

Nonduality

In Buddhism and Beyond

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Introduction to the Paperback Edition

This paperback edition provides an opportunity to reflect back on the gestation of this book as well as its reception: in the light of both, how might it be different if written today? The importance of the topic, and the vast literature touching on it, continues to dwarf any attempt to provide a comprehensive overview, but the perspective of a few years allows a better understanding of how tentative the following chapters are and how they might have been improved.

It was with some reluctance that the chapter on nondual perception was placed so early, and the passage of time has reinforced those hesitations. My concern is that some readers may become stuck in the middle of that chapter and never get any further! The basic difficulty is that the epistemology of perception is notoriously and inescapably complicated, with the result that my treatment of those complications is sometimes in danger of losing the main thread of the argument. The comments I have received, however, have been more specific. Some Vedānta scholars have pointed out that there is no such thing as nondual perception in Advaita, which is true (and even emphasized within the text), but this does not obviate the main points that chapter 2 makes about Vedānta: that understanding *nirvikalpa* experience as involving nondual perception illuminates many of the Advaitic claims about Brahman; and that reluctance to accept this touches upon the main problem with the Advaitic system, which is its

inability to understand the relationship between *māyā* (the locus of perception) and *nirguṇa Brahman* (without perception).

The main difficulty with chapter 2 is elsewhere: the search for an unconditioned Reality “behind” concepts misses the essential point (emphasized in chapter 6!) that the Unconditioned in Mahāyāna is to be found in the conditioned—more precisely, that the true nature of the conditioned is itself the unconditioned. Instead of looking for an Absolute usually obscured by conceptualization, it would be better to subject that distinction between the Real and whatever is opposed to it (thought? delusion? the phenomenal world?) to a deconstruction that inquires into why that duality has become so important to us.

To put it another way, the attempt in chapter 2 to discover non-dual perception has the effect of reifying another duality: that between Reality (usually accorded a capital R) and thought/language. This problem also applies, more or less, to the other chapters in part 1. It is addressed most directly in my essay in the book *Healing Deconstruction*, which is informed by a deeper appreciation of what Dōgen says about language.¹ Briefly, instead of rejecting language/thought (a response which is still dualistic), what is needed is an appreciation of the plurality of descriptive systems and the freedom to employ them according to the situation. As Dōgen might say, rather than eliminate concepts we need to “liberate” them!—which requires, of course, that we do not cling to any particular set.

In effect, however, this is less a critique of the arguments in Part One than it implies a more nuanced version of them.

I do not have as many reservations about any of the later chapters, and they are left to stand for themselves except for my concern to emphasize again the importance and centrality of chapter 6, “The Deconstruction of Dualism.” Although this chapter serves a key role in the larger argument, it may be read by itself without reference to any of the other chapters.

Some readers have noticed problems with a few translated passages, which are more ambiguous than I have credited them for. In a book full of so many different quotations from so many different traditions and languages, this difficulty is not easily avoided—but my own linguistic skills (or lack thereof) have not helped, since they have

made me largely dependent upon others' judgement. Nevertheless, I am not aware that this seriously impinges on *any* of the arguments offered. In cases where a particular translation is central—especially in chapter 3, which considers at some length the first chapter of the *Tao Tê Ching*—my versions have of course been discussed with scholars more specialized in those fields.

Those familiar with *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*, recently republished by Wisdom Publications, may wonder about the relationship between that book and this one. The two are distinct, of course, in that neither requires any acquaintance with the other. There is nonetheless a connection, for the central theme of *Lack and Transcendence*—the sense-of-self's sense-of-lack—is prefigured in chapter 4 of this book, where the issue is raised why our minds seek a secure "home." In that sense the second book may be said to have grown out of the first and the two supplement each other.

It remains to thank the fine folk at Wisdom Publications for this new edition, especially Ben Gleason, Josh Bartok, and Lindsay D'Andrea. I have resisted the temptation to rewrite portions of this book, although some typographical errors have been corrected and a few minor points are expressed somewhat differently. The only significant change is that the annotated bibliography at the end of the first edition has been removed. It was compiled more than thirty years ago, and since then there have been so many relevant new publications that a revised version would require much more space than is available. One excellent book I especially recommend, however, is Leesa Davis's *Advaita Vedanta and Zen Buddhism: Deconstructive Modes of Spiritual Inquiry*, which focuses on the nondual spiritual path.

I continue to hope that what follows will encourage other scholars to improve upon it, and that it will also encourage a new generation of readers to work on overcoming their own sense of subject-object duality. Those who find this book helpful may also appreciate its two "sequels": *Lack and Transcendence* (a second edition was recently published by Wisdom Publications) and *A Buddhist History of the West* (still available from the State University of New York Press).

Introduction

In our self-seeing There, the self is seen as belonging to that order, or rather we are merged into that self in us which has the quality of that order. It is a knowing of the self restored to its purity. No doubt we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities, seen and seer, instead of, boldly, the achievement of unity. In this seeing, we neither hold an object nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it: centre coincides with centre, for on this higher plane things that touch at all are one; only in separation is there duality; by our holding away, the Supreme is set outside. This is why the vision baffles telling; we cannot detach the supreme to state it; if we have seen something thus detached we have failed of the Supreme which is to be known only as one with ourselves.

—Sixth Ennead IX.10

In case we miss the main point, Plotinus repeats it a sentence later: “There were not two; beholder was one with beheld; it was not a vision compassed but a unity apprehended.”² The nonduality of seer and seen: there is no philosophical or religious assertion more striking or more counterintuitive, and yet claims that there is such an experience, and that this experience is more veridical than our usual dualistic experience, are not rare in the Western tradition. Similar statements have been made, in equally stirring language, by such

important Western mystical figures as Meister Eckhart, Jakob Boehme, and William Blake, to name only a few. Philosophers have generally been more hesitant about committing themselves so decisively, but a claim regarding the nonduality of subject and object is explicit or implicit within such thinkers as Spinoza, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Bergson, and Whitehead—again naming only a few; later I shall argue that similar claims may be found among important contemporary figures like Nietzsche, Heidegger, and perhaps Wittgenstein. We should not be surprised by the comparative reluctance of philosophers to commit themselves on this issue. Religious figures can be satisfied to rest the assertion of nonduality on faith or on their own experience, but philosophers must support their assertions with arguments; and what is reason to do with such an extraordinary claim, which (as Plotinus suggests) by its very nature is not susceptible even to adequate conceptual description, much less proof? It is not surprising that the mainstream of the Western intellectual tradition has not been sympathetic to such statements. Yet claims about subject-object nonduality, like the broad mystical tradition where they have found their most comfortable home, have survived as a puzzling subterranean undercurrent, sometimes attacked, at other times ridiculed.

The contemporary world prides itself on its pragmatism. This means, among other things, that most philosophers believe we have evolved beyond the abstract speculations of metaphysics by becoming self-critical and more sophisticated in the way we use language. But if traditional metaphysics is dead, metaphysics in the larger sense is inescapable. It ultimately refers to our basic understanding about the nature of the world, and some such understanding can always be extrapolated, if necessary, from our attitude toward the world we suppose ourselves to be “in.” The farthest we can remove ourselves is to “forget” this metaphysical understanding in the sense of no longer being aware of our philosophical presuppositions about the world and ourselves. Today we are so impressed with the success of the physical sciences—originally derived from metaphysics—that we return a compliment and derive our metaphysics from natural science. But the scientific worldview has its own metaphysical presuppositions, which

originated in ancient Greece, in ways of looking at the world that came to fruition in Plato and especially Aristotle. This dualistic view stands almost in diametric opposition to a worldview based on the nonduality of seer and seen. However, the Greek tradition of that time was a rich one, abounding in competing paradigms, and it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that, however inevitable it may seem in retrospect, the Aristotelian worldview which developed into the mainstream was not the only possible path. As we shall see, other important thinkers prior to Plotinus—such as Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and even Plato, according to how we interpret him—were more sympathetic than Aristotle to the metaphysical claim of nonduality, and what they thought on this matter may still have meaning for us today.

But my main concern is not the development of the Western philosophical tradition, although there will be many occasions to refer to it. In the West, the claim of subject–object nonduality has been a seed which, however often sown, has never found fertile soil, because it has been too antithetical to those other vigorous sprouts that have grown into modern science and technology. In the Eastern tradition—the rich yet dissimilar intellectual climates of India and China, in particular—we encounter a different situation. There the seeds of seer–seen nonduality not only sprouted but matured into a variety (some might say a jungle) of impressive philosophical species which have been attractive to many Westerners because they seem so exotic in relation to our own—and because they bear at least the promise of fruits which we Westerners lack yet still crave. By no means do all of these systems assert the nonduality of subject and object, but it is significant that three which do—Buddhism, Vedānta, and Taoism—have probably been the most influential.

I should note at the outset that none of these three completely denies the dualistic “relative” world that we are familiar with and presuppose as “commonsense”: the world as a collection of discrete objects, interacting causally in space and time. Their claim is rather that there is another, nondual way of experiencing the world, and that this other mode of experience is actually more veridical and superior to the dualistic mode we usually take for granted. The difference between

such nondualistic approaches and the contemporary Western one (which, given its global influence, can hardly be labeled Western anymore) is that the latter has constructed its metaphysics on the basis of dualistic experience only, whereas the former acknowledges the deep significance of nondual experience by constructing its metaphysical categories according to what it reveals.

But expressing the matter in this way is getting ahead of ourselves. That Buddhism, Vedānta, and Taoism are basing their worldview on the experience of subject-object nonduality cannot be presupposed; it is one of the main concerns of this book to argue precisely that point. In so doing, the significant differences among these systems (and internally, for example, among different Buddhist systems) will receive our attention, and the basis for those disagreements will be considered. It is safe to say that those differences have not usually been overlooked. If anything, there has been more emphasis on disagreements than on similarities, which have tended to be passed over too quickly—perhaps because disagreements naturally provide more to discuss. The unfortunate result is that, even in Asian philosophy, this shared claim about the nonduality of subject and object has not received the philosophical attention that it merits. It is such an extraordinary claim, so much at variance with common sense, and yet so fundamental to all these systems, that it deserves careful investigation; and such investigation gives rise to a suspicion.

In all the Asian systems that incorporate this claim, the nondual nature of reality is indubitably revealed only in what they term enlightenment or liberation (*nirvāṇa*, *mokṣa*, *satori*, etc.), which is the experience of nonduality. That experience is the hinge upon which each metaphysic turns, despite the fact that such enlightenment has different names in the various systems and is often described in very different ways. Unlike Western philosophy, which prefers to reflect on the dualistic experience accessible to all, these systems make far-reaching epistemological and ontological claims on the basis of counterintuitive experience accessible to very few—if we accept their accounts, only to those who are willing to follow the necessarily rigorous path, who are very few. It is not that these claims are not empirical, but if they are true, they are grounded on evidence not readily

available. This is the source of the difficulty in evaluating them. Plotinus has already drawn our attention to another characteristic of the nondual experience, which fully accords with Asian descriptions of enlightenment: the experience cannot be attained or even understood conceptually. We shall see that this is because our usual conceptual knowledge is dualistic in at least two senses: it is knowledge *about* something, which a subject *has*; and such knowledge must discriminate one thing from another in order to assert some *attribute* about some *thing*. Later I reflect on the isomorphism between our conceptual thought-processes and the subject-predicate structure of language. What is important at the moment is that the dualistic nature of conceptual knowledge means the nondual experience, if genuine, must transcend philosophy itself and all its ontological claims. And that brings our suspicions to a head: are these different philosophies based upon, and trying to point to, the same nondual experience? During the experience itself there is no philosophizing, but if and when one “steps back” and attempts to describe what has been experienced, perhaps a variety of descriptions are possible. Maybe even contradictory ontologies can be erected on the same phenomenological ground. That suspicion is the motivation for this study.

Because nonduality is so incompatible with our usual experience—or, as the nondualist usually prefers, with our usual way of understanding experience—it is very difficult to grasp what exactly is meant when it is claimed that, for example, perception is or can be nondual. Clarifying those claims is the major concern of part 1. This is not to say that a dualistic claim is less problematic—the relation between subject and object has always been a (perhaps the) major epistemological problem—yet at least a dualistic approach seems to accord better with common sense, despite whatever puzzles arise when one tries to develop this belief philosophically. But that nonduality is difficult to understand is necessarily true, according to the various systems which assert it. If we did understand it fully we would be enlightened, which is not understanding in the usual sense: it is the experience of nonduality which philosophizing obstructs. From such a perspective, the problem with philosophy is that its attempt to grasp nonduality conceptually is inherently dualistic and thus

self-defeating. Indeed, the very impetus to philosophy may be seen as a reaction to the split between subject and object: philosophy originated in the need of the alienated subject to understand itself and its relation to the objective world it finds itself in. But, according to the “nondualist systems” to be considered—Buddhism (especially Mahāyāna), Vedānta (especially Advaita), and Taoism—philosophy cannot grasp the source from which it springs and so must yield to praxis: the intellectual attempt to grasp nonduality conceptually must give way to various meditative techniques which, it is claimed, promote the immediate experience of nonduality. Of course, the shift of perspective from conceptual understanding to meditative practices is beyond the scope of this work, as it is beyond the range of philosophy generally. However, despite this attitude about the final inadequacy of philosophy—which means, among other things, that these systems are not philosophies at all in the Western sense—the various traditions have nonetheless made many specific claims about different aspects of the nondual experience. These claims provide the material for this work.

My approach is hermeneutical. I shall extract and elucidate a “core doctrine” of nonduality from these various claims. Such a project is ambitious enough, so let me emphasize that, despite the many references to Western parallels and contemporary theories, this work is not an attempt to establish, in some supposedly objective and rigorous fashion, whether our experience is or can be nondual. Instead, I shall construct a theory which is coherent in that it integrates a large number of otherwise disparate philosophical claims, and which is hence plausible as a systematic interpretation of these claims.

Such an approach is consistent with the attitude of the Asian traditions to be examined. Most of the passages I will quote offer assertions rather than arguments, a stance that is not atypical of the literature. When those claims were originally made, it was usually expected that they would be received reverently by those already committed to the tradition. In those whose minds were ripe (usually as a result of extensive meditation), a *mahāvākya* (great saying) such as “that thou art” or “mind is the Buddha” might be sufficient to precipitate the realization of nonduality. But logically compelling proofs

of the possibility of nondual experience were not offered. The Upaniṣads include many claims about the nature of Ātman and Brahman, and analogies to help us understand those claims, but not arguments—which is to be expected, since they, like the classic texts of Taoism, are “prephilosophical.” Much later, Śāṅkara developed and systematized these claims with the help of many arguments, but most of these criticize other interpretations; his own views are defended apologetically as consistent with the Vedas and not contradicted by experience. The Pāli Canon does not offer proof that there is an escape from saṃsāra. Although many of the Buddha’s doctrinal formulations are philosophically subtle, he intentionally avoided even describing what the state of nirvana is, other than characterizing it as the end of suffering and craving. Long afterward, the Yogācāra philosopher Asaṅga pointed out that there are only three decisive arguments for transcendental idealism, and it seems to me that the same three arguments apply to the claim for nonduality. First, there is the direct intuition of reality (nonduality) by those who have awakened to it; second, the report that Buddhas (or other enlightened people) give of their experience in speech or writing; and third, the experience (of nonduality) that occurs in deep meditative *samādhi*, when “the concentrated see things as they really are.”³ It is hardly necessary to point out that none of these three needs be accepted as compelling by anyone already skeptical. The third, meditative experience, may easily be criticized as abnormal and possibly delusive. The second is partly an appeal to authority, which is unacceptable as philosophical evidence, and partly a restatement of the first. This means that the argument for nonduality is actually reduced to the experience of nonduality—either our own or that of someone else whose testimony we may be inclined to accept.

W. T. Stace has argued that the “divine order” is “utterly other” to the natural order.⁴ Whether or not this accurately describes Western mysticism, it is not the view of the nondualist philosophies we consider. Their general attitude is that one can realize the nature of the dualistic phenomenal world from the “perspective” of the nondual experience, but not vice versa. The Buddha did not describe nirvana because nirvana cannot be understood from the perspective of

one still mired in *saṃsāra*, but full comprehension of the workings of *saṃsāra*—for example, the “dependent origination” (*pratītya-samutpāda*) of all things—is implied by the experience of nirvana. In fact, full understanding of *saṃsāra*, of how craving and delusion cause rebirth, seems to constitute the nirvana of Pāli Buddhism, for that is how one is able to escape the otherwise mechanical cycle of birth and death. Śaṅkara would agree: *mokṣa*—the realization that “I am Brahman”—reveals the true nature of phenomena as *māyā*, illusion, but until that liberation one is blinded by *māyā* and takes the unreal as real, the real as unreal. In Taoism, the realization of Tao gives one insight into the nature of “the ten thousand things,” but although some characteristics of the Tao (and the man of Tao) are expounded using parables and analogies, I am familiar with no serious attempt to prove the existence of the Tao.

That apparently dualistic phenomena can be understood from the perspective of nonduality, but not vice versa, appears to be necessarily true, due to the nature of understanding. What Sebastian Samay writes about Karl Jaspers’s philosophy also applies here:

Unlike science, which inquires into objects which are in the world, philosophy sets out to penetrate into the unity of all things by going back into their fundamental origin. Consequently, the object of philosophy can permit nothing outside itself by means of which it might be “understood.” Other objects are logically dependent on it, but it itself depends on nothing. Thoughts and statements about such an “object” are necessarily self-reflexive; while we explain everything by reference to this object, we must explain it by itself; it is self-explanatory, its own point of reference.⁵

This may be restated in our terms as follows: from the “perspective” of nonduality—that is, having experienced nondually—one can understand the delusive nature of dualistic experience and how that delusion arises, but not vice versa. There is no argument which, using the premises of our usual dualistic experience (or understanding of experience), can provide a valid proof that experience is actually

nondual. All philosophy is an attempt to understand our experience, but here the critical issue is the type of experience that we accept as fundamental, as opposed to the type of experience that needs to be “explained.” The Western epistemologist usually accepts as his data our familiar dualistic experience, dismissing other types (e.g., *samādhi*) as philosophically insignificant aberrations. In contrast, Asian epistemologists have placed more weight upon various “paranormal” experiences including *samādhi*, dreams, and what they consider to be the experience of liberation. The former approach accepts duality as valid and dismisses nonduality as delusive; the latter accepts nonduality as revelatory and criticizes duality as a more common but deluded interpretation of what we experience. Because it is a matter of premises, at this level there are no neutral or objective criteria by which we can evaluate these two views—indeed, the very concept of “objective criteria” is itself under question. In choosing between these approaches, cultural bias usually comes into play. Those raised in the classical Asian traditions are more inclined to accept the possibility of nonduality; those educated in the Western empiricist tradition are more likely to be skeptical of such an experience and prefer to “explain away” nonduality in terms of something else that they are able to understand—for example, as an “oceanic feeling” due to womb memory, Freud’s formulation. The Western belief that only one type of experience is veridical is a post-Aristotelian assumption now too deeply ingrained to be easily recognized as such by many. Yet such skepticism is dangerously circular, using arguments based on one mode of experience to conclude that only that mode of experience is veridical.

This study divides naturally into two parts. Part 1 extracts various claims from the major nondualist traditions, Buddhism, Vedānta, and Taoism, in order to construct a “core doctrine” of nonduality largely consistent with all three. The process of selection is unsystematic, making use of assertions and arguments that provide helpful insights while ignoring most of the rest. This yields a theory about the nature of nondual experience that also explains the apparent “delusion” of our more usual way of understanding experience. But

the disagreements among the nondualist systems—especially between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta—cannot be lightly dismissed. So part 2 works backward, using the core theory as a perspective from which to approach and resolve the disagreements. There we shall be able to understand how the same phenomenological experience may be subjected to different and even contradictory descriptions.

In this introduction, the term *nonduality* refers exclusively to the nonduality of (more narrowly) seer and seen, (more broadly) subject and object. Such nonduality is my main concern, but is by no means the only meaning of the term in the literature. At least five different meanings can be distinguished, all of them intimately related; three of those are of interest in part 1. Chapter 1 sets the parameters of the study by discussing the role of these three nondualities within Buddhism, Vedānta, and Taoism. It demonstrates their prevalence, importance, and relationships, dwelling particularly upon the third nonduality of subject and object, of self and nonself, of my consciousness and the world “I” find myself “in.” Each of the following chapters of part 1 investigates what such nonduality might mean in one particular mode of our experience—perceiving, acting, and thinking, respectively. How can we understand the assertion that each of these is actually nondual?

In the case of perception, we will find general agreement that the act of perception is normally not simple but complex (*sa-vikalpa*), for a variety of other mental processes interpret and organize percepts. Through meditative practices, however, one can come to distinguish the bare percept from these other processes and experience it as it is in itself (*nir-vikalpa*); experiencing this way is without the distinction normally made between the perceived object and the subject that is conscious of it. As *The Awakening of Faith* (an important Mahāyāna text) says, “from the beginning, corporeal form and mind have been nondual.”⁶ The meaning of this is discussed further, with particular reference to hearing and seeing, and is placed in the context of Western theories of epistemology as a version of phenomenism. Two recent psychological experiments into meditation

seem to provide empirical support for the possibility of such nondual perception.

We shall find a parallel in the case of action. Our normal experience of action is dualistic—there is the sense of an “I” that *does* the action—because the action is done to obtain a particular result. Corresponding to the usual tripartite division of perception into perceiver, perceived, and the act of perception, there is the agent, the action, and the goal of the action. Parallel to the superimposition of thought on percept, the mental “overlay” of intention also superimposes thought on action and thereby sustains the illusion of a separate agent; but without such thought-superimposition no distinction is experienced between agent and act, or between mind and body. Nondual action is spontaneous (because free from objectified intention), effortless (because free from a reified “I” that must exert itself), and “empty” (because one wholly *is* the action, there is not the dualistic awareness *of* an action). This perspective is derived from explaining the meaning of *wei-wu-wei*, the paradoxical “action of nonaction” of Taoism, and it is used to interpret the enigmatic first chapter of the *Tao Tê Ching*. It is also consistent with the emphasis, in some recent philosophy of mind, on intention as that which maintains the sense of self.

These accounts of nondual perception and nondual action seem to suggest that thought processes function only as an interference. Given also the emphasis on meditation in the nondualist traditions, one might conclude that thoughts are merely a problem to be minimized. But that is not the case. Even as thought processes may obscure the true nature of perception and action, so the nondual nature of thinking is obscured by its link with perception (hypostatizing percepts into objects) and action (providing intentions for action). The tripartite sense of a thinker who thinks thoughts is delusive, but there is a nondual alternative. We might suppose a thinker necessary in order to provide the causal link between various thoughts, to explain how one thought leads to another; but in fact there is no such link. In nondual thinking each thought is experienced as arising and passing away by itself, not “determined” by previous thoughts but “springing

up” spontaneously. Such thinking reveals the source of creativity, as testified by the many writers, composers, and even scientists who have insisted that “the thoughts just came of themselves.” It also provides a fruitful perspective for interpreting the later work of Martin Heidegger. The last section of chapter 4 suggests that Heidegger’s “way” is best understood as nondual thinking and points out that the nonduality of consciousness and world is the central theme of his most important post-*Kehre* (“turning”) essays.

The short summary concluding part 1 integrates these three studies into an understanding of a fourth nonduality, which may be called the nonduality of phenomena and Absolute, or, better, the nonduality of duality and nonduality. My approach supports the Mahāyāna claim that *samsāra* is nirvana. There is only one reality—this world, right here and now—but this world may be experienced in two different ways. *Samsāra* is the relative, phenomenal world as usually experienced, which is delusively understood to consist of a collection of discrete objects (including “me”) that interact causally in space and time. Nirvana is that same world but as it is in itself, nondually incorporating both subject and object into a whole. If we can “interpolate” from nondual experience to explain duality, but not vice versa, this suggests that our usual sense of duality is due to the superimposition or interaction among nondual percepts, actions, and thoughts. The problem seems to be that these three functions somehow interfere with each other, thus obscuring the nondual nature of each. The material objects of the external world are nondual percepts objectified by superimposed concepts. Dualistic action is due to the superimposition of intention upon nondual action. Concepts and intentions are dualistic because thinking is preoccupied with percepts and actions rather than being experienced as it is in itself, when it springs up creatively.

Part 2 defends our core theory by considering the ontological differences among the nondual systems, for the conflict among their categories constitutes the major challenge to a study of this sort. Chapter 5 interprets the three major systems of Indian philosophy—Sāṅkhya-Yoga, Buddhism, and Advaita Vedānta—as the three main ways to understand the subject-object relation. The radical dualism

of Sāṅkhya-Yoga is untenable, but several factors suggest that the claims of Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta are in fact quite compatible. Chapter 6—the most important of the book, in my opinion—provides a detailed analysis of five major issues on which Buddhism and Advaita seem diametrically opposed: no self versus all-Self, only-modes versus all-Substance, impermanence versus immutability, all-conditionality versus no-causality, and all path versus no-path. In each case, our nondualist approach leads us to conclude that the surface conflict of categories conceals a deeper agreement regarding the phenomenology of the nondual experience. When one wants to describe the nondual experience in the dualistic categories of language, two alternatives naturally suggest themselves: either to deny the subject or to deny the object; from this choice one's attitude toward the other disagreements follows. In both cases, what is more important than the choice between denial of subject or object is the denial common to both systems, of any bifurcation between self and non-self, and so on. The last section of chapter 6 employs the conclusions regarding time and causality to make a critique of Derrida's radical critique of Western philosophy, arguing that his deconstruction is incomplete because it is not radical enough to deconstruct itself; therefore it misses the possibility for a new, nonconceptual "opening" to something very different.

Chapters 7 and 8 test our core theory of nonduality in two ways. The first employs an analogy to demonstrate that the same experience can indeed result in incompatible descriptions, and in fact the "Mind-space" analogy seems to provide a common phenomenology for the major interpretations that we find in Indian philosophy. Chapter 8 uses the nondualist perspective to approach the two main philosophical issues raised by the *Bhagavad-gītā*: the relations among the various *margas* (spiritual paths), and the relationship between the personal (Saguṇa Brahman, God) and impersonal (Nirguṇa Brahman, Godhead) Absolutes.

The study concludes by considering, very briefly, the implications of subject-object nonduality for three other important areas of philosophy: the value-studies of ethics, aesthetics, and social theory. The nondual experience subverts the ground of the ethical problem, both

by denying the existence of the ontological ego and, more radically, by challenging all moral codes as deluding superimpositions. Nonduality also gives us insight into the aesthetic experience, as Schopenhauer realized; we shall see that, finally, it becomes difficult to distinguish between aesthetic and “spiritual” experiences. We shall end by reflecting on a social parallel and its implications, for “the same dualism that reduces things to objects for consciousness is at work in the humanism that reduces nature to raw material for humankind.”⁷

This introduction cannot end without an apologia. More than fifty years ago, Otto Rank temporarily gave up writing, complaining, “There is already too much truth in the world—an over-production which apparently cannot be consumed!” What would he say today? At the least no new book should be born without an *apologia pro vita sua*, an attempt to justify itself as more than a means for academic self-advancement. I write this book because I believe it is relevant to more than just our scholarly understanding of Asian philosophy: I hope that its critique of subject–object dualism helps to challenge the dualistic categories that have largely determined the development of Western civilization since Aristotle.

Today the Great Divide in Western philosophy is between those who see science as a model to be justified and emulated and those who see the scientific mode of knowledge—whose concern for objectivity makes it unavoidably dualistic—as only one mode of cognitive experience. Some of the most influential thinkers of the last century—Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are the ones most often referred to in these pages—criticized these dualistic categories in various ways. But their critiques have been more influential than any positive vision that they and others have been able to offer. Despite increasing suspicion about the merits of technocratic society and the dualistic mode of experiencing that undergirds it, there is no agreement about what the root of the problem is and therefore what alternative there might be.

One way to become aware of our own presuppositions is to examine the worldviews of other civilizations. The philosophies of India and China are the most profound and subtle alternatives, but they

present us with a profusion of systems which, despite some notable similarities, still seem to be poles apart in some important aspects of their understanding of reality. Their preoccupation with attaining another mode of experience stands in sharp contrast to the most influential strands of the Western tradition, which have rather sought to analyze and control our usual mode of experiencing. What is most promising about the Asian systems is that the alternative mode of experiencing they emphasize is understood to be not only revelatory but also personally liberating. Yet, as soon as we look more closely, the surface similarity among the systems seems to dissolve, for they characterize this other mode in very different ways. That is the point at which this study becomes relevant. If it can be demonstrated that beneath the clash of ontological categories there is a fundamental agreement about the nature of this alternative mode, our situation changes. In place of an internecine feud among rival opposition parties, which enervates them and keeps them from becoming genuine rivals to the incumbent government, we have a united front which must be taken seriously. In my opinion, the nihilism of present Western culture means that we cannot afford to ignore what the greatest philosophical traditions of India and China may have to teach us.



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