

# Commuting between Zen and Philosophy

## In the Footsteps of Kyoto School Philosophers and Psychosomatic Practitioners

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Although such a thing is indeed impossible, I nevertheless wish to somehow unite Zen and philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

—Nishida Kitarō

The problem of Zen and philosophy... remains even now to be settled. It is, after all, the task remaining at the core of the spiritual and cultural encounter between East and West.<sup>2</sup>

—Nishitani Keiji

It must be said that there is a fundamental gap between Eastern practice (行), especially the non-thinking (非思量) of Zen, and philosophy as an academic discipline of reflection (反省の学) that arose and developed in the West. Nishida Kitarō cast himself into that gap.... If the meeting of Christianity and Greek philosophy—as the collision between the principle of faith and that of reason—was an event that pervaded and drove (and still pervades and drives) the spirit of the European world for centuries, the mutual encounter between Buddhism—especially in the honed and concretized form of Zen—and the Western world will undoubtedly continue as a great drama played out in the depths of history for many generations to come.<sup>3</sup>

—Ueda Shizuteru

1. NKZ 19: 224–5. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are my own. This essay was composed largely on the basis of substantially revised and expanded versions of material drawn from DAVIS 2004A, 2013, and 2017A.

2. NISHITANI 1986, 153.

3. UEDA 1998, 167, 226–7.

One of the major transitions that have occurred in modern Japanese philosophy is the translation of Zen Buddhist ideas into a philosophical idiom. What gets lost, and what gets added, when we reflect on Zen texts in the context of the modern academic discipline of philosophy—a discipline that was transplanted into the Japanese cultural soil starting in the late nineteenth century? When Zen ideas are discussed in an academic context, we need to be attentive to the fact that they have been displaced from the psychosomatic practices—the embodied-spiritual disciplines—in which they were originally embedded.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, there have been a few philosophers who have engaged in the practice as well as studied the texts and teachings of Zen. They have commuted between the psychosomatic practice of Zen and the intellectual discipline of philosophy, and we should pay special attention to what they have said about the relation between these methodologically very different, yet potentially mutually enriching, ways of pursuing wisdom.

I have endeavored to follow in the giant footsteps of Kyoto School<sup>5</sup> philosophers Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990) and Ueda Shizuteru (1926–2019) by commuting between philosophy and Zen.<sup>6</sup> While residing for a decade in Kyoto, this often meant literally commuting on foot or by bicycle between Kyoto University and Shōkoku-ji Rinzai Zen monastery. These institutions of higher and deeper learning are located just a few kilometers apart, and yet there is a world of difference between their intellectual and psychosomatic methodologies. In contemporary

4. For an introduction to Zen that attends to both its psychosomatic practices and its philosophical teachings, see DAVIS forthcoming 1.

5. For an introduction to the Kyoto School, see DAVIS 2019A.

6. Unfortunately, Nishitani passed away soon after I moved to Japan in the summer of 1990, and so I never got to meet him in person. Later on, I did get to study for a couple of years under his last close student, Prof. Horio Tsutomu, at Ōtani University, who also enabled me to join the lay practitioner group at Shōkokuji, Chishōkai. When I entered Kyoto University in 1998, Prof. Ueda had already retired from that institution, but, to my great fortune, I was able to learn directly from him at Shōkokuji as well as in various academic contexts for a quarter of a century. For some personal reflections on my final meetings with Prof. Ueda before he passed away in June of 2019, see DAVIS 2020A.

Japan, modern academic philosophy thrives at Western-style universities while the traditional practice of Zen Buddhism survives intact at traditional temples and monasteries. Yet, rarely do these adjacent worlds intersect; few Zen monks or priests become academic philosophers and few academic philosophers engage in a serious practice of Zen. Some of the philosophers associated with the Kyoto School—starting with its founder Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945)—are the greatest exceptions to this segregation.

My interest in the Kyoto School has focused on the central figures of its first three generations: Nishida, Nishitani, and Ueda.<sup>7</sup> In particular, I have been interested in the impact their Zen practice made on their philosophies, even when my focus has been on their treatments of such topics as language, culture, ethics, politics, and religion. The present essay focuses specifically on their methodological reflections on the relation between the embodied-spiritual practice of Zen and the intellectual practice of philosophy. I am primarily interested here in the following questions: What can philosophers today learn from the psychosomatic practice of Zen Buddhism? How does Zen challenge the methodological constrictions of our cerebral practice of philosophy? And finally: What would it mean to bring the disciplines of Zen and philosophy together—not to try and merge them into one, but rather to commute between them so that they may speak to and inform one another?

With regard to such questions, this essay aims to demonstrate that we have much to learn from those Kyoto School philosophers who

7. Other noteworthy Kyoto School philosophers who were also serious Zen practitioners include Hisamatsu Shin'ichi and Abe Masao. Nishida's lifelong friend, D. T. Suzuki, should also be mentioned in this context, although he was not an academic philosopher per se, nor did he study or teach at Kyoto University, and so he is usually considered to be an associate rather than a member of the Kyoto School. For an introduction to the thought of Suzuki, Hisamatsu, and Abe, see MORI, MINOBE and HEINE 2020. It should also be noted that not all Kyoto School philosophers have been Buddhist practitioners, and, among those who have, many have practiced Pure Land rather than Zen Buddhism. While Nishida and Nishitani practiced Zen, they were also sympathetic to Pure Land Buddhism as well as Christianity.

were also Zen practitioners. After a preliminary section on the crucial role played by psychosomatic practice in Buddhism in general, the next three sections of this essay explain how Nishida, Nishitani, and Ueda challenge the disembodied methodology of Western philosophy by drawing on their psychosomatic practice of Zen. These central sections examine their efforts to rethink the methodology of philosophy so that it incorporates, or at least is informed by, the embodied-spiritual practices often associated with religion and art.

The penultimate section of this essay critically compares and contrasts the psychosomatic practice of Zen with the “somaesthetics” of Richard Shusterman. Although Shusterman himself pursued connections between his pragmatist project and Zen practice, it will be argued that the guiding aims of his *pragmatically* and *aesthetically* orientated somaesthetics need to be distinguished from the primarily *enlightening* and *liberating* aims of the psychosomatic practice of Zen.

The final section of this essay draws on Pierre Hadot’s retrieval of the ancient Greek and Roman conception of philosophy as a “way of life,” a way that was not only more soteriologically oriented but also more holistically practiced than is modern academic philosophy. And yet, as Hadot points out, even the ancient Western meditative practices of philosophy as a way of life did not involve the body as do Asian ways such as Zen. I conclude by addressing the the prospects, for those living in contemporary Western or Westernizing societies, of incorporating psychosomatic disciplines such as those of Zen into the practice of philosophy as a truly holistic pursuit of wisdom and liberating way of life. I suggest that, rather than attempting to merge institutions of higher and deeper learning, both sides should encourage and support those who are inspired to commute—that is, to transition back and forth—between them, allowing their intellectual endeavors and psychosomatic practices to supplement and enrich one another.

THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF PSYCHOSOMATIC PRACTICE  
ON THE BUDDHA WAY

James Heisig has written that the Kyoto School thinkers in general do not share an important assumption of Western philosophy as a whole, namely “the clear delineation between philosophy and religion.” Heisig therefore anticipates that “the reader accustomed to western philosophy can hardly fail to ask at some point whether these thinkers have not forsaken philosophy for religion.” However, he adds, this suspicion is based on a “fundamental confusion of categories,” since “the philosophizing of religions means one thing in a Judeo-Christian context and quite another in a Buddhist one.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the relation between “philosophy” and “religion” for the Kyoto School is generally neither that of a modern subjection of religion to the judgment of a purportedly pure reason, nor is it that of a medieval subjugation of philosophy to the role of handmaid to theology and its faith in revelation. Rather, in the Kyoto School’s thought we often find a provocative and productive ambivalence—a relation of mutual supplementation and critique—between philosophy and religion. Moreover, this mutuality is made possible by a third term that mediates the at times antagonistic relation between faith and reason, namely psychosomatic or embodied-spiritual “practice” (行 or 修行).

Before turning our attention to some of the central figures of the Kyoto School whose philosophies were deeply influenced by their practice as well as study of Zen, let me briefly comment on the pivotal role that psychosomatic practice plays in Buddhism in general. In modern history, Buddhists have often tended to stress the role that rational discourse and intellectual insight play in Buddhism as compared to other “religions.” In more recent times, to be sure, the deficiencies of secular humanism and the dehumanizing effects of reductive scientism have become a common threat, and Buddhists have often joined hands

8. HEISIG 2001, 13–14, 260–70.

with Christians and others in efforts to preserve a place for spirituality in a world of capitalist or communist materialism. Previously, however, when the prevalent threat was religious imperialism, Buddhists often responded to Christian missionaries—who criticized them for their lack of faith in a Creator God and an eternal soul—by pointing out that Buddhism was a far more rational religion, one that did not rely on non-rational faith in a supernatural revelation. In this sense, Buddhism was argued to be more compatible with the modern rational worldview.<sup>9</sup>

However, as critics of “Buddhist modernism”<sup>10</sup> have pointed out, various senses of “faith” or “trust” (Sanskrit *śraddhā*; Japanese/Chinese 信) do play significant roles in the various Buddhist traditions.<sup>11</sup> In Japan, this is obviously the case with Pure Land Buddhism, whose central practice of the *nenbutsu* (念仏) entails awakening the “faithful heart-mind” (信心) as an immanent presence of the “other-power” (他力) of Amida Buddha. In Zen, there is not only an important provisional role to be played by a “great root of faith” (大信根) in one’s Buddha-nature and capacity for enlightenment, there is also an ultimate sense in which faith—as true “self-confidence” (自信)—is synonymous with enlightenment.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, and more directly relevant to the present context, there is much more to the psychosomatic practices of Buddhism such as meditation than mere cognitive intellection. The “transcendental wisdom” (*prajñāpāramitā*) of which Mahayana Buddhism speaks lies beyond the reach of the discriminative intellect that conceptually reifies and dualistically opposes objects and egos. Even if Mahayana Bud-

9. VON BRÜCK and LAI 2000, 124–5, 159–60, 376–85, 518. For their criticism of an overly simple juxtaposition of Christianity as “*vernunftfeindlich*” and Buddhism as corresponding to modern natural science, see VON BRÜCK and LAI, 386–7.

10. “Buddhist modernism” generally refers to modern Western and postcolonial Asian attempts to re-present Buddhism in a demythologized and rational manner. See MCMAHAN 2008.

11. See EDELGLASS 2020.

12. See DAVIS 2020C.

dhism's key teaching of "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) can be understood and argued for intellectually, it is only by way of psychosomatic meditative practice that one can attain the existential insight into emptiness necessary for liberation.<sup>13</sup>

If, despite their remarkable degree of compatibility, there remains a decisive gap between Buddhism and rational philosophical analysis, it concerns precisely this ultimate appeal to the necessity of psychosomatic practices of meditation. Despite all the analytical rigor and philological industriousness displayed in the modern academic field of Buddhology, the Buddha Way resists incorporation into the modern university at the decisive point where it inevitably claims that, in order to truly "know thyself," one must rise from the psychosomatically disengaged comfort of the ivory tower armchair. It is this Buddhist requirement of extending rational discourse into embodied-spiritual disciplines—rather than that of a "leap of faith" into the acceptance of a rationally groundless doctrine of revelation—that challenges and is challenged by the presuppositions and limits of modern Western academic philosophy.

Of special interest to the present essay is the manner in which these challenges appear in some of the Kyoto School's philosophers' engagements with the practices as well as teachings of Zen. When the distinguished German philosopher Otto Pöggeler read Nishida's and Nishitani's works, he had the strange impression that their philosophies were deeply religious, and yet the Western terms "religion" and

13. In a Buddhist-Christian dialogue the Dalai Lama is said to have commented: "Buddhist experience is in no way anti-rational; logical reason can thoroughly grasp the essence of *śūnyatā*. ... And yet, the concept of *śūnyatā* must be deepened through meditation, while, on the other hand, meditative clarity and concentration are also preconditions for the unclouded function of the logical power of understanding" (VON BRÜCK and LAI 2000, 55). In Georges Dreyfus's account of his fifteen-year scholastic training in Tibetan monasteries, culminating in his becoming the first Westerner to earn the highest scholastic rank of Geshe, he stresses "the important role played in Buddhism by the tradition's rational and intellectual elements." And yet, he informs us that the entire scholastic curriculum in which he engaged is preparatory to "the liberatory insights achieved through concentrated meditation, the tradition's ultimate goal" (DREYFUS 2003, 3, 166).

“philosophy” did not seem to capture exactly what they were engaged in. In particular, what they mean by “religion” struck him as not so much a doctrine of faith as what he called “a holistic return to the source of life.”<sup>14</sup>

#### NISHIDA AND UEDA ON ZEN AND PHILOSOPHY

One day after class in 1912 or 1913 Morimoto Seinen—a young college student destined to become a famous Zen master—asked Nishida Kitarō the following question about his maiden work: “Did *An Inquiry into the Good* originate only on the basis of studying the texts of Western philosophy, or was Zen practice or the experience of an enlightening breakthrough (見性) involved in its origination?” Nishida is said to have clearly answered that his book originated “*from both*.”<sup>15</sup>

Decades later, in response to a letter from Nishitani Keiji, Nishida wrote:

It is indeed true, as you say, that there is in the background [of my philosophy] something of Zen.... Although such a thing is indeed impossible, I nevertheless wish to somehow unite Zen and philosophy. This has been my heart’s desire since my thirties.<sup>16</sup>

In what sense did Nishida’s years of intense Zen practice lie in the background of his thought?<sup>17</sup> In what sense did he wish to “unite Zen and philosophy,” while at the same time clearly recognizing their essential differences?

Ueda Shizuteru depicts the gap between Zen and philosophy, the gap into which Nishida cast himself, as a “magnetic field” in which opposites both repel and attract one another, both supplement and call

14. PÖGGELER 1995.

15. HANTŌ 1984, 65.

16. NKZ 19: 224–5.

17. On Nishida’s Zen practice, see SHIBATA 1981, and YUSA 2002, chapters 4 and 5.



one another into question.<sup>18</sup> Nishida did not seek to turn philosophy into Zen or Zen into philosophy, but rather, in Ueda's expression, to place himself at the position of the "and" in the *question* of "Zen and philosophy." This conjunction "and" in fact marks the (dis)conjunctive hinge in what Nishida would call a relation of continuity-of-discontinuity (非連続の連続); the "and" holds the two sides both together and apart.

Ueda interprets the relation of Nishida's philosophy to Zen experience according to the "discontinuous continuity" between three levels, namely: (A) the pre- and proto-linguistic (言葉以前 and 事-言) level of pure experience; (B) the *Ur-satz* (根本句) level of poetical-religious expression; and (C) the level of philosophical discourse.<sup>19</sup> It was Nishida's great accomplishment to have brought all three of these levels into a dynamic and bi-directional relation. While the tradition of Zen had moved freely between A and B, it had not yet undertaken the "metamorphic transplantation" (換骨奪胎) out of its original element into the realm of philosophical discourse. On the other hand, while other philosophical interpreters of Zen had been able to step back from C to B, without actual Zen training they had not been able to make the "leaping step back" (飛躍的退歩) to level A.<sup>20</sup> Moving in both these directions—from A all the way to C and from C all the way to A—Nishida opened up and maintained a magnetic field for "Zen and philosophy" as a "relation of bi-directional motility."<sup>21</sup>

There is both a critical tension and a mutual attraction between the reflective practice of philosophy and the religious practice of Zen. In Nishida's lectures on the relation between philosophy and religion, he depicts their essential convergence and divergence as follows.

18. See UEDA 1998, 168. Ueda developed his own thought within the mutual tension and attraction between Zen and philosophy; for introductions, see DÖLL 2020, and DAVIS forthcoming 2.

19. See UEDA 1998, 183ff.; UEDA 1992, 234ff.; and UEDA 1981, 71ff. On Ueda's understanding of "pure experience" and Zen practice in relation to language, see DAVIS 2019B.

20. UEDA 1981, 76–7; UEDA 1992, 242.

21. UEDA 1998, 230.

Philosophy is intellectual knowledge; it is academic learning. But in contrast to regular sciences, which are based on certain hypotheses or presuppositions, philosophy seeks to dig down further beneath these presuppositions and return to their origin, so as to bring them under the sway of what is immediately given. However, that which is immediate, truly concrete, and originary, is in fact the content of religion. At this point, philosophy and religion converge. But philosophy seeks to illuminate this conceptually, while religion experiences it, and seeks to live it directly. It is therefore the case that great philosophy contains religious content, and great religion contains philosophical reflection.<sup>22</sup>

Nishida's conception of philosophy, in short, is neither identical to, nor separable from, his conception of religion. Philosophy involves a double movement: a discursive advance (or rather "radical descent") toward, and a reflective step back from, religious experience. On the one hand, philosophy, by digging beneath the presuppositions of science and everyday cognition, leads back towards religious experience. On the other hand, philosophy steps back from this most intimate experience of life and reality and reflects upon it, attempting to articulate its logical structure, which Nishida comes to call a "logic of place" and a logic of "absolutely contradictory self-identity."

#### NISHIDA'S "RELIGIOUS" PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY

An examination of the senses in which Nishida's thought challenges predominant patterns and principles of Western philosophy is beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>23</sup> What is of particular interest here is the sense in which Nishida's philosophy of religion challenges the methodological limits of modern Western academic investigation—namely, in its call for a "religious" practice of attaining "self-awareness" (自覚) by way of "self-negation" (自己否定). An engaged practice of self-effacement is understood to be necessary in order to break through

22. NKZ 15: 47.

23. See FUJITA 2020, KRUMMEL 2015, MARALDO 2017.

the walls of egocentric subjectivity. While Nishida's philosophy of religion consistently eschews *otherworldly* transcendence, it does entail a radical path of what he calls "immanent transcendence" (内在の超越), a path of ek-statically opening the finite self to the world and to others by way of going back through the infinite depths of the self.<sup>24</sup> This involves radically stepping back beneath the ego's subjective field of consciousness to what Zen master Bankei calls "the unborn Buddha-mind" (不生の仏心). According to Nishida, "while religion is a matter of penetrating to this unborn Buddha-mind, philosophy must take its starting point from the fundamental self-awareness of this standpoint." This demands nothing less than "a conversion of standpoint" which overturns the "subjectivism from which modern philosophy is unable to free itself."<sup>25</sup>

"Only by negating the self completely does one come to know the bottom of the self."<sup>26</sup> In the end, this entails a religious demand: "In negating the self absolutely, there is seeing without a seer, and hearing without a hearer. Reaching this point is the religious ideal; this is what [in Buddhism] is called religious liberation (解脱)."<sup>27</sup> Only a seeing and a hearing that has freed itself of the distorting filters of egocentric subjectivity can clearly perceive the mountain as mountain, and the other as other. This trajectory of thought, we may surmise, inevitably led Nishida to turn from whatever remnants of subjective idealism may have remained in the middle period of his thought to his later attempt to think from the self-determination of the dialectical world itself. "It is not that we merely see the world from the self. Rather, the self is thought of within the historical world. ... Every standpoint of subjectivism, by taking its point of departure from the self of abstract consciousness, beclouds our vision."<sup>28</sup>

24. See DAVIS 2012; DAVIS 2014.

25. NKZ 10: 123.

26. NKZ 5: 172; NISHIDA 1958, 126, translation modified.

27. NKZ 5: 179; NISHIDA 1958, 133, translation modified.

28. NKZ 11: 447; NISHIDA 1987, 109, translation modified.

In the concluding chapter of his 1939 *Philosophical Essays III* Nishida stresses the religious practice needed to free one's vision from the strictures of a subjectivistic standpoint. One must begin by becoming aware of the self-contradiction in the heart of the self between the all-embracing Buddha-mind and an egoistically constricted self-consciousness.

By delving into the origin of this self-contradiction of the self, we obtain true life from the standpoint of the absolutely contradictory self-identity. This is religion. There must be an absolute negation here, namely the religious practice of forfeiting one's body and spirit. This is not a matter of thinking logically or acting morally. For this reason Dōgen speaks of seated meditation (坐禪) as the dropping off of body and mind; in other words, it must be a matter of religious practice (宗教的行) (i.e., what Dōgen means when he says: "One should learn the step back which turns the light around").<sup>29</sup>

Religious practice, in the end, reaches beyond both pure and practical reason. Nevertheless, this religious standpoint does not simply discard thought and morality; it is their radicalization and their well-spring. "Academic learning and morality too must be a matter of religious practice."<sup>30</sup>

Yet what would it mean to philosophize as a matter of "religious practice"? Elsewhere Nishida gives us some indications in this regard, namely, in his call for a return to, and a radicalization of, Descartes' method of doubt.<sup>31</sup> Descartes is said to have "denied (否定した) every-

29. NKZ 9: 332. Nishida is referring to a line from Dōgen's seminal text on Zen meditation, "Fukanzazengi." For an elucidation of Dōgen's teachings in light of this text, see DAVIS 2017b.

30. NKZ 9: 333.

31. Descartes claims that, in his search for certain truth, it was necessary for him to "reject as absolutely false everything in which I could imagine the least doubt, so as to see whether, after this process, anything in my set of beliefs remains that is entirely indubitable" (DESCARTES 1993, 18).

thing from a standpoint of self-awareness.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, Nishida affirms:

The method of philosophy must be thoroughly Cartesian. It must be thoroughly a matter of becoming self-aware through negation (否定的自覚), and analysis of self-awareness (自覚的分析). ... Philosophy is a matter of learning how to deny the self, that is to say [in Dōgen’s terms], a learning how to forget the self (哲学は自己を否定すること、自己を忘れることを学ぶのである).<sup>33</sup>

Nishida returns here to his Zen Buddhist roots in an attempt to articulate a philosophical practice of realizing a more profound, and profoundly open, dimension of the self by way of self-negation. Indeed, Nishida goes on to say that “in this great turning point in world history, we need to thoroughly dig down to the base of Japanese culture and build up our thought on a great and profound basis,”<sup>34</sup> a basis that would bring together East and West, embodied experience and logical reasoning, psychosomatic practice and cerebral intellection.

Nishida’s reference to Descartes and Dōgen in the same breath calls to mind the method of the “Great Doubt” (大疑) spoken of in Zen, albeit in the Rinzai Zen that Nishida practiced rather than the Sōtō Zen that Dōgen established in Japan.<sup>35</sup> Nishitani later compares and contrasts Descartes’ methodological doubt and the Great Doubt generated in the course of Rinzai Zen kōan practice. He sharply criticizes the limits of Descartes’ practice of methodological doubt, saying that it is “not doubt in its authentic sense, a doubt which grips one’s whole body-mind, in which the self and all other things in their

32. NKZ 11: 161–2.

33. NKZ 11: 173–74. Nishida is alluding to the famous lines from Dōgen’s Genjōkoan: “To study the Buddha Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be verified by the myriad things [of the world]. To be verified by the myriad things is to let drop off the body-mind of the self and the body-mind of others.” For a translation and philosophical interpretation of this text, see DAVIS 2009.

34. NKZ 11: 174.

35. On the roles of faith and doubt in both Dōgen’s Sōtō and Hakuin’s Rinzai Zen, see DAVIS 2017B, 202–7; and DAVIS 2020C.

entirety become one big question-mark, as is the case with the ‘Great Doubt’ in Zen.”<sup>36</sup> Elsewhere Nishitani writes that the self-conscious ego on which Descartes grounded his philosophy marks not only the limits of his thought, but also the essential problem of modern humanity as such. “If we grant that Cartesian philosophy is the prime illustration of the mode of being of modern human being, we may also say that it includes the fundamental problem lurking within this mode of being of the modern ego-self.”<sup>37</sup>

According to Nishida as well, Descartes did not pursue far enough the radical trajectory of the method of doubt. “He did not reach the true standpoint of self-awareness through negation.”<sup>38</sup> He remained within the presuppositions of subjective logic and modern metaphysics. In contrast to Descartes’ self-grounding *cogito*—which, upon meditative introspection, discovers that I am a purely thinking substance that “could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world or place where I was”<sup>39</sup>—for Nishida, “the self-evident fact which we in the end, try as we might, cannot doubt, is the fact of the contradictory self-identity of the self and things, outside and inside.”<sup>40</sup> It is this indubitable and indivisible fact of the dynamically dialectical intertwinement of self and world that Nishida attempts to articulate with such notions as “pure experience” (純粹經驗) in his maiden work and “action-intuition” (行為的直觀) in his mature thought. Knowledge of things takes place not by standing aloof and representing them as objects for a disembodied consciousness, but by engaging with them in praxis, by acting on them and letting them act on us. This demands a standpoint of “knowledge-*cum*-practice, practice-*cum*-knowledge” (知即行、行即知).<sup>41</sup> The dynamic nondualism of this dialectical inter-

36. NKZ II: 15; NISHITANI 1984, 9.

37. NKZ IO: 25; NISHITANI 1982, 19, translation modified.

38. NKZ II: 161; see also NKZ II: 158.

39. DESCARTES 1993, 19.

40. NKZ II: 162.

41. NKZ IO: 439.

twinement of self and world essentially involves seeing and acting through the mediation of the body.<sup>42</sup> Standing in the midst of the world, “our self exists in the manner of the ‘oneness of body and mind’ (身心一如) and action-intuition.”<sup>43</sup>

There are significant similarities between Nishida’s description of action-intuition as the basic fact of experiential reality and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological return to what he calls the “primacy of perception,” the embodied intertwinement of self and world that preexists Descartes’ dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.<sup>44</sup> And yet, as Yuasa Yasuo has pointed out, insofar as Nishida’s action-intuition can be understood as a modern philosophical reiteration of the traditional East Asian teaching of the “oneness of body and mind,” it is not merely a phenomenological description of an always already given state of existence, but is more specifically a normative ideal that must be achieved by means of “practices of self-cultivation” (修行).<sup>45</sup> According to Yuasa, Nishida himself did not sufficiently clarify the role such practices play in the transition from inauthentic everyday dualism to the authentic nondualism of what he calls “radical everydayness” (平常底).<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps Nishida was wary of calling into question the methodological limits of modern Western academic philosophy before it was firmly established in Japan. Or perhaps Nishida’s reticence to say more about the relation between Zen practice and philosophical thinking was due to the fact that, not long after having passed an initial *kōan* in 1903, apparently without having had a momentous breakthrough experience,<sup>47</sup> Nishida discontinued at least his formal practice of Zen in his

42. See NKZ 10: 442. On the central role of the body in Nishida’s thought, see NKZ 8: 271, 307ff.

43. NKZ 10: 438; see also NKZ 10: 158–9. Nishida is alluding to Dōgen’s teaching of the “oneness of the body and mind.” See DŌGEN 2002, 22–3.

44. See MERLEAU-PONTY 2012, 91.

45. See YUASA 1989, 194–5.

46. See YUASA 1990, 89ff.; YUASA 1987, 72ff.

47. See NKZ 17: 119; YUSA 2002, 72.

mid-thirties and fully dedicated himself thereafter to a career as an academic philosopher. In 1907, Nishida wrote to his friend D. T. Suzuki: “I intend to continue with my religious practice of self-improvement (宗教的修養) until the end of my life, but I think that academic scholarship may be the most appropriate field of work for me.”<sup>48</sup> Nishitani and Ueda also chose the profession of scholarship rather than priesthood. And yet, both of them continued to formally practice Zen throughout their careers; indeed they both eventually received the “seal of proof” (印可証明) of having completed the Rinzai Zen kōan curriculum, an extremely rare accomplishment for lay practitioners.<sup>49</sup> In any case, despite the many significant textual passages we have examined above, it must be said that Nishida did not thoroughly examine the relation between a philosophy of self-awareness and psychosomatic practices of awakening. This task was left to his successors such as Nishitani and Ueda.

#### NISHITANI ON THE NEED FOR AN EMBODIED PRACTICE OF KNOWING

Nishitani wrote that “Nishida’s philosophy takes for its standpoint a radical realism in which the standpoint of what we normally think of as the ‘self’—namely the self of consciousness (or reflection)—has been broken through,” and yet he did not sufficiently explain how this breakthrough takes place.<sup>50</sup> For Nishitani, both the problem of the everyday ego, self-enclosed in its sphere of self-consciousness, and the psychosomatic practice required to break free of

48. NKZ 18: 76; YUSA 2002, 89, translation modified.

49. Nishitani and Ueda both received *inka-shōmei* from an abbot of Shōkokuji monastery, Kajitani Sōnin (1914–1995). On Nishitani’s certification, see KAJITANI 1992. Although Ueda Sensei preferred not to present himself as a Zen master in public, or even when he gave his monthly talks on Zen classics at Shōkokuji, the current abbot of Shōkokuji, Kobayashi Gentoku Rōshi, confirmed to me in conversation that Ueda received *inka-shōmei* from Kajitani Rōshi.

50. NKC 9: 247–8; NISHITANI 1991, 184–5, translation modified.



this inauthentic everyday standpoint, needed to be more explicitly thematized and thoroughly examined.

Nishitani's own attempt to philosophically reflect on and from "the standpoint of Zen" led him to confront some of the fundamental issues at stake in the encounter between Western and Eastern philosophical and religious ways of life.<sup>51</sup> The dualism of the modern worldview, Nishitani contends, along with the reduction of knowledge to a purely cerebral affair, has effected a "personality split" in the West, a split that the Japanese have inadvertently imported underneath the shining surfaces of Western modernity.<sup>52</sup> Nishitani attributes this split to a falling into oblivion of the connection between knowledge and "practice" (行).

In a seminal essay entitled "The Issue of Practice," Nishitani writes:

A state of affairs that fundamentally characterizes the so-called early modern and modern historical time periods is found in the fact that the element of "practice" has been dropped from the formative path of human beings. In particular with regard to the intellect, a knowing of "objective matters," an objective knowing represented by science has become dominant, and the dimension of knowing in which the investigation of objects and the self-investigation of the subject are inseparably bound together has been closed off.<sup>53</sup>

In the more originary dimension of knowing of which Nishitani speaks, "the direction inward" and the "direction outward" are tied together without being simply identical; they are "two and yet one." "The apprehension of a state of affairs at the same time implies self-knowledge; indeed from the start this knowledge operates at the dimension of a 'unity of subject and object' (主客合一)."<sup>54</sup> The "unity" spoken of here does not entail a simple identity, but it does imply that the dualistic separation of subject and object is an *a posteriori* alien-

51. For introductions to Nishitani's philosophy, see DAVIS 2004B; and PARKES 2020.

52. See NKC 20: 57–8.

53. NKC 20: 54.

54. Ibid.

ation from their *a priori* mutual implication. The standpoint of dualism is a *post factum* alienation from the standpoint of an originary intertwining of self and world.

At the level of this originary nondualism, “knowledge can only come about in unison with embodied practice, in the manner of a ‘oneness of body and mind’ (身心一如的に).” In actively engaging with a matter at hand, “one understands it with one’s whole body and mind, and this knowledge at the same time entails a self-knowledge of the whole body and mind.” It is for this reason, Nishitani writes, that in East Asia one spoke of “the unity of knowledge and practice” (知行合一).<sup>55</sup> Nishitani finds this conjunction of knowledge and embodied practice in various aspects of Japanese culture, aspects which are all too quickly disappearing with the progress of modernization qua Westernization. At the profoundest level, he finds this originary dimension of practice-*cum*-knowledge in the religious practices (修行) of the Buddha Way (仏道). Indeed, he writes that “practice (行) is a matter of going along the Way (道を行くこと); and at the same time, the practice of going along the Way is itself the Way.”<sup>56</sup> The Way leads to the non-duality of sincerity and truth (まこと), that is, to a dimension in which things show themselves in their truth only to one who has undergone an existential practice of sincerity, a practice that can only be done with the whole body, heart, mind and spirit.

Nishitani was led (back) to this standpoint through both philosophy and Zen. Indeed, Nishitani’s personal and philosophical path can be understood as an attempt to recover, in a contemporary cross-cultural context, this mutuality of knowledge and practice. The problem of nihilism became the focus of his attention, to begin with as a problem that he painfully felt as a personal existential crisis. He later became convinced that the problem of nihilism lies “at the root of the mutual aversion of religion and science,” and “contains something

55. NKC 20: 55.

56. NKC 20: 61.

difficult to solve solely from the standpoint of religion, or solely from the standpoint of philosophy,” at least insofar as these remain disconnected from one another.<sup>57</sup> Having chosen a career as a professional philosopher, Nishitani recalls that, no matter how much philosophy he studied, he could not rid himself of a certain anxious feeling of disconnectedness from reality; it was as if his feet were not touching the ground, or as if he were a fly bumping up against the glass of a window pane, unable to actually go outside and directly encounter the world. It was the impotence of theoretical philosophy alone to solve this crisis of disconnectedness that led him to take up the practice of Zen. And, sure enough, after some time of formally practicing Zen, the feeling went away.<sup>58</sup> In this manner, Nishitani relates, “in my case Western philosophy became connected with the ‘practice’ of Zen.”<sup>59</sup>

However, Nishitani does not present this journey through Western philosophy to Zen practice merely as an autobiographical account of his personal path, since he took his own existential plight to be a sign of the nihilistic times. In such times, Nishitani claims, it is necessary for philosophy itself to undergo a transformation. In an essay entitled “Christianity, Philosophy and Zen,” he explicitly calls on philosophy to open itself, beyond the limits of “theory,” to the psychosomatic experience of Zen. There he writes:

Philosophy has in general remained stuck at the level of “theory,” and has not been a [thoroughgoing] inquiry into the self. The “theoretical” standpoint of “seeing” (見) or “viewing” (觀) could be said to lie at a halfway point on the way to what in Zen is called “pointing directly at the human heart-mind; seeing into one’s nature and becoming a Buddha” (直指人心、見性成佛). ... [Here we find] both the nearness and the difference between the fundamental character of Zen and that of philosophy. ... In Zen, the essential limitations of the standpoint of “theory” are raised into sharp awareness, and the standpoint of “theory”

57. NKC 20: 193–94.

58. NISHITANI and YAGI 1989, 57–60.

59. NISHITANI 1988, 29.

is sublated into the “seeing” and “viewing” of one who is awakened. The content of “theory” is transformed into the content of “awakening” (覺).<sup>60</sup>

Theory remains at the level of “a painting of a rice cake” or a “finger pointing at the moon,” whereas Zen practice aims to bring us into direct contact with the rice cake and the moon of reality itself. Hence, Nishitani asks, “must not philosophy also take a step forward from its heretofore basic standpoint, and proceed a step in the direction of its connection with Zen?” He suggests that theoretical reason must lead beyond itself to holistic experience; for, as he writes elsewhere with regard to “the limits of reason”: “Direct embodied experience (体験) can encompass the intellectual understanding of reason, but the intellectual understanding of reason cannot substitute for embodied experience.”<sup>61</sup>

Yuasa makes a similar claim when he writes:

True knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through “bodily recognition or realization” (*tainin* [体認] or *taitoku* [体得]), that is, through the utilization of one’s total mind and body. Simply stated, this is to “learn with the body,” not the brain. Cultivation [修行] is the practice that attempts, so to speak, to achieve true knowledge by means of one’s total mind and body.<sup>62</sup>

#### SHUSTERMAN’S SOMAESTHETICS AND THE PSYCHOSOMATIC PRACTICE OF ZEN

These Japanese philosophers’ calls for an embodied practice of knowing in part resonate with the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Shusterman’s project of “somaesthetics,” which also involves not just a *recognition* of, but a practice of *achieving* a unity

60. NKC 11: 222–23.

61. NKC 20: 13.

62. YUASA 1990, 21; YUASA 1987, 25.

of mind and body. Both Shusterman's appreciation and his critique of Merleau-Ponty are similar to that of Yuasa. Shusterman argues that "Merleau-Ponty creates a polarization of 'lived experience' versus abstract 'representations' that neglects the deployment of a fruitful third option—what could be called 'lived somaesthetic reflection,' that is, concrete but representational and reflective body consciousness."<sup>63</sup> This "third option" is the focus of Shusterman's own project of "somaesthetics," which he defines as "the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning."<sup>64</sup> In contrast to what he calls "Merleau-Ponty's commitment to a fixed, universal phenomenological ontology based on primordial perception," Shusterman contends that "pragmatism is more receptive to reflective somatic consciousness and its disciplinary uses for philosophy."<sup>65</sup> In purported contrast to Merleau-Ponty's descriptive project that aims to reawaken us to a "primordial state of unified experience" prior to the reflective dichotomization of subject and object, mind and body, Shusterman's pragmatic project "aims at generating better experience for the future."<sup>66</sup> "In the forward-looking, melioristic spirit of pragmatism," he writes, "Dewey sees body-mind unity less as an ontological given in which we can smugly rest than as a desired, progressive goal of dynamic, harmonious functioning that we should continually strive to attain."<sup>67</sup>

In fact, the contrast with Merleau-Ponty is not at all so clear. In the preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The phenomenological world is not the making explicit of a prior being, but rather the founding of being; philosophy is not the reflec-

63. SHUSTERMAN 2008, 63.

64. SHUSTERMAN 2008, 1; see also SHUSTERMAN 2008, 19.

65. SHUSTERMAN 2008, 66.

66. SHUSTERMAN 2008, 73, 75.

67. SHUSTERMAN 2008, 185.

tion of a prior truth, but rather, like art, the actualization of a truth.”<sup>68</sup> In his later essay, “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty writes that the painter’s vision is not a representation of things that are already complete in themselves. Rather, “The painter’s vision is a continued birth,” a “coming-to-be of the visible,” a cooperative creation, as it were, of a visible world.<sup>69</sup> He goes on to cite Paul Klee’s remark that “the line no longer imitates the visible; it ‘renders visible’; it is the blueprint of a genesis of things.”<sup>70</sup>

Nishida also turns to artistic poiesis as an exemplary instance of “action-intuition” (行為の直観); things reveal themselves to us most intimately not when we stand aloof from them but rather when we immerse ourselves in a creative engagement with them. Action-intuition, Nishida tells us in the 1936 preface to a reprinting of his maiden work of 1911, *An Inquiry into the Good*, is how he eventually came to think of what he had called “pure experience” (純粹經驗) in that first book.<sup>71</sup> In *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida had in fact wavered between using the term “pure experience” to refer, on the one hand, to the pre-reflective experience of “the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound,” a nondual state prior to thought and judgment in which “there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified,”<sup>72</sup> and, on the other hand, to experiences that have duration, require practice, and manifest a creative achievement, such as a “climber’s determined ascent of a cliff and a musician’s performance of a piece,” and also the “activity of thinking” itself, at least when it advances in a nondual and unbifurcated manner.<sup>73</sup> “Pure experience” is thus used to refer both to a *pre-reflective given* and—in a case such as the unity of mind and body, subject and object, self and world in

68. MERLEAU-PONTY 2012, lxxxiv.

69. MERLEAU-PONTY 1964, 168, 181.

70. MERLEAU-PONTY 1964, 183.

71. NKZ 1: 7; NISHIDA 1990, xxxiii.

72. NKZ 1: 9; NISHIDA 1990, 3.

73. NKZ 1: 11, 19; NISHIDA 1990, 6, 13.

the performance of a musical score after having reflectively and physically struggled to master it—to a *post-reflective achievement*. Nishida's ambiguous use of the term “pure experience” in *An Inquiry into the Good* could be said to reflect his effort to think something akin to what Merleau-Ponty and Shusterman are also after: a phenomenological return to a primordial level of experience that incorporates at the same time a creative achievement. It could thus be said that Nishida's later term “action-intuition” intentionally makes explicit—rather than tries to resolve—the essential ambiguity that remained somewhat confusingly implicit in his earlier term “pure experience.”

This essential ambiguity is rooted not only in the fact that Nishida's philosophy is based on both his study of philosophy and his practice of Zen, but also in the explicitly ambiguous notion of “enlightenment” in the Zen tradition itself. An acknowledgement of this ambiguity can be traced back in part to the relation between “original enlightenment” (本覺) and “initiated enlightenment” (始覺) in *Treatise on the Mahāyāna Awakening of Faith*, a seminal sixth century text that exerted a huge influence on the development of East Asian Buddhism in general.<sup>74</sup> It should thus come as no surprise that the Zen conception of such teachings as the “oneness of body and mind” combines both approaches: this unity is both a primordial given that needs to be *returned* to and something that needs to be *actualized* in and through that return. Dōgen's favored word for enlightenment reflects this essential ambiguity; the word is *shō* (証), which I translate as “verification,” since etymologically this can be understood both in the sense of *attesting to the truth* and *making true*.<sup>75</sup> Nishitani liked to use the English word “realization,” since it can mean both the *recognition*—especially the embodied apprehension (体認, 体得)—and the *actualization* of a truth.<sup>76</sup> The understanding of enlightenment as

74. See HAKEDA 2006, 43–4.

75. See DAVIS 2009, 256.

76. See NKC 10: 157–158, 174; NISHITANI 1982, 139–40, 154–5.

a psychosomatic realization, that is, as an explicit awakening to and actualization of what is implicitly already there, is a theme that can also be traced back to the doctrine of an original Buddha-nature that is discovered rather than produced through religious practice—the discovery of which initiates a Buddha’s life of compassionate awakening.<sup>77</sup>

Shusterman is a longtime practitioner of the Feldenkreis Method of somatic education and therapy. Although he does not purport to be a scholar of Buddhism or a committed practitioner of Zen, he did stay for a short time in a Zen monastery in Japan. Despite struggling with the rigors of the practice, he reports not being able to remember “a more perfect happiness or greater perceptual acuity” than what he experienced there. “This experience of Zen practice,” he goes on to say, reinforced his faith that the disciplined cultivation of somatic consciousness “can prove an invaluable tool for pursuing a philosophical life of self-discovery and self-improvement that also takes one beyond the self.”<sup>78</sup> Connecting East Asian philosophical traditions with Emerson and Dewey, Shusterman professes: “In our bodily actions, we are not self-sufficient agents but stewards and impresarios of larger powers that we organize to perform our tasks.”<sup>79</sup>

Shusterman concludes his account of what he learned from his experiment with Zen practice by saying that

the Zen *soma*, although initially the salient site of meditative practice, is ultimately experienced as a no-place when that practice is successful, exemplifying (albeit in a more blissfully powerful form) the way that the body tends to efface itself into the wider field of action when it is functioning at its happy best.<sup>80</sup>

This experience and understanding of our embodied existence as

77. See KING 1991.

78. SHUSTERMAN 2008, xiii. For an account of his stay in a Zen monastery, see SHUSTERMAN 2012, 305–14.

79. SHUSTERMAN 2008, 215.

80. SHUSTERMAN 2012, 314.



nondualistically participating in the wider field of reality is the Zen insight that Shusterman artfully weaves together with neglected yet prominent themes in the Western philosophies of pragmatism, American transcendentalism, and phenomenology, as well as with other East Asian philosophies such as Confucianism and Daoism.

Nevertheless, I find there to be a persistent tension between, on the one hand, Shusterman's principal stress on the pragmatic idea of "using" the body as the "tool of tools" for "self-fashioning," "self-styling," or "self-use,"<sup>81</sup> and, on the other hand, the idea—which appears especially in his references to Zen practice and East Asian thought—that such practices can ultimately, as Shusterman puts it, "take one beyond the self."<sup>82</sup> To begin with, the pragmatic idea of "using" reflective and embodied practices to refashion and enrich one's life tends to presume that we already know what the self is and what the self should desire. By contrast, the enlightening psychosomatic practices of Zen are aimed at liberating one from delusions about the self, and thus at realizing what the self really is and how it is interconnected with the other inhabitants of the world. As Dōgen puts it, the practice of Zen entails "studying the self" to the point of "forgetting the self," in the sense of "dropping off [our dualistic and reified ideas of] body and mind," so that we can allow "the myriad things of the world to come forth and enlighten us."<sup>83</sup>

It is noteworthy that Shusterman's Zen teacher, Inoue Kidō Rōshi, had to correct his "pragmatic" tendency to artificially manipulate the breath so as to produce certain states of consciousness. The aim of meditation, he was told,

is not somatic introspection in itself nor the intensification of everyday pleasures through such tricks as holding the breath (which [Inoue Kidō

81. See SHUSTERMAN 2008, 4–5, 196, and *passim*. See also the many references to these terms in the indexes of SHUSTERMAN 2008 and 2012.

82. SHUSTERMAN 2008, xiii.

83. See DAVIS 2009, 256–7.

Rōshi] argued was unnatural). The aim instead is a mindful consciousness that is so fully absorbed in the reality of the moment that it no longer feels itself as separate from that reality. My breathing tricks and somaesthetic diagnoses, Rōshi cautioned, were vestigial intellectualist handicaps to my progress, drawing me to experience my body as an object to be explored and manipulated by a distinct, critical, scopical consciousness. Though initially useful in strengthening my concentration on breathing, this analytic, manipulative consciousness of somatic introspection, Rōshi said, had to be transcended in order for me to make further progress, to achieve a more complete experience of nondualism where there was no longer a consciousness of self and breath but simply an overwhelming impersonal perception of breathing that pervaded all my consciousness and carried the breathing forward on its own accord.<sup>84</sup>

The question is: Was Inoue Rōshi instructing Shusterman to go *further* along the path of his somaesthetics, or to go in a *different direction*?

In another essay, Shusterman insightfully discusses the tension within the Confucian and Daoist traditions “between philosophies advocating reflective analysis and conscious control of the embodied self and those that instead advocate spontaneity,”<sup>85</sup> and he helpfully suggests that these can be reconciled by seeing them as “interchanging phases or stages” through which one enhances one’s spontaneous abilities by way of passing through conscious techniques of cultivation.<sup>86</sup> He then turns to the writings of the great master of the Nō theater, Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363–c. 1443), for indications that attention can be trained to a point that transcends any dichotomy between an unselfconscious spontaneity and a heightened awareness of oneself in one’s environment.<sup>87</sup> This might be taken to suggest that Inoue Rōshi’s reproach

84. SHUSTERMAN 2012, 313–14.

85. SHUSTERMAN 2012, 200.

86. SHUSTERMAN 2012, 204–5. In this regard, see also SLINGERLAND 2014.

87. SHUSTERMAN 2012, 209–12. Zeami suggests that this awareness can even be developed to the point of attaining to “the most mysterious feat of self-consciousness,”

and instruction to Shusterman was an encouragement to go further along the path of his somaesthetics, rather than in a different direction.

However, there are good reasons for thinking that Inoue Rōshi was suggesting a course correction rather than just a further step along the pragmatist path of somaesthetics. It seems to me that there remains a crucial difference—an at points subtle yet still decisive one—between Shusterman’s pragmatist somaesthetics, which understands “philosophy as an art of living aimed at realizing beauty through creative intelligence and critical reflection,”<sup>88</sup> and the psychosomatic practice of Zen, which, like all schools of Buddhism, aims primarily at liberating all sentient beings from suffering, the creation and appreciation of beauty being only a means to or manifestation of progress toward this end. The Buddha Way, says Dōgen, is a path of self-forgetting rather than self-styling.

Among schools of Western philosophy, phenomenology is arguably even better positioned than pragmatism to be adopted and adapted by the path of Zen Buddhism. Shusterman maintains that pragmatism is better suited than is phenomenology to his project of somaesthetics, insofar as it entails *enriching* rather than merely *describing* experience. Yet a psychosomatic practice of phenomenology might be capable not only of giving us a better sense of the tools we have to work with in refashioning the self by using the body; it might also have the potential to *transform* us by *deepening* our awareness of what we are and how our minds are embodied and interrelated with other minds and bodies. In this sense, we could understand the meditative and discursive practices of Zen in terms of what Rolf Elberfeld has called, in the conclusion to his *Phänomenologie der Zeit im Buddhismus*, a “*transformative Phänomenologie*,” rather than a merely “descriptive phenomenology” (*beschreibende Phänomenologie*) that would

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namely that of “seeing one’s appearance from behind as one’s audience sees it.” Shusterman offers a possible neuroscientific explanation of this phenomenon based on the mirror-neuron system.

88. SHUSTERMAN 2012, ix.

elucidate the self and things but leave them as they are.<sup>89</sup> Elberfeld's use to the phrase, transformative phenomenology, reflects his interest in bringing Buddhist phenomenological insights into "impermanence" and "the fundamentally temporal being" (*das grundsätzliche Zeitlichsein*) of the world into contemporary discussions of the fundamentally historical character or historicity of human existence. The implications of novelty and creativity in the adjective "transformative" are appropriate to that project.

Yet, in the context of the Buddhist discourses and meditative practices themselves, and with reference to the appropriate ambiguity of "realization" as an awakening to and (creative) actualization of a truth, we might speak rather of a "realizational phenomenology." We can also speak of a "liberating phenomenology" of the Buddha Way, as long as we understand this to imply, not a liberation of the mind or soul from the "tomb of the body" (*sema-soma*), as Plato would sometimes have it,<sup>90</sup> but rather a liberation from delusions that distort not only our understanding but also our experience of and participation in reality—delusions such as the Platonic and Cartesian idea that our minds are separate from, or need to be liberated from, our bodies and the rest of the psychophysical world, rather than harmoniously, creatively, and compassionately brought into accord with them.

#### PROSPECTS FOR A PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY AS A HOLISTIC WAY OF LIFE

For those living in contemporary Western or Westernizing societies, what are the prospects for incorporating psychosomatic practices into the discipline of philosophy as a holistic pursuit of wis-

89. ELBERFELD 2004, 382. In conversation Rolf told me of how he subsequently discovered the felicitous coincidence that Laycock (1995) had used the phrase "transformative phenomenology." Indeed, Laycock uses the phrase in a section of his book titled "The Transformative Phenomenology of Liberation" (LAYCOCK 1995, 154–9).

90. See Plato's *Gorgias* 493a, *Cratylus* 400c, *Phaedo* 62b, and *Phaedrus* 250c.

dom and liberating way of life? The idea of developing the discipline of philosophy into a holistic practice that would entail “subjective” existential transformation clearly challenges the modern parameters of a strictly “objective” academic discipline. The spirit of Max Weber might suggest that Zen practicing philosophers should step down from the university podium and return in meditative silence to the monastery, just as he suggested that those Western academics who were tempted to “sacrifice the intellect” because of their religious inclinations should silently return to the churches. The expulsion of the search for the meaning of life from the university, Weber claimed (albeit more in a tone of scientific resignation than of scientific triumphalism), was demanded by the modern “historical condition.”<sup>91</sup> Yet, aside from the question of whether the demands of our own late modern or early postmodern historical condition are still the same as those of Weber’s generation, I would argue that, then as now, Weber’s views apply more to the social scientist than to the philosopher.

To be sure, most professional philosophers today continue to work within a Eurocentric or even Euromonopolistic conception of the methods and aims of philosophy. This becomes apparent when they pass judgment on what, if anything, non-Western traditions have to contribute to the field of philosophy.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, not only in decolonizing deconstructions of the universalistic presumptions of Western modernity, but also in hermeneutic returns to ancient Western philosophy, we can hear a steady rise of voices of self-critique with regard to the prejudices and limits of modern Western academic philosophy. Rolf Elberfeld writes in this regard:

One could even propose the provocative thesis that it is precisely mod-

91. WEBER 1991, 268–72.

92. On the Euromonopolistic conception of philosophy that was forged at the end of the eighteenth century and has prevailed until recent times, on current efforts to open up the field of philosophy to non-Western traditions, and on the provocative methodological challenges this entails insofar as those other traditions incorporate holistic practices into their pursuits of wisdom, see DAVIS 2019C.

ern philosophy, with its ideal of becoming a strict science, that has lost sight of the proper tasks of classical [Western] philosophy—e.g., the love of *wisdom*, the training for death, and the task of ethical transformation; and it would thus be modern philosophy that is not philosophy in the strict sense.<sup>93</sup>

The central thesis of Thomas Kasulis’s monumental book, *Engaging Japanese Philosophy*, is that premodern Japanese philosophers predominantly aimed at an existentially “engaged knowing” rather than at the kind of objectively “detached knowing” that has come to dominate modern Western academic philosophy. While most modern Japanese philosophers have imported the method of detached intellection along with the content of modern Western philosophy, the traditional Japanese call for a holistically engaged knowing still resounds in the writings of some modern Japanese philosophers, those associated with the Kyoto School in particular.<sup>94</sup> Kasulis also remarks:

The Japanese idea of philosophy, that of the acquired wisdom discovered by means of the bodymind and expressed through it, strikes me as being closer to the original vision of philosophy in the ancient Greeks like Plato and Aristotle than it is to the modern emphasis on an impersonal, incorporeal, knowing.<sup>95</sup>

The pursuit of wisdom in which ancient Greek philosophers were engaged may indeed be closer in some respects to holistic Asian Ways such as Buddhism than they are to the mainly cerebral methods employed by modern academic philosophers to attain a detached, objective knowledge. And yet, the legacy of Platonic dualism and Aristotelean intellectualism can also be said have pointed the Western tradition of philosophy in a detached direction. John Maraldo argues that “a detachment from everyday life accompanied the distancing from the body in ancient Greek philosophy.” He also claims that, in general,

93. ELBERFELD 2017, 161–2.

94. KASULIS 2018, 20–32, 557–8, 575–7. See also KASULIS 2002.

95. KASULIS 2018, 576.

“Greek-based Western philosophy often displays a double detachment, from everyday life and from embodied existence. In contrast, Japanese Buddhist and Confucian philosophies evince an appreciation of embodied existence in the ordinary world.”<sup>96</sup>

Both the similarity and the difference between ancient Western and Asian ways of pursuing wisdom and liberation appear, at least tangentially, in the pioneering work of Pierre Hadot. Hadot’s major achievement is to have reminded us that the proper task of classical Western philosophy was to provide its practitioners with a liberating and relatively holistic “way of life” (*manière de vivre*).<sup>97</sup> If we focus our attention on the “spiritual exercises” (*exercices spirituels*) found at the core of ancient Western philosophies, Hadot writes, philosophy “then appears in its original aspect: not as a theoretical construct, but as a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way.”<sup>98</sup> Philosophy was

a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal was to transform the whole of the individual’s life. ... For the ancients, the mere word *philo-sophia*—the love of wisdom—was enough to express this conception of philosophy.<sup>99</sup>

Today, however, “philosophy” is for the most part a name for one academic discipline among others within the institution of the university. The discipline of philosophy is thus

no longer directed toward people who were to be educated with a view to becoming fully developed human beings, but to specialists, in order that they might learn how to train other specialists.<sup>100</sup>

96. MARALDO 2013, 21, 31.

97. HADOT 1995; and HADOT 2002. On Buddhism in relation to Hadot’s interpretation of ancient Greek philosophy as a way of life, see FIORDALIS 2018; and DAVIS forthcoming 3.

98. HADOT 1995, 107.

99. HADOT 1995, 265.

100. HADOT 1995, 270.

We have lost the ability to make the crucial distinction, as the ancients had always done, between the techniques of philosophical *discourse* and the love of wisdom as a *way of life*; and we no longer see that the former was originally meant to serve as one part of the latter. Philosophical discourse has taken on a life of its own, but it is merely the professional life of an academic philosopher, and not that of the entire existing human being.

Hadot traces the distant origins of this transformation of philosophy into a “purely abstract theoretical activity” back to the process of the absorption of *philosophia* into Christianity. Christianity originally assimilated both the *logos* and the *praxis* (the spiritual exercises) of ancient *philosophia*; but it eventually relegated the rational discourse of philosophy to the role of handmaid to theology, while the spiritual exercises, stripped of their rational content, lived on in the religious form that we encounter much later in, for example, the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. When philosophy declared its independence in the Enlightenment, it had already become a purely theoretical discipline, disconnected from its original context of spiritual exercises.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, Hadot believes that traces of the original sense of philosophy as a way of life can be found in all periods of Western history, including the present. Hadot is both sympathetic to and critical of Foucault’s attempt to interpretively retrieve the spiritual exercises of the ancients in his idea of “the care of the self,” and he suggests that in phenomenology, as well as in Nietzsche, Bergson, and existentialism, we see modern academic philosophers consciously attempting to return to an understanding of philosophy as “a concrete attitude, a way of life and of seeing the world.”<sup>102</sup>

Given their Buddhist background—a background in which, as we have seen, rational inquiry was always wedded to a holistic practice of a way of life—it is not surprising that Japanese thinkers such

101. See HADOT 1995, 107–8, 126–40, 269–70.

102. HADOT 1995, 108.



as Nishitani were attracted to precisely such figures and movements in modern Western philosophy. One might thus expect that a fruitful dialogue could be opened up between Hadot's retrieval of ancient Western spiritual exercises and Kyoto School philosophers who were engaged in the psychosomatic practice of Zen. In a few places, Hadot does recognize some profound resonances between ancient Greek philosophy and Asian traditions, in particular Buddhism.<sup>103</sup> Yet, one sticking point of methodological divergence stands out. The ancient Western philosophical ways of life that Hadot endeavors to retrieve are not holistic enough to include *embodied* practices of meditation. "Unlike the Buddhist meditation practices of the Far East," Hadot writes, "Greco-Roman philosophical meditation is not linked to a corporeal attitude but is a purely rational, imaginative, or intuitive exercise."<sup>104</sup> On the one hand, he affirms that what "is interesting about the idea of spiritual exercises is precisely that it is not a matter of purely rational consideration, but the putting into action all kinds of means, intended to act upon oneself;" and he sees a major role to be played here by "imagination and affectivity."<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, for Hadot, incorporating a discipline of embodied practice would evidently cross the line and introduce an element of impurity into the "purely spiritual" practices of ancient philosophy.

The body, of course, is never completely absent from the discipline of philosophy, neither from the spiritual exercises of the past nor even from the theoretical study undertaken in the modern university. When professors ask their students to sit down (but not lie down) and stay reasonably still in class, so that they and others may focus their attention on an argument or explanation, they are admitting an element of "embodied practice" into the process of learning. (Even Descartes, after all, required a certain amount of warmth and physical isolation in

103. See HADOT 2002, 232–3, 278.

104. HADOT 1995, 59.

105. HADOT 1995, 284.

order to meditate on the essential disembodiment of his *res cogitans*!) Professors may even suggest to students that maintaining a good posture while studying will increase their mental alertness, as will periodic physical exercise and a balanced diet. At precisely what point, however, do we cross the line and commit the forbidden Weberian “intellectual sacrifice” by incorporating non-theoretical elements of psychosomatic practice into the modern discipline of rational inquiry? And where should we draw the line between, on the one hand, empirical testimony or phenomenological description of experience and, on the other hand, the liberating and transformative broadening and deepening of experience through psychosomatic practices of meditation? One might expect even the sympathetic academic philosopher to respond here: “If that line should indeed be redrawn somewhere beyond the existing borders of the university, it should nevertheless still be drawn somewhere prior to the entrance gate of the Zen monastery.”

Keen readers of Nishida, Nishitani, and Ueda may find themselves wondering at some point how, and where, one could lead a philosophical way of life in which rational thinking and psychosomatic practice could mutually supplement and critically engage one another. Do we need to invent a new, more encompassing “university,” one that would enable us to pursue wisdom in a truly holistic manner? Perhaps. Yet would it be possible, or even advisable, to bring under one roof the distinct practices of Zen and philosophy, or to institutionalize the bi-directional movement between them? We should bear in mind that the Kyoto School philosophers who have engaged in Zen practice have *commuted* between the institutions of the university and the monastery. This institutional split in their lives can of course be understood as a sign, or symptom, of their hybrid historical condition, that is, of a Japan torn between its Eastern traditions and its modern Westernization.

This split or hybrid condition continues to exist today, and not only for those Japanese philosophers who wish neither to forsake the potential fruits of their Eastern roots nor to evade engaging with

the problems and possibilities of a Westernizing world. It also exists for those Western philosophers who, sensing certain limits or something missing from the methodological scope of their academic discipline, approach and, to various degrees, engage in a tradition such as Zen as more than an object of scholarly research. Some philosophers may wish, for example, to go beyond contemplating the philosophical products of Nishitani's life spent, as he put it, "sitting [in meditation], then thinking; thinking, then sitting."<sup>106</sup> They may wish to follow his example and move back and forth between the study desk and the meditation cushion. For such existentially engaged seekers of wisdom, the practice of philosophy as a holistic way of life may need to entail commuting between institutions of intellectual inquiry on the one hand and psychosomatic practice on the other.

Rather than to try and bring these institutions under one roof, it may be more appropriate and beneficial to find ways to open them up to ongoing dialogue and diapraxis with one another. It may be best for Zen practicing philosophers to remain commuters. It may be best for all practitioners of philosophy as a holistic way of life to remain, like Socrates, *atopos*, without a place of their own, never fully institutionalized, so that they may serve as mediators between places, facilitators of dialogue and diapraxis. It is perhaps as commuters that they may best remain ever on the Way.

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106. This is how Nishitani described his way of life, that is, as a commuting between Zen (sitting) and philosophy (thinking). See HORIO 1997, 22.

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