cuts off [evil] nor does [good] but freely accepts things as they come is called a liberated person.” (Gregory, P.N., *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, p.238.)

Recall the 'nihilist' position from chapter 1: God is dead, the transcendent metre of morality has fallen. In the words of Dmitri Pisarev, "What can be broken should be broken; what will stand the blow is fit to live; what breaks into smithereens is rubbish; in any case, strike right and left, it will not and cannot do any harm."⁴⁶⁶ Furthered by Nietzsche's affirmative move, whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger, strength is recognised as the greatest value. Indeed it is only strength which is capable of forging and maintaining value. This is seen to be the fundamental drive in nature – the will to power.

The struggle of life permeates our existence. The plants in the fields as the raindrops fall, each leaf from a stem, reaching for the sunlight. Each plant, each leaf, so different and yet the force of life is in all alike. If there was but one force how could it become so segregated – competing against itself? How can one tree outgrow another only to stunt it in its shade, while they share a common root system. Of course free animal life takes this even further. We put this down to accident. Each living entity only has its own survival in mind (or in nature) and so, even if it has the capacity to do so, will rarely act for the benefit of another unless it is a credit to one's own survival. There is no 'morality' here, not in any classic sense, yet there is a directedness. But, we say, there is no unified direction other than what may happen to appear from group interactions over time (ecosystems happen to occur for instance) – how could this be when each entity is only in it for their own survival. This kind of statistical direction (of ecosystems or social groups and the like) is but a peculiar dynamic, an emergent force to be considered from the perspective of the all pervasive 'will to power'.

Returning to the question of compassion; we can present both the exception and the rule. In order to expand one's personal power, the demon must take into account its wider

⁴⁶⁶ Dmitri Psarev, quoted in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p.805 'Russian Nihilism'.

influences and the effects these have on its power plays; including the impact of the minds of others. The perfection of this understanding is (arguably) the meta-moral position akin to that of the Bodhisattva. However, the demon that is wholly compassionate can no longer be considered demonic. The emphasis here is on motivation, of the necessity of being interconnected and the implications for resulting action, and we are all at least slightly compassionate if only for our own existence. If we take Camus' opening proposition to *The Myth of Sisyphus* as a normative imperative - that "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide."⁴⁶⁷ - then we must accept that any self-conscious being that has control over themselves must have chosen existence over nothingness. This was the rejection for the existence of the perfect nihilist in chapter 1. Now this logical imperative must drive the power-seeking demon from a purely negative 'nothing', of non-being, to engagement with that 'nothingness' which interpenetrates with every identifiable phenomenon as impermanent, interconnected and absolutely contingent. Without this development they must remain trapped in one side of a self-inflicted dichotomy, perhaps relatively powerful but limited to a specific time and place.

The demonic drive is a response to the natural call to power. At every level, at every point on the path to enlightenment, the path can be abandoned – one can get caught up on *one idea of reality*, one can affirm themselves over all else and can fight for those beliefs. *Justification* is a symptom of demonics. Reality does not need to be defended. We find justification where there is more than one possible response – a recognition of the incompleteness of a system of interpretation and one's responses.⁴⁶⁸ One can follow the nihilistic manifesto and scream at the universe at every step – except the final one –

⁴⁶⁷ Camus, A., *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p.3.

⁴⁶⁸ In the same way, one may claim that God does not need to advertise.

Nirvāṇa. Enlightenment is nothing more than recognising reality. Reality is that there is nothing to scream at. This is the sense in which Nishitani claims that nihilism overcomes itself.⁴⁶⁹ A demon, being restricted to a single nihilistic mode, cannot be enlightened. From that state we can have projects, we can slip into various modes of being, yet these projects will remain the total extent of one's understanding of the world. The limitation of a single system is then the artificial limitation of the human being. 'Power' is a relative concept. To have 'ultimate' power one must be capable of transcending *any* particular mode of being, to be unbound by a single system, and adapt to new relative fields.

Nietzsche's vision of the Übermensch was of a being who walked the earth unafraid, as a creator rather than subject, transforming every negative affect into an affirmative drive to overcome. However, even in a Nietzschean sense, suffering still exists. While conventional suffering is transformed into a 'good' thing, strengthening us in our struggle with it, suffering as an existential phenomenon still exists. The 'suffering' is transformed into a restriction of power, that which rejects our will. Thus the desire to overcome this suffering is the same as any attempt to overcome any interpretation of suffering – it is a desire for freedom. We can argue that the only possible way to overcome suffering, *in any form*, is enlightenment in the Buddhist sense. In the terminology of pragmatism, power is freedom which is only possible through the cessation of suffering.

As another example, and one that will fling us into the depths of the problem proper, consider a masochist. One of our most common conceptions of suffering, physical pain, is transformed into pleasure for this individual. So, to carry over the argument from the last paragraph, their relative suffering would be an absence of physical pain (in our sense). Now

⁴⁶⁹ Following Nietzsche's affirmation of the *eternal recurrence of the same*, and thus overcoming the nihilistic negation - Nishitani, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*, p.64.

the way to overcome this suffering, following Buddhist 'enlightenment', is not to seek pain in order to gratify this desire for pleasure – this is the crucial distinction between *sukka* and *Nirvāṇa* – rather it is to overcome the very craving which causes this suffering to occur. I chose this example because, for many of us, this is an easy situation where we may look at this individual and think to ourselves 'something is not right with this one. We should give them psychological help.' Perhaps this assumption is justified, since they may well be harming themselves during this pursuit, or they may eventually escalate their actions into the harming of others as the concept of pain becomes universalised as a good thing in their minds. What is important is that *every* situation that presents us with suffering, every mind-state in which we desire, *including* those 'normal' modes of being, are a sickness requiring 'help'. In this understanding Buddhism is not naturalistic, in fact it goes against nature – after all this is what *enlightenment* is all about – extinguishing (*Nirvāṇa*). To achieve the freedom needed to express one's power ultimately, the natural drives for power must be overcome.

Now let us examine a classical moral hypothetical and reverse our focus. A child is in a pond, struggling for breath. Do you help the child (knowing you are capable of doing so)? We must question a Buddhist motivation here. There is no self, all things are empty and so the suffering of another being is just as empty as your own suffering (which you are supposed to realise and so overcome). So consider a normal individual presented with this situation. Yes, you must save the child; this is your desire. But why stop at rescuing them from drowning? Why not help them to end all suffering? Indeed why not help all beings thus? Surely to do this you must save yourself. So when you see the child, you jump in and pull them to shore - but who are you really saving from drowning?

This motivation presents a strange twist to the idea of morality.⁴⁷⁰ You don't do something to pursue a reward or out of fear of punishment. You don't do something because it brings you pleasure. It's not even about considering the future because (a) you don't know what the consequences of your actions will be and (b) your actions affect the outcome.⁴⁷¹ The reason you act is because *it is*. Anything that suffers, whatever it is, whatever its definition of suffering, even if it does not have one, *it is suffering*. Of course the same can be said of pleasure, but pleasure of itself is not conventionally considered a problem.

What would happen if we tried to apply this to business ethics? Could an economic theory be based upon a model wherein *all* suffering is suffering, wherever it occurs, equally accountable? In the business of pleasure and suffering there is no zero-sum game. Marxists argue that capitalism works through the exploitation of the lower class in order to benefit those at the top – outsourcing suffering as it were. But the human condition is not a linear system, it is not quantitative nor fixed in its extent. Happiness begets happiness, anger proliferates anger, likewise fear, despair, laughter, violence – in the language of the human being, profit creates profit and loss, loss. For the Buddhist it is clear that suffering leads to suffering, but also, they argue, that conventional pleasure also leads to suffering. What has happened to profit in the Buddhist model? The Buddhist path does *not* posit benevolence as an end but as a means towards the freedom of the individual. This freedom allows the development of wisdom and offers the greatest potential for the realisation of power.

Using the drive for power as a paradigmatic example for pragmatic motivations generally, we can begin to set out the 'pragmatic principle'. In order to fulfil the complete pragmatic

⁴⁷⁰ The idea of morality here being somehow devoid of *personal* gratification, in this sense appearing closer to a Kantian imperative rather than the 'natural' origins I have thus far explored.

⁴⁷¹ For example, saving a malevolent person may alter their personality.

demands of *any* position, the referents of the position must necessarily be recognised as interdependent. As such, they are subject to the principles derived from the metaphysical framework established in this thesis. Since, metaphysically, it has been shown that no phenomenon can be explained or characterised without reference to its environment, it is to this extended environment that one's pragmatic ends must refer. As this extension necessitates interdependence, the reciprocal interpenetration of the focal phenomenon and its environment presents a dynamic world, upon which no reified system can be permanently overlayed and remain valid. To extend validity, and thus power, one must be adaptive and recognise the implications of existing interdependently. Most significantly, to pursue a single pragmatic goal, such as a personal increase in power, one must take into account the impact of other beings, including their particular motivations. This intersubjective awareness has dramatic repercussions, not only regarding the technicalities of fulfilling personal desires, but also the very idea of self.

The Martial Art

In order to elaborate upon the pragmatic principle our focus will now turn to the particularly interesting example of the association of Zen concepts to martial arts.⁴⁷² While concepts and practices from Zen have been adopted into many disciplines, the martial arts presents a field which directly conflicts with the Buddhist emphasis of non-violence.⁴⁷³ This field is also

⁴⁷² The martial arts and their philosophies are vast and greatly divergent and while this association could only legitimately be extended to schools of East Asian origins, the relevance of the characteristics examined in this section is more widespread and, as will be shown, are even applicable to other fields.

⁴⁷³ This conflict is often addressed in the literature as a necessary conflict to avoid greater violence. (See for instance, Kim, D. & Bäck, A., *Martial Meditation*, p.203 – “everyone has a *prima facie* moral duty to learn how to fight”.) There is not the space to enter this debate here, suffice to say the position remains problematic. This position is at least given some credibility in Aikido wherein the ultimate ideal is resolution whereby neither practitioner nor opponent is harmed. (See Westbrook, A. & Ratti, O., *Aikido and the Dynamic Sphere*, pp.33-34 - following Uyeshiba's ethical imperatives.)

a special case among the traditional 'Zen arts'⁴⁷⁴ with regard to the immediacy of feedback of one's actions, owing to the engagement with an equally positioned opponent. It is this aspect which is of greatest interest as a test case for both the pragmatic principle and the application of the complete concept of 'no-mind' as examined in the previous chapter.

The most direct connection of Zen to the martial arts is the explanation of the fighting forms as a form of 'moving meditation'. A popular story of the origins of Shaolin kung fu involves Bodhidharma introducing the martial practices as a form of exercise for the monks who otherwise remained motionless for long periods in zazen.⁴⁷⁵ As meditation though, in movement one would appear to have lost many of the characteristics, such as reducing distractions, for which secluded sitting was favoured. These increased difficulties are only magnified for one engaged in combat, which lead us to wonder how one could possibly 'meditate' in this mode and why such practices should even persist. One may be tempted to simply explain away the attribution of 'meditation' as fanciful, however this would fly in the face of the emphasis on daily practice in Zen – "For when this wise and deeper world opens, everyday life, even the most trivial thing of it, grows loaded with the truths of Zen."⁴⁷⁶ Regarding an *active* exercise of mindfulness, Nagaboshi, in his *Bodhisattva Warriors*, notes that, "One advantage of such a meditation method is that while it is easy to

⁴⁷⁴ Which include particular styles of calligraphy (*Shodō*), painting (*sumi-e*), flower arrangement (*ikebana*) and archery (*kyūdō*). - Toshimitsu, H., *Zen in Japanese Art*, P.4.

⁴⁷⁵ The story is recounted in Nagaboshi, T., *The Bodhisattva Warriors*, pp.229-230. The validity of this tale is strongly contested by most scholars, not only for Bodhidharma's part in it, also owing to the existence of earlier martial art forms in the area including those based on Daoist principles. A brief account of various potential points of origin of Eastern martial arts is given in Kim, D. & Bäck, A., *Martial Meditation* p.14. Contentions are also drawn from the historical records in Shahar, M., 'Ming-Period Evidence of Shaolin Martial Practice', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol.61, No.2 (Dec. 2001), pp.359-413.

⁴⁷⁶ Suzuki, D.T., *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, p.238. Suzuki's immediate example is Joshu's comment "wash your bowl" in response to a monk's request for instruction – case 7 in the *Mumonkan*, in Reps, P., *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, p.101.

be either verbally or self-deceptive, it is very difficult to be kinetically so.”⁴⁷⁷ This distinction readies a significant philosophical point.

While sitting in meditation one becomes aware of bodily and mental details otherwise hidden in the sensory overload of everyday life, however one must at some point re-enter this world (even if only to maintain one’s physical requirements). The goal of mindfulness meditation (*vipasāyanā*) is to continue to apply this mindfulness in one’s day to day activities. Those active forms adopted as ‘Zen art’ serve as an exercise in the application of this mindfulness, in accordance with the experience of ‘no-mind’ as detailed in the previous chapter.⁴⁷⁸ In this manner, the ‘art’ is a direct expression of the artist. As a practice, the art form becomes a mode of feedback for the practitioner. In this respect the martial arts stand out as a particularly potent test. Martial art presents a clear goal, not to be defeated, and, unique to this art, this goal is inversely reflected by a directly engaged opponent. An act of attack is mirrored as an act of defence for the opponent. The inability to respond appropriately is not trivial or merely subjective; ultimately it is a matter of life and death. One is forced to directly confront one’s own vulnerabilities, and ultimately, one’s mortality. The threat of direct physical violence was more prominent in the ancient world than today. Evidence suggests that the Buddhist monks at the Shaolin monastery were practicing combative arts prior to Bodhidharma’s introduction of Ch’an, and that this practice was actually inherited from a long history of training in the Daoist inspired martial arts.⁴⁷⁹ Such claims should not upset historians of the martial arts or Zen as the story of the relationship between Zen and the sword is one of integration and moulding of teachings to fit new

⁴⁷⁷ Nagaboshi, *The Bodhisattva Warriors*, p.278.

⁴⁷⁸ See Toshimitsu H., *Zen in Japanese Art*, p.18.

⁴⁷⁹ See footnote 468 above.

contexts. When considering the connection to violence, keep in mind that prince Siddhartha was himself trained in combat, being one of the Sakyumuni clan of warriors. However, after his enlightenment his attitude towards violence appears pacifistic.⁴⁸⁰ There is no simple way to reconcile violence with Buddhist practices, and it is perhaps for this reason that this aspect has been heavily emphasised in contemporary studies of Zen.⁴⁸¹

“The problem of death is a great problem with every one of us; it is, however, more pressing for the samurai... It was, therefore, natural for every sober-minded samurai to approach Zen with the idea of mastering death.”⁴⁸² An art form as meditation presents a mode in which one experiences the results of their practice, becoming aware of their own developments and shortcomings, as presented in through their own actions.⁴⁸³ In combat, as meditation, one’s own actions interpenetrate the actions of their opponent; the feedback is relational; intersubjective. The radical freedom that arises with increased awareness, as discussed in the last chapter, is simultaneously realised on both sides.⁴⁸⁴ Both individuals aim to defeat the other, both are capable of spontaneous creativity, whatever happens next cannot be scripted.

These points, regarding the peculiarities of Martial Arts as a meditation practice, outline my philosophical interest in presenting the example here. The further, but related, point is the

⁴⁸⁰ For example, his non-intervention with the army headed to sack the Śākya clan (recalled in Hirata S., ‘Zen Buddhist Attitudes to War’, in Heisig, J. & Maraldo, J (eds.), *Rude Awakenings*, pp.3-4). Hirata points out that “The early Buddhist posture of nonviolence was based not on humanistic ideas about the value of life, but on a religious understanding of the workings of karma.” (ibid, P.4)

⁴⁸¹ An important point for consideration here is the potential for social action from the (Zen) Buddhist position. For instance the recent protests of Monks in Burma, or the philosophical emphasis of Korean *Minjung Buddhism*. On the latter see the final section of Park, J., ‘Wisdom, Compassion, and Zen Social Ethics: The Case of Chinul, Sōngch’öl, and Minjung Buddhism in Korea’, in *The Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 13, 2006. For a brief study on nonviolent Buddhist responses to the political see King, S., ‘Buddhism, Nonviolence, and Power’, *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.16, 2009.

⁴⁸² Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, p.71-72.

⁴⁸³ For example the deftness of one’s brushstroke.

⁴⁸⁴ Assuming that both practitioners are of a sufficiently developed level and are not merely reacting habitually.

accusation that Zen is a corruption of Buddhism, as outlined in chapter 2. The above quotation from Suzuki serves to illustrate the focus of these accusations, particularly in relation to the influence in Japan of Bushido. D.T. Suzuki has been a prime target in the accusations levelled against Zen, due in part to his prominence in the West and interest in Bushido. Victoria writes, “But perhaps his most creative contribution to the discourse of his day was the assertion that the Zen-trained swordsman (and, by extension, the modern soldier) ‘turns into an artist of the first grade, engaged in producing a work of genuine originality.’”⁴⁸⁵ In fact Suzuki’s interest drew on a long history of relating Zen practice to ‘creativity’ in the arts, the martial arts and ‘the sword’ in particular. Satō, in his paper *Suzuki and War*, deals directly with accusations of Suzuki’s position made by Victoria in his *Zen at War* and presents a strong case in defence of the prominent figure.⁴⁸⁶

Katsu Kaishu (1823-1899), a statesman of the Meiji period, stated in a public address “The way of the sword and Zen are identical....” The expression ‘life giving sword’ was coined in the 17th Century by swordsman and Zen enthusiast Yagyu Munenori, a contemporary of Miyamoto Musashi. Both were in correspondence with the Zen Priest Takuan Sōhō.⁴⁸⁷

Takuan wrote, “Completely oblivious to the hand that brandishes the sword, one strikes and cuts his opponent down... Understand this, but do not let your mind be taken by Emptiness.”⁴⁸⁸ As previously noted, it is this emphasis on ‘no-mindedness’ which led to the oversight of mindfulness and fostered the Zen moral problem, due to its pragmatic appeal.

⁴⁸⁵ Victoria, *Zen at War*, p.110 – quoting Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, p.145.

⁴⁸⁶ Satō, K.T., “D.T. Suzuki and the Question of War” in *The Eastern Buddhist*, 39/1, (2008), pp.61–120.

⁴⁸⁷ Author of writings translated as ‘The Unfettered Mind’

⁴⁸⁸ Takuan, *The Unfettered Mind*, P.37.

Far from recommending the adoption of a mindless state, both Suzuki and Takuan maintained that thought is absolutely necessary when engaging in the world.⁴⁸⁹ Concerning Bushido, Suzuki wrote, “Nothing is more malign than ‘the sword that takes life’ when it is uncontrolled by ‘the sword that gives life’”.⁴⁹⁰ The dual forces of creation and destruction are here focussed inwards, as the ‘life giving sword’ represents the very destruction of that demonic element, examined in the previous section, to overcome it in oneself. The very act of drawing a sword implies the destruction of life, an act which should never be taken lightly. Suzuki’s idea is in the spirit of the fox kōan; that Zen *transcends* thought and morality but does not *ignore* them.⁴⁹¹

The subtleties of the ultimate truth of Zen as ‘transcendent’ have been examined previously. Here in relation to practical ends, the complication of transcendence and immanence lies at the heart of the moral problem, and of this the philosophically minded Suzuki was well aware. Regarding the extension of mindfulness from the experience of no-mind he writes, “These are not questions of non-discriminating wisdom (*Prajñā*) but of discriminating knowledge (*Vijñāna*) that involves the intelligence and education of the person who has had the Zen experience.”⁴⁹² Zen consciousness and Zen thought differ according to one’s learning and intellect. At the same time, that ‘transcendent’ truth of Zen somehow permeates the enlightened being and is expressed in the very same actions.

It is not uncommon to find characters in the history of Zen who practiced calligraphy and painting in addition to their scriptural studies and meditation and occasionally swordsmen, martial artists or masters of tea ceremony, archers, flower-arrangers and so-on. The Daoist

⁴⁸⁹ Suzuki, cited in Kirita, K., ‘D.T. Suzuki on Society and the State’, in Heisig & Maraldo, *Rude Awakenings*, p.68.

⁴⁹⁰ Suzuki, D.T., quoted in Satō, ‘Suzuki and the Question of War’, *The Eastern Buddhist*, 39/1, (2008), p.114.

⁴⁹¹ Suzuki, cited in Kirita, K., ‘D.T. Suzuki on Society and the State’, in Heisig & Maraldo, *Rude Awakenings*, p.69.

⁴⁹² Suzuki, cited in *ibid.*, p.70.

ideal of 'mastering one way, master all ways' is continually expressed through Zen stories. A prominent example is that of the tea master challenged to a duel by an unaffiliated swordsman (*rōnin*), whereby the swordsman is overcome simply by the tea master's presence, as an expression of 'no-mind' (*mushin*), despite being unskilled with the sword.⁴⁹³ The idea that developed was that through the 'perfection' of an art the practitioner is able to reach a position 'beyond' the mundane form of the art itself to its transcendent connection with all other art forms. In this way one may move from one art to another, but more importantly each and any art is a potential path to enlightenment- because each art is a restricted mode of mastering oneself.

This development was not purely of Japanese origin. The connection of pragmatic ability and the mastery of arts in Zen (Ch. *Ch'an*) is found in Chinese Daoist philosophy and associated pragmatic spiritualism. Several Daoist concepts have been examined in chapter 2, along with their relation to the development of Zen thought, which were modified in chapter 5 in light of Dōgen's criticisms of the 'original nature' concept.⁴⁹⁴ In Daoist thought, attainment of Dao is expressed as the effortless actions of the master artisan towards achieving his/her goal, through an internalisation of technique and related intuition regarding the situation at hand. Since every art, craft or discipline is subject to the universal Dao, then to master any one art is to attain Dao. The implication is that since Dao is at the heart of every practice, when one has mastered one practice then the essence of every practice has been penetrated. In this formulation 'Dao' functions as the steady bedrock of worldly experience so that any specific scenario can be transcended to the eternal working

⁴⁹³ The story is recounted in Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, pp.189-193.

⁴⁹⁴ In order to explain the function of Daoist concepts in Zen thought, 'Buddha-nature' was established as *empty*, and as so compatible with Dōgen's analysis (though not with original Daoist metaphysics).

of Dao.⁴⁹⁵ For Dōgen the only ‘transcendent’ aspect, valid in every situation, is the immanence of the Buddhist practice itself. This is developed as the ‘true self’ by the Kyōto school. In this latter sense, to master ‘the way’ (Ch. *Dao*) is not to discover something beyond the world, but to develop an engagement with reality which is unlimited and thus dynamically applicable to any system.

What does it mean to ‘master’ something in this sense and what could this mean in a Buddhist context? It is clear that enlightenment ‘as *omniscience*’ must be taken in a certain sense. From the record of the Buddha’s life, where he skilfully develops his conventional teaching to adapt to emerging circumstances,⁴⁹⁶ we can intuit that a Buddha would not instantly know how to drive a car for example. So what is enlightenment then if not absolute technical knowledge? Perhaps the concept may be summed up in the ancient Greek adage - “Know Thyself”. Omniscience in this sense should not be understood as an exhaustive collection of ‘knowledge’ but rather a dynamic state of awareness – not a database of facts but the ability to ‘read’ situations and re-assess what is present. Concerning the mastery of arts/ disciplines, the benefit of enlightenment would be akin to an uncanny ability to *learn* that is not restricted to any specific doctrine or discipline.

Commonly, as previously examined as a characteristic of Zen more widely, the actions of a martial artist are masked behind explications of ‘no-mind’ (jp. *mushin*). Since deliberation is not possible from this (‘superior’) state, criticism of one’s actions from within this state is

⁴⁹⁵ Though keep in mind that ‘Dao’ itself is adopted as a heuristic device and is itself utterly without form. To quote Huang Po; “It is a method of arousing people’s interests in the early stages of their development... if you were to follow the empirical method to the utmost limit, on reaching that limit you would still be unable to locate Mind.” (Huang Po, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, Trans. Blofeld, J., pp.54-55.)

⁴⁹⁶ A pertinent example is the story relating to the origin of the inclusion of nuns (*bhikkhuni*) in the monastic order (Vin.ii.253ff) – the Buddha is persuaded by Ananda after initially rejecting the possibility; recounted in Kabilsingh, C., ‘The History of the Bhikkhuni Sangha’, in Chodron, T. (ed.), *Blossoms of the dharma: living as a Buddhist nun*, pp.18-19.

also not possible. From this state one is said to have no karmic effect since there is no cognitive individual to whom karma can be applied. This is contentious since within the Buddhist literature even an enlightened being appears to be affected by the karmic results of their actions.⁴⁹⁷ More significantly, the attribution of ‘no-mind’ to the characteristics of enlightenment is plainly overstated.⁴⁹⁸ As we saw in the previous chapter, the ‘no-mind’ (ch. *wu hsin*) expounded by Huineng necessarily included the dual aspects of mindfulness *and* being without mind. Furthermore, considered within the limited paradigm of the martial artist’s drive for success in combat, without both aspects (‘no-mind’ and ‘mindfulness’) the martial artist’s goal could not be consistently realised. I maintain that the inclusion of both aspects simultaneously necessitates a type of ‘mastery’ which is dynamic and able to transcend the limited bounds of the system which gave rise to it, meaning one can adapt to new paradigms.

This presents a ‘Buddhist martial artist’ with a peculiar dilemma. Nāgārjuna tells us that the principle afflictions all “arise completely from conceptualisation”,⁴⁹⁹ thus for someone who understands emptiness *violence is impossible*.⁵⁰⁰ Firstly there is no self, so there is ultimately nothing to defend or fear or fight for. More subtly, a strong metaphysical point is being made which is brought into being psychologically. Here I must be careful not to make the same mistake of which I have previously accused the ‘transcendence thesis’ – that an act is not violent because we see the underlying reality (ultimately) that nothing violent is

⁴⁹⁷ A story from the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra*, tells of a Bodhisattva, a previous incarnation of Gautama Buddha, who kills an individual to prevent the murder of five hundred others. This is expressed as an act of compassion as the Bodhisattva accepts the consequence of rebirth in hell for their actions, rather than allowing another to commit murder and suffer this fate. See Tatz, M., *The Skill in Means (Upāyakauśalya) Sūtra*, pp.73-74.

⁴⁹⁸ It is interesting to note that ‘*mushinjo*’, as a ‘blank’ or ‘without-mind’ experience, is referred to as a form of ‘trance-like’ meditation which *does not lead to nirvana*. Wood, E., *Zen Dictionary*, p.71.

⁴⁹⁹ Nāgārjuna, *MK XXIII.1*, in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.455.

⁵⁰⁰ It is a standard position that “Dharma is non-violence” – Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka XII:23*, in Tsong Khapa, *Ocean of Reasoning*, p.378.

taking place. This is strictly (logically) *true*, however we must keep in mind that violence still occurs *conventionally*. As developed in chapter 6; this is the very basis of enlightened morality and is its metaphysical ground.

Through enlightenment one's motivation has changed as well as one's perspective since one's experience of reality in these two respects has also been radically altered.

Overcoming violence – ensuing enlightenment, an end to suffering and emancipation - is the goal of Buddhism. To bypass the pitfalls of wide generalities, imagine the position from an enlightened perspective; the position of realising 'emptiness'. Imagine interactions with objects, with oneself and with others. There is no anger, no desire to destroy, no fear of another being better than oneself and no fear of being destroyed. Yet this is not nihilistic, for even while suffering does not exist personally from the enlightened perspective it must be recognised as a motivational force in others. Furthermore, there is beauty⁵⁰¹ (recognised as a conventional mode) and there is love⁵⁰² (without attachment). With this in mind, consider the origins of a motivation to create. It is the conventional reality of this love that inspires this desire to create – it is this recognition of others suffering that is compassion.

To again consider the conventional position of ignorance and the experience of suffering - the world appears to be heartless, playing infuriating games with our emotions and attempts at rationality. If life were a novel we would surely curse the author (or praise them if we were an absurdist). Perhaps the amazing thing is that we are able to make sense

⁵⁰¹ An example commonly used throughout Zen literature is the temporality of falling blossoms, the experience of which is connected to *satori*. Consider the following from Dōgen; "The spring wind deeply hates the peach blossoms, but as the peach blossoms fall we will drop off body and mind." Dōgen, Fascicle 68- 'Udonge', *Shobogenzo*, Book 3, p.213.

⁵⁰² Drawing parallels between Zen Buddhist *karuṇā* and Christian *agape*, Nishitani Keiji writes of the perfection of 'non-differentiating love' – "it is not a cold and insensitive indifference, but the indifference of love. It is a non-differentiating love that transcends the distinctions men make between good and evil, justice and injustice." (Nishitani K., *Religion and Nothingness*, p.58.)

(both emotional and rational) of our lives at all. We project meaning onto the world and thus we create our reality, while at the same time creating all our philosophical and moral problems. Rather than now ask the question: 'is it worth it?' (That is to ask- does the pleasure we get from this mode of existence outweigh the misery it causes?) I would instead like to jump out of the problem altogether. What does 'coming to see the world as it really is' have to do with conventional pleasures or sufferings? It is a different thing altogether and as such requires neither the denial of pleasure nor the avoidance of suffering. That said, there is a need for us, being the limited creatures that we are, to have a certain calmness about us before we can concentrate in order to pursue this goal of 'right seeing', and so in that respect one should aim to temper one's own desires for this purpose.⁵⁰³

What does enlightenment have to do with martial arts? Following my analysis, an enlightened being is skilled, they see and feel clearly and are constantly aware, adapting and learning based on their circumstances.⁵⁰⁴ However, the 'martial art', like any art form, is a single mode with pre-established boundaries; in effect it is a game. An enlightened being is supposed to be highly competent, but would they win a game? Following the emphasis on pragmatics in this chapter, one may assume that such success is guaranteed, however one's perspective must also be expanded in accordance with the wider implications of interdependence. From the perspective of the enlightened being a game is just a game. Recall Dōgen's response to Nansen's Cat kōan "he could have done otherwise". Considering the wider context, there are more important things than winning. As far as martial arts are

⁵⁰³ For those hung up on the worth of conventional pleasures then a metaphor may help – playing in the waves is fun, even though it can be dangerous. Wouldn't it be good if you learnt how to swim? In order to do this you'll have to concentrate though, and take some time out from playing.

⁵⁰⁴ D.T. Suzuki, relating to success in combat, emphasises the need for constant vigilance - "If, relying on the bit of Zen insight you might have gained, you allow yourself to become unaware, that insight will vanish as thought dropped from your hand. Why would this apply only to Zen training?" (Quoted in Satō, 'Suzuki and the Question of War, *The Eastern Buddhist*, 39/1, (2008), p.85.)

limited, the enlightened being is not omnipotent (they can be beaten) but in the wider context the goal of martial arts is recognised as limited. If martial arts present the means for further development, being development in all areas towards spiritual enlightenment, then it should have nothing to do with winning or losing.

As we have seen, 'no-mind', without creative mindfulness, only works within a restricted mode. The directed focus has to be in place for discursive thought to cease and prevent the mind 'stopping'.⁵⁰⁵ No-mind is a result of an extreme *focus*, hence the indistinction between unity and nothingness (as unity) within this mode. This mode is a result of the virtual ceasing of the physiological system – I say virtual because the system *must* continue to function and thus its function becomes limited to a single *focus*. From this state an advanced awareness is possible, but this awareness is not posited by the mode of no-mind; it is a further step. Without the move to awareness there can be no realisation, no morality and no possible enlightenment. This awareness is made possible due to the restriction of focus on the physiological system, which results in a freeing-up of the conscious mind. However this is not multitasking. By being 'focussed' one should be united in mind and action – *but this is incomplete* – by being aware one becomes united with their place (as *this* action) in the universe. The former is successful in its specific mode; the latter is invincible and applicable to all modes.

Nietzsche maintained that any belief or system should be openly followed through.⁵⁰⁶ In this spirit I have attempted to address the various responses to nihilism, in chapter 1 and again in the first section of this chapter. Any system which is incomplete will either reveal

⁵⁰⁵ For example; the code of the samurai, the rules of a game or the requirement of victory in combat.

⁵⁰⁶ See Hollingdale, R.J., *Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy*, p.145 - That the philosopher "must live his philosophy and not only think it".

itself to be so, through philosophical investigation or insightful practice, or will *limit the adherent*. In a dynamic competitive mode this restriction becomes more apparent.⁵⁰⁷ The martial artist limited in this way will always be found lacking in combat with one of adequate skill who is not thus limited. The way forward is always through introspection and awareness of one's own limitations. Careful pointing towards the practitioner themselves should shift their consciousness towards an awareness of these limits in order that they may be understood and hence overcome. This is the meditative benefit of such engaged art forms. The element of awareness produces the effect that, in the end, the originating form is no longer important and is transcended. For the martial artist, this means that the highest attainment; mastery of the art; is an awareness beyond the inherent limits of combat. The pragmatic principle, coupled with the moral implications of interdependence, indicates that the martial arts master need not fight.⁵⁰⁸

Formlessness

Hearing that all phenomena are *ultimately* empty (of intrinsic existence) but are conventionally real, and that we make use of conventionally existent things, one may wonder, what then is the purpose of emptiness? What function does ultimate reality play in a conventional world? The obvious answer is that there is a psychological benefit to understanding emptiness, and this fits with the Buddhist soteriological project to overcome suffering – if one realises emptiness, one should not cling to or crave these things in the

⁵⁰⁷ Though it is still masked, as it is in all enterprises, by the mass of interconnected influences and particularly by the ego.

⁵⁰⁸ In which case, ultimately, there is no martial arts master, nor any other master artist for that matter, since they no longer fulfil the conventional requirements of the title. In relation to the end of a martial artist, consider Satō's reading of D.T. Suzuki, "I believe a full reading reveals that Suzuki's intention throughout these writings was not to encourage conflict, but to stress that the avoidance of conflict was at the heart of Bushido." (Satō, 'Suzuki and the Question of War', *The Eastern Buddhist*, 39/1, (2008), p.93.)

world that are impermanent. This is a simple explanation but is not readily incorporated into one's everyday life. In this section I will briefly set up the concept of 'formlessness' and propose that it can function as a practical mode of engagement with the world and that this is a recognition of emptiness. This consists of two tasks; first to briefly examine the meaning of the concept 'formless' and secondly to apply 'formlessness' to everyday action.

Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, Kyōto philosopher and contemporary with D.T. Suzuki, developed the idea of the 'Formless Self' in relation to Zen Buddhism. Rather than being a 'self' in potentia,⁵⁰⁹ the nature of the 'true self' is the imminent and ultimate reality of this (illusory) 'self'.⁵¹⁰ What Nishitani called 'the absolute near side' is necessarily empty of intrinsic existence and so cannot maintain a specific form. It is explained to be dynamic, allowing for the creation of difference, and absolutely contingent, manifest only in relation to its environment.

The concept 'formless' can be defined in the broadest sense as that without recognisable character (no form). As an absolute concept it appears in Indian Buddhist thought⁵¹¹ and in this sense is often interchanged with 'nothing', 'empty', 'void', or even 'non-being'. Each term has its own implications, both within the field from which it was developed and in the English language into which the concept is variously rendered. 'The formless', specifically read as neither a simple negation nor positing some non-being, has its conceptual roots in both Buddhist and Daoist thought. Later developed by (Zen) Kyōto school thinkers,

⁵⁰⁹ A position maintained by Tillich, see for example - Stambaugh, J., *The Formless Self*, p.63. This also relates to Heidegger's 'being-unto-death' – "*Dasein's* innermost possibility", which Fred Dallmayr saw as a refutation of Nishitani's accusation that Heidegger did not move beyond a relative negative conception of 'nothingness'. (Dallmayr, F., *The Other Heidegger*, p.209. – in reference to Nishitani K., 'Ontology and Utterance', *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.31, No.1 (Jan. 1981), pp.29-43.)

⁵¹⁰ Stambaugh, J., *The Formless Self*, p.73

⁵¹¹ As 'the formless realm' (*Ārūpyadhātu*) – Lopez, D., *Buddhism and Science*, p.43.

Hisamatsu and Nishitani, the concept of the 'formless self' oriented the idea to existential ends.

There are two senses of formless that are intertwined in both the Daoist and Zen literature. The Dao itself is recognised as formless⁵¹² – as the ultimate reality, unnameable, unsensible, and without form. Also in Daoism is the second sense of formless – the idea of moving with things in the world, being the way of the sage (or enlightened individual), to move with the natural mode of reality. This sense of a formless engagement, to 'go with the flow', is always posited in conjunction with 'the formless' (as the absolute state of 'otherness' – Dao) but is distinct in its application. The individual who engages formlessly is not completely other than form, since they are certainly not non-being, nothing, void – they exist. Consider this chapter from Laozi's *Dao De Jing* that expresses the principle.

A man is born gentle and weak.

At his death he is hard and stiff.

Green plants are tender and filled with sap.

At their death they are withered and dry.

Therefore the stiff and unbending is the disciple of death.

The gentle and yielding is the disciple of life.

Thus an army without flexibility never wins a battle.

A tree that is unbending is easily broken.

The hard and strong will fall.

The soft and weak will overcome.⁵¹³

⁵¹² See Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, 14.

⁵¹³ Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, 76., trans. Feng & English.

The last line of this passage may appear to resonate well with a Christian ethos, but keep in mind that it is by no favour of the Dao that the soft and weak will overcome the strong, it is a metaphysical principle. There is something about the weak that gives an advantage, the properties of life no-less, over the unyielding and 'strong'.

The ability of water, representing an ideal mode of being embodied by the actions of the sage, is often used as an ideal of this potency of the dynamic element - as in chapter 78 of Laozi;

Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water.
Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better;
It has no equal.⁵¹⁴

The metaphor indicates the erosion of rocks, or a coastline, of mountains in the rain or metal rusting, are all the result of the innate power of water to have its form modified as a result of its circumstances. In this manner water is able to continue to flow, maintaining its dynamic being, while the 'solid' static objects slowly weather away.

And again the chapter concludes:

The weak can overcome the strong;
The supple can overcome the stiff.

So how could the formless form actualised by water be embodied by an individual? For Daoists the answer is through non-action (*wu wei*) achieved as the expression of no-mind (*wu hsin*). The concepts are posed as negatives in an attempt to capture their unconventional character. Recall that non-action is not *inaction*, it is instead action without action (*wei wu wei*) – that is action that arises spontaneously. As the function of no-mind is freedom from delusion and a return to the natural way of things - in order to achieve such a

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, 78.

mode of interaction all discursive thought must cease. For the Daoists, one becomes like a mirror for the eternal, formless, Dao. If Dao is then considered to be *empty* of intrinsic existence, what is reflected by the mirror-like sage is nothing other than the changing face of reality itself.

Adapted to a Buddhist framework, formlessness becomes a correspondence to impermanence. To approach the dynamic world with a single form can only lead to failure, if not in the first instance then certainly if an activity is repeated enough. Since everything in the world is seen to be constantly changing there cannot be a fixed mode that can usefully correspond to all the variations one will inevitably be exposed to. The three awakening insights accorded to prince Siddhartha Gautama; old age, sickness and death; are all striking examples of impermanence, countering the essentialisation and extension of more permanent conceptions of the human being and the 'self' in particular.⁵¹⁵ In this simple sense, to be 'formless' is to hold no fixed preconceptions and approach the world openly.

The 'Formless Self' is at once both one's ontological state of being and the mode through which an enlightened being engages the world.⁵¹⁶ Hisamatsu states:

Chan thus may be said to have two aspects: one is the aspect of the true emptiness of the True-Self which, unbound by any form, is completely free from all forms; the other is the aspect of the wondrous working of the Self which, unbound by any form, actualizes all forms. These two aspects constitute the "substance" and "function" of the True Self.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ Every account of the life of the Buddha retells this discovery. See for instance, Gowans, C., *Philosophy of the Buddha*, p.18. The connection of the three insights is explained in the Pāli - *Digha-nikaya*, XIV - '*Mahapadana sutanta*'.

⁵¹⁶ And that which those on the path should work towards

⁵¹⁷ Hisamatsu S., 'Chan', Trans. DeMartino, R. and Tokiwa G., *The Eastern Buddhist*, Vol.1, No.1 (Sep. 1965), p.10.

The first part of this quotation opens debate into the emptiness of emptiness; that is that the substance of the True-Self is no substance whatsoever, and is hence free of form. This has significant metaphysical implications which should be examined in light of the framework of interdependence.

To examine formlessness as a transcendent metaphysical entity, as a 'non-thing', denies the possibility of interaction with the world. If such a thing did interact then it would become part of causal existence and would not be a 'non-thing' in the absolute sense necessary. Instead, Nishitani relates the formless self to 'absolute nothingness'⁵¹⁸ which is beyond the mere negation of 'nothingness' – and so becomes, rather than a negation of all forms, the affirmation of all forms in their interdependence. In effect, to realise *absolute nothingness* is to transcend mere nothingness and conventional delusion (of which the concept 'nothingness' is a part). We are left with an idea of self which is intimately tied up with all reality and empty of independent existence. From this position, to quote Zen master Dōgen; "The ten-thousand things advance and confirm the self."⁵¹⁹

The *substance* of the true self is nothing other than its existence as interpenetrating with the rest of reality. To attempt to investigate the nature of the 'self', as distinct from the world, is then to invoke the inverted metaphysic, developed in chapter 4. According to this metaphysic, the nature of the entity of focus is recognised as composed of *everything but* that focal phenomenon. Thus, from the state of meditative equipoise, wherein the self disappears,⁵²⁰ all apparently 'external' influences tell of, and indeed manifest the self. As

⁵¹⁸ Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, p.71

⁵¹⁹ Dōgen, 'Genjokōan', *Shobogenzo*, Book 1, p.28.

⁵²⁰ Nishitani refers to this as the realisation of the 'absolute self'; where "The absolute is a non-subjectum" (Nishitani, in Heisig, J. (Ed.), *Philosophers of Nothingness*, p.230.) Hui-neng.; "Having resorted to the ultimate, you will find that even the name *ultimate* disappears." (in Price and Wong (Trans.), *The Diamond Sūtra and*

one mindfully examines one's surroundings then, following the metaphysics of interdependence, the interpenetration of self with a specific phenomenon allows the realisation of one's own nature to be discovered through engagement with the world. This active realisation (Jp. *kenshō*) represents a conflation of the identification of 'subject' and 'object' and is understood to be a step on the path to enlightenment in the Zen tradition.

Let us move now from the *substance* of the self to focus on the *function* of the self within interdependent reality. Specifically, to examine the possibility of the self as a mode of formlessness. In order to do this we will return now to the key example of martial art.

Traditionally, in the martial arts, 'forms' are recognisable sets of movements or techniques that designates the division into a particular school or subset.⁵²¹ Additionally we find the term 'form' used to refer to specific sequences of repeated moves, sometimes called 'patterns' or *kata* (Jp.). There are several reasons one practices a form. In addition to the significance of the practice as the spiritual tradition of a particular school, the simple pragmatic explanations are that the repetition of form teaches technique and cultivates physical conditioning. Each element of the form is a move which can be adapted to a fighting situation – and since it has been practiced repeatedly, the mind should never need to 'stop' (to deliberately assess the situation) before the movement is reactively employed. So, through repeated practice the moves become second nature to the practitioner, so that it is then possible for the martial artist to experience 'no-mindedness' – the body seems to move by itself, leaving one's creative consciousness free to explore the nuances of their

The Sūtra of Hui-neng, p.66) For Dōgen this is expressed as 'mind and body fall away' (Dōgen, 'Genjokōan', *Shōbōgenzo*, Book 1, p.28.)

⁵²¹ For example, various animal forms of Wushu, Tae Kwon Do or Aikido would each be a form or 'style' of martial art.

actions, rather than being caught up in their mere execution. This phenomenon is not unique to martial practices and can be found in any engaged practice.⁵²²

This leads into the other significant aspect of the practice of forms within the martial arts – which was examined in the last section - repetition of a physical sequence as moving meditation. With meditation as the goal, the practitioner seeks to be absorbed in their movements in order to become aware of the experience of ‘no-mind’. There are obviously stark differences in this mode to that of seated meditation, and yet in both the mind and body are dropped away,⁵²³ either seated in stillness or through repetition of the same cycle of movement until the body is forgotten. In both modes the body still exists, the heart still beats, respiration occurs. In both modes the practitioner avoids radical interaction with anything, other than their own bodies, their own mind; so that the underlying nature of (one’s own) reality can be experienced as it really is. For Hisamatsu this is the realisation of the formless self.

A meditative mode is needed to existentially realise the ‘substance’, or rather ‘non-substance’, of the formless self, but the function of formlessness is supposed to be expressed throughout reality – in every mode. Formlessness as function must engage with the world. If this can occur then formlessness cannot be absolutely other than worldly forms, the two must be connected if they are to interact. If formlessness is an expression of the reality of emptiness then what does it mean to engage with emptiness in a world of

⁵²² For example, playing a musical instrument – virtuosity is such a higher level adaptation – in this guise Jazz is often used as an example of ‘formless’ musical form.

⁵²³ Dōgen, ‘Genjo-koan’, in *Shobogenzo* book 1, p.28. This experience of ‘nonduality’ is also the aim in other ‘Zen arts’, such as that of the actor in *Noh* theatre – see, for instance, Nagatomo S., ‘Zeami’s Conception of Freedom’, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.31, No.4 (Oct. 1981), p.407: “Appropriation of various modalities of one’s body in the Noh training, consequently, means to destroy the imbalance between the mind and the body, or rather to ‘dissolve’ the ambiguous character of our mind and body so as to restore a primordial identity.”

forms? Is it even possible to meditate and be engaged simultaneously? I want to say the answer is 'yes', so here it is my task to provide evidence for this position.

Consider a combative situation involving two martial artists. For the sake of discussion let us assume that they are in general respects equal with regard to strength, speed, stamina and even relative levels of skill and experience in their respective styles. We may even assume that they have come from the same school of training – simply to conceptually eliminate unnecessary variables. Even with parameters such as these fixed there are still many aspects where variation between the two fighters could present victory or defeat, so let us just consider those whereby the 'formless' could be applicable.

If a fighter calculates, while another does not, all other things being equal, the calculator will have the tactical upper hand – however this is redundant if the moment of calculation causes a delay in reaction – they will be beaten before the tactic can be employed. This is why the immediacy of 'no-mind' is favoured in the martial arts. If a calculation has been made in advance of the moment to which it is to be employed, then an assumption has been made and the success or failure of the movement depends upon chance. At best the calculation relies upon the predictability of their opponent.

We should next consider what would make somebody predictable in this situation? First the extreme case; if a fighter were performing a set form or *kata* then, if their opponent is familiar with this sequence, their action in the next moment can be predicted. If a fighter made use of a particular element of such a form, that is one or several techniques, then the

execution of that element could be predicted by their opponent. In other words, in response to a predicted move a counter-move can be devised and executed.⁵²⁴

Nothing I have mentioned so far could be considered 'formless'. The point continually being stressed in this chapter is that the world is constantly changing so one must constantly adapt. Keep in mind that 'formlessness' as a pragmatic concept had developed in response to impermanence, and this is directly related to the limits of systems. Use of a form (an idea or a mode of being) is functional, until this use is extended beyond that scenario to which it usefully corresponds, either temporally, spatially or conceptually. To be 'formless' and engaged implies that one can adopt forms specific to whatever situation they find themselves in (an enlightened being would do so skilfully). If adoption of various forms over spatial and situational distance is the mark of the 'formless' then it would appear that we are all in some sense 'formless', knowing well the adage 'adapt or perish' we do alter our actions depending upon differing situations we are faced with - if we don't just give up. But this is not an engagement founded on a realisation of emptiness. Here the example of the martial arts comes into its own.

In order to act 'formlessly' one must dwell in the state of no-mind. In this state there is no hesitation, and one might assume that the individual in this state would cease to be an active agent and would become completely *reactive*, dependent upon the actions of their opponent. If this were the case then this 'mindless' individual would be little more than a conditioned collection of habitual responses. Their form or style would be predictable, just as an individual's style of handwriting would foretell the characteristics of one cursive

⁵²⁴ In theory this is not unlike the opening move sequences in Chess. Or, as a simple martial arts example; a practitioner who favours wide-ranging kicks is technically countered by an opponent shortening the distance between the fighters.

character from its last appearance. Such stylistic tendencies can never be completely dispelled (the significance of embodiment should not be underestimated) but the expression of the 'formless' can never be simply reactive. The 'formless' individual is reflexively engaged, but never determined by their situation. To be thus would be a *mere* mirror on the world, an important aspect of formless engagement to be sure, but without the possibility of change *this is not formlessness*. Without reflexive awareness the state of no-mind is incomplete. Recall that from the meditative mode the conscious mind is freed up to become aware of its own situation. Any mode of engagement comes then not as a reaction, a habit, but as a unique and mindful response to the situation in its *thusness* – exactly as it is, without preconceived notions.

So how would a formless martial artist appear? Let us return to our imaginary confrontation. First, dwelling in a state of no-mind, there would be no delay in their response to the opponent. Since the 'formless' experiences each instance as unique each response would be unique and so the pattern of movement would not be easily predictable. Moreover individual techniques or manoeuvres are themselves nothing more than empty forms, thus allowing for countless variations, meldings and adaptations.⁵²⁵ Most significantly, that lack of delay caused by calculation does not necessarily indicate a lack of cognition for an individual in the meditative state. In that peculiar reflexive state where the mind and body have dropped away, and then brought back into focus, the very mode of confrontation itself is up for reassessment.

⁵²⁵ Such adaptations occur incidentally with any engaged activity, which itself should deter any assumptions that forms can be simply 'scientifically assessed' (See for instance Smith, J.W., *The Worms at the Heart of Things*, p.372) or that concepts such as 'the formless' are merely 'religiously inspired' with no practical affects.

So formless engagement allows the opening up of variables, of dynamic (unpredictable) reflexive action, to the pragmatic extreme that the rules of engagement are discarded. If victory is one's goal then any means are open to achieve it. Where the idea of formlessness *has* touched martial arts the result tends to be eye-gouges, groin strikes, picking up the nearest heavy object to clobber one's opponent, and so on – which isn't considered very sports-person-like and is usually not acceptable behaviour for a Buddhist. The trouble here is that the 'formless' reassessment doesn't go far enough. If we can reassess the means to achieve our set goal, then why not reassess the goal itself? If a formless martial artist really experiences each instance as a unique moment, then that moment is not restricted to two individuals, facing off, wanting to do harm to one another. Interdependence indicates that every situation can be reassessed. Perhaps a more considered course of action, if the option were available, would be to just walk away. It is conceivable that a martial artist who followed this path would rather suffer a blow than inflict one.

To be formless, an individual must actualise the principle of *śūnyatā* and thereby come to accord with the metaphysics of interdependence. By maintaining no form (or set of forms) as one's own form, one naturally recognises impermanence and all pragmatic engagements must be thus based. The realisation of the conventional reality associated with 'other' minds must guide a mindful individual towards a harmonic engagement with this intersubjective reality. Rather than being a highly technical calculation, the state of 'no-mind' (appropriately coupled with 'mindfulness') is the direct awareness of one's position in this reality. Compassion is the natural response, which is nothing other than the path of enlightenment.⁵²⁶ "There is no dharma that can be clung to nor any Buddhahood that can

⁵²⁶ As we examined previously the expression of compassion is spontaneous. Whitehill notes that "There is considerable resistance evident in Zen interpretation to the notion that the enlightened person

be attained.... Simply allowing the mind to act spontaneously is cultivation".⁵²⁷ This is not deliberative, but as spontaneous as any conventional personal drive (such as hunger or anger). As with every aspect of reality directly realised; when confronting an opponent, one confronts oneself.

Conclusion

I set out to argue that a 'formless' engagement in the world is pragmatically fruitful, and while I hope that some evidence of this has been shown, I've now sneakily moved the goal posts and said that a formless engagement must reassess what is pragmatically fruitful.

From that reflexive point this mode of 'formlessness' can be applied to any mode, not just martial arts, and similarly (though perhaps with less dramatic examples) 'formlessness' can be derived with any mode as a starting point. As I have implied here, this is the beginnings of something like morality being implicated into worldly interactions. To move through vastly different situations, to engage with each on its own terms and reflexively respond without being made to tremble is the mode of the 'formless'.

I maintain that if the association of Zen and the Martial arts were carried through, then any martial artist following Zen would actually act compassionately. This is not due to any philosophical imposition but follows directly from a desire for a specific pragmatic outcome, specifically a desire for victory. Wherever the demonic strive for power arises, the ultimate recognition of the interdependent nature of this drive necessitates that one also recognise the principles which follow from interdependence. Being formless, these principles do not

compassionates thoughtfully, in a calculating way with the usual hesitations." (Whitehill, J., 'Is There a Zen Ethic?', *The Eastern Buddhist*, vol.20/1 (1987), pp.24-25.) However, he goes on to say that Zen does not oppose deliberation, rather the tradition rejects calculation as the mode in which the Bodhisattva's compassion functions, thus allowing for our earlier discussion on the 'freeing up of mind'

⁵²⁷ Tsung-mi, quoted in Gregory, P.N., *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, p.238.

stipulate any specific course of action; they must remain open to (skilful) interpretation. However, they do posit the impermanent nature of *any* specific course, that any essentialised system is limited. Thus every moment must be engaged with in its own specific immediacy with the knowledge that you and your actions actively interpenetrate with this multi-faceted reality.

Conclusion

The identification of the enlightened state as transcendent and 'amoral' in Zen philosophy has allowed for the misappropriation of Zen. Concepts such as 'no-mind' have been abstracted from their expression as part of the Buddha-dharma and applied to various limited objectives. In contrast, while acknowledging the 'tearing up of scriptures', Huineng described 'no-mind' as necessarily coupled with 'mindfulness'. Dōgen went further and argued that the enlightened state is not a state in isolation, but is intertwined with conventional experience, implicating the mode of enlightenment as one of continual practice. Even within these testimonies; mindfulness invokes a focus and practice implies direction – we are left with the philosophical problem of explaining the validity of the Zen expression of the Buddhist project with a focus on 'nothingness'. Compassion remains an artefact of dogma unless the pervasive problem of nihilism is addressed.

Nishitani suggests that the arising of nihilism is a call to introspection, to investigate that 'absolute near side' of the universe that brings nihilism into being. Where Nietzsche proposes the *Übermensch*, the forging of one's own values and the triumph of the 'will to power', Nishitani maintains that the only resolution is to overcome oneself, as it is this self-reification that creates the problem of nihilism in the world. Where nihilism arises in Zen, it is through the reification of the state of the enlightened being leading to the conception of transcendence. In this sense the 'nothingness' of the absolute is ultimately valued and turns to nihilate conventional reality, justifying the apparently (conventionally) 'immoral' actions of 'enlightened beings'. It is this nihilistic reading which must be overcome; this 'nothing' must be transcended in order to resolve the Zen moral problem.

The philosophical analysis of this problem thus requires the careful avoidance of both nihilism and reification for Zen to be reconciled with the Buddhist soteriological project. This thesis proposed the construction of a metaphysical framework based on Nāgārjuna's connection of emptiness and interdependence in order to explain both the apparent connection and separation of phenomena and the possibility of enlightenment from Zen principles. The goal of this framework was to make sense of the two truths concurrently in order to explain how enlightened wisdom and compassion could function simultaneously; the problem being that within a metaphysical instant, with a single focal subject, the latter implies suffering whereas the former denotes non-suffering. If the two are metaphysically reconciled, and the possibility of enlightenment is established, Zen and the wider Buddhist project are philosophically validated. In this regard, interdependence, taken as the key principle, was shown to have far-reaching implications.

The first step was to revoke the possibility of justification across 'transcendent' levels, as the valuation required for such justifications exceeds the limits of the levelled system which proposed it. In addition, I established that all reified systems are limited, and that all systems are necessarily reified, including this very project. The best any system approaching some understanding of the nature of reality, identified as 'ineffable', can achieve is to be ultimately self-refuting. My response was to recognise every concept as ultimately 'empty', and propose a metaphysical framework which is absolutely contingent and devoid of any essential ground. These, I argue, are necessary characteristics of any metaphysical system compatible with interdependence, universally applied.

Interdependence applied metaphysically requires a reassessment of reductionist tendencies in contemporary thought, specifically in relation to scientific theory; our method of

interpreting phenomenal reality. To reduce a phenomenon to its constituent parts essentialises those parts, which is ultimately untenable. Problematically, 'emptiness' is commonly understood as the result of a reductive argument: that an entity is dependent upon specific causes and conditions and so is in itself empty, and in effect *is* those causes and conditions. I term these specific causes and conditions the 'environment' of the focal entity. The mistake, I maintain, is to essentialise *either* environment or focal entity, as both are epistemically and causally interdependent. To reduce one to the other is to lose the explanatory power both interdependent aspects allow. This is particularly prominent in the case of 'mind'.

The alternative to the reductionist framework, wherein there is some fundamental ground, is the groundless 'bootstrap' model, wherein the universe continually creates itself. By recognising the metaphysical connection of 'minds' in the world, as well as their subjective separation, the 'bootstrap universe' is seen to be constructed intersubjectively. Recognising the causal efficacy of mind necessitates that any attempt to understand the physical function of the world must take into account the states of minds around them. For the enlightened being this amounts to the recognition of a conventional being's experience of suffering and its effects, while also realising the ultimate emptiness of this suffering. This is the metaphysical basis for the possibility of compassion. The motivation for compassion is explained as a result of 'interpenetration', derived from the work of Zen master Dōgen.

The possibility of enlightenment is provided in the framework through an 'inverted metaphysics'. The reason for this inversion recalls Nishitani's 'absolute near side': enlightenment is directly experienced. If the 'environment' of any entity is extended to the total universe then the entity is metaphysically identified, either realised as that entity or, as

inverted: the total universe *minus* the focal entity. Completely realised, these amount to the same thing. If such vision were practically possible, this would entail being able to see 'the universe in a single atom'. Such an understanding allows a different approach to the work of Dōgen.

For Dōgen, every instance of meditation was the 'awakening of the universe', he tells us that 'blue mountains walk', that every aspect of reality interpenetrates, connecting every meditation practitioner with every other and every aspect of nature. Furthermore, by emphasising that enlightened beings see 'flowers in the sky' (a Buddhist phrase commonly denoting delusion), Dōgen recognises that they cannot be unaware of conventional cause and effect. More than this, they are not restricted to any particular mode and the expression of each and every mode appears to be up for interpretation. This last point indicates the *freedom* of the enlightened being, the need for a creative response to the dynamic diversity of situations they enter. This freedom is symptomatic of the enlightened state, unobtainable by one trapped by a *will to power*. To be able to respond to an ever-changing immanent reality, one's response must also be dynamic. In the final chapter I proposed that 'formlessness' could be adopted as a principle by which to guide one's actions in accordance with interdependent reality, with pragmatically fruitful results. A consequence of this though is the continual reassessment of the goals of any undertaking. Dōgen's response to Nansen's killing of the cat can be taken as an example.

Recognition of the universe as interdependent and absolutely groundless indicates that conventional morality certainly cannot hold ultimately. Nevertheless, the convention is active in the minds of those who hold it. I maintain that the Zen concept of 'absolute nothingness' is not a nihilation of morality, instead *every* question becomes a moral

question. The freedom of the enlightened being requires that they use 'skilful means' in their actions and responses to other sentient beings. While temporarily making use of systems is certainly useful, to adopt a single system would be to artificially limit oneself and project the limits of that system onto others as universally binding. The enlightened being should not be definable, in accordance with the nature of interdependence, they should act formlessly. As their ultimate nature ('Buddha-nature') is formless, their every enterprise would be akin to our conventionally constant practice.

From the conventional perspective, which is to say our own, the metaphysical framework of interdependence indicates that there is no 'other' realm by which to justify one's actions or motivations, nor those of others. The result is a direct confrontation with immanent reality. At this point, while we can explain phenomenon as a result of interdependence, this relationship works both ways. Every sentient being is ultimately responsible for their own response to the world. In order to understand the world, and one's place in it, focus must first be turned to that common aspect in all experienced reality – one's own mind. Far from turning away from the world, this is the means by which one can actually come to realise reality as it is. The method is meditation. This is *Zen*.

As this is a philosophy thesis, I have attempted to focus on examining those human existential problems that transcend any particular instance of their postulation. The problem of nihilism, as it arises in Zen stems from the groundlessness of the 'nothingness' found proposed at its heart. Hisamatsu tells us to 'Stand exactly where there is nowhere to stand'; a position I adopted in the thesis. Perhaps what scares us about nihilism is not that there is no meaning but instead that there is nothing for us to defend ourselves with, nor anything to attack the position of others with. Without ego, nihilism is nullified. In a great

ocean we may float quite happily; it's the ships and the sharks and the surf that threaten us. It is against reality that we find the shadow of nihilism – it is in contrast with the world that meaninglessness becomes a problem - for *something* must lack meaning. Yet it is at root one's own mind which projects the problem of nihilism in attempting to ground one's beliefs, to reify its own existence beyond that of an empty, interdependent and contingent arising.

Nietzsche made much of affirming nihilism, recognising the lack of intrinsic meaning in the world as an utterly empowering force, a point which Nishitani fondly adopted. The affirmation of 'absolute nothingness' though should not lead one to forge one's own values, but rather recognise those values that already persist. Rather than a nihilist who 'smashes left and right', to take up a stance in the groundless metaphysics of interdependence one must recognise the validity of others in their 'thusness'. An enlightened being is not determined by conventional norms, but they do not exist in isolation from those conventions – they must mindfully engage with them. Wisdom entails the recognition of interdependence, and compassion is an implication of one's motivations realised interdependently.

In reference to the warrior class' appropriation of Zen, Suzuki writes in 'Zen and Japanese Culture', that it was pragmatically useful;

Zen has sustained them in two ways, morally and philosophically. Morally, because Zen is a religion which teaches us not to look backward once the course is decided upon; philosophically, because it treats life and death indifferently.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁸ Suzuki, D.T., *Zen and Japanese Culture*, P.61.

Victoria takes statements such as this as the core of his arguments against Suzuki.⁵²⁹ In light of the interpretation of Zen pursued in this thesis through the metaphysics of interdependence, such statements from Suzuki and others should be read in light of the complexity of the apparent 'transcendence' of the enlightened state, and the ineffability of the ultimate truth. From the perspective of the absolute, neither life nor death can take priority. Existentially applied, this entails that one should accept whichever state they are in,⁵³⁰ be it fortunate or otherwise, and continue to move forward. This emphasis on the present moment over the past or future, is a pragmatic tool, as we have seen, but it does not eliminate the need for mindfulness. As Suzuki states: "Zen never teaches one to throw one's life away."⁵³¹ Conventionally analysed, Zen is 'amoral'; it presents no preset moral code, and as such its application is contingent upon the characteristics of the present instance. Ultimately such moral codes have no bearing. I have claimed that the Zen practitioner must be formless, as formlessness is the response to the nature of reality as it is – interdependent, empty of intrinsic existence and a call to the continual moral enterprise driven by the conventional experience of suffering in the world.

It is apparent that the maintenance of interdependence as the key metaphysical principle has implications for fields outside the philosophical study of Zen. Some of these are already being developed, as noted in chapter 4, including the development of epistemic modes incorporating two levels of causation to predict and model the interactions of complex systems, as well as the attribution of mental effects to metaphysical frameworks. However, the most immediate implication is towards the development of an ethical system based on

⁵²⁹ Victoria, B., *Zen at War*, p.106.

⁵³⁰ In order to be aware of to such a distinction we may assume that the subject will be alive.

⁵³¹ Suzuki, D.T., quoted in Kirita K. 'D.T. Suzuki on Society and the State' in Heisig, J. & Maraldo, J. (eds.), *Rude Awakenings*, p.61.

the principles developed from this metaphysical framework.⁵³² In addition, chapter 7 examined the pragmatic application of formlessness using the example of martial arts, with further application to any field provided its scope is sufficiently extended. One field where the potential application is particularly interesting is economics; interpreting 'profit' as an interpenetrating aspect of markets would necessitate a reassessment of the identification of capital.⁵³³ Of course such applications are beyond the scope of this thesis but present a wide scope for further investigation.

Overall the result of transcending the nihilistic reading of 'nothingness' is a confrontation with the metaphysics of interdependence – the immanence of reality wherein 'no-thing' is transcended. An enlightened realisation is thus revealed to be nothing other than the clear recognition of the conventional experience of the world, *as it is*, unbound by the fetters of an essential self. In this metaphysical reading 'morality' is nothing other than cause and effect. We are all responsible for the state of our existence. The popular kōan, quoted below, captures this well.

A soldier named Nobushige came to Hakuin, and asked: "Is there really a paradise and a hell?"

"Who are you?" inquired Hakuin.

⁵³² Christopher Ives considers such a move essential to the practical resolution of the Zen moral problem - "Without critical reflection on, for example, self-interest, conflicts of interest, power, ideology, and sociopolitical suffering in light of core Buddhist moral values - that is to say, unless Zen Buddhists were to construct a systemic and rigorous social ethic - self-interest or moral systems not necessarily congruent with Buddhist values can fill the void and grant compassion the specificity it lacks." (Ives, C., 'What's Compassion Got to Do with It?', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Vol.12 (2005), p.52.) In keeping with the principle of formlessness, I can only accept any such system as expedient means, as adherence to any system will, eventually, lead to further problems (somewhat curbing the spirit of Ives mandate - proclaiming the need for a world-wide '[insert ideology here]' superstate for example).

⁵³³ For example, taking into account 'national happiness' (as in Bhutan); or accounting for the impact of production in relation to long-term environmental effects. (See for instance, Stiglitz, J., *Freefall: Free Markets and the Sinking of the Global Economy*, pp.283-284: "Some of the debates that we have concerning the trade-offs between the environment and economic growth are off the mark: if we correctly measured output, there would be no trade-off. Correctly measured output will be higher with good environmental policies, and the environment will be better as well.")

"I am a samurai," the warrior replied.

"You, a soldier!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar."

Nobushige became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued: "So you have a sword! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head."

As Nobushige drew his sword Hakuin remarked: "Here open the gates of hell!"

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

"Here open the gates of paradise," said Hakuin.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁴ 57. 'The Gates of Paradise' in 101 Zen Stories, Reps and Senzaki (trans.), *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, p.80.

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