

# Philosophy East/West: Exploring Intersections Between Educational and Contemplative Practices (Ergas and Todd) and Reconstructing "Education" through Mindful Attention: Positioning the Mind at the Center of Curriculum and Pedagogy (Oren Ergas)

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Review of

*Philosophy East/West: Exploring Intersections  
Between Educational and Contemplative  
Practices*

by Oren Ergas and Sharon Todd (Eds.). Chichester, England: Wiley Blackwell, 2016.

and

*Reconstructing “Education” Through Mindful  
Attention: Positioning the Mind at the Center of  
Curriculum and Pedagogy*

by Oren Ergas. London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

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### Introduction

I was extremely pleased to be asked to do a review of the anthology *Philosophy East/West* and Oren Ergas’s *Reconstructing “Education” Through Mindful Attention*. However, once I received copies of the books, I had some real qualms. These were sourced in the fact that the anthology is so diverse and often complex in the material its essays bring to bear that many of the essays warrant nothing less than a full-length essay response. Regarding content, the overarching theme of the anthology papers is “educational and contemplative practices,” which is approached by “reading across philosophical traditions” (p. 1). This is done in order to explore the dialogue between Eastern traditions and Western philosophy and educational praxis. The anthology covers non-Western wisdom traditions, with the majority addressing Buddhist “mindfulness” in dialogue with a range of Western philosophers. Oren Ergas’s *Reconstructing “Education” Through Mindful Attention* is a development of the ideas he introduces in his anthology paper.

The anthology essays are uniformly readable and stimulating, although some of the papers, such as those engaging with Heidegger, Levinas and Foucault, may be challenging for non-philosophers, and the Eastern spiritual traditions with which the papers engage may be unfamiliar. Nevertheless, they are all

bound to provoke thought about what education is and can be and what new directions we might wish to take it in. All of these papers have extensive bibliographies that can guide readers to developing a deeper engagement with their material and positions. In what follows, I indicate the main issues and material the essays address and focus on an aspect or issue which is engaged with one or more non-Western spiritual traditions. In most cases this is Buddhist meditation. While this of necessity overlooks much important material, my hope is that it will encourage readers who wish to expand their knowledge to access these books, look at some of the original literature, and begin to work toward developing their own practice, responses and applications.

While Buddhism originated in India, it has traveled and developed in a number of cultures and, as it has moved Westward, has undergone change(s). In discussing Buddhism in these essays, I will stick to its most basic and widely accepted aspects without attempting to address particular cultural developments or demotic beliefs and practices. I begin with an extremely brief introduction to “mindfulness,” drawing mainly on the work of the Buddha as recorded in the early *suttas*. This is important in part since, while most of the papers reference the importance of the “ethical foundation” of Buddhist practice, we are given little information about what exactly constitutes the Buddhist view of that foundation. “Attention” or “awareness” is a second topic that runs through several papers, and for this I turn to the major philosophical work of Nagarjuna, which is widely accepted across the traditions. This will be supplemented with some contemporary clarification by Buddhism scholar David Loy. This background will, I trust, make it easier to assess and appreciate the important work of the two books that I am reviewing.

### **The Historical Buddha and Basic Buddhism**

In the well-known although mythologized account, Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, had a privileged youth. However, the sight of a sick man, an old man, a corpse and a monk led him to abandon home and family to seek a cure for psycho-spiritual suffering/*dukkha* through the study of Yoga (see Armstrong, 2001), most likely a form close to that recorded by Patanjali (Iyengar, 1993). After years of Yoga practice, while meditating, he recalled his experience as an infant when he was left alone under a rose-apple tree while the adults conducted the spring plowing. Upon seeing the suffering of the insects, rodents and grasses being dug up and destroyed, he had a profound experience which he now recognized as the first stage of enlightenment and the release from suffering (see Majjhima-nikaya 36, 85, 100 in Nanamoli, 1992, p. 21).

The “naturalness” of the experience he recalled, which we can now understand as natural human empathy (see Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2000, pp. 53–63; Lavelle, 2000, pp. 17–25), is important for grounding the practice of Buddhism entirely in the here-and-now. His experience was not provoked by other people (he was an infant and alone) nor by any spiritual education, from which his father had completely shielded him. Its naturalness is symbolized by the myth of the earth roaring its confirmation when Mara, the archetype of evil, suffering and death, asked for validation of his attainment. From this point on, the Buddha entirely eschewed any reference to the transcendent entities central to Classical Yoga. He was clear that he only taught what he himself had experienced. This is summed up in the Four Noble Truths, which provide the heuristic of a psycho-spiritual therapy:

1. Diagnosis: human life is suffering/*dukkha*.
2. Etiology: the 3 *kleshas* are the origin of suffering (*avidya*/delusion, the acquired sense-of-self or ego is the root delusion; *raga*/attachment or clinging to “things” such as the delusional reified self; *dvesa*/avoidance of that which we reject, for instance death which is the extinction of the reified self).
3. Prognosis: suffering can be overcome.
4. Prescription: a life lived in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path (right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration).

This Path is a holistic way of being, a complete way of life. “Right” here is determined by circumstances. There is no universal principle or any form of absolute which is applicable to all cases. This is especially important for moral behavior, for which there is nothing such as modern ethical principles to guide that behavior (Orr, in press). One must determine the “right” way based on their *karuna*/compassion and *prajna*/wisdom. These features are common to all three of the major schools: the early Theravada on which much of Western mindfulness is based, the later Mahayana or Middle Way, and Tibetan Vajrayana.

Nagarjuna’s *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (MMK in Garfield, 1995), his major philosophical work, analyzes the key concepts of Buddhism. The concept *Sunyata* is often misleadingly translated as “emptiness” and taken to mean “non-existence” or nihilism, but Garfield explains that its meaning can be best captured by “non-essentialized” or “non-reified.” To say that a person is *sunyata* is to say that they lack an essence (*svabhava*/own-being or essential nature), they have no stable, unchanging core. With regard to the sense-of-self, the closest Western paradigm is social constructionism. Clinging to the belief in a reified self is the root delusion that causes suffering (pp. 89–90).

Practicing the *Anapanasati Sutta* (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2009, pp. 941–948) as recommended by the Buddha can lead to the realization that the (1) body, (2) mental formations (sensations, feelings) and (3) mind are all (4) impermanent. Note that since this is a holistic practice, it does not only involve the “mind” but the totality of one’s being. He begins instruction with, “when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and benefit” (p. 943) and then instructs on this breathing followed by instruction on the “four foundations of mindfulness” as given above. Through this the person comes to *experience* their sense-of-self not as a reified entity, nor as entirely autonomous and independent, but rather as *annica*/impermanent, and their being as *pratitya samutpada*/dependently co-arising, that is interconnected with all things, or in Thich Nhat Hanh’s widely used term, their “interbeing.” All of the four foundations must be engaged in order to obtain this result; mindfulness of breathing is preparation for this engagement.

Here, as in Buddhist meditation practice generally, “mindfulness” is not about thinking; it is about paying attention and awareness, but awareness of what? *Sati* (Pali) or *Smṛti* (Sanskrit) have the sense of “recognition” or “remembering.” One begins with awareness of the breath but by practicing the full *Anapanasati Sutta* one becomes aware of and can drop the delusional views and “remember” or “return to” undeluded awareness. As David Loy (2009) explains, awareness/attention is “bound” when it is deluded by the *kleshas*, that is, when it separates the world, including the self/ego, into “things” by the use of names/words (thinking). It is liberated when it is “unbound” by being freed of the *kleshas*. Dropping the root delusion of a permanent self is key to developing a fuller undeluded awareness because retaining this will continue to create a separation between the sense-of-self and all else. This experiential,

rather than cognitive, realization can be difficult as it calls for dropping the constructed sense-or-self or ego which is experienced as a form of death (Loy, 1992). But, by giving up dualistic thinking, that is, “me” or “I” as distinct from all other “things,” one can experientially realize one’s being as interconnected with all things, or one’s *pratitya samutpada*. It is important to be aware that this is not an all-or-nothing undertaking; rather, one can change and develop over time and the “unlearning” achieved through meditation will deepen in one’s lived experience.

Meditation fosters both *karuna*, the empathic compassion or “experiencing together” or “as one” (from its Latin roots), and awareness of our “interbeing”/*pratitya samutpada*, and from these, *prajna*, which is the wisdom of seeing things as they really are. Nagarjuna is explicit, and in agreement with the Buddha, that “[t]he cessation of ignorance occurs through Meditation and wisdom [*prajna*]” (MMK XXVI: 11), in consequence of which “[t]he entire mass of suffering, Indeed, thereby completely ceases” (MMK XXVI: 12).

In summary, the process I have outlined above is succinctly stated by Dogen, the 13th century Japanese founder of Soto Zen:

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 actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of enlightenment remains and this no-trace continues endlessly. (Tanahashi, 2000, p. 36)

Beyond that, as John Schroeder demonstrates in *Skillful Means: The Heart of Buddhist Compassion* (2001), we must develop the ability to respond as each individual and each situation requires. That calls not only for both the empathy and wisdom to understand other beings and the world, but also in many instances the knowledge and critical skills that academic disciplines can provide. These must be integrated to produce efficacious action. This task, to foster not only compassion and wisdom but also appropriate knowledge and skills, is the challenge for education.

## **Western Uses of Contemplative Traditions**

The first three anthology essays by Hyland, O’Donnell and Ergas focus on “contextualizing contemporary educational concerns with mindfulness” (p. 5).

Terry Hyland’s “On the Contemporary Applications of Mindfulness: Some Implications for Education” focuses on questions of “definition, meaning and interpretation” (p. 9) that arise as “mindfulness” is integrated into a wide range of activities, from therapeutic practices, to the training of soldiers, to education *per se*. In this, he addresses such questions as the possibility of free will (arguing that Buddhist practice enhances this), secularity and morality. He concurs with Kabat-Zinn’s assertion that mindfulness is not a belief system, ideology or philosophy but rather a practice aimed to cultivate “mind and heart” (p. 19). His final section addresses the incorporation of mindfulness in education, especially as an antidote to the instrumentalization of education, as well as its range of positive effects on students and its ability to educate for a better quality of life. This paper raises important issues and responds well to them, although the debates he addresses are sure to continue.

In “Contemplative Pedagogy and Mindfulness: Developing Creative Attention in an Age of Distraction,” Aislinn O’Donnell begins by asking if mindfulness has been “co-opted as a coping technique in a world of information and sensory overload and if so, what does it mean for students encountering mindfulness in schools” (p. 29). She argues that it can and has been used to obscure the underlying issues to which it seeks to respond. In many of its current uses, it is the “Faustian bargain” that Purser and Loy debunk in “Beyond McMindfulness” (2013). Some extreme examples of this are its uses to get employees to de-stress and be more productive in workplaces that are both exploitative of workers and producers of products that cause multiple levels of harm, and its military uses to produce more “productive” fighters. In these and many other examples, mindfulness is being co-opted to *suppress* rather than enhance empathic care. With her discussion of other “Faustian bargains” that abound today, O’Donnell clears the way for a useful discussion of mindfulness as a holistic practice that has significant educational uses. However, she does not explicitly take her discussion to the point of engaging the distinction of “bound” and “unbound” awareness/attention discussed above (Loy, 2009), so here the sense-of-self of the student appears to remain intact albeit modified. Finally, however, she references the works of Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch who share with mindfulness the orientation of letting go of self which “illuminates whatever is the object of attention with love” (p. 43). Although not grounded in mindfulness, these works move toward “unbinding” the self.

Oren Ergas contributed the essay “The Deeper Teachings of Mindfulness-Based ‘Interventions’ as a Reconstruction of ‘Education’” and also authored *Reconstructing “Education” Through Mindful Attention*. That volume is a much more detailed expansion of the paper in the anthology and so I will discuss them together.

Ergas’s discussions are grounded in the work of William James on attention. Ergas argues that teaching mindfulness to students is a worthwhile part of education in that it enables them to access their meaningful present-moment inner experience, which teaches them that meaning can exist in the *here* and *now*, and that the aim of education does not lie solely in some future attainment (p. 48). Ergas focuses his work by reference to James when he says that, “I treat attention as a very basic, unsophisticated, almost mechanistic concept. It is, ‘the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought’” (p. 53). Attention has two loci, “in here” or “me,” and “out there” or “not-me,” the world. His discussion of pedagogy critiques a Friereian banking model of education in which students focus on “out there” for lessons which will serve future purposes, but which in the process impoverishes them by ignoring the “in here” or “me.” The approach of guiding attention “in here” not only enriches the student’s self-understanding, but it also “transform[s] the social understanding of ‘education’ and ‘the educated person’” (p. 65). He acknowledges that there are many issues that need to be addressed to bring this about and refers the reader to other articles in the anthology to gain an introduction to the possibilities.

*Reconstructing “Education” Through Mindful Attention* is organized around a series of exercises to be practiced in order to fully understand his points. He does mention mindfulness but, as he acknowledges, relies on it and other wisdom traditions “very little.” He justifies this by holding that they can “easily send the mind *out there* and to *them*” (p. 314, emphasis in original). However, as discussed above, by practicing meditation as described in the *Anapanasati Sutta* (Nanamoli & Bodhi, 2009, pp. 941–948), one stays in the here-and-now “within,” in awareness of the foundations which arise until the awareness is “unbound” and the inner/outer dichotomy is dissolved. In common with many other forms of self-examination, Ergas’s method may lead to future change, but the nature and level of that change, in particular the final

unbinding of awareness, is not typical with those other forms and seem unlikely by Ergas's method (see Loy, 2009).

Ergas's stated goal with his practice is to go "beyond" both the *me* and the *reflective I*, which are precursors to his final stage of attention. That stage is the *contemplative I*, which is "the one that takes us beyond a socially-culturally constructed identity, whether as *me(s)* or as *reflective I(s)*." It is this "embodied contemplative *I* that takes us beyond language and discourse to enable us to escape the self-justifying system that creates the problem of education as 'education.' It all begins with attending *in here* deliberately" (p. 256). Ergas further claims that the practices he recommends will bring one to a more primal *I* with an ethical dimension. But, as noted, he does not claim that this is a practice that entirely drops or unbinds *I*, for it is a form of *I*, the *contemplative I*, that remains and is ethical.

There is much worth in Ergas's method. Working with him can take one to a deeper level of the self and will foster a fuller self-understanding that certainly may support compassion and have an ethical dimension. However, it does not claim to go to the point of fully dropping the self and the realization of interbeing with its "ethical dimension" grounded in *karuna* and *prajna* that is the outcome of Buddhist mindfulness.

## Mindfulness and Western Philosophy

The next three papers by Lewin, Todd, and Hattam and Baker focus on Heidegger, Levinas and Foucault respectively to continue examining the nature and role of attention. All three philosophers interrogate contemporary Western philosophical assumptions and the relationship of these to social and personal issues. While the positions they advocate differ, all three philosophers are working from a place of discontent with prevailing Western philosophy and constructions of the self and are seeking an alternative.

David Lewin's "Heidegger East and West: Philosophy as Educative Contemplation" interrogates the pedagogical relevance of Heidegger's "concept of thinking as a form of attention to being" (p. 68) and the extent to which the parallels he sees between Heidegger's work and Eastern philosophy can provide an understanding of Heidegger's position regarding a form of "thinking" other than cognition or representation. Heidegger's writing is notoriously difficult, but Lewin explains that he was seeking a form of thinking that could "overcome the Western metaphysical tradition" (p. 68) and thereby give us access to "being." Although Heidegger did some study of Zen and Daoism, according to Wolin (1993, p. 113), he maintained that "[t]hinking is transformed only by thinking that has the same origin and destiny" (as cited on p. 72). His reason for not embracing Zen and Daoism fully, that is, only utilizing these traditions for Western ends, has some validity. But as Hyland and O'Donnell as well as many other Western scholars and practitioners have devoted some effort to showing, although there are Western misuses and distortions of these traditions, we need not commit them. Heidegger's search is for a form of non-cognitive or representative "thinking as a form of attention to being," but for mindfulness meditation engaging with an idea that may arise during meditation practice, that is, thinking about it, is a distraction, an avoidance of simply "being with" that idea and allowing it to express itself fully. Thinking about it, whether cognitively or non-cognitively, will serve to keep awareness/attention, in Loy's term, "bound" and thus avoid experiencing "original being."

In addressing Heidegger's theory in relation to Buddhism, it is useful to have in mind the Buddhist psycho-spiritual understanding of suffering/*dukkha* which meditation aims to end. David Loy (1992)

points out that Buddhism understands suffering as originating with the root delusion of the inherent reality of the acquired sense-of-self. The repressed awareness that the sense-of-self is *sunyata* and impermanent gives rise to a haunting shadow, the sense-of-lack, that is the sense-of-self's nonbeing/death. But it is only by giving up the delusional sense-of-self that I will achieve "a serenity that is imperturbable" (p. 175). This giving up of the sense-of-self is not a form of thinking; it is giving up thinking and letting go of the sense-of-self. That is, meditation does not name and thereby separate "things" but, in the words of Dogen, "your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away." All "things" are experienced as *sunyata*/non-reified and *pratitya samutpada*/dependently co-arisen, also called interbeing. In this respect it does, as Heidegger sought, "abide in pure awareness."

Enlightened teachers, beginning with the Buddha, use common language pragmatically to teach, but they do not do so with the implicit assumption that this language refers to reified things, nor with a commitment to a particular metaphysics or world-view. From "the tooth fairy" to "alien invaders" to "the king of France," we all use "names" to refer to things we know do not exist as such. This is not uncommon and especially necessary in the Indo-European linguistic family, which names and thereby divides as some other languages do not. For instance, the Confucianism scholar Roger Ames uses the "focus-field model" to discuss the Chinese language in which "the personal, societal, and political order are coterminous and mutually entailing" (1994, p. 204). That is, things exist in a field from which some "thing" can be picked out with language. This will be discussed more fully with regard to Tom Culham's essay.

On a final point, Lewin writes that there are connections between Heidegger's conception of "thinking as releasement, but also of the emptiness of self, ego, or direct agency entailed in the experience of this kind of thinking" (p. 71). It is unclear what the sense of "emptiness" or of "thinking" is here, but they clearly are not the concept of *sunyata* which entails *pratitya samutpada* as analyzed by Nagarjuna, nor the unbinding that is necessary for this.

In her paper "Experiencing Change, Encountering the Unknown: An Education in 'Negative Capability' in Light of Buddhism and Levinas," Sharon Todd seeks a response to the current instrumentalization of education in Keats's notion of "negative capability," the human capacity to deal with uncertainty, change and mystery. She asks if this can provide an ethical dimension to education and, if so, how it can be philosophically grounded and practiced (p. 92). Her focus is on *Vipassana* or Insight meditation, a prominent aspect of the Theravada school, which follows the Buddhist notions of *dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anatta* (p. 93). She explains that in order to eradicate *dukkha*/suffering, Buddhism does not first seek to change the narratives by which we construct our world in order to liberate the constructed self, *anatta*, from suffering, but rather to deconstruct that self. This awakens one to *anicca*, the uncertainty, change and mystery of impermanence.

Todd holds that for both Buddhism and Levinas the self is ineluctably bound, and physically so, to its encounters with and in the world. They are subject to the changes of those encounters with as well as their changing experiences within them. For Theravada Buddhism it is the different attachments arising out of sensate experience that sets the chain of identity building on its way. For Levinas, it is the ways in which encounter with the other occasions sensate experience, such as vulnerability and exposure, that lead to my subjecthood. For both, what needs to take place if an ethical orientation to the world can emerge is a depositioning of the self (Buddhism) and ego (Levinas). It is only by stepping aside, so to speak, in realizing my implication with others in the world that I begin to live a life of ethical import. Ethics is not rooted in principles or knowledge, but in an embodied, felt experience of the world. (p. 103)



But here she points to the significant difference between these two approaches. For Levinas, “ethics, like sensation, breaks through conventional systems,” but by this one can only “develop a sensitivity to the situation at hand.” In contrast, Buddhism is based on “meditation and *Dhamma* practice” and offers the Eight-fold path as a holistic and ethical way of living, not an isolated happening (pp. 103–104).

While both Levinas and Buddhism present a challenge to prevailing conceptions of ethics/morality, there are radical differences between these approaches. It is not only the narrowness of Levinas’s position that stands in marked contrast to that of Buddhism but also his apparent view that “ethics” is something inherent but hidden below the ego which, when provoked, will “break through” only for the individual provoked and otherwise, apparently, remains hidden. I have discussed elsewhere (Orr, in press) that, although the ideal of the early Theravada school of Buddhism, the *arhat*, is often understood as one who seeks only their own enlightenment, this is contradicted by the literature. The first support of the position that Buddhist “ethics” seeks the end of the suffering of all beings lies in the Buddha’s earliest experience of empathic *karuna* when, as an infant, he empathized with the suffering of grasses and insects. As the cloistered and privileged son of the clan leader, he would have been well aware of depth of a loving mother’s care. Thus, the *Metta Sutta*, which also appears in the Theravada literature, enjoins the *sadhaka*, or seeker, to love “every living being ... as a mother with her life, Will guard her son, her only child.” This clearly establishes universal compassion and loving-kindness as *an ethical way of life* which is fundamental for Buddhists, including the *arhat* (Nanamoli, 1992, pp. 180–181).

This maternal love is not a mere emotion, nor is it a spontaneous “just knowing what to do” (Schroder, 2001). As Todd points out, Buddhism is based on “meditation and *Dhamma* practice,” and it is these that foster the *karuna*/compassion and *prajna*/wisdom that ground skillful means. This means that one must act in accordance with the demands of the situation and without a “guarantee” of doing the ethically correct thing. And, as is supported by the wide range of action and literature exemplifying “engaged Buddhism,” it will move beyond the individual’s interests to address the range of narratives and their social and cultural grounds and practices which contribute to suffering of all types. I concur with Todd that a Buddhist approach is much richer than a Levinasian one in its resources for educating, not only for the student’s future life, in which they may “change the narratives by which we construct our world,” but also for “engaging the very life that students are living—right here and right now” (p. 105). Thus, Theravada Buddhist practice can both address moment-to-moment experience and prepare students for their more ethical and transformative future while maintaining the uncertainty, change and mystery of impermanence.

In “Technologies of Self and the Cultivation of Virtues,” Robert Hattam and Bernadette Baker conduct a “thought experiment” to consider the possibilities of Foucauldian and Buddhist approaches to further critical pedagogy in the context of doctoral education. This brings out the stark contrast between Foucault, who theorizes the person’s creation of a “better” self, and Buddhism, which provides practices to drop the self in order to develop lived compassion that is extended to the totality of existence. Hattam and Baker’s aim is not to definitively focus on or resolve comparative issues, but rather to offer a “dialogue of openness” that will encourage further dialogue on these issues.

In their first section, they focus on Foucault’s “technologies of the self” by which individuals can operate on any aspect of themselves in order to achieve a desired state of self. This is then contrasted in their second section with Tibetan Buddhist “mind-heart training,” which fosters compassion and loving-kindness “not as ideas to have but as a way of life” (p. 108). The major contrast of Foucault’s work with

Buddhism is revealed in his statement, “It seems appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject” (as cited in Hattam & Baker, p. 110). These “forms and modalities” are named as “technologies of self,” “techniques of the self,” “art/s of existence” and “aesthetics of existence” whereby, Hattam and Baker comment, “‘the modern individual’ turns into an object of study becoming a particular kind of subject” (p.110).

Their interest in this essay, explain Hattam and Baker,

is the potential for doctoral study to provide a site for learning that resists contemporary diagrams of *subjection*, especially to the kind of methodological scientism that currently dominates Education, and thus for doctoral education to be considered a site for spawning meaningful *aporia*. (p. 120)

Their purpose in bringing to bear the possibility of mind-heart transformation in the context of such institutions is to challenge the status quo by creating such an *aporia*. They continue:

The *aporia* such approaches invite as interruptions to a Cartesian project and scientism, do not elaborate a “religious” sense of “public” space so much as question the spatialisation and other projects that produce a “one” out of nebulous forces and relations for Foucault and no-thing out of universal compassion for Buddhisms. (p. 125)

Engaging the practices of Tibetan Buddhism, or the other contemplative practices they include in their discussion, would be a powerful tool for breaking through the scientism and instrumentalization of the self that currently dominate education at all levels.

## Education and Spirituality

The third set of three essays focuses on the spiritual dimension of Eastern traditions for education (pp. 6–7). These papers more closely address actual pedagogical practice while invoking a range of non-Western spiritual traditions.

Claudia Eppert, Daniel Vokey, Tram Truong Anh Nguyen and Heesoon Bai begin with “Intercultural Philosophy and the Nondual Wisdom of ‘Basic Goodness’: Implications for Contemplative and Transformative Education.” This is a clearly written and detailed paper which provides a grounding in Shambhala Buddhism and works out some of its details as they are relevant to transformative education.

In their Introduction, the authors state that they will bring to bear a range of traditions—Vedic, Buddhist, Taoist/Daoist and Confucian—to challenge the hegemonic Western world-view of scientific materialism because, they hold, no one world-view can grasp the totality of the universe. “[W]e expect that adequate solutions to the kinds of complex challenges we face today will only emerge from openness to the rich abundance of ontological perspectives that intercultural engagement affords” (p.130). What follows in their paper is a lucid overview of the traditions they engage with sufficient detail to support their position.

Their main focus is on Shambhala Buddhism, a contemporary Tibetan form grounded in the work of Chogyam Trungpa. The importance of this for their concerns is that it “joins the Buddhist aspiration for personal liberation or awakening with a socio-political commitment to the betterment of society as a whole” (Gimmian, as cited in Eppert et al., p. 132). “When Trungpa described Shambhala as a *secular*

path, he proclaimed a tradition in which spirituality is conceived as inseparable from all aspects of personal, domestic, cultural, artistic, political and economic dimensions of human living” (p. 136). The authors hold that it is by cultivating “the sacred path of the warrior” that one can not only transform personally but “translate alternate insights and potential into concrete action” (p. 134). Thus, “[t]his path is a kind of curriculum through which, or so Shambhala maintains, its goal of enlightened society may be gradually realized” (p. 134).

The authors devote a section to spiritual warriorship, in which the warrior abides in nondualistic “basic goodness.” They point out that the word “warrior” is rooted in the Tibetan word *pawo* which means “one who is brave”; this warrior does not use violent aggression to achieve their ends. In the Shambhala tradition, this path can demand years of cultivation through study and meditation. Although basic goodness is fundamental to human nature, we do not easily abide in it. Thus, the traditional “curriculum” of the spiritual warrior cultivates human fundamental nature through “meditation, calligraphy and art” (p. 135), although the authors acknowledge that the other traditions they discuss could also be utilized and that practices are adaptable to individual needs. The result is the spiritual warrior who is characterized by “fearlessness, nonviolence, gentleness and elegance” (p. 135) and treads the secular path that is described above. Meditation practice does not end in developing the awareness of basic goodness in the practitioner; it reveals that, in David Loy’s words, one is “already grounded in the totality” (as cited in Eppert et al., p. 140). This experience is of basic goodness and interbeing is the foundation of the spiritual warrior’s work.

An example of such a warrior is Trungpa’s first Western student after his escape from Tibet, Diane Perry. As Tenzin Palmo, she received full *bhiksuni*/nun ordination. Then, on the advice of her teacher, she spent twelve years in retreat in a cave in the Himalayas until she was forced to leave (MacKenzie, 1998). Subsequently, because of the discrimination she underwent in an all-male monastery, she began her work with women and founded the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery where women could receive a full education and live a spiritual life. She continues her life of activism today. Tenzin Palmo exemplifies a true spiritual warrior. While most of us will not follow this path that fully, daily life provides ample opportunities to draw on the strength of the warrior to act with the wisdom and compassion which one develops in their own practice.

The authors provide a range of considerations for contemplative education in contemporary North American society. They point out that it presents challenges to character education; to the role of neoconservative and neoliberal instrumental education; to world views that “underwrite a poverty mentality and its corresponding all-versus-all competition” (p. 142); to fragmented and piecemeal approaches to social transformation rather than a holistic approach that also recognizes the sacredness of nature; and to the failure to strive for global solidarity and work together across differences.

In their conclusion, the authors say that “Shambhala Buddhism, like many wisdom traditions, teaches that we are unconditionally healthy physically and psychologically. As well, at the fundamental level of our basic nature, society is already enlightened. The problems that exist, while they are real and colossal, are secondary and workable because the nondual ground of wisdom and compassion is always available” (p. 146; see also Loy, 2002, 2003, 2008). Thus, Shambhala Buddhism, as well as the other traditions they reference, are important for transformative education and their incorporation can provide perspectives from which to interrogate foundational assumptions of Western modernity, as well as form an alternative “ethical” praxis.

In the next paper, “Reuniting Virtue and Knowledge,” Tom Culham provides a closer look at Daoism’s understanding of virtue and its attainment, its relationship to knowledge, and some of the implications of these he sees for a transformative pedagogy. While there are some questions to be raised about the alignment of Western philosophical concepts and practices with those of Daoism, this is a thoughtful paper that provides a good overview of Daoism and gives some topics for the reader’s further thought about the integration of Daoism with current pedagogy.

Culham begins by referencing the work of Hadot and Davidson who maintain that, for the ancient Greeks, philosophy was a “way of life” in which spiritual exercises and the practice of virtue issued in wisdom, which provided both knowledge and a way of being (p. 152–153). His valid concern is that post-Cartesian Western culture has bifurcated knowledge and virtue, although, he notes, there have been recent attempts to reconnect these through the use of contemplative practices in the educational context.

In developing his position, Culham draws some connections with other traditions, especially Buddhism. He also invokes a wide range of Western philosophical thinkers, some of whom have been discussed in previous works in this volume. A concern that this eclecticism raises is the degree to which the language used in any culture or at any historical period can be translated into contemporary English with just the same meaning it had there and then for speakers or readers here and now, and whether, in fact, there are any analogs at all.

The importance of a cross-cultural sensitivity to language is addressed at length by the Confucianism scholar Henry Rosemont Jr. (2015), who investigates it by considering “concept clusters.” These include terms that work together in a particular language, in the case of “virtue” to understand human conduct. Rosemont contrasts the concept of the individual, which is central to Western culture and moral thought from Plato onwards (p. 26), with the Confucian “role-bearing person,” a person who is who they are by virtue of the roles they play, and who play these roles in relationships (p. 51).

In the Western moral concept cluster, we find “freedom, ought, rights, liberty, reason, obligation, choice, dilemma, evil, subjective, objective, right/wrong, individual, duty, rational and several related terms” (Rosemont, 2015, p. 26). These concepts, drawn from individualistic Western patriarchal culture, are not directly applicable to the Confucian “role-bearing person,” and this is especially true of the concept “virtue” which, Culham notes, “is much broader than our current understanding of the term and has been translated in a number of ways” (p. 159). In his discussion, Culham points out that “at birth the *dao* endows each person with an innate authentic nature that is unique to every individual” (p. 159) but that their experience of life, culture and family obscures. The person can cultivate access to their authentic nature, but it will be as a “role-bearing person” with the qualities of authenticity, integrity, health and wisdom (p.160). They will do so holistically and as a person in relationship with others, not as the Western isolated individual.

Culham gives us an overview of Daoist thought and the practices in which it plays a part. He ends his paper with a challenging series of thought-provoking questions, regarding the pedagogical implications of Daoism for contemporary education, that are well worth considering. For instance:

Daoist pedagogy assumes that humans are an integrated whole, and virtue applies to all aspects of what it means to be human—body, heart, mind, and spirit ... [C]an pedagogy be developed to support the development of the whole person so that virtue or excellence emerges in all aspects of the person? (p. 169)

Or, touching on intuition, another theme of his paper, Culham suggests that this is sacred and asks if spirituality can be introduced into contemporary secular institutions. These and other questions are well worth consideration for the exploration of the integration of contemplative practices in education.

Edward Sarath's "Improvising and Meditation in the Academy: Parallel Ordeals, Insights and Openings" draws on his years of experience introducing and utilizing contemplative practices in his university courses on jazz improvisation and in developing a curriculum for this type of teaching. Here, he discusses the resistance he met in the contemporary academy, with its entrenched commitment to materialism and objective rationality as the foundation of all intellectual production of worth.

In support of his argument for expanding the standard university curriculum by incorporating jazz and contemplative practices, Sarath makes the pertinent argument that "most of the great icons in the classical European tradition" were improvisers as well as great composers (p. 176). He also maintains that "ancient philosophers" incorporated "dietary, discursive, meditative and contemplative practices" to facilitate their work (p. 176). In commenting on this, I would return to the need discussed in connection with Tom Culham's essay regarding differing uses of terms; in this case, "contemplation." My Oxford English Dictionary (1982) provides a range of definitions of both "contemplation" (or "contemplative") and "meditation," all of which focus on some aspect of thinking or reflecting. In general, the practices of ancient Western philosophers were more of this type than of Buddhist meditation or other Eastern contemplative practices, which seek to "unbind" awareness and foster experience, not thinking. However, the non-meditative thinking one does will be informed by one's meditative attainment.

In regard to the integration of contemplative practice with knowledge and thought, it is relevant to note that, in the early history of Buddhist culture, "[m]any monasteries began to function as seats of learning rather than as mere shelters for a sequestered spiritual culture" (Dutt, 1959, p. 181), and that there was also a special emphasis on "education for dialectical skill and ability in argumentation" (p. 182). As the monasteries developed, their curricula expanded to include works of other spiritual traditions—philosophy, agriculture and architecture, among other areas. After the 1st century BCE, they also began developing libraries. Here we have centers of learning much like our contemporary universities that did include contemplative practices in the relevant sense. Thus, Ed Sarath has strong precedent for the feasibility and usefulness of contemplative practices in education (see also Thurman, 2006).

Sarath continues with an informative discussion of how he has integrated contemplative practice by developing a program of Systematic Meditation/Contemplation Practice (pp. 178–182). He continues with a discussion of the contradictions inherent between contemporary educational praxis and Buddhist meditation incorporation. These include issues around secularity, scientific materialism, attempts at materialist readings of Buddhism and "the conduciveness of mindfulness practices ... with these forces in the 21st century classroom" (pp. 182–185). In this, he raises issues that many of us have faced and continue to face.

Sarath ends his paper with a reference to research that purports to "suggest" that conscience is "non-material, non-local and intersubjective" (p. 183) and speculates on the support this gives to "rebirth" and "disembodied intelligence" (p. 184). Finally, he accesses the Vedantic tradition regarding the transformation of experience that may result in "teams of 'intention experts'" who could positively impact climate and weather and the possibility of "large group meditation practices" that could promote world peace and impact the climate (p. 187).

While these possibilities may be beyond the scope of most teachers' concerns, as well as those of most Eastern wisdom traditions, there is currently considerable interest in the non-materialist

understanding not only of human being but also of the “self-organizing universe.” Theodore Roszak explores this at length in his accessible *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (2001), and argues in detail and with considerable evidence that materialism is inadequate to explain the origin and development of the cosmos. His strong and well-supported argument for this leads him to argue for self-examination and change on a personal level, especially with regard to the narcissism that has so alienated us from the earth and led to the massive and multi-layered dysfunction with which we are now faced. Ed Sarath’s paper brings us, by way of his interest in incorporating contemplative practices with teaching jazz, to begin to give some serious concern to the fuller implications of alternative paradigms of the cosmos and our place in it.

## Conclusion

While I have not agreed with every point in every one of the works discussed above, they each present worthwhile discussions of, and arguments for, the pedagogical engagement of contemplative practices. I am very aware that there is a great deal more to be said about each of them and much to be learned from the material they present, and regret that space would not allow me to go further.

We are now facing a range of serious issues with both personal and global implications. To address these, we need to educate not only for conventional skills and knowledge but also for the development of the resources of the Shambala warrior. Contemplative traditions provide a rich repertoire of practices that can lead students to develop these resources and bring them to bear as they face the future. With regard to the works I have discussed, if I would ask for anything further, it would be some more specific and detailed techniques for education both inside and outside of the classroom. I look forward to the future production of these authors that will continue their work.

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