Online Supplement for Brook Ziporyn, Experiments in Mystical Atheism:
Godless Epiphanies from Daoism to Spinoza and Beyond

Online Appendix B:

World Without Anaxagoras: Dispelling Superficial Resemblances

I have been insisting that the mainstream Chinese traditions, and the Buddhist tradition both prior to and after its participation in Chinese traditions, are a strong antithesis to the notions of God and purpose that have grown out of the Anaxagoran *Noûs as Arché* premise, with its stipulation that intended purpose is the ultimate foundation of all existence and of all value--an assumption that persists and grows through Plato and the mainstream theologies of the Abrahamic religions, and unreflectively continues to exert enormous influence on many of the assumptions embedded in modern secular consciousness as well. But some readers who are somewhat familiar with classical Chinese and Buddhist materials may object to this contrast, thinking of the many seeming resemblances to God and "*Noûs as Arché*" ideas in these traditions: karma as intention in Buddhism, intercessionary cosmic Bodhisattvas in the Mahāyāna, a single "eternal" Buddha who calls himself "possessor" and "father" of the world (which he watches over and constantly cares for) in the *Lotus Sutra*, the universal Buddha-mind in Chan (Jp: Zen) Buddhism, Heaven and "the Mind of Heaven and Earth" in Confucianism, the "Creator of Things" or even Dao itself in Daoism. Aren't all of these quite Godesque concepts?

My answer is an emphatic no. On the contrary, all of these are, each in its own way, beautiful exemplars of opposites of God. Each of these, without exception, is precisely a strong denial of the *ultimacy* of personality, of purpose, of intention, of work and foresight and planning and accountability. Of course, I am not claiming that the idea of a deity who somehow rules, produces or even creates the world never appears in Chinese traditions; on the contrary, as already noted in the main text, some form of this idea seems to pop up in some form or other in the mythology of almost all known cultures. The question is whether there was an available philosophical tradition to receive and support and reinterpret this idea, such that literate cultural elites take it up and develop a rigorous philosophical or theological exegesis of it, allowing it to be taken seriously as anything more than quaint folklore throughout a sustained subsequent

cultural development. This is what fails to occur in China. [1] On the contrary, these sustained developments as represented in the literate canon consistently go in just the opposite direction, the atheist direction. In my opinion the fact that this is not obvious to an impartial reader is an indication of the unnoticed prevalence of the monotheistic aftereffects, so deeply ingrained that it has become difficult even to notice differences from it or think outside of it.

When talking about the eschatological monotheism that reaches its high-water mark in the preachments of the messiah figure of the New Testament, we introduced the term "dichotomizing monism."[2] In that system, a unity is posited as a means to make a distinction, an inclusiveness is used as a tool of exclusion: the one source of the universe, God, is posited as an exclusive oneness, distinguished from the multiplicity of creatures and rival god-claimants; the oneness is then used as a standard of selective inclusion, but this inclusion is itself a means to

[1]As noted in the main text, I am speaking here of the overwhelming majority of representative writers in the mainstream traditions; this is not to say an occasional outlier might not be possible even in some relatively high-culture texts here and there, particularly in explicitly religious milieus. That said, it is worth noting that even the most marginalized Daoist religious texts, with the clear intention of elevating Laozi to a universal deity under the name Supreme Lord Lao (Taishang Laojun 太上老君), we find the same eschewal of the Noûs as Arche move, the same deferral to ultimate self-so *wuwei*. The surviving fragments of the Xiang'er commentary to the *Daodejing*, preserved only in a damaged manuscript at Dunhuang after being forgotten for centuries, mentions Laojun only once: "The One when dispersed its forms is Qi, when congealed in form is the Supreme Lord Lao, who constantly governs Kunlun. Sometimes it is called nothingness, sometimes self-so, sometimes the nameless, but all of these are the same." 一散形為氣，聚形為太上老君，常治昆侖。或言虛無，或言自然，或言無名，皆同一耳。Here we have a formless unintentional Qi that can congeal into the shape of a personal god; the god does not precede and create the Qi. The same motif is common in those Chinese texts occasionally cited as somewhat straw-grasping attempts to demonstrate the existence of an indigenous Chinese creationism, e.g., the *Huainanzi*, Chapter Seven, where two gods are born from a primordial inchoate void, and then go on to divide, organize and rule the known world. The further reaches of a lean in this direction among highly literate works is perhaps found in later Daoist religious texts like Du Guangting's *Daodezhenjing guangshengyi* **道德真經廣聖義**，where Lord Lao is elevated to the parent and root and source of all things and the creator of heaven and earth—indeed, even to the "ancestor" of the Primal Qi **元氣之祖**. But even there, it is notable that Lord Lao does not pre-exist eternally, but is said to "arise" and "be born" from beginningless time and without cause, and from a prior *wuwei* and nameless realm, and his "creation" (*zao* **造**) of heaven and earth is described in terms of serving as the basis (*genben*) of heaven and earth, and as that from which all things "are born and completed" (*shengcheng* **生成**); such descriptions, like the language of being "ancestor of the Primal Qi" and "mother and father of all transformations **萬化之父母**,"point not to creation on the model of deliberate manufacture but to begetting on the model of unplanned gestation. The ordering comes later in the story, in the form once again of "dividing" heaven from earth and so on, organizing them into distinct entities rather than conjuring something up ex nihilo. But even on the most creationist possible reading of such a passage, what we have here is equivalent to a theology of an eternally begotten Logos, like the second person of the Christian trinity, through which all things are created and ordered, but where that from which he is begotten is not a person at all, a "first person" of a trinity, not *Noûs* like God the Father, not a *youwei* entity with a divine will even if an inaccessible and inconceivable will. He is eternally begotten from *wuwei* indeterminacy itself.

[2] See online appendix A, Supplement 7, "Why So Hard on Love Incarnate?"

achieve the goal of exclusion (extirpation of "evil," where the latter is defined as whatever opposes the will of God). All-embracing love and obedience to the source of all things paradoxically becomes the standard used in the end to divide, exclude, hate certain things. The motto there might be, "We are all one with the One—and therefore anyone who doesn't acknowledge and surrender to this oneness with the One is beyond reprehensible, worthy of hatred, death, eternal torment, and worse…." We have noticed a certain parallelism here to the Parmenidean disjunction that begins Greek metaphysics: there is only Being, an indivisible One, but the result is that almost everything anyone says and does and thinks is—false! Nothingness, Parmenides says, does not exist—but that leads here not to the Spinozistic idea that there is no nothingness, that anything mentioned or imagined is therefore some form of Being, but rather that there is an absolute and unbridgeable dualism between Being and Nothingness, so that some candidates for Being end up being relegated to the Nothingness category, where one would think that their mere candidacy for being should be enough to qualify them as beings in some sense or other. It is admitted that what grounds experience must indeed be some real being, but the experiences so grounded, the actual contents of our experience at every moment, are in most cases no beings at all—consciousness of change, multiplicity, sensory objects all fall into this category. The assertion that there is only Being ends up necessitating a split between substratum and surface, between reality and appearance, and it is here that the dualism really kicks in, becoming an absolute gulf. Here the oneness of the sole true reality does not end up meaning that all candidates for being-true are thus true in some sense, as we saw in Spinoza's *genuine* follow-through of the privation theories of the Good (routinely trotted out but always stunted in *Noûs as Arché* traditions, turned instead into instruments of total dichotomization), where "false" ideas are really merely inadequate fragments of true ideas, whose very inadequacy follows with the same absolute necessity as true ideas, and which contain nothing positive by virtue of which they are false. Instead of that, we are introduced to an absolute dichotomy between true and false, between reality and appearance, for in the *Noûs as Arché* world it is possible to have a criterion for what counts for a real being that goes beyond merely seeming to, merely appearing, merely being there according to anyone. Once this happens, we quickly learn that almost all of what comes into awareness belongs to that category of non-things that do not belong to the one reality:

the oneness is a means of exclusion. The all-embracing truth ends up being a way to exclude falsehood. Allegedly all-embracing oneness ends up being a premise for ultimate dualism.

I have been arguing that this move in its various forms defines what ends up winning out as the mainstream Western tradition, both philosophical and religious. Its direct opposite would be any system that structures these two elements in the opposite way: i.e., uses bifurcation to lead to monistic consequences. This is another of those clear markers of atheist mysticism. Here too we find the same two elements, the dualistic and the non-dualistic, but with the opposite relation between them. We see this in Spinoza, in the use of ethical distinctions between "perfect" and "imperfect" as a means to attain the beatific vision in which all existences are equally perfect (see Introduction to E4), equally necessary, equally eternal essences. We see it in Nietzsche, as the Lion (dualism, rejection, critique, destruction) was a step toward reaching the Child (absolute Yea-saying to all things). We see it in early Schelling and early Hegel, in the gradual stairsteps toward to convergence of purpose and purposelessness in beauty, and the advocacy of the bifurcations of the Understanding (*Verstand*) as a necessary means by which to go beyond them to the unification of oppositions and the transcending of all dualisms in unconditioned self-cognition of Reason (*Vernunft*).[3] Mahāyāna Buddhism too has both a dualistic and a non-dualist aspect. As we've seen, and will touch on more extensively below, these are organized in terms of the Two Truths, which to a large extent are themselves modeled on the "raft parable" of early Buddhism. Here too the structure is "dualism" (morality, judgment, discipline, authoritarianism, hierarchy) as a means by which to transcend dualism (the "other shore" of Emptiness, beyond any either/or, beyond the mutual exclusivity of "this" and "that"). This is, again, precisely the opposite of the structure that emerges in the teleological ontologies linked to monotheism generally, especially the eschatologically-structured monotheisms, where tolerance and inclusion, non-dualism and non-judgment, are made into means by which to reach the real desideratum, the true goal, the end, the absolute final exclusionism of the Last Judgment in which ultimately Purpose wins, where the sheep are to be divided from the goats, the wheat from the tares.

[3] See online appendix A, supplement 11, "Europe's Missed Exit."

In more complex ways, classical Confucianism and Daoism also, each in its own way, involve both a deliberate, dualistic, judgment-making dimension, and a spontaneous, non-dual all-embracing dimension: in classical terms, both *youwei* 有為 and *wuwei* 無為, the deliberate and the undeliberate. These complexities should not blind us to the remarkable fact that in all cases it is the *wuwei* dimension—the goalless, the purposeless--that stands as ultimate, as source, as value, as goal. My claim is thus that all the atheist systems can be characterized as using dichotomy to reach ultimate monism, the precise opposite of the monotheistic/Parmenidean use of monism to achieve ultimate dichotomy. The danger of not understanding the structure of dichotomy and monism in eschatological monotheisms and Greek-influenced metaphysics is that a superficial observer notes that Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism all involve both a "harsh" side and a "soft" side, an exclusive side and an inclusive side, a rejecting side and an accepting side, an authoritarian side and a libertarian side, just like monotheism does, and thus it is assumed that these systems are all compatible, or that all religions somehow teach the same truths or the same morals, or else that all are equally hideous ideological ruses. What is neglected here is that the structure, the relation between the two sides, is exactly the opposite in these two cases: generally speaking, what is mere temporary means in eschatological monotheisms is final goal and ultimate value in the central Chinese traditions, while what is mere temporary means in these traditions is final goal and ultimate value in eschatological monotheisms. This means their ultimate values are diametrically opposed. The end result, though, is that in modern discussions these traditions are generally assimilated to monotheism rather than vice-versa. We lose what is truly distinctive about these traditions, what could provide the rarest thing in the world--a genuine alternative to monotheism--as they come to be read more and more as ultimately promoting a moral and epistemological dualism, using their non-dualism only as a means, only therapeutically.[4]

[4] From this point of view we begin to understand also the uncanny appeal of monotheism, particularly in its post-Jesus forms of Christianity and Islam. For it is mistaken for profound, it moves souls, because of the juxtaposition of vociferous love and vociferous hate, radical conditionality and radical unconditionality, absolute surrender and insane violence, extreme tenderness and extreme brutality. If one neglects the simple and unparadoxical eschatological structure that binds these together as ends and means, masking a straightforward dualism of the most crudely depressing kind, one can get the mistaken impression of being in the presence of a genuine paradox, a paradox commensurate with the paradox which is our own existence, in which we live and move and have our being. The real convergence of radical conditionality and radical unconditionality has been attempted here and there

I have been casually inserting references to the Daoist thinkers, and occasionally to Confucians and Buddhists as well, especially Tiantai Buddhists, as foils against which to make clear the structures and implications of monotheist thinking. But those sorts of references were nods to the ways in which these doctrines most obviously serve as a foil for the monotheist ideas. What is perhaps more interesting is to take up the aspects of those traditions that might seem to unwary readers with a perennialist bent to be somewhere at least in the neighborhood of monotheism: places where they seem to be talking approvingly of something like God. Leaving aside the clearly naturalizing thinkers within the tradition, for whom Heaven was a name only for the sky and the processes of natural growth and change that it initiated and exemplified, even those most insistent upon asserting the strongest available sense of, say, a universal mind were most emphatically committed to a specific denial of the purposive and determining mind of willing, desiring and knowing, as we shall see below. Instead, the "universal mind" of these traditions is either an ontologicization of a mirrorlike responsiveness of pure awareness devoid of intention and any definite commitments, identities or determinations (early Chan), or an omnitelic drive to maximal production and reproduction fulfilled by any and every emergence but adjusting for maximal coherence and becoming explicitly intentional only when a faced with a stubborn obstruction (Zhu Xi), or else an infinitely responsive awareness that posits and annuls values and purposes without any single overriding goal or fixed purposes, perfectly at liberty to will completely contrary goals in different times and places, adding up to no cumulative whole (Wang Yangming)—a Will-to-Good with no fixed goal, rather more like the zigzagging Nietzschean Will-to-Power than the birds-eye all-disposing *Noûs* fashioning things in advance toward a single goal. The mind at the base of things, on any of these views, is nothing like a separate mind that controls events, envisioning or enforcing any specific willed arrangement of existence as the Good, much less one that creates the world on the basis of a planned Good: wisdom here is always identical to the lack of definite conclusions and fixed conceptions of what is so and what is good. A person who awakens to this knowledge—a Buddha or a sage—is

---

in human history—the most unmistakable example of which I am aware is called Tiantai Buddhism. Christianity is to that kind of participation in the inescapable paradox of Being what fake X is to real X: it is parasitic on the demand for real X, but it also ruins the appetite for it by filling the same ecological niche. See, again, online appendix A, supplement 7, "Why So Hard on Love Incarnate?"

emphatically not someone who is omniscient in the monotheist god's sense, but precisely someone whose knowledge has become constitutively paradoxical—a point grievously misunderstood by those modern interpreters who assume that the "master's" omniscience and authority everywhere proclaimed in these traditions is to be understood according to models of knowledge derived from Platonic and monotheistic assumptions about knowability. Above all, this mind cannot stand apart from or opposed to finite minds, as a monotheist God stands apart from or opposed to lesser minds: rather, it is mind expressed as all minds. But unlike the sort of world-soul posited by the Stoics and others in the West, it is not a mind that directs or controls events: it is rather mind that apprehends and responds to and enables events. Knowledge, like authority, is constitutively split and self-corrosive here, but rather than undermining what knowledge and authority there is, this self-corrosiveness is indeed the condition of the existing and functioning of any knowledge and authoritativeness at all, dichotomy as a means but never as an ultimate end. It is most remarkable: the most extreme antithesis of the God idea is literally the summum bonum of all three traditions, and this is in fact their one incontrovertible point of convergence. That highest good is not control, not conscious intention, purpose, and direction of events, but the precise opposite: the Chinese term for it, again, is *wuwei*. The cosmos is ultimately an *wuwei* cosmos in all the Chinese schools: no one mind deliberately controls it or makes it so, and it is ipso facto not made for any purpose. This can perhaps start to reveal what a real godlessness might look like.

I will deliberately leaving out the more extreme and obvious forms of anti-theism in Chinese traditions, taking up only those that might superficially be viewed as having a convergence with monotheisms. It is incumbent on me to give some account of what is actually going on in such places, how we are actually still very much in the realm of the opposite of God. Because that makes my readings somewhat contentious, I must spend some time explaining them in detail. Just for fun, I will do this in the traditional order in which the three teachings of China were listed when spoken of as a unit: *ru-shi-dao* 儒釋道, Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism.

1. Confucianism and The Interpersonal Universe: Humanity Beyond Personhood

The real homeland of the concept of *wuwei*, non-deliberate activity with no explicit goal as the ultimate source of cosmic activity and as both the most valuable and the most efficacious state of human activity, would seem to be the ancient "Daoist" thinkers, Laozi and Zhuangzi. We've called it the ground zero of Emulative Atheism. Dao does nothing and yet all things are done (*Daodejing* 37). The sage does nothing and thus leaves nothing undone. Heaven and Earth are not humane: to them all creatures are disposable sacrificial effigies made of straw. The sage is not humane: to him all creatures are disposable sacrificial effigies made of straw. (*Daodejing* 5) Dao has no intention, does not play the lord or master, knows nothing and is never known, and thereby does its bounty flow to all creatures.

However, this centrality and ultimacy of *wuwei*, this hallmark of ultimate godlessness, is the one point shared by theoretical Daoism and Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism. All see the world as something that comes into being without the intervention of anyone's intention, without any plan or purpose, and each in its own way sees what is best in human experience as some manifestation of that same effortless unintentional purposelessness in us. Indeed, strictly speaking, we must trace the concept of *wuwei* first to Confucian sources. The locus classicus is a single ritual-political reference in the *Analects*, "Is not Shun someone who ruled without any effortful action? (*wuwei er zhi* 無為而治) He simply made himself respectful and faced south, that is all." (Analects 15:5) The sage-king Shun is here depicted as placing himself in his ritually proper position as emperor, and doing so with the proper ritual attitude of respect. This is probably to be understood as referring to the non-coercive organizing power of ritual, referenced elsewhere in the text. In *Analects* 2:1, we are told that "one who rules with virtue (*de*, 德 virtuosity) is like the North Star: it simply occupies its place and all the other stars turn toward it." Virtue here is ritual virtuosity, attained mastery of the received ritual system, internalized to the point of grace and effortlessness, believed to come with certain attitudes in the person and effects in the world. Truly internalized ritual mastery is depicted as having an automatic effect on others who are also operating within that shared traditional ritual system. We see effortlessness manifest on both sides of the relation here: the ruler does no more than take his position, with the respect for that position and for the other positions in the system that is considered by Confucians to be the essence of internalized and thus effortless mastery of the system, and the

others, without thinking about it or having to make efforts to overcome contrary inclinations, respond, organizing themselves spontaneously around him. The implications are spelled out a few lines later in the same text, which pairs "ritual" and "virtuosity" (virtue), contrasting this pair favorably with the alternative pair of "governance" (*zheng* 政) and "punishment," (*xing* 刑) i.e., penal law, as two alternate possible approaches by which a ruler might bring order to the people. The coercive method of punishment and threat, combined with explicitly formulated statutes and controls, incentivizes the people to avoid the punishments, but without any internalized feeling of shame in failing to comply, as long as they are not caught. "Shame" here means a feeling that one has failed to live up to a standard that one recognizes and has made one's own, that one has internalized as a standard of worth, as one would feel shame in failing to accomplish a task for which one had trained and to which one had aspired. It also presupposes that this failure will mean loss of status and recognition in the system of other social agents sharing membership in this system. This internalized sociality and its power to incentivize action, the threat of loss of recognition and belonging, are key to the ritual form of social organization, the form of orderly social grouping offered as an alternative to law and control and punishment. Leading the people with virtuosity and organizing them with ritual brings to the people their own internalized sense of shame, allowing them to correct themselves, literally "come into the grid" (ge 格), assume their own positions in the same system of ritual that the ruler inhabits and internalizes with *wuwei* mastery. (*Analects* 2:3) The next item in the Analects describes a process by which this *wuwei* mastery of traditional ritual, which allows one both to follow one's own desires with no sense of effort and to elicit order-producing responses from others equally effortlessly, is attained, through long and sustained practice and effort. (*Analects* 2:4) The model nearest to hand for understanding this conception is perhaps that of learning a skill: one practices for a long time, having to consciously pay attention to every movement, correcting and coercing oneself, subjecting oneself to executive conscious control—with the goal of finally reaching a state where one can forget what one is doing, because one has internalized it and is doing it so well. Such skill entitles one to membership in good standing in a mutually recognizing society of practitioners who share this skill and the values it exemplifies. The added dimension of spontaneous response to this attained spontaneity has been illuminatingly compared to the sort of

response we see, for example, in a handshake.[5] If (and only if) the person in front of me has been trained in the same cultural ritual system as myself, he will understand my action of lifting my hand in front of him, and without thinking, without naming it, without controlling it even himself, his own hand will rise to grasp mine. I will not have to tell him what to do, or order him to do it, or threaten him with punishments if he fails to do it. This is the magical responsiveness of ritual—and it presupposes a shared tradition. The content of that tradition need not be entirely rational or explicable or even consciously known: what matters is that it is shared, it is presupposed, it is internalized, and thus that it works, and works unreflectively.

The seeming curmudgeonly insistence on an irrational inherited system of ritual as the sole source of order, with its profound traditionalism and conservatism, is thus framed as actually being a protest against the ideas of explicit command and threats of coercion and deliberate control as the only possible sources of order—the very ideas applied on a cosmic level in the monotheistic idea of God. Obviously neither of these alternatives is about freeing the individual from social control: it is assumed that we need some sort of social organization, that this requires some sort of power of normativity and sanction, and that punishment and ritual are the only alternatives to anarchy. But even if we were to assume that social control is a kind of necessary evil (a view not shared by the Confucians), we can say that from the point of view of non-coercion, Confucianism is one long argument that ritual is the lesser of the two evils. Ritual is like grammar; normative but unformulated, and not imposed ex nihilo at any point in time. It has no single source: no one is credited with creating it wholesale. Rather, the picture we are generally given is of virtuosic sages and sage-kings who add and subtract to it in minimal ways, forming a communal cumulative system of always-already functioning rules, as much descriptive

[5] The example is originally Fingarette's: "I see you on the street; I smile, walk toward you, put out my hand to shake yours. And behold - without any command, stratagem, force, special tricks or tools, without any effort on my part to make you do so, you spontaneously turn toward me, return my smile, raise your hand toward mine. We shake hands - not by my pulling your hand up and down or your pulling mine but by spontaneous and perfect cooperative action. Normally we do not notice the subtlety and amazing complexity of this coordinated 'ritual' act. This subtlety and complexity become very evident, however, if one has had to learn the ceremony only from a book of instructions, or if one is a foreigner from a nonhandshaking culture. Nor normally do we notice the the 'ritual' has 'life' in it, that we are 'present' to each other, at least to some minimal extent. As Confucius said, there are always the general and fundamental requirements of reciprocal good faith and respect. This mutual respect is not the same as a conscious feeling of mutual respect; when I am aware of a respect for you, I am much more likely to be piously fatuous or perhaps self-consciously embarrassed;" Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Sanfrancisco: Harper Collins,1974), p. 9.

as prescriptive. Those sages and kings are to ritual what genius writers are to the grammar of the language they work in: through this effortless internalization of the grammar, which was objectively never created or formulated on purpose and which has now lifted free of any conscious sense both of effort and of definitely fixed purpose, they can make new sentences to serve any purpose: the purposelessness of grammar enables infinite meanings and intentions to be expressed. Purposelessness again enables infinite purposes. In exceptional cases, these virtuosos can even create new forms that may resonate enough into the future to slightly tweak the grammar itself, as a particularly striking Shakespeare or Goethe phrase might do in English or German, respectively. A virtuoso might deliberately use improper grammar, against a massive background of effortless correctness, for a particular effect in a particular time and context, and this would ipso facto make that irregular usage legitimate and effective, perhaps even becoming a precedent, becoming part of correct usage in the future; we may think of phrases like, “If it ain’t broke don’t fix it” here: grammatically incorrect, but now a part of standard usage and recognized as such. The phrase has no single inventor, and no one passed a law that suddenly made it grammatically lawful; but it has become normatively acceptable, changing in this case the nature of the norms through actual effectivity of use. But no one can make up a grammar or a language ex nihilo and make people speak it and follow its rules. That would by definition involve coercion and enforcement, for it would require dropping their unreflectively prior ways of speaking and replacing them with new, more “rational,” ones. Someone would have to go around enforcing that, punishing violations of the new rule, of which there would be many, since the whole point of it is to contravene the acquired habitual actions that preceded it, without any specific creator or rational warrant but incorporated into behavior as second-nature by now. The point of this weird preference for ritual over law is precisely that ritual is mainly unintentional; the small tweaking that constitutes the sole possibility of reform in this context is always concerned only with that surface that is going astray, resting on a massive pre-reflective understanding of the shared social fabric. As with a grammar, corrections are only possible on the basis of an assumed prior massive agreed-upon correctness of operation: one has to be able to understand the correction in some language before one can correct one’s language accordingly.

We can perhaps begin to see how the idea of a controlling consciously purposeful deity begins to get de-incentivized in the context of this general ritual view of the continuity between deliberate and non-deliberate activity, with the deeper and more primordial role always granted to the non-deliberate. The Confucian tradition was certainly deeply interested in rooting a sense of human ethical normativity into the very fabric of the universe somehow, making human values and purposes feel firmly rooted, non-quixotic, and at home, as it were, in the cosmos. This makes it all the more remarkable that, even when presented with the opportunity for a broadly theistic solution to this challenge in the form of Mohism—which energetically propounded the idea of a single universal ruling deity, very consciously surveilling human behavior, equally concerned with all humans, constantly watching, relentlessly interested in legislating and enforcing human ethical behavior with clear-cut norms and punishments and rewards--the Confucian tradition literally defines itself in terms of its staunch opposition to it, beginning with Mencius (4th century BCE), setting the terms for the next two millennia thereafter. Initially at least, to be a Confucian is, quite literally, to reject the idea of Heaven as a fully anthropormophic moral deity who enforces justice in the universe through commandment, law and punishment.

And yet the majority of Confucian systems do want a universe that supports human values, a cosmos that is even often characterized ontologically above all by its relation to *ren* 仁, humaneness (the word is as closely cognate with the word for "human" *ren* 人 as the English "humane" is to "human"), and indeed, the term "Heaven" remains a privileged marker for some dimension of normative authority throughout the tradition, in one way or another. But because the essence of human experience is here assumed to be centered not in the deliberative, separable consciousness but in the spontaneous reciprocal interpersonal responsivities, the idea of Heaven as a separate mind in unilateral control was felt again and again to be actually at odds with a humane/human cosmos: an anthropomorphic God, an intentional mind with absolute unilateral power, would make the universe inhospitably inhuman, and inhumane. Instead, Confucianism gravitated from almost its first steps toward a truly narrativeless Heaven which, even when still overseeing the world in some way and lending its weight to some particular tendencies in human affairs over others (enough to still be claimed as a partisan in political struggles), was quickly divested of both speech and deliberate world-creation, and usually of unilateral and identifiable

interventions, and was not at all interested in deliberately micromanaging rewards and punishments for individual human behavior either before or after death. This is not to say that these thinkers did not embrace many beliefs that would, by modern standards, be judged superstitious; most glaringly almost all of them believe in divination. But this is a very different thing from belief in a purposeful and morally interested God in control of events; indeed, whenever schemas of predictability are developed within divination systems (and explaining their efficacy in terms unrelated to the intentions of unseen intentional spirits is the overwhelming trend among these thinkers), there comes to be a powerful contradiction between these two directions of superstition, two opposite though perhaps equally empirically groundless ways of approaching what is beyond human control. There were, to be sure, some Confucian thinkers, particularly in the Han dynasty, who did try to make a case for at least the moral "responsiveness" of Heaven to human moral turpitude, in the form of natural disasters—though even that was generally seen as occurring only exceptional cases, in response to truly egregious acts with large political consequences, and usually only on the part of rulers. But even these thinkers were consistently marginalized by later Confucian thinkers, and whatever role remained for Heaven's punitive responsiveness was overwhelmingly explained away in terms of inherent non-intentional factors rather than deliberate acts of intervention on the part of a controlling deity. Even that moral responsiveness served merely as an incidental supplement to the Confucian moral anthropology, rather than as its main engine and support: the grounds and motivations of morality were located in factors that were unrelated to any rewards or punishments imposed externally by Heaven, either before or after death (keeping in mind the stark difference between the conception of "rewards and punishments," which implies the intention and activity of a punisher, and the conception of mere "consequences," which does not). Already for Confucius, Heaven did not speak, and operated by some means other than the issuing of explicit orders or laws either to humans or to the rest of the cosmos, though this does not prevent him from making occasional references to Heaven as a support and sponsor for his particular cultural mission in some vague way. The Neo-Confucians of the 10th century CE and later went ahead and fully divested the Heavenly deity of any non-metaphorical existence, turning it into a word either for a type of coherence that was intrinsically always both one and

many, always both some one specific principle and also alternate principles, never reducible to a single univocal system of consistent and stable formulae, or else for an active and affective version of a immanent universal mind that is again a strong antithesis to God, as we'll see. What is most surprising about these developments, though, is how little anyone in the tradition seemed to think they was particularly shocking or troubling.

For this resistance to a unilaterally and exclusively controlling deity is not something merely incidental to this tradition, but a key structural concomitant of the very ethical ideals it hopes to encourage and the cosmological vision it requires to sustain them. Spontaneous continuity and responsive reciprocity become ultimate; the disjunctive aspects of personality as controller and choice-maker become, both for the natural world and for humans, an always-present-but-always-surpassed mode in the broader fabric of a larger spontaneity. The status of Heaven in the *Analects* and *Mencius* is admittedly a highly contentious and problematic topic. I have elsewhere stated and argued for my view that Heaven in those two texts is a metonym for the locus housing a collective group of forces, both personal and impersonal, like "Hollywood" or "Washington," a locus that includes both purposeless aspects and diverse purposes which can be temporarily summed as a specific overall collective purpose when linked to some specific human alliance or interest, but which is neither completely purposive nor completely purposeless, and where the purposeful is certainly not the ultimate source of either being or value.[6] This gives us a way to account for Confucius' remarks about Heaven "knowing" him (14:35), and wanting certain things like the preservation of "this culture" (9:5), and being something whose dispositive power is unsurpassable (3:13), but also for the striking quantitative lack of references to it, explicit or implicit, in making normative claims and describing the world, and also for the opposite tendency seen in the sole expansive discussion of Heaven in the text (17:19, discussed below), which attributes to it the natural phenomena of seasonal change and animal and plant birth and growth, all accomplished without Heaven ever "speaking," i.e., without communicating with humans or giving the natural world any instructions or orders. The seemingly incompatible aspects of purpose and purposelessness are resolved if we view Heaven as a metonym for all the powers that be, both spiritual and otherwise, both personal and

[6] See my Ironies of Oneness and Difference.

otherwise, both purposive and otherwise. This view is controversial, however, and our argument here is served just as well by the still plausible view that Heaven in these earliest Confucian texts is indeed a supreme and purposeful personal deity, but not the creator of the world, and one who operates through some means other than those suggested by the Mohists, i.e., not through close control, intervention, supervision, command, explicit standards and injunctions, and punishment of individual behavior. The Confucian Heaven is envisioned as ruling in the same way the Confucian sages rule: through *wuwei*. I have already mentioned in passing Confucius' most extensive comment on the nature of Heaven in the Analects, which give us the earliest locus classicus of Emulative Theism turning into Emulative Atheism. Here is the passage in full:

> Confucius said, "I want to speak no words at all." Zigong said, "If you, master, spoke no words, how would we disciples be able to tell others about you in the future?" Confucius said, "What words does Heaven speak? And yet the four seasons move along through it, all things are generated through it. What words does Heaven speak?" (Analects 17:19)

Confucius wants to be like Heaven, but what Heaven is like is that it says nothing, gives no orders or instructions, issues no commands and makes no rules--and yet moves the world along and generates all things. Its efficacy, apparently, does not derive from what it says, from telling anyone to do anything, from issuing commands or instructions, much less from directly intervening; it brings order but does not do so by means of exerting any control. In other words, it is *wuwei*, just like Shun sitting on his throne in the center of the ritual system: acting purposelessly, and thereby bringing about order in the way all things respond by arraying themselves around that effortless nonaction, that still center that is not trying to do anything, making no intentional moves. Rather than seeking to compensate for this dearth of control by taking control (Compensatory Atheism), Confucius wants to be like heaven and get things done by non-doing: as Heaven accomplishes the circular motion of the seasons, the production of life, without direct interference, Confucius would like to accomplish the ritual ordering of society in the same way. This is the format of Emulative Theism---man should be like the divine—but on

the cusp of transforming to Emulative Atheism. For in this case, unlike the monotheist case, the deity to be emulated is not more purposive and controlling than us, but less so. We relinquish direct control not to allow Heaven to take control, but to be more effortless and uncontrolling, as Heaven is. Heaven is not quite fully purposeless yet here, it is true: it seems to still have a crucial role in making the seasons flow and making all things grow, and in the political destinies of ruling dynasties that foster or obstruct this process for their populaces. Heaven has no specific command structure or controlling purpose, perhaps no deliberate activity, but it has a preference, it would seem, for life over death, for sustainable growth over decline and extinction, and in this very early version of the idea may well be thought of as conscious of this preference, which it accomplishes through its own silent charisma. The Daoists will subsequently accuse Confucianist *wuwei* of being a sham: it claims to get things happening through ritual alone, but if the expected response fails to come, it "rolls up its sleeves" and forces the intended result (*Daodejing* 38). Its alleged *wuwei* thus ends up being a thin sugar-coating for the punishment-based type of control it ostensibly rejects, which is always there at the ready to do the dirty work if and when the non-coercive ritual attempt fails. The burden of this critique, however, is that Confucianism does not follow through in its own idea of non-deliberateness: the Daoist thus try to radicalize it. The issue is whether or not there is in fact an unstated specific goal informing the apparent non-striving, whether there is an unspoken teleology hidden beneath this veneer of goal-lessness. To the extent that there is, apparent non-coercion and effortlessness is still not thoroughgoing, and is vulnerable to the Daoist critique. The extent to which the effortless Confucian cosmos counts as a real teleology will continue to be a vexed issue in Confucianism; we will see it explicitly addressed in a moment in the thought of Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the formulater of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy 17 centuries later, who offers an ingenious solution that remains true to the spirit of *wuwei* while putting a distinctive Confucian normativity into play at the same time. But it is clear already in the Analects, the first properly Confucian text, that we are already moving in the direction of, and getting dangerously close to, the full-blown purposelessness of *wuwei* as it comes to be understood in the Daoist texts, which are soon to follow.

However we may wish to understand the case of Heaven in the earliest Confucian texts, we certainly see a clear and forceful example of God-less religiousness developed in the Confucian metaphysic found at the end of the classical period in the "Xicizhuan" 繫辭傳 commentary to the *Zhouyi* 周易. (also known as *The Book of Changes*), which becomes the wellspring of well-nigh all later Confucian speculation. This text accepts and adapts the Daoist idea of a universe and universal creative process that acts with no ethical intentions—the "Heaven and Earth are not humane" idea of *Daodejing* 5 (*tiandi bu ren* 天地不仁)--but changes the human consequence of Daoism (i.e., the *Daodejing*'s further claim that the sage is also not humane, *shengren bu ren* 聖人不仁) by adding that the sage, on the contrary, does have ethical intentions and concerns. The question is how to relate these two. We see this adaptation clearly expounded, along with the key response to Daoism, in the following central passage of the mature Confucian God-less metaphysic:

> One Yin and one Yang alternating in balance—this is called Dao. Whatever continues this is called "the Good." What completes it is called "inborn human nature." The humane see this Dao and call it "humaneness"; the wise see this Dao and call it "wisdom"; the ordinary folk make use of it every day and yet are not aware of it. Thus the way of the exemplary man is rare indeed. It manifests as humaneness, [but] is concealed in [all] those uses [of the ordinary folk]. It drums the ten thousand things forward and yet does not worry itself as the sage must….[7]

This is the key Confucian contribution to the problem: the universe is indeed thoroughly *wuwei*, and is neither created by nor for any particular intention or value: Dao is just the alternation of Yang and Yin, of light and dark, of hot and cold, of foreground and background, of this and that, of value and disvalue. Following the contrasts of the *Daodejing*, Yang and Yin in

[7]一陰一陽之謂道，繼之者善也，成之者性也。仁者見之謂之仁，知者見之謂之知。百姓日用而不知，故君子之道鮮矣。顯諸仁，藏諸用，鼓萬物而不與聖人同憂。

this newly universalized sense are simply what is picked out because desirable—brought to light, honored with a name, vigorously moving against a static background—as against that background being darkened, inchoate, nameless, disvalued, ignored. When there is something, there must be some other with it. Where there is any one, there must be a two. Where there is a thing, there is simultaneously a context. This requires no design or intelligence, it is not the result of being put into order—any other thing that could possibly be there, simply by virtue of being a thing, would also have this quality. It is another way to say "determination is negation." Anything determinate, even eternal blankness, thus presents a Yin-Yang pair: Yang is whatever is determined, Yin is whatever surrounding otherness it negates but also draws upon to establish itself, minimally merely by contrast, maximally rather by material dependence as the resources for its nourishment and the place of its growth and fostering. This passage warns us against conceiving this as a wisely or benevolently designed order in its own right. It is not a manifestation of any cosmic preference for value over disvalue, wisdom over folly, benevolence over indifference. On the contrary, it is precisely the cohesion of the two sides--wisdom and folly, benevolence and indifference, the valued and the disvalued--that constitute the cosmic process. Those who are oriented toward love may call that whole process a kind of love, since it is indeed the source of all love; those who are oriented toward wisdom may likewise call it wise. This is just as we would expect on the basis of Zhuangzian perspectivism, to which this passage is undoubtedly a response. This is of course also the critique that would be applied to monotheists: they look at this inadvertent structure and see *Noûs* or Agapé or Design there, not because they are really any such things there, but rather because they are projecting these qualities based on their own preoccupations. But the Confucians here find a way to accept the Zhuangzian perspectivist point while also rooting these human moral qualities in that indifferent universal process, and even assigning a crucial cosmic role to those qualities. For the highest human values, defining the role of human effort, human *youwei*, are those that stand in a very specific relation to that *wuwei*, that unplanned and unfabricated cohesion of any possible state and whatever is other to it: they "continue it" 繼之. Value is here still rooted in valuelessness, purpose in purposelessness; the two now form the inseparable halves of a single whole which alone accounts for human values and purposes. The Dao is not good, and doesn't try to be good

or want the good; but it is the basis of good. Good is the continued existence of the yin-yang relationship, which is neutral, neither humane nor wise, but "can be seen as" either humane or wise, in some sense contains aspects of what, if selectively viewed, can be seen as a source or instantiation of both humaneness and wisdom. The crucial move is a slight tipping of emphasis in the direction of the ethical, for the function of Dao here is said to be "revealed" 顯 in humaneness, but "concealed" 藏 in all other functions. That is, all things in some way are the operations of Dao, the neutral process of balanced alternating Yin and Yang, but benevolent human activity reveals it in the most direct or explicit way. There is an undeniable privileging of human values here, but carefully and ingeniously positioned as both rooted in something real in the operation of the cosmos and as describable in that way only in relation to posterior human activities and ethical feelings, which themselves emerge unintentionally from that pre-ethical process, though rooted in it, like everything else.[8]

[8]Indeed, the entire Yin-Yang conception on which this text is based is constructed from the interplay of two key metaphors, drawn from observations about the origin of life, in its vegetable and animal forms. Both are emphatically anti-intentional. Vegetable life emerges due to atmospheric cycles (diurnal, seasonal). Animal life emerges due to sexual reproduction. Both of these are root metaphors for the life-giving structure of the yin-yang relationship. Atmospheric cycles means day/night, hot/cold, etc. Crops grow only because of the cycle of day and night, of light and dark, and of hot and cold over the course of the year. It is the proper balance or relation between these two that make the harvest possible. The same is true of the creative power of the sexual relation of male and female; again we have a balanced relation between two opposed poles which accounts for the origin of things. Note that in both cases, the source of being is 1) non-monolithic, involving more than a single agent, and thus not a matter of unilateral command or control, and 2) an unintentional by-product of a spontaneous relation rather than an intended creation (most obvious in sexual reproduction). In sum, Yin and Yang are just a minimal assertion of "there is something intelligible there, against a background of what it is not." We must emphasize that they are not to be thought of as "first principles" that require anything to be made-so, but rather the lack of any such principles, again as the "Law of Averages" is the lack of any law. Note also the resistance to an overriding order set of mutually consistent laws implied by the fact that the Yi system is rationalized divination, an intrinsically case-by-case endeavor geared to changing circumstances and addressed to the specific projects and desires of specific participants in those situations, as opposed to rationalized mythology, which typically attempts a global explanation for why the world is as it is, for its constant characteristics. It is no accident that this metaphysics and its "principles" are attached not to a univocal myth, but to a fortune telling book: thoroughgoing situationalism and particularism, not a universal order but an order vis-à-vis each particular time, place, observer and desire/purpose (rather than one overridding purpose). Mythology, rationalized, produces God-steered religion and metaphysics. Divination, rationalized, produces God-less religiousness. What we end up with are not global laws laid down once and for all by an intentional lawgiver, but rather rough and ready tendencies which are traceable but not strictly reducible to any formula. The text thus insists, "The transformations simply go where they go; no essential norms or rules can be made of them." (*wei bian suo shi, buke wei dianyao* 唯變所適,不可為典要).

This idea may at first blush seem similar to the structure I criticized at length in online appendix A, supplement 8, "Negative Theology, and Why it Doesn't Really Help Much." The argument put forth there, it may be recalled, was that the claim of prominent apophatic mystics (e.g., Pseudo-Dionysius) that God was beyond all predication was fatally belied by their assertion that, although God was properly speaking neither wise nor foolish, neither alive nor dead, neither good nor bad, neither orderly nor chaotic, nevertheless it was wisdom and life and goodness and orderliness that came "closest" to Him, that were somehow better approximations of this neither-nor than foolishness, death, badness or chaos. We suggested that this undermined the claim that this God was beyond all determinations; God's greater similarity to some particular things than others—to all the usual godly suspects, in fact—even if, as claimed, only in a "superessential" or "eminent" sense, unavoidably meant that God does have some determinations, is in fact some one particular entity rather than another, i.e., is a determinate being after all, and very much is something conceivable in at least some minimal sense, about which some definite things could be truly predicated: namely, that God resembles goodness and life and intelligence more than God resembles badness and death and stupidity. Here in the Confucian case, we have the seemingly similar claim that Dao is neither humane nor inhumane, but that humaneness "reveals" it better than the other functions, in which Dao is nevertheless present but concealed. A certain parallel may thus legitimately be suggested here. But it is more important to note the crucial differences, and their consequences. First of all, the point at issue here is not the claim of indeterminacy or ineffability; it is only a claim about value and valuelessness, about purpose and purposelessness. Dao is disarmingly presented here as perfectly described in four characters: one yin one yang. No claim is made for its ineffability, no claim therefore that Dao should not resemble anything more than anything else. Where claims about ineffability are made, e.g., in Daoist and Buddhist works, we have quite a different dynamic, which we explore elsewhere. But perhaps even more strikingly, the claim here is not that human goodnesses like humaneness and wisdom resemble or even approach Dao more than other functions do, like the claims of the apophatic mystics within monotheisms, e.g., that goodness and intelligence resemble or approach the ineffable God, which is beyond any such things, more than badness or stupidity do. Rather, what human goodnesses do in this Confucian vision is not

"resemble or approach" Dao more than other things. What they do is *continue* it, and thereby *reveal* it. Indeed, in so doing, the human role is to complete it 成之, to perfect that very *wuwei* process of Yin and Yang. So when we are told here that Dao is "revealed" in humaneness, it does not mean that humaneness is more like the one-yin-one-yang *wuwei* process of Dao itself than any other function. Indeed, in the last sentence we quoted above, what is stressed is precisely the dissimilarity between them: the sage worries, acts deliberately, makes choices, while Dao does not. It is precisely in this ("Compensatory Atheist") way that the human *youwei* goodness of the sage continues and completes the cosmic *wuwei* indifference of the Dao. It *complements* it, fills in what is missing, nudges it through impasses, providing deliberative *youwei* interventions which serve only to return to and further advance the non-deliberative *wuwei* process itself, precisely by *resembling it least of all*. This is how human goodness "reveals" Dao: by being so unlike it and yet serving to make the visibility of its omnipresent operation more prevalent, more widely and clearly seen—as the labor of carving a canal through land is what "makes manifest, reveals" the radically dissimilar effortlessness of the water that is then allowed to gush through it, or as the labor of a gardener thoughtfully and deliberately digging the soil and hauling fertilizer "makes manifest, reveals" the undeliberating growth of the plants that then spring up. Indeed, in terms of the resemblance, the "daily use without knowing it" of the ordinary people, in which it is "concealed," resembles Dao most of all.

In one way or another, this special status of man, as one who can uniquely "form a triad with Heaven and Earth" (*yu tiandi can* 與天地參)[9] or as receiver of the most excellent (*xiu* 秀), correctly aligned (*zheng* 正) and/or numinously efficacious (*ling* 靈) "qi" (breath-energy) of Heaven and Earth, would become a staple of most later Confucian metaphysical systems. The classical version just discussed may be described as a unique version of Compensatory Atheism. But it differs sharply from to those forms of Compensatory Atheism found in aftermath of the *Noûs as Arché* milieu, as noted in the body of this book, where *Noûs* was the highest value, such that when it was judged to be lacking in the cosmos, mankind took it upon themselves to provide

[9] The phrase is found in the 經解, collected in the 禮記, where it is applied to the emperor, but in the 中庸 in the same collection, it is applied to human beings generally. The same idea appears in a slightly different form in the Xunzi.

it: in these forms, purposeful *youwei* remains the only real value, so man must provide himself with purpose in a purposeless cosmos. The Confucian case is different in that purposeless valueless *wuwei* is assumed to be the highest value, and remains so throughout. Man's *youwei* is brought in to promote and extend this *wuwei* dimension of existence, not to glorify *youwei* itself. Our ideal cooperation and participation with Heaven is thus accomplished by our dissimilarity, our *youwei*. In the mature Confucian speculation of later eras, to be sure, there are lively debates about exactly how to construe this. Dao always remains *wuwei* and is never a deliberative agent with a will, an intention, a plan, and this is embracing-of-no-explicit-values is always the highest conceivable value. But that fact itself may be described either as morally neutral or as morally good. Many, from Hu Hong (胡宏 1105 年—1161 年) to Wang Yangming (1472-1529), will continue to state outright that Dao is itself best described as beyond good and evil (forming the original nature of the human mind, which is itself therefore also without good and evil), but as grounding human goodness, and that only in this specific sense, and for this very reason, can it be called the highest good--which in my judgment is the more classical view. Others, for example Zhu Xi, the consolidator of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy in the Song dynasty, will insist that this purposeless and valuelessness of Dao can after all be described as Good in itself, and indeed should be so described (albeit in a highly attenuated and qualified sense), since what issues directly from it can unambiguously be so identified. But this is arguably more a rhetorical than a substantive shift; it is still the case that Dao is *wuwei*, and indeed even that this Good human nature is *wuwei*, while the role of human moral striving and evaluation is to deploy strenuous *youwei* to reconverge with the perfect *wuwei* of Dao and man's original nature; it's just that now this *wuwei* Dao is claimed to be best described as "Good." This "best described" belongs to the realm of a performative ethical act: the human use of language itself, naming *wuwei* in one way rather than another, is part of the *youwei* process of continuing and completing it—a profoundly important Confucian point that can be traced all the way back to Mencius 7B24. Indeed, we may view Zhu Xi's insistence on the synonymity of the Wuji 無極 (the pivotless, the unbounded, the standardless) and the Taij 太極 (the Great Pivot, the Great Ultimate, the Great Standard), as an emphatic acknowledgement of the unchanged ultimacy of the indeterminate and non-normative in the very midst of ultimate normativity. The justification for the rhetorical shift

is not without important consequences, but it involves no alterations of the basic metaphysical situation. The argument that informs it is that, given the fact that Goodness is what is uniquely able to reveal it, and it is the standard of Goodness, it is legitimate and indeed needful to describe this *wuwei* Dao as Good. With this shift, we frame this metaphysical situation not as a Compensatory relationship between Heaven and Man, as in the classical Confucian case, but as an Emulative one. Actually, however, what is distinctive about the Confucian case is the continuity between these two dimensions, *youwei* and *wuwei*, which allows a broad range of rhetorical redescriptions ranging from the Compensatory to the Emulative. We will unpack this further below.

But what is to be noted even in the Confucian instances of Emulative framing, which makes human beings the uniquely privileged representative among existing beings of the nature of ultimate reality by virtue of resemblance rather than dissimilarity, is that it is to be carefully distinguished from the *imago dei* idea in God-centered traditions. The latter asserts not only a specially exalted role for man, but an isomorphism between the mind of the creator and something about the human being (usually the human mind or spirit) alone among all creatures, which gives a special ontological status to human ideas and ideals as tapping into and accurately instantiating the ultimate source of the being of things via a close imaging or imitation of some kind. The Confucian systems that do move in this Emulative direction, in contrast, satisfy the religious intent and psychological role of this idea, finding a unique kind of similarity between the human being and the ground of all being, but in entirely different ways. What makes human beings special in the universe according to the orthodox Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi, for example, is not that they alone possess the image of the creator, or that they alone embody the numinous source of creation. Every being embodies this indivisible coherence of Yin and Yang, the condition of possibility of the process of generation of beings as such. Zhu Xi calls it Li 理, which is at once the Great Pivot (*taiji* 太極) between yin and yang, enabling the coherence of the cosmos as a whole, and the individual nature of each being, the specific coherence that makes each being what it is. As such, it simultaneously serves as the ground of connection and of individuation of all distinct identities, enabling their coexistence and transformation, the balance of yin-yang which on the one hand centers and thereby sustains the cosmos as a whole, and on

the other hand does so for each individual being, giving it its distinctive nature and character. He insists that this Great Pivot qua Li is present in its entirety, not in part, in every particular being. Each is able to come into being only through a unification of the contrasting forces of heaven and earth, to grow and transform by continually fostering and adjusting the generative balance between these forces according to that standard, and thereby to produce and reproduce beyond themselves. All entities are thus endowed with the entirety of the Great Pivot--not a part of it, and not merely an image of it--as their own nature, Li qua human *xing* 性, which makes them what they are in particular. Humans are unique only in that they have bodies in which this entire Great Pivot, the inmost nature of every being, can function with fewer obstructions and distortions than is the case for other creatures, in a more balanced, extensive and unimpeded way, a body that also allows them to increase the degree to which they do so, through their own moral effort. Zhu Xi borrows the Buddhist image of the reflection of the moon in various bodies of water: the entire moon is visible in each of them, but in muddy water it is dulled, in choppy water it is scrambled, in wavy water it is undulating unstably—but in all cases it is there, and in all cases all of it, the entire round disc of the moon, is there. It is not a question of being endowed with it or not; it is not even a question of embodying all of it or merely part of it, a crescent or slice of it, for it is indivisible, it is coherence itself, and every being is thus the embodiment of the whole of it, not a part of it; it is a question of embodying all of it in a more or less biased, one-sided, indistinct or obstructed way. All things high and low and good and bad necessarily exemplify it in its entirety, exist only as embodiments of this very coherence of Yin and Yang itself; the question is not whether they do so, but how they do so. We will discuss Zhu Xi's unpacking of this idea in greater detail below. But I think it can be easily shown that a similar relation of the human to the rest of existence, mutatis mutandis, can be found also in other Confucian systems, whether of the more "idealist"-leaning stripe as with Wang Yangming (where the substance of mind is explicitly described as "neither good nor evil"—which is itself described as "the highest good"!), or the more "qi"-oriented, as with Zhang Zai and Wang Fuzhi.

Indeed, this continuity between the similarity and the dissimilarity between Heaven and Man, and the continuity between heaven, earth and man more generally, and from there to all creatures, is embedded already in the earliest Confucian ideas. One route was what we saw

above in the case of Confucius himself: the ideal man on the one hand must be at times dissimilar to Heaven in having biases and moral principles, but even in so doing, he does remain in continuity with the Heavenly in himself, and at the pinnacle of his cultivation will also resemble Heaven specifically in his eschewal of any explicit articulation of rules, commands, laws, or indeed any specific invocation of Heaven. Normativity and non-normativity, value and valuelessness, will and will-lessness, must remain forever entwined. Confucius wants to be like Heaven in not speaking at all—and he instantiates this Heavenly unbiasedness, this utter lack of definite norms or intentions, in his creative timeliness 時; he is most like Heaven when he says, "There is for me nothing definitely permissible or impermissible" (無可無不可 *Analects* 18:8); Heaven is at once the source of definiteness and rule and also the transcending of them, unified not in a cumulative whole but in the inseparability of alternate times, roles, situational responses, as Heaven (in the sense of the sky) has its four seasons but is not a cumulative higher unity of the four seasons; Heaven is the timely application of each season in turn, and the unobstructed transition from one to the other when appropriate, rather than a static totality of the four seasons resolved into a higher unity. Heaven, the sky, is entirely vernal in the spring, entirely autumnal in the autumn; it doesn't hold the other seasons in reserve somewhere outside the spring, but transforms entirely into the spring sky, which precisely as such has the power to then transform entirely into the summer sky when the time comes to do so. Neither spring, nor summer, nor autumn, nor winter, nor a separate summative totality of all four, is "definitely permissible or impermissible." Even the "ability of each to transform in a timely manner entirely into the appropriate other," this principle of the totality, does not stand apart from the instantiations as their separate controller, but is rather another name for the coherence of each season being precisely the season that it is, its internal coherence as its coherence with the others that precede and follow it (even as developed in the allegedly transcendent notion of Li in Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, as we shall see shortly). This is the ethical ideal embodied in Confucius, his participation in the creative process of Heaven. This is still seen as entailing the generation of desired ethical results, but as we've seen in the "Xicizhuan" passage just quoted, the anti-control atheism at the heart of the tradition incentivizes the creation of explanations of this value as a continuation of a *Wertfrei* natural process, rather than an emulation of an eternal value. By

always keeping one foot beyond bias, as Heaven is, with nothing permissible or impermissible, one continues the work of Heaven even in one's dissimilarity with Heaven--i.e., in one's morality, in the specific bias for this continuation which is called the Good, the human bias for the good over the evil. This ingenious asymmetry appears as a distinctive stance of the tradition again and again throughout its history. We can thus begin to see the significance of the Confucian tradition's consistent resistance to the idea of an ultimacy of a divine personality exerting intentional control: it is symptomatic of an ethical structure that resists the ultimacy of intentional control and exclusion in general, and with it the ultimacy of the disjunction and discontinuity of being and of values that intentional control entails. Precisely because the intentional is not ultimate, the continuity between the intentional and the nonintentional, between the biased and the unbiased, is ensured. Unlike ultimate purposivity, which strives to exclude purposelessness, ultimate purposelessness enables both purpose and purposelessness--another example of the Great Asymmetry discussed in Part One of this book.

The same problem is approached in another way in what is generally described as the central issue in the first generations of Confucian theory after Confucius himself, the conflict between Mencius and Xunzi over human nature. This is not well-described simply as a crude contrast between the alleged views that human nature "is good" and that it "is bad." Rather, the issue is how best to characterize the relation between human moral sentiments and social values on the one hand and the non-moral spontaneities of affect and desire from which they can sometimes emerge on the other. The question is how best to describe both the continuities and discontinuities between these. Both assume that the *youwei* of deliberate moral effort is both preceded by and in some manner succeeded by the *wuwei* of spontaneity. On the basis of a prior spontaneity acquired and operating without effort, one starts out making an effort, and ends up internalizing the moral practice to the point of making it effortless. The model is of learning a skill: on the basis of some measure of innate ability found in one's possession but not acquired by plan or effort, one effortfully practices until one gets good at it and it becomes effortless. Both Mencius and Xunzi see some form of effortlessness and non-deliberation as the cosmic condition that precedes the taking up of moral effort, both within and outside of the human self. The question is how precisely to conceive the relation between 1) the prior effortlessness, 2) the

effort, and 3) the achieved effortlessness at the end. In Xunzi's case, we begin with an unruly set of spontaneous emotions and desires which must be deliberately organized, trained, pruned and even opposed—not for the sake of some abstract good posited independently by this organizing and opposing deliberative effort, however, but only to satisfy those very spontaneous desires more efficiently:

> Whence does ritual emerge? I say: humans are born having desires, and if their desires are not satisfied, they cannot but seek to satisfy them. If they seek without any measures or limits, they cannot but get into conflict with one another. Because of conflict there is chaos, and because of chaos there is impoverishment and lack [of things to satisfy the desires]. The former kings hated his chaos, and thus created ritual norms to divide things among them, so as to nurture their desires and provide what they sought, causing their desires to never run out of the things they want, and things to never be depleted by desires, so that the two support each other and can long be sustained. This is where ritual comes from.[10]

The desires that stand as the final arbiter of good are themselves spontaneous and subject to no further inquiry: they are simply given facts. The chaos among these desires and emotions in their original state puts them at odds with one another, making their satisfaction minimal unless they are organized by some intervention—tried and tested forms of social organization that must be deliberately applied, that allow for a division of social labor, which in turns allows for social cohesion, which in turn allows for the strength that allows human beings to have greater power over their surroundings and thus to satisfy their desires more effectively—given them dominance over other creatures even though naturally they are slower than horses

[10] Xunzi, "Lilun" (Treatise on Ritual). 禮起於何也？曰：人生而有欲，欲而不得，則不能無求。求而無度量分界，則不能不爭；爭則亂，亂則窮。先王惡其亂也，故制禮義以分之，以養人之欲，給人之求。使欲必不窮乎物，物必不屈於欲。兩者相持而長，是禮之所起也。

and weaker than oxen.[11] Though Xunzi must be classified as a Compensatory Atheist, he differs from those in the post *Noûs as Arché* world in a decisive and very revealing way: for them, we are to go from a purposeless cosmos to a fully purposive humanity, from *wuwei* to *youwei*, whereas Xunzi still envisions an internalization of these trained behaviors that amount to effortless virtuosity at the end of the process, where no intentional striving is any longer needed. We go from *wuwei* through *youwei* to a newly accomplished *wuwei*, which is even more effortless and intentionless than the initial state, because it has been freed of the initial conflicts that had led to the need for intentional intervention in the first place. Xunzi tells us, "The sage indulges his desires and embraces all his dispositions, and yet whatever he thereby produces simply ends up well-ordered. What forcing of himself could there then be for him? What will-power to endure? What precariousness? Thus the humane person's practice of Dao is without any doing (*wuwei*), and the sage's practice of Dao is without any forcing himself."[12] The initial *wuwei* of spontaneous human nature is described as odious because its desires are chaotic, self-conflicted, and must be strenuously modified in order to reach the final *wuwei*, which however accomplishes precisely the satisfaction of the desires of the initial *wuwei* phase, and is again freed of any need for effort, forcing oneself, will-power, intention. And yet, we notice, Xunzi here specifies that the sage embraces *all* his dispositions 兼其情. Because the principle of value is completely immanent to the desires themselves, the only standard is a quantitative or mereological one: more desires fulfilled is better, less is worse, because "better" just *means* "fulfilling more desires." As he puts it,

> Know that ritual principles and decorous order are the way to nurture one's desirous dispositions. Thus if a person has his eyes only on living, he is sure to die. If a person has his eyes only on benefiting himself, he is sure to be harmed. If a person is only lazy and sluggish, taking these as means to attain safety, he is

[11] Xunzi, "Wangzhi" (Regulations of the King). 水火有氣而無生，草木有生而無知，禽獸有知而無義，人有氣、有生、有知，亦且有義，故最為天下貴也。力不若牛，走不若馬，而牛馬為用，何也？曰：人能群，彼不能群也。人何以能群？曰：分。分何以能行？曰：義。故義以分則和，和則一，一則多力，多力則彊，彊則勝物；

[12]聖人縱其欲，兼其情，而制焉者理矣。夫何彊？何忍？何危？故仁者之行道也，無為也；聖人之行道也，無彊也。

> sure to be endangered. If finds joy only in the pleasures of his dispositions, he is sure to be destroyed. Thus if a person concentrates and unifies himself with ritual principles, he will attain both [i.e., both ritual principles and the pleasure of the dispositions]. If he concentrates and unifies himself with the inborn dispositions, he will lose both. Thus the Confucians are those who cause people to gain both, and the Mohists are those who cause people to lose both."[13]

What makes restraint of certain desires and the development of others good, the only standard, is that the former prevent the satisfaction of both, while the latter enable it. Here we have a second-order application of the Great Asymmetry, to great effect: just as ultimate purposelessness is to be preferred to ultimate purpose because it enables both purposivity and purposelessness, here the same criterion is applied to the selection of *which* purposes (i.e., desires) are to be prioritized: those the preference for which is a merely temporary means to overcoming the preference, those that enable the satisfaction of both themselves and what they initially have to temporarily exclude, are the ones to be preferred. A preference for desires whose satisfaction prevents the satisfaction of the unpreferred desires—i.e., the sensory satisfactions—is what must be (temporarily) discouraged. Note the contrast to the ultimacy of moral dualism, mutual exclusivity and dichotomization of the desired and the undesired (i.e., so-called good and evil) that results from making purpose ultimate, i.e., monotheism on the basis of *Noûs as Archê.*

Although Mencius, in contrast, insists on calling human nature good, we find that for him this same quantitative or mereological standard is the only criterion of value by which to make this claim: "good" means what satisfies some desire, and the more desires are satisfied by something, the more "good" that thing is judged to be. This is the hallmark of atheist thinking that we have seen again and again, as stated most explicitly by Spinoza: we do not desire something because it is good, but rather call if good because we desire it--and that desire neither has nor requires further justification. Mencius too says this explicitly, when asked what he means by "good": "Whatever can be desired is called good." 可欲之謂善 But as with all the great

[13] 孰知夫禮義文理之所以養情也. 故人苟生之為見，若者必死；苟利之為見，若者必害；苟怠惰偷儒之為安，若者必危；苟情說之為樂，若者必滅。故人一之於禮義，則兩得之矣；一之於情性，則兩喪之矣。故儒者將使人兩得之者也，墨者將使人兩喪之者也。

atheist mystics, this is not the end of the matter; given this immanent standard, the next question will again be how to adjust and combine all these diverse desires in such a way as to maximize the satisfaction of as many of them as possible. Mencius continues: “Whatever can be desired is called good. To possess it [i.e., something desired, a “good”] truly in oneself is called being genuine. To be suffused and filled with this it [i.e., that good as genuinely possessed in oneself] is called beauty. To be filled with it to the point where it radiates outward is called greatness. When this greatness is such that it transforms others, it is called sageliness. When this sageliness is beyond comprehension it is called divine.” (7B25)[14] The question is always the extent of influence of the desirable thing, the way it affects the things around it, both other persons and the other dispositions in the person. Among the many desires and their concomitant objects of those desires (desired states or attributes) found given in the human being, some of them are able to be appropriated in the self and expanded in such a way as to fill the person, to radiate their influence outwardly, to transform other desires and desired goods of that human being as well as other human beings in their surroundings. Thus when Mencius says human nature is good, he means by this only that *a certain subset* of the spontaneous unplanned unmotivated tendencies and responses human beings are born with, which arise without deliberation or choice or will, can, under certain conditions, be deliberately selected out, cared for, cultivated, nourished and grown to become what are later identified as full moral virtues—virtues that are considered “good” only because they are what can, when so developed, transform otherwise conflictual desires and desirers into harmony with one another, to maximally satisfy all of them. These innate starting points are not things one tries to do; they are rather things one cannot stop oneself from doing even if one tries, e.g., feeling a twinge of discomfort when seeing an infant about to fall into a well, even when there is no good reason to do so, even if one may have great reasons not to feel it, even when one doesn’t want or will to feel it, even if one is at the same time also feeling many other, contrary things about it. Looking back from the accomplished moral virtues, a continuity with *that* subset of spontaneous human responses can be traced, which provides a guideline for which among the mass of spontaneous responses to the world are thus to be singled out for cultivation. The deliberate activity is thus again given a mediating role: its function is to select

[14] 可欲之謂善. 有諸己之謂信。充實之謂美，充實而有光輝之謂大，大而化之之謂聖，聖而不可知之之謂**神**

and care for certain spontaneous aspects of the self and the world, thus deprioritizing other spontaneous impulses equally inborn and spontaneous in human beings. All of these spontaneous impulses, those chosen to be nourished as seeds of morality and those demoted and starved out or at least subordinated in this process, are from Heaven, are extensions of the spontaneity of Heaven. The *youwei* human role of the sage is to select out some of these spontaneous processes and get into the habit of describing and regarding only these as *xing*, i.e., "inborn human nature" insofar as it is considered as the basis of further moral development, without losing sight of the fact that strictly speaking all of the spontaneous non-deliberative processes, including sensory desires of the mouth liking flavors and the body liking comfort, are equally human nature, equally *xing*:

> Mencius said: "The mouth's relation to flavors, the eye's to forms, the ear's to sounds, the nose's to scents, the four limbs to ease and comfort—these are all human nature, [*xing* 性, the inborn human nature that can serve as the basis of moral cultivation], but since in these there is also something of the fated [*ming* 命, mere neutral givenness of what human effort cannot change], the noble man does not call them human nature. The relation of humankindness to the relationship of father and son, of righteousness to the relationship of ruler and servant, of ritual to the relationship of host and guest, of wisdom to the worthy, of the sage to the way of Heaven—these are all fated (*ming*), but since in these there is also something of the nature (*xing*), the noble man does not call them fate. (7B24).[15]

Both physical hedonic pleasures and interpersonally interactive impulses ("ethical" desires) are spontaneous, and Mencius tells us explicitly that, strictly speaking, both are mere neutral givens (what he calls *ming* 命—just the way things are, conditions we are stuck with and

[15] 孟子曰：「口之於味也，目之於色也，耳之於聲也，鼻之於臭也，四肢之於安佚也，性也，有命焉，君子不謂性也。仁之於父子也，義之於君臣也，禮之於賓主也，智之於賢者也，聖人之於天道也，命也，有性焉，君子不謂命也。」

cannot change, with no particular moral meaning) and both are also the distinctively human nature that can be developed into sagehood (which he calls *xing*). But he also tells us explicitly that the noble person *calls* the former *ming* and the latter *xing*, in spite of the fact that each *is* both: this is a morally significant *act of naming* and a concomitant way of regarding them that begins the process of cultivation, which will lie in prioritizing, nourishing and clearing the way for the full growth of these tendencies—and also, again, as we'll see in the moment, even the full flourishing of those spontaneous tendencies that are initially not prioritized. At the other end of the process, the Heaven-like spontaneity is to be recovered in the accomplished moral virtues themselves, in their non-deliberate operation, in the effortless virtuous behavior of sages and the unpremeditated responses that people will have to that behavior, like the stars rotating around the North Star in the *Analects*. As Mencius says of the sage-king Shun, again in line with Xunzi's later characterization of sagehood quoted above, "His activity proceeded from humaneness and righteousness—he did not put humaneness and righteousness into practice." 由仁義行，非行仁義也 That is, he did not deliberately try to be humane and righteous; his activity followed from them without even having to know what they were as objects or goals. Here too we go from *wuwei* through *youwei* to accomplished *wuwei*.

The presence of these spontaneous inclinations in the human being is in some sense due to Heaven. If Heaven were thought of here as deliberate, and had deliberately implanted these spontaneous inclinations in man as part of Its own deliberate plan, then we would have (divine) deliberate activity leading to (human) spontaneous activity, supplemented by further (human) deliberate activity—which then, oddly, is consummated not in what would be maximally godlike (i.e., deliberate) activity, but instead in (ungodly) spontaneous virtue. The result would be a mix of Compensatory and Emulative Theism, with the former put in the ultimate position (Heaven alone has the prerogative of deliberate activity, which is the true value, while man must know his place and strive to be as unlike Heaven as possible, to be merely *wuwei*, deploying the presumptuous prerogative of divine *youwei* only as a temporary means to that end!). It seems quite clear, however, that Mencius places ultimate value on *wuwei*, as Confucius did. It lies at both the beginning and end of the process: Heaven does not speak, does not act deliberately, and its efficacy in ensuring that mankind has these particular spontaneous inclinations is an

outgrowth of its own spontaneous growths and actions, not a deliberate choice or bestowal with a moral intent: man's spontaneous goodness is in continuity with some aspect of Heaven's own spontaneity. When final sagely spontaneity is again attained, one has come to resemble Heaven all the more.

Hence Mencius says, "To fully plumb one's own mind is to know one's Nature, and to fully plumb one's Nature is to know Heaven. Thus by preserving our own minds and nourishing our own natures, we serve Heaven. Then it makes no difference whether we live long or die young. We cultivate ourselves and await either outcome, thus establishing ourselves in our destinies." (7A1)[16] To know the spontaneity in oneself is to know heaven, which is a way to preserve and nourish specifically those spontaneous sprouts of that nature that are capable of becoming the basis of the deliberate moral mind—meaning specifically the four spontaneous sprouts of humaneness, ritual respect, righteousness and wisdom selected out from all that spontaneity as what we find upon reflection we truly want, because they can nourish the spontaneity as a whole, including the demoted and deprioritized parts. Here again we find the mereological or quantitative immanent standard, and no other standard: the only goal is to nourish *all* the spontaneous parts:

> The relation we human beings have to our own bodies is to love and cherish every part of it. Because we love and cherish every part of it, we nourish every part of it. Since there is not so much as an inch of our own skin that we do not love, there is not so much as an inch of our skin that we do not endeavor to nourish. In examining what is good or not good, how could there be anything other than this? It is just a matter of how we choose to apply it to ourselves. Some parts of our body are nobler than others, some are of greater scope and some of smaller. We must not harm the greater for the sake of the lesser, the nobler for the sake of the ignoble. Those who nourish the lesser parts of themselves are lesser men, those who nourish the greater part of themselves are greater men. Imagine a gardener

[16] 孟子曰：「盡其心者，知其性也。知其性，則知天矣。存其心，養其性，所以事天也。殀壽不貳，修身以俟之，所以立命也。」

> who neglects his lumber trees and evergreens to nourish his bramble bushes—he would be an ignoble gardener indeed. A man who nourishes his finger and thereby loses his shoulder and back, without realizing it, has made of himself a wretched invalid. The reason we look down on those who prioritize only eating and drinking is that they lose the greater for the sake of the lesser. But if we can eat and drink without losing the other, how could the mouth and stomach be considered equal to merely an inch of skin [which we also love and nourish]? (6A14) [17]

That last line means that, since we also love nourish even the inch of skin, how much more so should we love and nourish the mouth and stomach, which are nobler and of larger scope—as long as we can do so without causing harm to parts of the body that are still greater, like the heart, which is an organ that just *wants* to feel interpersonal ethical desires and satisfy itself with the interpersonal ethical satisfactions, and further to prioritize its choices accordingly, through thinking and choosing—which is also just something one of the organs of the human body, the heart, desires to do. The goal of our deliberate choice and effort is to nourish the spontaneous body, the whole self, in all its parts with all their spontaneous desires, physical, mental and moral. The reason we prioritize some over others is that some promote this very goal of nourishing all, while others obstruct it: the criterion by which we should decide which plants are more valuable seems to have to do with the tendency of some of them, the bramble bushes, to overgrow and obstruct the nourishment of the others. Ideally, we want all the plants to thrive, but to do this we must deprioritize those that are prone to weedlike overgrowth. The favoring of one group of spontaneous *wuwei* behaviors over the other is done only because the non-favoring that

[17] 孟子曰：「人之於身也，兼所愛。兼所愛，則兼所養也。無尺寸之膚不愛焉，則無尺寸之膚不養也。所以考其善不善者，豈有他哉？於己取之而已矣。體有貴賤，有小大。無以小害大，無以賤害貴。養其小者為小人，養其大者為大人。今有場師，舍其梧檟，養其樲棘，則為賤場師焉。養其一指而失其肩背，而不知也，則為狼疾人也。飲食之人，則人賤之矣，為其養小以失大也。飲食之人無有失也，則口腹豈適為尺寸之膚哉？」

is the real goal can only be accomplished by a temporary favoring, can only be done by favoring those among these spontaneous *wuwei* interactions with the world that are themselves non-obstructive of the development of the others spontaneous parts of the self. The spontaneous Four Sprouts of commiseration, embarrassment, yielding, and preferential distinction-making are selected out from among all the spontaneous *wuwei* activities of the human being because they can be developed into Humaneness, Righteousness, Ritual and Wisdom, respectively; they are thus prioritized and called *xing* 性, while the mouth's preference for flavors, the body's preference for comfort and so on are deprioritized and called *ming* 命 (although we must also remember that strictly speaking all of them are really both *xing* and *ming*). The role of *youwei* here is to select out from among the *wuwei* aspects of the human being those that will ultimately maximize all the *wuwei* aspects. The point is made more explicitly in the second example: the reason we should nourish the shoulder rather than the finger is that if we lose the shoulder we lose the finger too. The criterion of goodness is simply inclusiveness. "In examining what is good or not good, how could there be anything other than this?" We must temporarily prioritize deliberate thought and moral choice to facilitate this, by following the mind, the "greater" part, rather than the eyes and ears, which are led along by things because they are obstructed by those things, giving them limited scope: they are incapable of the inclusiveness of concern of the thinking mind. As long as we first establish the priority of the greater, the lesser cannot undermine it. (6A15) All of those spontaneous process can be transformed by the cultivation of the narrow range of them that are to be thus singled out as the basis of development. Though some are initially favored over others, this is not the final goal, quite the contrary: the goal is not to favor some over others, but to "equally love all parts" of the spontaneous self. Here we have another application of the Great Asymmetry: one side (the virtues) is inclusive, and the other (the hedonist desires) is exclusive—and thus a temporary exclusive preference must be made for the inclusive, but only to reach the inclusion also of the elements that, if prioritized and made ultimate, would have led to the ultimate exclusion of the other. The goal is to have both virtues and hedonist enjoyments; prioritizing the virtues allows this, for it will eventually include also the hedonist enjoyments; the prioritization of the hedonist enjoyments, on the other hand, will end up foreclosing the virtues completely. As in Xunzi, the goal is to "attain both," and the claim

is that what makes the so-called moral virtues moral at all, the reason they are singled out from among all the dispositions for special development, is precisely and only their ability to do this. As in Xunzi, the direct indulgence in the "smaller" desires, the hedonistic ones, is claimed to lead to loss of both hedonistic and moral satisfactions, while the nourishment of the "greater" ones, the moral ones, leads to the satisfaction of both. The "greater/smaller" language here is again a way of talking about relative inclusiveness and exclusiveness, with the goal of maximal inclusiveness, achieved through the temporary narrowing by means of choice, selection, prioritization. The "noble and base" language has no other content, no standard independent of this "greatness"; nobler is more inclusive, baser is less so. Higher rank means wider scope of engagement and influence, lower means narrower, just as in the ideal Confucian social hierarchy of the day. The highest is what has the widest jurisdiction. Here Mencius makes clear that the attribution of nobility is to be consequent to the greater breadth of influence, not the other way around. One is exalted because one's influence is broad; one is not given broad influence because of one's prior exalted rank. Mencius applies the same standard when discussing the succession of the sage kings Yao and Shun (5A5), and also, most trenchantly, when defining what it is to be a sage, as we saw above: 充實而有光輝之謂大，大而化之之謂聖 "To be filled with it [i.e., the desired, the good] to the point where it radiates outward is called greatness. When this greatness is such that it transforms others, it is called sageliness." (7B25)

To nourish that total spontaneity of our body and mind, which is *wuwei* as Heaven is *wuwei*, is "to serve Heaven," without any interest in meeting any externally imposed standard meant to maximize anything other than this total spontaneity itself, and without interest in the control of external events or in punishment and reward. That spontaneity is our contact with Heaven, and that part of it that can grow into goodness—i.e., into what can maximize the spontaneous flourishing of all parts of the Heavenly, including those not initially to be labeled "the greater and nobler parts," i.e., including every inch of skin and the appetites of mouth and belly and so on--is the only revelation of any basis of goodness in Heaven, with which it is in constant continuity. Least of all is Heaven anything like *Noûs*, as Socrates describes it in the *Phaedo*: intelligently arranging things in order to attain its good purpose, choosing the good over the bad through its ability to think or be thought-like. In fact, Mencius tells us explicitly that

"thinking," *si* 思 –a term which implies also seeking and choosing—is exactly what distinguishes Man from Heaven. Heaven does not think, it is rather Man who has to think. We cannot direct indulge in the spontaneous *wuwei* desires of every part of the body, including both the moral sprouts and the sensory pleasures, though the satisfaction of all of them is our ultimate goal: there must be a temporary intervention of *youwei* which chooses among these *wuwei* elements, temporarily prioritizing *some* of them so as to fulfil *all* of them. None must be allowed to starve out or obstruct the others. Prioritizing among these desires, making choices among them so as to maximize the satisfaction of as many of them as possible, is the role of thinking. Asked why some people follow the greater parts and some follow the lesser parts, Mencius said, "The organs of eye and ear do not think, and thus are obstructed by their involvement with things. One unthinking thing interacts with another, which simply draws it along. The role of the heart-mind is thinking; by thinking it gets it, by failing to think it loses it. This is what Heaven has endowed us with, so as to give priority to the greater, so that the lesser cannot snatch it away."[18] The initial hedonic interactions of the senses with things, though these desirous interactions are fully *wuwei* like Heaven just as the ethical desires of the heart are, cannot be followed because the lesser among them will get in the way of the greater; the problem is with obstruction by things, narrowness of engagement, neglect of the whole array of Heavenly spontaneity. Thinking, *youwei*, must intervene by selecting the spontaneous growths of greater scope and not allowing the lesser spontaneous growths (overgrowing shrubs) to starve them out. Man's role is thus initially to be *youwei*, to think, to choose, to seek, to prioritize. But what he thinks about and seeks and chooses is how to be more like Heaven precisely in its non-seeking, non-choosing, non-thinking:

> If those in lower ranks have no way of getting through to those with power in higher ranks, the people can never be put in good order. There is a way to get through to those in positions of higher ranks: one who is not trustworthy with his

[18] 曰：「鈞是人也，或從其大體，或從其小體，何也？」曰：「耳目之官不思，而蔽於物，物交物，則引之而已矣。心之官則思，思則得之，不思則不得也。此天之所與我者，先立乎其大者，則其小者弗能奪也。此為大人而已矣。」

> own friends of equal rank will not be able to get through to those of higher rank. There is a way to gain the trust of one's friends: if one fails to please one's parents in serving them, one will not be trusted by one's friends. There is a way to please one's parents: if in looking into oneself one finds oneself duplicitous, not integrated into a complete whole, that is, if one is unintegrated and insincere (*bucheng* 不誠), one will be unable to please one's parents. There is a way to become sincerely free of duplicity: if one does not understand what is good [i.e., what one truly wants, integrating all one's desires], one cannot become integrated and sincere. Thus being integrated and sincere (*chengzhe* 誠者), free of all duplicity, is the way of heaven; thinking how to become free of duplicity, to be integrated and sincere (*sichengzhe* 思誠者) is the way of man. There has never been someone who is perfectly free of duplicity, completely integrated and sincere who fails to move others, and someone who is completely duplicitous, unintegrated and insincere can never move others at all. (4B12)

What is meant by being free of duplicity, being "integrated and sincere"? We are talking here about ways in which various levels of a structure interact and influence one another. The assumption is that some of these have more power and some have less, some have more influence on their surrounding members and some have less: these are the "higher" and the "lower" respectively. The primary example is a human society or organization. Mencius is here describing his ideal of spontaneous organization: how to get the parts of this nested hierarchical structure to interact harmoniously but without coercion: how to get the various levels to interact, to maximize the satisfaction of the desires of all of them. He thinks it has something to do with there being no conflicts among them, no being of two minds, no duplicity—the achievement of a kind of "integration and sincerity": the term means the consistency of all the parts to form a complete whole (punning on *cheng* 成) so there is no conflict or mutual obstruction between its various parts, which is expressed in the behavior of "sincerity," i.e., the consistency of one's inner intentions and external words and actions. Because of this lack of inner conflict and ulterior motive, the perfectly sincere is effortless, *wuwei*. Just as we saw in the ritual effortlessness of

Confucius and his Heaven, this effortless sincerity in particular agents is what makes other agents respond to them in a way that is equivalent to a non-controlling, non-coercive form of order, allegedly to the benefit and satisfaction of both parties. This is extended to a model for how the observed order of the cosmos comes about—things like the movements of the heavenly bodies and the turning of the seasons. Parallel to the structure we saw in the key "Xicizhuan" passage discussed above, Mencius can be read as combining a notion of a non-moral Heaven with a Heaven-derived internal imperative for humans to be moral, as Franklin Perkins has convincingly shown: it may be that the only will of Heaven is for each thing to follow its own nature, which in the case of humans alone is to strive to be moral and social, without implying that Heaven's own global intentions are for a moral or harmonious cosmos that in any way accords with those values; moral values are provided by Heaven for human behavior alone, though Heaven's cosmos as a whole may well be amoral. Human values can still be rooted in a Heavenly imperative without that implying that Heaven has any moral intentions for the cosmos considered globally, and without implying that It makes any promise that events in the universe will turn out in a way that is morally satisfying to those Heaven-instilled moral values rightfully embraced and developed by humans.[19]

A cruder reading, regrettably still much in evidence in both Chinese and English secondary works on this thinker, though in my view transparently twisting the text toward conceptions derived from modern models rooted in *Noûs as Arché* assumptions, alleges that Mencius views the working of the cosmos as exemplifying some sort of value that bears a closer relation to human values. But even if we adopt this cruder reading, it will have to be one that does not entail precise moral justice: as we saw in Mencius 7A1 above, a morally exemplar person cannot expect Heaven to reward him, even when he has realized his own Heavenly nature to the utmost. The external operation of Heaven is not humanly moral in that sense. At most, as in the "Xicizhuan" passage already cited, the human values can be understood as a continuation and extension of the value-free natural operations of the seasons and the sky as the preconditions of life, which can be read retrospectively as exemplars of a sort of efficacy that has values to

[19]See Franklin Perkins, *Heaven and Earth are Not Humane: The Problem of Evil in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2015), and *Doing What You Really Want: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mengzi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

human beings, once human beings embrace values, which is something they must do in accordance with their particular Heaven-endowed nature, though these values are not shared by Heaven itself. The Heaven-endowed nature of humans involves moral values; the Heaven-endowed nature of fish involves swimming. But this does not imply that Heaven itself either swims or has moral values.

The operations of Heaven and the rough-and-ready approximate cosmic ordering it accomplishes are enough to produce life and humans, and these are the preconditions of value. These operations too go smoothly and well because of a kind of "sincerity" in the sense of reliability, a perdurance through time made possible because it requires no special effort. This is what makes it an order that emerges not as the result of anyone controlling or commanding anyone else, but through spontaneous response of one member to another. But sincerity is precisely effortlessness. It is the lack of any interior division or any external ulterior motive, equally describable as willing with all one's being and not willing. But willing with all one's being, as we saw in Spinoza, Nietzsche, Emerson above, is just being exactly what one is without the intervention of a separate controlling executive function of *Noûs*. The word for this, which Heaven has and Man has to think about obtaining, is *cheng*, 誠 which means "trueness" or "sincerity" or "sustainability," or "reliability," with an implication, writ large in the composition of the character, of integration, coherence, consistency. The idea is that when one's innermost spontaneous desires and commitments, including both the physical and the ethical, are all of a piece with each other and with one's outer words and behaviors, one's words and actions are considered "sincere" and "true to oneself," and thus likely to be sustainable without effort. It takes effort to pretend, or to maintain a division within oneself, or to recall which of the various spontaneous aspects of the self are to be allowed to show. If one is integrated and consistent, coherent within and without, one need not worry about what to do or say, all of it will express the needed content, effortlessly. This inner coherence or consistency in turn is what has efficacy in producing spontaneous effects in the world. In the human sphere, sincere behavior is believed by Confucians to "move" others without having to coerce them, and Mencius is clearly claiming that this is in fact the model we should apply when we try to think about how Heaven gets things done. It doesn't think, and it moves others just by means of the inner consistency and integration,

which are precisely what makes thinking and seeking and choosing unnecessary for it. The expanded parallel passage in the "Zhongyong" is even clearer on the kind of pre-human value we are entitled to envision here:

> …There is a way to make oneself integrated and sincere: if one does not understand what is good, one cannot become integrated and sincere. Being integrated and sincere (*chengzhe* 誠者) is the way of Heaven; making oneself integrated and sincere (*chengzhizhe* 誠之者) is the way of man. To be integrated and sincere means to make no effort and yet hit the mark, to take no thought and yet get it done, ambling at ease on the Way of the Mean (*chengzhe bumian er zhong, bu si er de, congrong zhongdao* **誠者不勉而中，不思而得，從容中道**). Thus is the sage. To make oneself integrated and sincere, in contrast, is to choose the good and firmly hold to it (*zeshan er guzhi zhizhe ye* **擇善而固執之者也**), to broadly study it, acutely investigate it, carefully contemplate it, clearly discern it, deeply practice it.

Effortlessness is the way of Heaven. Effort, choice, resolution, decision of the best course of action, preference for the good as an object to be pursued, willing one thing rather than another—that is man's job. *Noûs* is not *Arché*, is not of Heaven, is precisely what Heaven lacks and has no need of. *Noûs* is secondary, derivative, precisely what is peculiar to man's role. The Mencian form of Confucianism seeks to find that spontaneity in oneself, that subset of spontaneous impulses that are capable of "making oneself sincere," those that, if chosen and held to and cultivated above all the others, can in turn be used to spontaneously integrate both all those other spontaneous desires and inclinations of the self into consistency with themselves (again see *Mencius* 5A14-15, where Mencius describes this as precisely *si*,思， deliberative thought, the particular role given to man's mind in contrast to the thoughtlessness of Heaven) and beyond that moving into alignment, i.e., integrating, the community spontaneously around oneself. This is the hump that Aristotle approaches but cannot get over with his observation that "Craft does not deliberate." In Greece, there was no way to go forward from here except to read

this as some sort of crypto-*Noûs*, for no other metaphor of coordination and consistency and optimizations was available; Aristotle has to imagine this non-deliberative coordination, *theoria*, as ultra-*Noûs*, as uberpurposive. In Confucianism, in contrast, the metaphor is not purposive planning, but "sincerity," immediate uninterrupted impulse and integration, "non-doubleness" 不貳 (to use another striking formulation from the "Zhongyong"), unimpeded and uninterrupted process going directly to its consequence, undisturbed by ulterior intent. Intelligence and choice and moral intent are not the ultimate source of coordination. Rather, intelligence and choice and moral intent are secondary remedies to a disturbance in sincerity caused by selectivity and narrowness--in this case, the narrowing of spontaneity into the obscuration of the sense desires, just what we saw described by Mencius as "thing (sense organ) interacting with thing (external object) and merely being led along by it" (物交物，則引之而已矣 5A15), of prioritized "food and drink," the "smaller" aspects of the human bodymind spontaneity. Though all are beloved, these smaller aspects of spontaneity narrow the breadth of the total spontaneity of body and mind by drowning out other aspects of that all-equally-beloved spontaneity. Heaven is thus the opposite of *Noûs*, and it is the non- *Noûs* like aspects of ourselves that we are to locate and prioritize, using our own *Noûs*, and which we should then treat in such a way that they result in a total spontaneous integrated system that is again effortless like Heaven, effective in moving all things spontaneously and without coercion as Heaven does. Non- *Noûs* to *Noûs* to non- *Noûs*: *Noûs* is not *Arché*, is not ultimate, is rather merely a means to get back to the real ultimate, the lack of any deliberate values or purposes from which all value and being flow: Heaven as effortless, as unthinking, as unchoosing, as non-*Noûs*.

This does not require us to deny that Mencius is sometimes still willing to at least rhetorically grant Heaven a kind of intentionality, in setting the general trend of macrolevel human events (e.g., when a true king will appear and order will come to the world, Mencius 7B36) and in selecting out human beings (like Mencius himself!) for special tasks in promoting its ends and training them with special hardships (Mencius 6B14), though he does deny its just management of the outcome such a chosen or virtuous individual encounters, his success or failure, his survival or demise (7A1). Assuming for the sake of argument that these few passing remarks are meant literally and in earnest, which their marginal position in his total discourse

suggests they likely are not, they must be understood in the context of the ultimacy of spontaneity that characterizes Heaven's more direct manifestation within the nature of Man, this Inner Coherence or Sincerity that achieves effortlessly and without intent the very things that man must strive to achieve. As we have stressed repeatedly in this book, ultimate purposelessness does not exclude the emergence of purpose and intent, but rather serves as its basis. When the above passage states that Heaven "hits the mark" or "gets it done," there is certainly an implication that what Heaven, or the spontaneous Heavenly in man, accomplishes without intention is something we can legitimately regard as having humanly-recognizable value, rather than a chaos that leads to nothing of value. What is this value? Again, the tradition settles on the answer cited above from the "Xicizhuan": it is the continued process of generation through the effortlessly balanced interaction of yin and yang, cosmic process that begins the production of things through sexual reproduction of male and female and agricultural rhythms of hot and cold and light and dark, not characterized as good in itself, and not guided by any intention, but a thread to be picked up which gets the ball of existence rolling and is ex post facto taken as a standard of the good in that human intentions seek to enhance, prolong and continue it through their efforts. It is that process of forming coherent, sustainable (often but not exclusively "living"—see below!) wholes, through quasi-sexual attraction and quasi-atmospheric teeter-tottering balance around a pivot like the light and dark of day and night and the warmth and coolness of spring and autumn, the undirected mutual grouping of opposites around a center through which they related to and reproductively link to each other, rather than through intentional command or coercion or obedience. Like the "law of averages" discussed in Part 1 of this book, this balance is regarded not as a result of a deliberate preference for any one outcome but rather precisely by an unbiased allowing of all outcomes, as a circle is the statistically likely outcome of a spreading outward on a flat surface as long as no other tilt or torque or friction intervenes. It is bias, choice, preference which on the contrary would disturb this spontaneous general tendency to balance. The intentional aspect of Mencius's Heaven is itself one extension of this pre-intentional process, one to which he grants an authoritative role to be sure, but which is itself rooted in a deeper level of spontaneity from which it gets its real value, the unintentional purposeless "Sincerity" or "Integrity" or "Realness" which is in Heaven more than Heaven itself,

which is more profoundly Heavenlike than the intentional, knowing part of Heaven, to the extent that there is one for Mencius at all.

It is certainly true that in this case the emergent personality deriving from the substratum of the unintentional is emphatically singular. But here too, as I have argued at length elsewhere, the sort of singularity at play in this conception is not a dismissal of diversity but a coherence of one-and-many: the model in play is of summative organization and continuity, in this case of ghosts and spirits and rulers and populi which are brought into the orbit of Heaven's activity, forming a continuity with it, expressing it. Heaven's Sincerity is at the center of this system of reciprocities, but is also present as all its expressions. Heaven is both personal and impersonal, both intentional and unintentional—like "Hollywood," like "Washington." The sage too is both personal and impersonal, both intentional and unintentional, both *youwei* and *wuwei*.

We can imagine a theological rejoinder on this basis: since we would not therefore say that the sage is not a person, why should we say that Heaven is not a person? And indeed, we do not say so. We say rather that, for early Confucianism, Heaven is both personal and impersonal, and the same is true for the sage. The fact that this is even possible is indeed our point. Personality as ultimate (absolutized personality, not personality per se) excludes impersonality, just as purpose as ultimate excludes purposelessness, which is why the sometimes-attempted theological concept of God as both personal and impersonal shipwrecks on the ultimacy of personality. Where thinkers in the monotheist traditions have attempted to situate the personhood of God on the basis of a deeper nonpersonal essence (Pseudo-Dionysius, Eckhart, Boehme, the Schelling of the *Essay on Human Freedom* of 1809 onward, where the personal God must make himself exist by arising from an eternally prior impersonal ground that remains forever within himself), they have risked Plotinian heresy, because here "personal" equates to "purposive," "good-seeking," "intelligent," *Noûs*, which defines whatever is not its purpose as ipso facto evil. Schelling is perhaps the bravest of those who attempt to connect all the dots here, requiring a daring redefinition of evil which, however, does not really escape the basic contours of his tradition: evil ends up still meaning free-will disobeying God's will in favor of its own will. That is not the case in Mencius no matter how singular and how personal his Heaven may be. For here, both Heaven and sage are structured in the typically atheist way: combinations of purposive

and purposelessness, of personhood and impersonality, of conscious willing and will-lessness, where the latter of each pair is always the more ultimate in both generative power and value.

Much more straightforward but not radically different is the full Compensatory Atheism of Xunzi's "Tianlun" 天論, rejecting any intentional aspect of Heaven altogether. Here too man fulfills his role in the triad through his specifically human and non-Heavenlike character, i.e., precisely through his purposive intentionality and effort:

> To accomplish without action, to attain without seeking: this is what is called the work of Heaven. Although it is something deep, man need apply no thought to it; although it is vast, man need apply no skill to it; although it is something precise, it does not bear the application of any investigation. This is called not competing with Heaven's work. Heaven has its times, earth has its resources, man has his governing. This is what allows him to form a triad with them. To try to form a triad with them while giving up that by which one forms a triad is just a confusion.[20]

The difference is that here it is not spontaneity *alone* that has value; as in Xunzi's famous "Human Nature is Odious" chapter, value comes from deliberate activity, from control, from purposive control in shaping things towards an end. This is the shared view of the Emulative Theist, the Compensatory Theist and the Compensatory Atheist generally. But even here, as already noted, this deliberate activity is understood as having a necessary relation to the spontaneous, i.e., to the other members of the triad, Heaven and Earth. Unlike the case of the straight Compensatory Atheist of post-monotheist traditions, where the uncontrolled is simply anti-value to be eschewed as much as possible, here the continuity is forefronted: it is really the totality of the non-deliberate plus deliberate, i.e., Heaven-and-Earth plus Man, that is the creator of value. Man is the finisher, the decisive determinant; but the impossibility of this role in the

[20]不為而成，不求而得，夫是之謂天職。如是者，雖深、其人不加慮焉；雖大、不加能焉；雖精、不加察焉，夫是之謂不與天爭職。天有其時，地有其財，人有其治，夫是之謂能參。舍其所以參，而願其所參，則惑矣。

absence of the non-deliberate is still an essential aspect of this Confucian view of the world. Ultimate value is not in purposive control as such, but in the controlled combination of control and irreducible non-control. Even here, as we've noted, space is made for the non-intentional as integral to the highest accomplishment even of the human, in the effortless virtuosity strenuously attained by the deliberate efforts of the sage.

Finally, we have perhaps the most influential classical options for this uniquely human participation in the creative work of the universe, those derived from the "Zhongyong" 中庸 and *Zhouyi* 周易, the metaphysical climax of classical Confucian metaphysical speculation, adopted in various forms in the Neo-Confucian systems. We have already taken up the *Zhouyi* "Xicizhuan" position, finding it to be an artful crystallization of many trends within the prior tradition. The "Zhongyong" presents an equally penetrating attempt to characterize the precise nature of the human relation to the creative process of the cosmos that it continues and completes. Extending the motif presented in Mencius 7A1, man's distinctive role here is described as plumbing to the utmost his own nature, which in this case reveals to him not just the Heavenly spontaneity as such, but also the spontaneous inborn natures of other people, and indeed the spontaneous inborn natures of all things. Here too this is presented as enabling one to "assist in the creative and nourishing work of Heaven and Earth, and form a triad with Heaven and Earth."[21] This adaptation of the Xunzian motif of the triad in combination with the initially quite distinct Mencian motif of "plumbing one's own nature" produces crucial new results. "To plumb the nature" of all things in this way certainly does point to some kind of privileged access to the metaphysical reality of things. This is what sometimes misleads unwary readers into thinking we have here something analogous to the God-centric metaphysical systems where a special capacity of man's (e.g., *imago dei*, Reason) allows him to grasp the real nature of things. The question, though, is what this "real nature" is in the two cases, and this differs radically in the God-centric and the God-less worldviews. For the Nature of all things, rooted in Heaven, is stipulated in the "Zhongyong" to be inextricably related to unknowability, not just to us, but in principle, in itself, to itself, just as we see in the Daoist texts. The text begins with the unmanifest

[21] 可以贊天地之化育，則可以與天地參矣

"Center" that is neither happiness nor sorrow, neither joy nor anger (the "inner center which is unexpressed" (*xinuailezhiweifa wei zhi zhong* 喜怒哀樂之未發，謂之中), which is the more evident and manifest precisely by being the more hidden and unknown (*moxianhuyin, moxianhuwei* 莫見乎隱，莫顯乎微). Because it is expressed in no one determinate form (least expressed), it is what is operative in and dispositive of all forms (most expressed). Such is the innermost inborn nature that is at once the most unmanifest and the most universally expressed, beyond the reach of intention. Here again the conscious effort of human ethical endeavor is a kind of carefulness and attention directed toward this pre-intentional indeterminate nature, the unknown from which the known emerges (*junzi jieshen hu qi suobudu* **君子戒慎乎其所不睹**). The text ends by describing Heaven's operations as equally unmanifest in any particular form, without even sound or smell (*shangtian zhi zai wushengwuxiu* 上天之載，無聲無臭), achieving its universality in the same way. The sage is himself effortless, beginning and ending in the maximally unmanifest, the ultimately unknowable. Harmony and Heaven's mandate are reconceived as surface manifestations of this deeper indetermination, which is the ultimate source of both being and value. The Center is in itself indeterminate, "having neither sound nor smell," the indeterminate Inner Middle before the emergence of determinate pairs of contrasting mental conditions (joy, anger, sadness, happiness), affects which precede thinking, and with which alone determinate knowable characteristics become available, for it is the contrast between these opposites that provide determinate content.

Here, however, in contrast to what we find in the Daoist accounts, unknowability is presented as only half the story, the less important half for humans; unknowability serves as the everpresent ground and enabler of reliable human knowledge. This unknowability is what grounds the possibility for a continuity between knowledge of entities which are, as known, distinct and separate: the self, other people, and all other things. For because our own nature and the nature of all other things are in no case *fully* determinate, they are not mutually exclusive; growing from the same pre-determinate root, they are inextricable linked to one another, and converge at their deepest point. The human nature we plumb is thus more than just Reason, more than just intelligibility; it is the whole being of man, a being that not only includes but is indeed

rooted in and most pervasively disposed by what is beyond any determination or intelligibility. Most crucially, this means that the whole being of man is even more than just "human"; it partakes in the nature of all things. It is not because we have Reason that knows those things as objects that we plumb them, but because they, like us, are joined to the totality of other things by the unknowability at the root of them, the non-mutual-exclusivity which is the unknowable aspect of their nature. Daoist sensitivity to unknowability is repurposed, put in the service of knowledge in the Confucian systems, as valuelessness is put in the service of value in the "Xicizhuan" passage repeatedly cited above. And yet in these Confucian metaphysical systems, distinctively, the achieved goal is not the full suppression of the unknowability, effortlessness and valuelessness, not even (quite) in the Compensatory Atheism of Xunzi, but rather their full expression.

We later come to see reaffirmations and developments of these two points of indetermination—identified on the one hand as the ultimate source of beings and posited as a locus of transcendence of limitations to specifiable identities which marks the consummation of human excellence on the other--in nearly all the full-blown Neo-Confucian systems of subsequent eras, elaborated into 1) the dimension of non-specifiability in the ultimate nature, (e.g., as *wuji* 無極 for Zhu Xi, already discussed, or as the denial of pre-existing "fixed coherences/principles" *dingli* 定理 in the universal "innate knowing" which constitutes the world for Wang Yangming), and 2) a view of the nature of things whereby in one sense all things have the same nature but in another sense each thing has its own distinct nature, and the realization of the convergence of these two is the goal of ethical cultivation. These two points go together: the absence of ultimate determination at the most fundamental level of reality is precisely what remains operative at the concrete level in the ambidexterity of the determinations of both being and normativity that pertain to each entity, the many that continues to open out from any "one," the one-many of a coherence that prevents both atomized onenesses and disconnected multiplicity, without resort to a species-genus type of external unification of the many from above. In the later systems these persistent intuitions are elaborated through an affiliation with the Yin-Yang cosmology of the *Zhouyi* system, and we can easily see why. For the primary meaning of Yang and Yin illustrates this deep unknowability in the known: they mean

respectively, essentially, the seen (Yang) and the unseen (Yin), the obvious and the obscure, the foreground and the background, linked to "valued" and "neglected" (as in the *Daodejing*), the obviously desirable (Yang) and the usually shunned (Yin). "Definite" and "vague" are given a formal structure here. This is just a formal statement of the previous point about knowledge: whatever appears to knowledge is always half-in-darkness, all Yang rooted in its inalienable relation to Yin and vice versa. To be knowing something is to not-know half of it. To be known is to be half-unknown. To be knowable is to be half-unknowable. Only thus is there any knowing, or anything to know. It is just that now this is in the service of asserting a kind of authoritative, reliable knowledge on the Yang side, but one which necessarily expands the sense of the knowing self and the self to be known beyond the range of any notion of unity as consistency of purpose and conscious control.

Confucianism may seem to resemble monotheism in terms of some of the themes we've developed here, at least in terms of the main thing: like Durkheim, like Sociology, like monotheism, Confucianism (unlike Bataille or Daoism or Buddhism or Spinoza or Nietzsche) sees the realm of non-utility, its chosen form of liberation from the PSR, its access to the unconditioned, in terms that are wholly social, interpersonal—personhood and its purposes are what are transcended but are also what are found in the transcendental realm. It wants to reassign the purposeless effortless joy of the spontaneous into the realm of utility to social purposes. In some readings, especially of Neo-Confucianism, this is even in the form we found in Durkheim, a form we see as unmistakably rooted in monotheism: non-negotiability as the inviolability of absolute moral demand. But this is what makes Confucianism especially valuable for illustrating our thesis in this book. For what is it that, in spite of this shared commitment to ultimacy of the personal and interpersonal, makes Confucianism (for us atheist mystics) so much more palatable than monotheism or Kantianism or Durkheimian sociology? The answer is simple: Confucianism has a different idea of what a person is. The Confucian person is both body and mind, reason and emotion, purpose and purposeless, controlled and uncontrolled, *youwei* and *wuwei*. Confucian virtue is intercorporeal as much as it is intersubjective: it is mediated always by *li* 禮, ritual, saturated with the givenness of both existing traditional social forms and of bodies which no single mind has created ex nihilo. This personhood will be different from the personhood of the

disembodied souls of Platonic shades, and even forever different from the selves of Abrahamic believers in the literal resurrection of the flesh, for whom body and mind are, let us remember, also inseparable. For in the latter case, that body is still under control of and indeed still designed by a mind, still purposefully made—not by my mind, but by God's mind. So mind, personhood, thinking, *Noûs*, purpose, control are ultimate in all directions, body or mind. Confucian persons are not deliberately-created selves in this sense, and control is not the final category accounting for either their existence or their virtue. They are cultivations of a pre-existing unintentional facticity, pruned and guided and nourished and grown in a certain purposive way, so that the purposeless is brought partially into the service of a purpose, and only to this extent somewhat resembling the body-as-tool conception of some monotheisms. But the purpose into whose service the purposeless is here pressed is not the purpose at the root of the world, for that is not the kind of world it is: it is not a world created by a mind or by anything mental. Furthermore, the pinnacle of this virtue restores a condition of *wuwei*, of effortlessness and purposelessness, where mind is not controlling, where ends-means deliberations have ceased. The origin of the Confucian self is in the *wuwei* transformations of the universal process of generation, has a period of deliberate *youwei* activity and deliberate cultivation in which he tries to attain a balance of the two sides of his nature, the spontaneous and the deliberate.

Mencius 2A2 gives a strong version of this Confucian self-conception, one that would later become canonical. We start with something spontaneous, purposeless, non-human in the very depths of the human: those aspects of man's spontaneous (non-deliberate, *wuwei*) being that, with proper nourishment and environment, if they are not unduly obstructed, if they are cultivated and pruned and trimmed properly, will grow into fully fledged social virtues. These are compared to growing a plant, cultivating a garden: the key metaphor is that we are trying to grow the "sprouts" of virtue. The *youwei*, purposeful aspect of life is this pruning and cultivating and feeding of a *wuwei* purposeless spontaneity. Mencius positions the Confucian way between two extremes: total purposelessness, laissez-faire of anything goes, which just lets the plants grow however they want, all together with whatever weeds might be there—let's call that the Daoist extreme. On the other extreme, are those people who, like the foolish man of Song, tried to "help their sprouts grow" 助長: the growth was felt to be too slow and indirect, so he tried to

pull up on the sprouts—thereby killing them. That is, he tried to exert total control over the spontaneous side of his nature, to force it to follow his conception of how it should be, to make the body genuinely and exceptionlessly a *tool* of the mind. This latter attitude accords with the Emulative Theist and Compensatory Atheist options, in both of which deliberate activity and willed goals are what is of most value in human existence. Confucianism, for Mencius, is rather a gentle, patient guiding of the spontaneous by the deliberate, which, when successful, then drops the deliberate altogether, leading back to spontaneity, an expanded state of spontaneity, as the spontaneous sprout has now become an equally spontaneous and *wuwei* tree, through the temporary intervention of the *youwei* gardener. The source and the goal are still both *wuwei*; the instrumental role of the purposive is self-canceling. In the pithy phrase Zhuangzi (Chapter 6) uses to satirize the Confucian position, it is simply a case of "using what knowledge knows to nourish what knowledge does not know." The proper role of my consciousness is to be the leader, the controller, the ruler, the king only in the way the sage-kings are leaders and rulers: by non-deliberate *wuwei*, by assuming its ritually proper position and issuing no commands, so that the *qi* of the body circulates around it without effort or coercion, like the stars rotating around the North Star (*Analects* 2:1). When it does have to deliberately intervene, it is as a gardener, a leader who leads by where he goes and what he does rather than by what he commands: it is to be the nourisher of the non-conscious. The proper role of purpose is to nourish the spontaneous, the incomprehensible, that which acts without knowing why it acts. The proper role of the personal is to nourish the impersonal that is its basis, its root, its living font. This living font is what knowledge does not know, and can never know. Not just my knowledge, not just human knowledge: what no knowledge in the universe knows, what even Heaven doesn't know and doesn't need to know: the genuinely spontaneous process of nature.

So when Confucians assert that the universe is ren 仁, humane--that the intersubjective affection (ren 仁), and respectful yielding to tradition and to others (*li* 禮), and harmonious-clustering-each-in-the-right-place (*yi* 義) and mutual-recognition-and-acquired-knowhow (zhi 智) (for these are the four Mencian virtues: *ren, li, yi, zhi* 仁禮義智—which mainstream Neo-Confucians correlate in this sequence to the four seasons, spring, summer, autumn, winter) are the ultimate, the real source of all being and value, it means something very different from a

monotheist who makes the interpersonal relation the ultimate ontological fact. The monotheist interpersonal relation is the relation between two responsible controllers who exist in a universe in which responsible control is the ultimate ontological fact. The ontological interpersonality of the Confucian cosmos is the relation of persons who are, from beginning to end, both purposeful and purposeless, with the purposeless dimension as both the deepest root and as the ultimate development, the source and the end.[22] Confucian persons are from the beginning to the end purposeless-purposeful-purposeless sandwiches, so the interpersonality of the Confucian cosmos does not imply the ultimacy of the purposeful, but just the opposite.

We can now come to understand how this complex commitment to ultimate atheism plays out even when a sort of "humaneness-mindedness" to the Cosmos is allowed or even insisted upon, as happens in a passage from the "Sorted Dialogues" of "the Aquinas of Neo-Confucianism," the gold standard of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, Zhu Xi (1130-1200):

> Q: Is the Mind of Heaven and Earth conscious? Or is it just silent non-doing?
>
> A: The Mind of Heaven and Earth cannot be said to be unconscious, but it doesn't think and deliberate like the human mind. Cheng Yi said, "Heaven and Earth have no mind and yet accomplish all transformations; the sage has a mind and yet is without any deliberate action."
>
> Q: The Mind of the Heaven and Earth is just their Productive Compossibility/ies.[23] Productive Compossibility means principle, while mind denotes the aspect of being master. Is that correct?

[22]I am here not speaking of the Xunzian line of Confucianism, touched on above, which I consider a simple case of Compensatory Atheism. Nor am I speaking, at the other extreme, of the imperial Confucianism derived from Dong Zhongshu and other Han thinkers, which, stands in the relation to Confucianism where negative theology stands in relation to monotheism: the outlying and ultimately marginalized attempt within these respective systems to massage the outcome in the other direction, in this case toward a quasi-monotheism. But just as I've argued in the case of the negative theologians, the attempt ultimately fails: the negative theologians end up shipwrecked in the last instance in a hyper-purposive cosmos, while Dong Zhongshu and the like end up in the last instance with a limp henotheism still rooted in the ultimate spontaneity of yin-yang processes that undermine total control by any one agent. For a full account, see my *Ironies of Oneness and Difference*.

[23] I will try to justify this unorthodox translation of Zhu Xi's key term Li below.

A: Mind definitely means being master, but it is precisely the Productive Compossibilities that are the master here. It is not that outside this mind there is some other Productive Compossibility of Productivity, or outside this Productive Compossibility there is some other mind.

Daofu said, “Previously you told us to think about whether Heaven and Earth have a mind or not. Recently I have been thinking about this, and my personal conclusion is that the Heaven and Earth have no mind, for only Humaneness (ren 仁) is the Mind of the Heaven and Earth. For if it had a real mind, that would necessarily mean it engaged in thinking and deliberation, in management and purposeful action—but when have Heaven and Earth ever had any thoughts or deliberations!? Thus when [Confucius says] ‘the four seasons proceed, the hundred creatures are generated,’ it just means that it is like this because it is meet that it be like this, without requiring any thought—this is why it is the Way of the Heaven and Earth.”

Zhu Xi answered, “If that is the case, then what does the Book of Changes mean when it says ‘The Fu [“Return”] hexagram shows the Mind of Heaven and Earth,’ and ‘Aligned and Vast, thus showing the dispositions of Heaven and Earth’? What you have said only touches on its non-mind aspect. But if there were ultimately no mind at all, then cows would give birth to horses and plum blossoms would bloom on peach trees. In reality all these things are naturally fixed. It is as Cheng Yi said: ‘In terms of its role as master, it is called Lord. In terms of its nature and disposition, it is called Qian [the hexagram representing the tireless vigor of heaven’s movement].’ These various names and their meanings are naturally so determined. ‘Mind’ refers to its aspect of mastery or control, which is what is meant by saying that ‘the mind of Heaven and Earth is to generate things.’ On this point, Qinfu once objected that I shouldn’t put it in these terms, but I told him that it just means that Heaven and Earth have no other business, that their sole intent, their sole mind, is to generate things. The one original vital force operates and circulates, flowing unobstructedly, never

stopping for an instant, doing nothing besides generating all the myriads of existing things."

Q: Is this what Cheng Yi meant when he said, "Heaven and Earth have no mind and yet accomplish all transformations; the sage has a mind and yet is without any deliberate action"?

A: This is referring to the non-mind aspect of Heaven and Earth. When 'the four seasons proceed, the myriad creatures are generated,' do Heaven and Earth ever harbor any deliberate mind? As for the sage, all he does is follow Productive Compossibilities. What deliberate activity could he have, above and beyond this? Thus Cheng Hao said, 'The constancy of Heaven and Earth is to pervade all things with their Mind and yet to have no mind at all; the constancy of the sage is to follow all affairs with his emotions and yet to possess no emotions at all.' That's the best way to put it.

Q: "Pervading all things"—does that mean comprehensively pervading all things with the mind but without any one-sided selfishness?

A: Heaven and Earth reach all things with this mind. As obtained in human beings it becomes the human mind, and as obtained in things it becomes the minds of things. When received by plants and animals it then becomes the minds of plants and animals. But all of them are nothing but this one Mind of Heaven and Earth. What we need to do is to recognize both the sense in which it has a mind and the sense in which it has no mind. To fix it [on one side or the other] as you have is not sufficient."

[At another time Zhu Xi said:] When all things are born and growing, that is the time when Heaven and Earth have no mind. When things are dried and withered and about to spring back to life, that is the time when Heaven and Earth have a mind.[24]

[24]問：「天地之心亦靈否？還只是漠然無為？」曰：「天地之心不可道是不靈，但不如人恁地思慮。伊川曰：『天地無心而成化，聖人有心而無為。』」問：「天地之心，天地之理。理是道理，心是主宰底意否？」曰：「心固是主宰底意，然所謂主宰者，即是理也，不是心外別有箇理，理外別有箇心。」

Let us summarize Zhu Xi's position as delineated here:

First, Heaven and Earth, meaning the cosmos, can in one sense be said to have a mind, and in another sense to have no mind.

They have a mind in two related senses: 1) that there is regularity and predictability of cause and effect in the process of generation (plums produce plum blossoms, horses give birth to horses); and 2) there is a definite proclivity in the cosmos toward production and reproduction, transformation, generation.

They have no mind in the sense that they do not consciously deliberate, think, manage or control in any way analogous to human minds.

We may find it surprising that, like Aquinas and many other medieval European thinkers, Zhu Xi seems to find no way to conceive causal regularity without referring it to mind

---

道夫言：「向者先生教思量天地有心無心。近思之，竊謂天地無心，仁便是天地之心。若使其有心，必有思慮，有營為。天地曷嘗有思慮來！然其所以『四時行，百物生』者，蓋以其合當如此便如此，不待思維，此所以為天地之道。」

曰：「如此，則易所謂『復其見天地之心』，『正大而天地之情可見』，又如何？如公所說，祇說得他無心處爾。若果無心，則須牛生出馬，桃樹上發李花，他又却自定。程子曰：『以主宰謂之帝，以性情謂之乾。』他這名義自定，心便是他箇主宰處，所以謂天地以生物為心。中間欽夫以為某不合如此說。某謂天地別無勾當，只是以生物為心。一元之氣，運轉流通，略無停間，只是生出許多萬物而已。」

問：「程子謂：『天地無心而成化，聖人有心而無為。』」

曰：「這是說天地無心處。且如<4>『四時行，百物生』，天地何所容心？至於聖人，則順理而已，復何為哉！所以明道云：『天地之常，以其心普萬物而無心；聖人之常，以其情順萬事而無情。』說得最好。」

問：「普萬物，莫是以心周徧而無私否？」曰：「天地以此心普及萬物，人得之遂為人之心，物得之遂為物之心，草木禽獸接着遂為草木禽獸之心，只是一箇天地之心爾。今須要知得他有心處，又要見得他無心處，只恁定說不得。」道夫。

萬物生長，是天地無心時；枯槁欲生，是天地有心時。(Zhuzi yulei, pp. 52-53.)

and purpose.[25] However, before taking this to suggest a deep convergence of intuitions, we should note that the exact meaning of this claim will differ to exactly the extent that the relevant conception of "mind" and "purpose" differs in the conceptions of Chinese and European thinkers. That is, although both Zhu Xi and theistic theologians assume that causal regularity has some necessary connection to mind and purpose, their conceptions of mind and purpose themselves differ radically, and thus the implications of this claim are wildly different. How do these conceptions differ?

The first clue comes already in the second aspect of "having a mind" mentioned above: to have a mind and a purpose is here constrained to one specific purpose, "production and reproduction." That is the specific telos that Zhu Xi detects in all things, though in different determinate ways for each specific thing so produced and reproduced, and it is this aim that he sees as constituting "the mind of Heaven and Earth" in its "minded" aspect. The productive compossibility (as I translate Li 理 in the context of Zhu Xi's brand of Neo-Confucianism—more on this below), the enabling possibility or non-obstruction of coexistence and mutuality and coherence, of various forms of production, as we shall discuss below. Here we need only note that the ultimate telos of all things is both one and many in the way that Li is both one and many, a complex system of coherence of diverse forms of productivity. The mind in all things wants only one thing: to produce and be produced along with (hence "compossibility") all the other things that are produced and producing. As such, this one desired direction in all things is also the various specific directions of all things. But the content in all cases is the maximal collective productivity, literally "life" or "birthing," that is also experienced as Humaneness and also described as Li, which I thus translate here as Productive Compossibility.

But here too we must be cautious: what is this production and reproduction Zhu Xi speaks of? Does it mean that there is some preference for living beings over non-living beings, and that this really defines the reason things are as they are? Does the universe intend to produce

[25] See for example Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, 1.44.4, "Treatise on Creation," "Whether God is the Final Cause of All things." See Summa Theologica by St. Thomas Aquinas, Translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province
[1947], available at http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/: "Every agent acts for an end: otherwise one thing would not follow more than another from the action of the agent, unless it were by chance."

living beings? Are we talking about some sort of folk-Schopenhauerian "will to life"[26] or a Bergsonian élan vital, a will to life that is the secret purpose behind the production of non-living things? The answer to this is a qualified no. The reason for this negative answer lies in the meaning of the Chinese word *sheng* 生. Consider the following explanations from Zhu Xi:

> Q: I have seen that in your letter responding to Yu Fangshu that you consider even dry and withered things to have Productive Compossibility (Li). But I don't see what Productive Compossibilities there are in dried and withered things, or tiles and shards.
>
> A: Consider the medicines made from rhubarb and from aconitum. These are dried and withered, but the rhubarb medicine cannot be used in place of aconitum, and aconitum cannot be used in place of rhubarb.
>
> Q: "Dried and withered things also have the Nature"—what does this mean?
>
> A: It means they should also be said to have this Productive Compossibility (Li). Thus [Cheng Hao] said "In the whole world there are no things outside the Nature." Then walking on the street he said, "The bricks of the steps have the Productive Compossibility of the bricks of the steps." Sitting down he said, "The bamboo chair has the Productive Compossibility of a bamboo chair. Dried and withered things can be said to lack the intention to produce (*shengyi* 生意), but not the Compossibility of Production (*shengli* 生理 [27]). For example, rotten wood cannot be used, and can only be put to the flame. This is what it

Schopenhauer equivocates on this point: when he is speaking more strictly in delineating his metaphysics, he specifies quite clearly that "the Will" has no specific end, that it is blind in precisely the sense of wanting no particular object, just wanting. But in his more popular writings, or when discussing living organisms, or perhaps when he is being less careful, he does speak of a "Will to Life."

[27]Here I take shengli 生理 to be an explicit explication of the meaning of the usually abbreviated and general term 理 itself, so I translate them the same way.

> means to say it has no impulse of production. But even so, burning a given kind of wood produces a given kind of scent, each one different from the others. This is because the Productive Compossibility of each is thus."[28]

"Production," sheng 生, does not refer only to what we mean by the English word "life": it means any transformation, any emergence of a qualitiatively distinct entity. Burning rotten wood produces scented smoke. Neither the wood nor the smoke is "alive," but this is an instance of sheng, and thus the relation of production is the expression of the Li, the Productive Compossibility, of the wood. Basically, any event that occurs is an example of "ceaseless production and reproduction" 生生不息. The rotten wood does not "intend" to produce, it has no living "intention" or "impulse" to produce (*sheng yi* 生意), but it has the potentiality to produce; to exist is to have this potential to produce a certain effect, and requires that this entity was something that could come into existence, could be produced, in tandem with whatever else is already existing. To have a Li is to be something that can be generated by whatever is already existing, and to participate in this process of ceaseless production and reproduction by in turn having the capacity to produce something else beyond itself. This is why I translate Li in this way for Zhu Xi. The Song Neo-Confucians often use the term in its everyday sense to mean "possibility," as when they say something could possibly exist with the phrase *youcili* 有此理, or when something is impossible, *qiyoucili* 豈有此理. This can apply to things like the existence of spirits, or telepathy, or seemingly miraculous events: judging whether such things can exist depends on whether they fit in with what else exists in a way that is consistent both with their being produced by them and by them continuing the process of production within the context of

---

[28] 問：「曾見答余方叔書，以為枯槁有理。不知枯槁瓦礫，如何有理？」曰：「且如大黃、附子，亦是枯槁。然大黃不可為附子，附子不可為大黃。」

問：「枯槁之物亦有性，是如何？」曰：「是他合下有此理，故云天下無性外之物。」因行街，云：「階磚便有磚之理。」因坐，云：「竹椅便有竹椅之理。枯槁之物，謂之無生意，則可；謂之無生理，則不可。如朽木無所用。止可付之爨□，是無生意矣。然燒甚麼木，則是甚麼氣，亦各不同，這是理元如此。」

the total matrix of relations that exist, and this interrelation of all beings is considered to be intrinsically productive, even where the "impulse" of production is lacking. Li is a kind of coherence which is productive, a way in which things join together so as to continue the process of production and reproduction, the continuation of the process of creativity which is the cosmos. The "co-" in "compossibility" denotes this possibility of coexistence, and this already implies a kind of value. Coexistence is itself a value, a kind of unity among produced entities that allows them to all exist without obstructing each other, without excluding each others' production. We see this in the Neo-Confucian tropes of ren 仁 (humaneness), the most direct manifestation of Li, as primarily manifested as (though not identical to) unbiasedness (*gong* 公) and as sensitivity (*jue* 覺), the extension beyond any given boundary to include and connect and respond to whatever else exists, which is also the key characteristic of production and reproduction: non-limitation within a given determinate sphere, the continuation of one thing into something else, the expansion into and the generation of otherness: growth, but in the sense that also includes any non-living event as well, even that of firewood turning to smoke.

Indeed, even human creations of inanimate implements thus count as instances of sheng. Consider the following:

> Q: Do dry and withered things have Productive Compossibility or not?
>
> A: As soon as there is anything at all, right away it has its Productive Compossibility 才有物，便有理. Heaven produced no writing brushes; it was human beings who take rabbit hair and make a writing brush out of it. But as there is a brush, there must be the Productive Compossibilities of the brush.
>
> Q: How do you discern Humaneness from Righteousness [which are the innate characteristic of Li] in the brush?
>
> A: Such a small thing does not bear a division into its Humaneness and its Righteousness [i.e., they are present there only as its Li].[29]

[29]問：「枯槁有理否？」曰：「才有物，便有理。天不曾生箇筆，人把兔毫來做筆。才有筆，便有理。」又問：「筆上如何分仁義？」曰：「小小底，不消恁地分仁義。」 Zhuziyulei, p. 81.

Several things are to be noted here. Taken literally, the language here suggests the brush exists before the specific Li of "brushness," and that Li follows from the emergence of the brush in reality. But the production of the brush also instantiates the prior Li of Productive Compossibility with all else that exists, which until the time of the brush's emergence simply is the Li of all these other things, not yet the Li of the brush. The general compossibility of all things, which is also the specific compossibilities of each thing already existing, including rabbit hair, ink and the human desire to write, is compossible with the creation of a brush from rabbit hair, which make that creation possible, at which time there will necessarily be a Li of that brush. The Li of the brush may be said to be newly emergent, but it may also be said to have always existed: for the relation between the Li of the brush and the Li of anything else that priorly existed is not of two distinct individual entities, this Li and that Li. Rather, each individual Li is also a version of the Li of all things, the Taiji, that has always existed priorly as the Li of each prior thing. The creation of the brush is an instance of sheng. When that creation occurs, all those prior compossibilities are present as the specific productive compossibility of the brush to participate in further sheng. Perhaps it will be used to write a poem. That will be a further instance of sheng, which demonstrates the specific Li of the brush. And that poem, once it is written, will then be present in the compossibility of all other things with that poem: the general Li of Productive Compossibility is the specific compossibility of the brush, of the poem. Indeed, Cheng Yi does not hesitate to see a poem written by the Tang poet Du Fu as being inherent in all Li—once it has occurred:

> It is like the case of the man who had been illiterate all his life, and then one day fell ill and was suddenly able to recite a Du Fu poem. There is such a Li (possibility). Between Heaven and Earth there is just what exists and what doesn't exist. What has come to exist exists, what doesn't exist doesn't. As for Du Fu's poem, this poem really exists in the world. So when the man was so sick that his

> mind reached a state of perfectly concentrated unity, there was this principle (*daoli*) that resonated naturally all the way to this man's mind.[30]

Whatever can be created ipso facto instantiates the prior generative compossibility of all prior existence and that thing, which also set limits (norms) on its continued operation in the future. All future emergences must be compossible with this specific Li in same way. It now becomes the Li of all things to have to be compossible with this brush and this poem, which can thus be apprehended, under the right conditions, in the Li of any currently existing thing. The brush and the poem were produced by a human mind bringing together elements already existing in the world. Once existent, we might think this either demonstrates or produces the corresponding specific Li, not both. But Zhu Xi's metaphysics presents a third option. The Li of Z is pre-existent to the emergence of Z only in the sense that compossibility must be compossibility with everything, including whatever already exists or has existed, and that the compossibility of "everything else" with X is the same as the compossibility of Z with "everything else." Prior to the emergence of Z, the possibility of X is present not as a self-standing formal cause of Z, but only as the compossibilities of every priorly existing thing. The specific Li of Z, prior to the emergence of Z, is present only as all other Li, and their necessary opening out toward "more." The role of the human mind in creating the brush and the poem: teleological consciousness as "winter" aspect of Li, Ren, Generative Compossibility, making a special effort, at a time of obstruction, to further generativity (*sheng*) through conscious purposive effort. The horse hair was priorly *intended* neither for human brushes, nor only for horses in nature. It was neither intended nor created ex nihilo: it is rather the coherence of all prior compossibility that enables its emergence, to which it then contributes. We could call this contribution either a change to the prior Li of the world, or simply a further extension of it: it reveals more of what is compossible with the prior compossibilities, which in that sense remain unaltered, though the specific compossibility of the brush is not among the conditions for new emergences, i.e., does not function as part of the Li for the world, until that brush emerges,

[30] 如有人平生不識一字一日病作卻念得一部杜甫詩。卻有此理；天地間事只是一箇有一箇無。既有即有無即無。如杜甫詩者是世界上實有杜甫詩。故人之心病及至精一，有箇道理自相感通以至人心.

through human fiddling, in actuality. Hence, though each thing's Li is the specific telos endowed by Heaven and Earth to it in particular, with the strongly conservative requirement to cohere also with human cultural tradition, because Li is both one and many, because compossibility is both of each and of all, there is no one way in which this telos is fulfilled: the "end" of sheng reaches no single end anywhere. The norm that governs the emergence of any thing is its compossibility with whatever already exists; as soon as it emerges, its structure and function establish a new norm for itself, a specific particular form of that prior compossibility of all prior things. Henceforth, its presence is an additional item with which all subsequent things must be compossible, altering the universal norms for new emergences to exactly that extent.

We see here how defining Li as "Productive Compossibility" helps us understand one of the most distinctive and puzzling features of Zhu Xi's metaphysics: the simultaneous oneness and manyness of Li. For Zhu Xi is very clear that Li is at the same time one Li (the Taiji 太極) of all things, and at the same time is, in its entirety, all the many individual mutually differentiating "principles" and "patterns" and natures of things (*liyi fenshu* 理一分殊──note well that the "*fen*" here does not mean that only a portion or division of Li is present as the specific principle which is the nature of any individual thing: the entire Li is present as the specific principle of production and growth of each thing). For the "compossibility"—i.e., the possibility of coexistence, of two items, A and B--would be described in just this way. This reconfiguration of singular and plural is precisely the biggest difference between "possibility" and "compossibility." The "possibility" of A is something entirely different from the "possibility" of B, and the "possibility of the coexistence of A and B" is yet a third thing. But the "compossibility of A with B" is exactly "the compossibility of B with A," which is none other than "the compossibility of A and B." Analogously, for Zhu Xi, the Li of a chair is the Li of a table, and this is the same as the Li of the world that has table and chair. And yet the compossibility of A and B can never be reducible to a featureless unarticulated "Oneness": it specifically delineates the possibility of A and the possibility of B as two separate and definite aspects. The possibility of A is the compossibility of A with all other things (abstract and concrete, human and natural); this is different from the possibility of B, which is the compossibility of B with all other things. But the compossibility of A is the compossibility of B,

while maintaining this specific difference. We can see here how this conception requires us to rethink reform and conservativism with respect to norms. Normativity, order, teleology, consciousness, nature, mind, purpose, human and cosmic creativity all scan differently depending on the presumed conception of the one-many relation. And the one-many relation has everything to do with how we are conceiving the nature of purposivity.

Li for Zhu Xi is thus coherence qua compossibility, or to put it more strongly, the copotentiality of production of all things. We can see this quite clearly in Zhu Xi descriptions of specific Li. For example, speaking of the Li of a chair or a fan, he says:

> Clothing, food, activities are just things, while their Li is Dao. It is impermissible to call the thing the Dao. For example, this chair has four legs, and can be sat on: this is the Li of the chair. If we take away one of the legs, it will be impossible to sit on it, and thus it will have lost the Li of a chair….Or take this fan, which is a thing, but has the Dao, the Li, of a fan. How the fan is made, and how it should be used, is the Li of the fan that is above its form.[31]

Li is how the chair is constructed (it has four legs cohering in a certain way to form a whole) and what can thus be done with it (people can sit on it). These are both obviously

[31] 衣食動作只是物，物之理乃道也。將物便喚做道，則不可。且如這箇椅子有四隻脚，可以坐，此椅之理也。若除去一隻脚，坐不得，便失其椅之理矣。…且如這箇扇子，此物也，便有箇扇子底道理。扇子是如此做，合當如此用，此便是形而上之理。Zhuxi yulei, p. 786. （The complete passage: 楊通老問：「中庸或問引楊氏所謂『無適非道』之云，則善矣，然其言似亦有所未盡。蓋衣食作息，視聽舉履，皆物也，其所以如此之義理準則，乃道也。」曰：「衣食動作只是物，物之理乃道也。將物便喚做道，則不可。且如這箇椅子有四隻脚，可以坐，此椅之理也。若除去一隻脚，坐不得，便失其椅之理矣。『形而上為道，形而下為器。』說這形而下之器之中，便有那形而上之道。若便將形而下之器作形而上之道，則不可。且如這箇扇子，此物也，便有箇扇子底道理。扇子是如此做，合當如此用，此便是形而上之理。天地中間，上是天，下是地，中間有許多日月星辰，山川草木，人物禽獸，此皆形而下之器也。然這形而下之器之中，便各自有箇道理，此便是形而上之道。所謂格物，便是要就這形而下之器，窮得那形而上之道理而已，如何便將形而下之器作形而上之道理得！飢而食，渴而飲，『日出而作，日入而息』，其所以飲食作息者，皆道之所在也 。」）

instances of coherence: how the pieces fit together, and how it fits in with other entities, i.e., human desires to sit down. It is coherence as compossibility, i.e., it is possible for these pieces of wood to coexist with each other and with the world in such a way that the pieces of wood can be put together in this way so as to make possible another thing, the sitting down of a person. Of course this facilitates human flourishing, production and reproduction, and so on—a little piece of Ren, which is Impartial, which is the Copotentiality of all things. The greater coherence of the chair with the rest of the world—its use, the way it fits together with things which are not chairs—is the direct content of the Li. Li as double coherence, as second-order coherence necessarily also involving those among human desires that are themselves coherent with each other, i.e., "harmonious," i.e., remaining expressive of the Center (humans are, after all, the finest and most sensitive qi, the most balanced and complete representation of Li or Taiji in any concrete entity), an enabling of further coherences, a compossibility of planks of wood and the human desire to sit. These precede the chair, and the chair depends on it, in the sense that no chair would occur without this compossibility. Simply to describe it as unmodified "coherence" obscures the sense in which it might precede its concrete existence. But by redescribing this sort of coherence as compossibility and even copotentiality, we see immediately in what sense it is still the standard idea of coherence (internally and externally), but with the extra sense of its place in the total context of all existing and all future things, the role it is able to place among whatever already exists to help maximize the unity of things, the interconnection of things, the production and reproduction of things, the balance of things, the coexistence of maximal things, the maximization of functions, of life, of impartiality, of mutual non-numb sensitivity of one thing to another—in short the impartiality and oneness-in-manyness which is Ren, which is Li.

More specifically, the Neo-Confucians define value in terms of the "continuance of the process of alternating Yin and Yang," (*jizhizhe weizhishan* 繼之者謂之善) or "production and reproduction without cease,"（*shengsheng buxi* 生生不息） derived from the "Great Commentary" to the Book of Changes, already quoted above. To have the potentiality to produce and be produced in coherence with all that exists, including both historical particular facts and general conditions of Heaven and Earth, is to have a Li. This "togetherness" also implies a kind of unity that is productive, including a unity with human nature and human inclinations. As

Cheng Hao had indicated in his "Discourse on Recognizing Humaneness," "this Li" is the Li of Humaneness which is a coherence both of the human being with all things and a coherence between Humaneness and the other three Mencian virtues (Ritual Propriety, Righteousness and Wisdom), all of which are in one sense contrasted to Humaneness and in another sense are included in its unity, are further extensions of it, even when they seem to oppose it: the continuation and growth of one thing into its apparent other. So to have a Li is to have a capacity, a potentiality, to be produced and produce, to exist and support other existences, in tandem with the rest of all things, as expressed most directly as the coherence with the human inclination manifest as Humaneness as the most comprehensive manifestation of the unity of this Co-productivity, as impulse to unify, to feel, to be unbiased, to produce and reproduce. It is noteworthy that, read in this way, Li in Neo-Confucianism means almost the same thing as the Buddhist "dependent co-arising" (*pratītyasamutpāda, yuanqi* 緣起) , which, as Emptiness, is precisely the primary meaning of the term Li in Chinese Buddhism. The huge difference of course is that in the Confucian usages the continuation of this collective productivity is the Good itself, while in the Buddhist usage it is (initially) what must be understood and in some sense seen through or transcended to achieve the stated goal of the end of suffering. In Confucianism, we may say, it is directly and unqualifiedly what is to be continued, which is the Good itself, while in Buddhism it is initially precisely Samsara, the Bad itself. But when in later developments of Buddhist thought, this Samsara is seen to be precisely Nirvana, when all generation is seen to be already intrinsically quiescent because, precisely as dependent co-arising, they are already Empty, and thus they are the Good itself.

These considerations allow us to understand the specific sense in which both teleology and regularity are understood in the context of Zhu Xi's thought. The telos amounts to nothing more and nothing less than the impetus or at least the Compossibility without intent, of production and reproduction as coherent with all other existents both natural and cultural, which as we have seen really is underdetermined to an extraordinary degree: it simply means that, to the extent that the universe wants anything specific, what it basically wants is not to stop. "The Mind of Heaven and Earth is simply Li": Generative Compossibility, it "wants" to generate whatever is compossible with the prior existence of whatever has already existed. Derivatively,

this requires the orderliness embodied in the specificity and constraint of each generative event, which requires something that can rightfully be described as a sort of mindedness. This ceaselessness generativity requires a certain structure: the fourfold dialectical order modeled on the Yin-Yang process of growth and decay.

To the extent that it is "wanting," what it wants is no more and no less than not to stop anywhere or in any one form or as any final state. It resists reaching final equilibrium or steady state, which would amount, on this conception, to ceasing to exist.[32] The Neo-Confucian universe goes on forever, beginningless and endless. This infinity is more than an incidental piece of scene-setting; it modifies how we must understand the idea of telos here. The universe "wants" only to continue, and it continues via its coherence, its collective coexistences of contrasted qualities, states, and beings, productive in general Yin-Yang contrasts like male and female or like the generosity of Humaneness and the strictness of Righteousness, or the life-giving warmth of Spring and the death-dealing cold of Autumn. These things hang together in a way that produces and reproduces. Here we have something more like Spinoza's the infinitely changing but always self-maintaining conatus of the infinite mediate mode than like a conscious telos that singles some aims out over others; for any continuation is a partial fulfillment of the telos for production and reproduction. The determination of what is produced is regulated by, and its relative value adjudicated with reference to, the degree to which coherence is fostered and exemplified by any given production. That is, the more the totality of opposed virtues are present, or the productive combination of all things, is made operative in any deed or thing, the higher its value. So the reason horses give birth to horses and not cows is not due to the "impulse of production" or the universe's "intent to produce" as such, as a conscious and deliberate concept or aim, but rather the compossibility of production and reproduction, the Productive Compossibility of being a horse. These things hang together in a way that endlessly produces and reproduces. This is the opposite of a telos in the sense of a final state of perfection to which it is striving, and at which it will stop. It is the antithesis of the idea of an eschaton, or a final

[32] The premise here seems to be, as Cheng Yi insists (in an attempt to out-Buddhist the Buddhists emphasis on flux and impermanence), that to exist is to be in process: "Production 生 and change 異 only, not abiding 住 and no nothingness 滅 [the Buddhists claiming that process consists of all four]." (Citation)

judgment, or any single final sustained ideal condition. This is why Zhu Xi calls it "a nonmind mind," 無心之心 (not just "nonmind")--a telos that is no telos, an intention that is no (specific) intention.:

> All things under heaven, even the tiniest things, have mind. It's just that they also have [a preponderance of] places of insentience. For example, when a plant is turned toward the sunlight it grows, when turned toward the shade it shrivels—there is an element of liking and disliking in this. …. At the opposite extreme of the most vast, Heaven and Earth themselves have a nonmind mind."[33]

That last phrase, "the nonmind mind," gives us the key to understanding the Mind of Heaven and Earth. For it is just this that Zhu Xi calls the Mind of Heaven and Earth, which is identified precisely with the mind/intention to generate things.[34] What this amounts to is nicely clarified and summed up in Zhu Xi's general "Theory of Humaneness" *Renshuo* 仁說： "

> It is the generating of things that serves as the mind/intention of Heaven and Earth. But in the generation of humans and things, each obtains the Mind of Heaven and Earth as its own mind….This mind of Heaven and Earth has four virtues: origination, flourishing, benefit and consolidation, but origination unifies all four. They function processionally as the four seasons, but the energy of springtime growth pervades all four. Thus in what serves as the mind of human beings, there are also four virtues—humankindness, righteousness, ritual and wisdom--but humankindness includes all four. They emerge into function as the emotions of love, respect, appropriateness and differentiation, but the sensation of fellowfeeling runs through all four….There are those who say love is not

[33] …天下之物，至微至細者，亦皆有心，只是有無知覺處爾。且如一草一木，向陽處便生，向陰處便憔悴，他有箇好惡在裏。至大而天地，生出許多萬物，運轉流通，不停一息，四時晝夜，恰似有箇物事積踏恁地去。天地自有箇無心之心。

[34] 程先生說『天地以生物為心』，最好，此乃是無心之心也: "Master Cheng put it best: Heaven and Earth take generating things as their mind. This is non-mind mind."

> Humankindness, instead explaining the word Ren as referring to the mind's awareness….When they speak of the mind having awareness, this can be used to show that Humankindness [item 1] also includes Wisdom [item 4]. But this is not what Humankindness itself refers to…It is not only human beings who are embody the perfect consciousness and intelligence between heaven and earth. One's own mind is the mind of birds, beasts, grasses and trees. It's just that human beings are born through receiving the Balance (center) of Heaven and Earth."[35]

The Mind of Heaven and Earth is present only as all the finite minds in the universe, considered en masse, with no actual unified consciousness or unity of apperception apart from the minds of those beings—including even the "mind" of a brush, a stone, a plank of wood. In one sense, we might say that the entire Mind of Heaven and Earth becomes each finite mind, or rather, more accurately, becomes not each finite mind, which Zhu considers a quasi-physical Qi-activity, but the Nature of each finite mind: the Mind of Heaven and Earth as filtered through a particular Qi-configuration. The fourfold structure of continuing process of yin-yang coherence (origin-flourishing-benefit-storage, humaneness-ritual-righteousness-wisdom, spring-summer-autumn-winter, etc.) is the mark of this Nature, present in each. In separation from the minds of all beings, living and unliving, it is no mind. But it is these minds, and their own generative compossibilities, which is at once each specific generative compossibility (to generate the specific thing this being can generate in coexistence with all other things and in continuation of

---

- [35] 天地以生物為心者也，人物之生，又各得夫天地之心以為心者也。。… 蓋天地之心，其德有四，曰元、亨、利、貞，而元無不統。其運行 焉，則為春、夏、秋、冬之序，而春生之氣無所不通。故人之為心， 其德亦有四，曰仁、義、禮、智，而仁無不包。其發用焉，則為愛、 恭、宜、別之情，而惻隱之心無所不貫。。。。亦有謂愛非仁，而以心有知覺釋仁之名者矣。。。。彼謂心有知覺者，可以見仁之包乎智矣，而非仁之所以得名之實也。

the yin-yang process, but which can be anything at all, including brushes, poems, smoke) and the generative compossibility of all things, the simple impulsion to keep generating, to continue, to produce (*shengsheng*). It is every specific telos, and no particular telos: nonmind mind.

This can perhaps help us understand the surprising final specification in Zhu Xi's discussion of the Mind of Heaven and Earth collected in the Zhuzi yulei, cited above, where it is claimed that Heaven and Earth sometimes have a mind and sometimes do not. The specification of when it does and does not have a mind is highly revealing of what Zhu Xi thinks consciousness is and what it's for, which provides us with a stark contrast to anything that emerges under the aegis of the *Noûs as Arché* traditions. As quoted above, Zhu Xi tells us that when things are flourishing (in the growth process proceeding directly in thriving lifeforms budding and blooming during the spring and summer, for example), there is no mind; when things get dry and withered (for example, in the autumn and winter), and striving to regenerate, the universe has a mind. 萬物生長，是天地無心時；枯槁欲生，是天地有心時。 What is assumed here? Consciousness, it seems, goes with being thwarted and having to delay gratification, having a prospective accomplishment of the impulse toward generation of life, rather than in its immediate satisfaction, which, it is implied, requires no mindedness. Mind in the sense of consciousness seems to be a kind of Plan B for when the immediate gratification is thwarted. This arranges the consciousness and unconsciousness diachronically, along the lines of the four seasons or the four virtues or the four phases of productivity in the Book of Changes. It is noteworthy that in this scheme "winter" correlates with Wisdom: the storing up of resources during a time when the direct satisfaction of the impulse of growth is temporarily obstructed.

This idea is particularly intriguing, although it seems added to the discussion almost as a throwaway, an afterthought. For it exposes certain presuppositions about the nature of consciousness that inform the previous discussion, and perhaps give us a sense of in what sense the Cosmos may be called both conscious and unconscious. Zhu Xi seems to take it for granted that there is something less than ideal about consciousness; far from being the sign of the highest or most perfect being, it is rather a sign of a problem, an imperfection. This assessment of the status of consciousness is, in a deep structural sense, the real hallmark of ontological atheism.

For as we have seen, the story of Western theism begins with Anaxagoras' claim that thinking mind (*Noûs*) is the real first cause, Arché, of all things[36]—the doctrine that Plato has Socrates so excited about in the Phaedo, and arguably the program for intelligent design fulfilled speculatively in the doctrine of the demiurge in Plato's *Timeaus*, and, also arguably, the deep source of the ascendancy of Christian monotheism in later Hellenist culture within the Roman Empire. Schopenhauer regarded consciousness as the "foreign relations office" of the organism; something relatively superficial and employed for handling relatively difficult negotiations between various persons. Nietzsche had a similar view, noting that consciousness only arises and gets involved in times when instinct fails, when new and not immediately solvable problems arise that require deliberation[37]—as in Zhu Xi, it is a sign of a problem. So on this crucial question of the status and function of consciousness as such, Zhu Xi arguably has much less in common with ontological theism than with arch-atheists Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. But the difference between Zhu Xi and the arch-atheists is that for Zhu Xi this aspect of difficulty, of the thwarted and obstructed life which requires and produces consciousness, is not a kind of going awry or degeneration as it seems to be in Nietzsche at times, nor something with an ontologically second-rate status as it is in Schopenhauer; on the contrary, it is integrated into Zhu Xi's general picture of coherence between direct and indirect expressions of life. The relation between unconsciousness and consciousness is exactly correlative to the relation between Humaneness and Righteousness, or between Spring and Autumn. Humaneness and Spring and Unconsciousness are directly the Good, the direct and full expression of the smooth harmonious coherent totality of the impulse and compossibility of productivity. But Righteousness and Autumn are the reverse but necessary alternate forms of expressing and completing what begins as Humaneness and Spring (harsh punishment and harvest as opposed to love and warmth and sprouting growth). Righteousness is 1) the opposite of Humaneness, 2) an alternate form of Humaneness, and 3) a component included within Humaneness, and 4) the completion of

[36] See also Schopenhauer, Ibid., p. 269.

[37] See for example Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), Section 11, pp. 84-85: "Consciousness is the last and latest development of the organic and hence also what is most unfinished and unstrong. Consciousness gives rise to countless errors that lead an animal or man to perish sooner than necessary….If the conserving association of the instincts were not so very much more powerful, and if it did not serve on the whole as a regulator, humanity would have to perish of its misjudgment and its fantasies with open eyes, of its lack of thoroughness and its credulity—in short, of its consciousness…."

Humaneness. The cold harvest of Autumn is 1) the opposite, 2) an alternate form, 3) an included component, and 4) the completion, of the warm sproutings of Spring. And in an analogous way, Consciousness is 1) the opposite, 2) an alternate form, 3) an included component, and 4) the completion, of the perfect harmony and smooth functioning of unconsciousness. Unconsciousness is root, and the whole; consciousness is the branch, and the part.

And I think this is our key clue for understanding why Zhu Xi insists that Heaven and Earth must be considered both conscious and unconscious. Consciousnesses arise within the total process of Heaven and Earth in the same way that Autumn must arise from Spring, as an expression of Spring itself as the impulse of generation, for generation must reach completion to be real generation. Unconsciousness can only do what it does if it goes through a phase of consciousnesses. This consciousness appears at first glance regrettable, a necessary evil; but Neo-Confucian wisdom teaches that it is as good and as necessary as Autumn and harsh Justice, for these apparent opposites too are really parts and expressions and completions of the sproutings of Spring and the warm love of Humaneness. Thus Zhu Xi still wants to claim that Heaven and Earth have consciousness in some sense, and must have them. In what sense? Minimally, as in the passage translated above, in that it is what is manifested in and as the conscious minds of each animal and thing as its own mind, nonetheless never ceasing to be a portion or manifestation of the one mind of the Cosmos. Granting that Zhu Xi seems to allow "minds" here even for inanimate things (since he lists this as a third category, above and beyond humans, plants and animals), the totality of minds present at all points of space, in the Qi of Heaven and Earth, is this collectively conscious mind of the Cosmos.

Pushing this further, we may speculate that the totality of all conscious minds is all there is to the conscious aspect of the Mind of Heaven and Earth, and that as totality, considered as one, this mind is not conscious. In other words, an unconscious whole is made up of conscious parts, such that this totality can be described as either conscious or unconscious. This perfectly matches the relation between Humaneness and the other three virtues: the totality is Humaneness, but the individual components are only one-fourth Humaneness. The universe is unconscious, but the individual components of the universe all have their individual minds. The lack of distinction between singular and plural makes this a rather natural way for Zhu Xi to

express such an idea: the one mind of Heaven and Earth is really just a way of saying the (many-)mindedness of individual beings, which however do not add up to a single mind with a single purpose; the universe has no consciousness of the kind any animal being has, which is predicated on a particular distinct Qi-endowment. However, there is an important sense in which this is totality is also a oneness, justifying the phrase "one mind of Heaven and Earth": it is a harmony of precisely the kind described by the term Li: coherence, copotentiality, Productive Compossibility. That is wherein the "oneness' of the "One Mind" of Heaven and Earth resides, not in anything like the oneness of consciousness or unity of apperception. This is why Zhu Xi says above simply that "there is no mind other than Productive Compossibility (Li) itself." The mind of Heaven and Earth is the Productive Compossibility of Heaven and Earth, which is unconscious *wuwei* expressing and completing itself in its opposite, the conscious, *youwei* minds of individual living beings. The many are the one and the one are the many, just as in the case between individual Li and the totalistic Li which is the Taiji. But just as the individual Li cannot be viewed as mere dispensable "epiphenomena" of the one Taiji, any more than Righteousness is a mere dispensable epiphenomenon of Humaneness, consciousness is not a mere dispensable epiphenomenon of the more primary unconsciousness, as it seems to be in Nietzsche or Schopenhauer. Unconsciousness requires consciousness to complete itself; they are parts of a single inseparable whole, although it is unconsciousness, not consciousness, which has the privileged place as the most direct expression of the character of the whole as both being and as value.

The peculiar intimacy between Heaven and Humans, and the difference between humans and all the rest of creation, reflects this structure in a particularly telling way. It is not the personhood of man that gives him a special relationship to Heaven, or even a resemblance to Heaven, as would be the case when Heaven is itself construed as a maximal exemplar of personhood. It is not man's responsiveness to reasons, his purposive activity, this rational soul, often identified as the *imago dei* in theistic traditions, uniquely possessed by human beings, though potentially obscured or corrupted, and entirely lacking in all other animals and created entities. Rather, in line with the classical Confucian reflections on the purposeless effortless sincerity-integration-completeness (誠) of Heaven as what man strives through his purposes to

attain, Zhu Xi construes this relation as one of partiality and completeness. Heaven is simply Productive Compossibility itself, and its complete form is evident in the Nature of human beings as the four Mencian virtues of Humaneness, Ritual Propriety, Righteousness and Wisdom; these are construed as a process of productive sprouting, flourishing, maturation and preservation, exactly what is seen in the processes of animal activity and vegetable growth through spring, summer, autumn and winter. This entire Nature is not uniquely present in human beings; the entire nature, the entire Productive Compossibility, is present as the Nature of every entity in the world, mineral, vegetable or animal. But due to their differing bodies, their different "*qi*-endowments," this totality may manifest more or less completely in various beings. It is convenient to think of this as something like the relation between the Internet, present everywhere in its entirety, and the receptive capacities of various digital devices, in an environment where a strong signal is present everywhere: some get better reception than others, faster or slower load times, or have software allowing the opening of more windows at once and so on, but there is no difference in the signal itself. Whatever narrow content may be displayed on a particular screen does not represent all that is available, and the signal itself is not divided into parts: it is present entirely everywhere, even in a rock which can manifest none of it. On Zhu Xi's conception, "Sages" are people whose *qi*—whose body, whose digital device--is "balanced and clear" (正\中\清), allowing the entire fourfold process of Productive Compossibility to manifest fully and evenly. Other humans may be born with a body/device that is to some extent "muddied and one-sided," (濁/偏), to some extent obscuring or narrowing how the signal comes through, even though it is completely present there too. But the human body is unique in that even these can strive, through their cultivation, to attain balance and clarity; this is what all human purposive activity, all moral striving, the whole endeavor of human life consists in. But other creatures too, though they cannot change their qi-endowment, are without exception also possessors of the entire signal, the entire Productive Compossibility, the entirety of Heaven, as their own nature, by which they are born and live. Zhu Xi can be amusing in explaining this idea: the "one-sided" moral nature of animals can be seen in carnivorous mammals like tigers and wolves, whose bodies allow the Benevolence to shine through (as evidenced in their care for their kin) but not its extension into Ritual Propriety, Righteousness or Wisdom (as seen in their

inability to form societies or consideration for creatures beyond their own kind); ants and bees, on the other hand, are one-sided in the other direction: they have plenty of Righteousness (as seen in the role-directed duties that suffused their complex social organizations), but no Benevolence, no emotional empathy. All animals and all things have the entire Nature, and yet man is "special" in having the kind of body-device that can allow the full range of this nature of all things to shine through. For man to be truly man and truly Heavenly is for him to fully exemplify what all other things exemplify in a piecemeal way, to be a microcosm of Heaven and Earth and of the entire four-season cycle of productivity of new entities, including both the conscious and the unconscious, the animal and the human, the unthinking purposeless eros of Spring in Benevolence and the ponderous struggling purposivity of winter in Wisdom, the benevolence of the mammals and the dutifulness of the ants, which are merely subhuman or animal only because separated from one another, failing to represent the total Productive Compossibility between them that is their true Nature and source. They become distinctively human, fully reflecting the Heaven that is the Nature of all things, precisely through their preservation in the restoration of their unity.

So we have nothing like the teleology of ontological monotheism or its aftermaths here; the only telos is that of the single unconscious (but also secondarily but indispensably multi-conscious) process of production and reproduction, of Productive Compossibility to produce, among other things, conscious beings as a completion of the expression of its value, its unconscious self-satisfaction. As the "Great Commentary" says, "it is completed in human nature." Full consciousness is the completion, not the source, of the purpose that informs the cosmic process. Oddly enough, we may say that unconscious non-teleology requires conscious teleology to complete itself, rather than the other way around, as is the case in many monotheistic theodicies. It is *wuwei* that is ultimate and foundational, and that is expressed derivatively (though indispensibly) as *youwei*.

We may now recall Kant's speculations about teleology in the *Critique of Judgment*, discussed in online appendix A, supplement 11, "Europe's Missed Exit to Atheist Mysticism." Zhu Xi's form of teleology cannot be that of "teleological realism" in Kant's sense, either of the Stoic "world-soul" type or the Christian "transcendent creator" type: the origin of this purpose is

not a mind of any sort. Rather, we can revert to Kant's second alternative, the "ideality of purpose" found in Spinoza's idea of causally efficacious self-instantiating unity. It may not be immediately apparent why Kant would think that a prior non-mental unity with causal effectivity would count as a possible explanation of even apparent teleology, in any way that differs from the first alternative, that of mere chance. How does this even appear to approximate the "causality by concepts" which Kant stipulates as the basic meaning of teleology? The answer lies in Kant's breakdown of what a "concept" actually is. For one of the results of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that continues to inform his explorations in the *Critique of Judgment* is the breakdown of a "concept" into itself a form of unity. A concept is not a particular perception ever found in experience, but a condition for understanding particulars as particulars, which must be related to each other in specific ways to count as real particulars in our experience. In short, a concept is a way of unifying particulars. So if "teleology" really means "concept acting as the cause of the particulars that instantiate it," and "concept" really means "way of unifying particulars," the possibility of as it were skipping the middle man of mental concepts becomes available: the appearance of teleology might be due to a causally efficacious sort of unity that precedes and makes possible the appearance of the particulars available to perception and understanding, and this, in Kant's reading, is what Spinoza is suggesting, but which Kant rejects as "incomprehensible." Spinoza would disagree, of course. Zhu Xi, though sharing with Spinoza a commitment to the idea of being as maximally inclusive unity and as productivity, comes to these problems with a completely different set of presuppositions and premises. But it seems that he, and Confucianism in general, would disagree as well.

2. Buddhism as Ultra-Atheism

Buddhism begins as a sort of cosmic version of Compensatory Atheism. The cosmos is meaningless and left to its own aimless drift it tends toward suffering. No one created it, no one controls it, and it leads to no good. Buddhism begins as a rebellion against this default condition, which by will and design and purposive practice devises a project and a program to shape these available materials toward our own sentient goal, the end of suffering, even though these

materials were by no means designed or created to serve as tools in the quest to end suffering. The universe has no purpose, and thus is always undermining all our purposes, all our desires. In response, we set up a way to use our purposes to fulfill our goal of freeing ourselves from suffering.

But the specific way in which it conceives the only possible way to achieve that goal complicates the picture, introducing a dimension that begins to approach, initially in a rather ambiguous way, Emulative Atheism. For it turns out that the only way for us to attain our self-imposed purpose is, in a certain way, by coming to be more like the rest of the universe in its purposelessness, its non-unity, its desirelessness, its lack of a controller, to recognize that this is our own real condition as well. We must overcome attachment, desire, the attempt to be self as controller—just as the universe always has been free of attachment, desire, purpose, a controlling self. So on the one hand we are to become as unlike the purposeless suffering universe as possible, and in another sense we are to do so by becoming more like it. Not only that, but our very attainment of this overcoming cannot be done in the usual overcome-y way to which we are accustomed in our pursuit of purposes: Buddhism begins as the assertion that neither of the two extremes of indulgence of our desires nor suppression of our desires can ever work, these being the two extremes rejected by the Buddha in his discovery of the "Middle Way." The second of these is precisely the direct control of desire, the desire to rule over our desires by making the end of desire and suffering a direct goal to be achieved by our own will and agency. We cannot even use our controlling self to overcome our controlling self. Rather, a complex indirect accomplishment of the purpose is prescribed, involving the Eightfold Noble Path of setting up various conditions and enhancing direct awareness of the uncontrollable without trying to control it, letting go by means of a middle mode between activity and passivity, detaching the cycle of purpose from its psychological fuel so that it gradually starves and fades away.

Thus does pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism occupy an interesting problematic that stands between Emulative and Compensatory atheism, or rather that combines them and works their tension in various ways. The ironic premise is that it is just by trying to be unlike the universe—to be completely personal, in-control, purposive—that causes our suffering. So we use a special subset of that purposivity—the Buddhist path with all its deliberate practices—to get from

purposivity to the purposelessness of the cosmos. The Buddhist path is thus compared to a raft, used to get beyond the need for a raft: purpose is the means, purposelessness is the end. That purposelessness, it turns out, is only a problem when we are trying to force purpose upon it.

What is clear, however, is that both of these elements—the Compensatory and the Emulative--are deeply, radically atheist, and the manner in which they are combined here is even vociferously anti-theist. Our attempt to live as if the personal is the ultimate, that the purposive is the ultimate cause and end, what we've identified as the essence of monotheism, is the problem. Our use of purpose is a necessary evil to get beyond the purposive. The famous founding move of Buddhism, its unique contribution to world culture, is the shocking doctrine of Non-self (anattā), and its extension in the even more thoroughgoing doctrine of thoroughgoing universal Emptiness (śūnyatā). These are of course anti-foundationalist bombshells in the most straightforward sense, and it is obvious how they stand as radically challenges to the notion of God. Like the Daoist *wuwei*, they are ground zero for atheist religion: denials of the ultimacy of selfhood, of the ultimacy of the personal. These are radical rejections of the idea of the ultimacy of intention, will, purpose, the unity of the self, in principle and in every possible instance. Indeed, from the point of view of Non-self doctrine, the idea of God is a giant self, a giant error whereby, in denying the ultimacy of one's personal self, acknowledging that one is neither the source nor the end of what happens, one instead affirms the ultimacy of the Big Self as the source and end of all that happens. As a projection of the suppressed selfhood of the individual, the big Self God unfortunately has all the problems of selfhood that were the basis of the Buddhist critique: attachment, greed, anger, delusion, selfishness, bias, power-hunger, systemic distortion of everything it touches. That's just what selves do, whether the small self of a person or the Big Self of God.

Selfhood is viewed as thoroughly problematic, both an erroneous inference and a moral disaster, as well as the single biggest obstacle to true spiritual progress. This is because Self is defined here in terms of power: self means a single cause capable of bringing about an effect unassisted, and thus able to sustain its own existence over time independently of other conditions. This self Buddhism emphatically denies, stipulating instead that a single cause never produces a single effect, nor does a single cause produce multiple effects, nor do multiple causes

produce a single effect, but rather that all that exists is causal in the specific sense of multiple causes producing multiple effects: dependent-co-arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*).[38] A "self," as an agent capable of single-handedly producing any effects, as an independent causal power, is thus impossible. But all desire is really desire for selfhood in just this sense. Dependent co-arising means not only multiple causes for each effect, but multiple effects for each cause. Any desire that wants to make things be just one certain way, to the exclusion of other ways, is thus always going to be contravened by this inexorable involvement in otherness. Thus all desire is doomed, and suffering is the fate of every desire. The only escape from suffering, then, is the escape from this misguided desire, the desire for selfhood embodied in every particular desire for a definite single end. The denial of self is thus equivalent to Spinoza's denial of free will, and as in Spinoza it goes hand in hand with a stipulation that purpose is a by-product of desire, and desire is an ephiphenomon of a prior purposelessness, and that our liberation—indeed, our freedom in a deeper sense—depends on getting back in touch with that purposelessness, that desirelessness, that lies at the bottom of our desires and purposes. The question for Buddhism becomes how this relation between desire and desirelessness, person and personlessness, samsara and nirvana, is to be understood. Is the former to be overcome and abandoned, redissolved into the latter? Or is to to be merely seen through, but allowed to continue? Or perhaps are the two finally to be seen as converging, as two sides of the same coin—perhaps even as one side of the same coin?

Early Buddhism allowed the desire for liberation to stand as a temporary exception to its stricture against desire; compared to a raft, it was a temporarily necessary means for transcending all other desires, and finally, in a kind of self-overcoming structure of planned obsolescence, a means of transcending and abandoning itself as well. This desire for liberation was the basis for commitment to the Buddhist path, which culminates in the practice of a contemplative method known as sati, mindfulness. The classical formulation of this practice is found in the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness": mindfulness of body, of feelings, of mental states, and of mental objects. The procedure to be applied to these varied objects of experience is

[38] For the classical formulation of pratītyasamutpāda specifically as multiple causation, see Buddhaghosa, *Vissudhimagga*, trans. Bhikku Nanamoli (Taipei: Buddhist Educational Foundation [reprint from Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre edition], 1999), 623, para. 106: "Here there is no single or multiple fruit of any kind from a single cause, nor a single fruit from multiple causes, but only multiple fruit from multiple causes."

perhaps most pithily described in the words of the Buddha in the Udâna: “In the seen will be merely what is seen; in the heard will be merely what is heard; in the sensed will be merely what is sensed; in the cognised will be merely what is cognised.”[39] This means experiencing sense-data precisely as sense-data, rather than collating them with each other to form a concept of a reattainable object in the world—or rather, to also be aware of this thing-constituting act of cognition itself as another temporal and conditional event enacted by one’s own cognitive apparatus. What is left is a clear real-time awareness of the conditional arising and perishing of all experience as experience, thereby directly apprehending each experience’s (1) multiple causality, (2) lack of self, (3) not being under anyone’s or any single thing’s control, (4) saturation with the other-than-what-is-desired, (5) inherent suffering. By this kind of precise perception, particularly as applied to feelings (i.e., pain, pleasure, and hedonically neutral sensations), desire is disincentivized, and eventually withers away. A feeling of pleasure, which is what serves as an incentive for desire in ordinary inattentive experience, is noticed to be no more and no less than just a feeling of pleasure—it implies nothing about a thing that can single-handedly and unconditionally cause that pleasure, that could be reattained to the exclusion of other things and feelings. Indeed, if attended to closely enough, it is found to be always-already saturated with the feeling of displeasure that is intrinsic to it as a conditioned and impermanent sensation: the pleasure of gaining it is always pervaded by the necessarily concomitant and proportional pain of the prospect of losing that very gain. Feeling pleasure may still lead to a desire to feel it again, but that is a separate fact to be perceived, and no less automatic and conditional than the feeling itself.

All this is attractive to modern secular observers: it sounds a bit like psychological analysis, a bit like standard scientific reductionism in general. Would-be Buddhists in the West are often rather less friendly to ideas like karma and especially the proliferation of very godlike Bodhisattavas in the Mahāyāna, up to and including the final insult, the seemingly very monotheistic sounding “father of the world” and “possessor of the world,” the one Buddha of this world, the Ancient of Days, who suddenly is slipped to us in the Lotus Sūtra and Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra—superstitious unverifiable stuff, just the kind of stuff we were trying to

[39] *The Udâna*, trans. John D. Ireland (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1990), 20.

get away with when we turned to this rational religion and away from those wacko religions of revelation and invisible deities. Superstitious and unverifiable they may or may not be. But be that as it may, I would like to establish here that in fact they are not just the kind of stuff we were trying to get away from if we were against the idea of God. They are still very much in line with the anti-God thrust of Non-Self and Emptiness. Let us take a look at them one by one.

3. Karma Versus God as Animistic Atavisms

At first blush, the Buddhist notion of karma appears to be just as problematic a notion as is the notion of God, judging by the standards we have laid out in this work. Not, that is, because it is empirically unverified and, by scientific standards, unlikely to be literally true, but rather, 1) because like the idea of *Noûs* as the only cause, intentional mentation as the real efficient cause of physical realities, which we located as the key idea of theism, is asserted here though in a radically different form, but still excluding the notion of purposeless physical causality, and 2) because this idea is emphatically linked to the idea of a moral interpretation of existence, to postmortem reward and punishment for intentional action. Indeed, the Buddhist version of the idea of karma seems especially susceptible to this charge, insofar as the Buddha famously restricted the idea of karmic efficacy specifically to intention (*cetanā*), in pointed contrast to, say, the Jain view of karma, where both intentional and unintentional acts have karmic effects. As in Anaxagoras, as in Socrates and Plato, as in monotheism, for Buddhism, it would seem, purposeful intention is what really makes things happen.

But granting that something of the same impulse, the same doubts, the same shortsightedness—the basic animistic idea-- may have been behind this rash claim (and excluding for the sake of argument those few places in the Pali canon where the Buddha allows that there are also other forms of causality, for example, wind, rain, weather, etc.—and the emphatic disavowal of this idea in Mahāyāna texts like the Mahaparinirvana Sutra), we must note here that the monotheist and proto-monotheist versions of this claim have wildly different consequences from the Buddhist version. This is due to several differing parameters:

1) The one-many distinction: in the monotheist versions, the cause of all things is not just intentional purposes produced by mind, but a single unified mind's intentional purposes; in the Buddhist version, it is any and every intentional purpose, of infinite diverse sentient beings, over infinite time that combine to produce any effect. That is, the cause of things is a hugely complex and diverse combination of a huge number of discrete, finite, desirous, even deluded intentional impulses, not unified into a master plan, not directed in a particular way.

2) the self-other distinction: what is of course most distinctive about the karma idea is that the intention that makes you the way you are is thought to be not the intention of another, whether a single all-ruling God or a particular spirit that happens to being holding sway, but yourself. That is, the main cause of you being one way or another, or encountering one or another event, even on the crudest and most literal-minded interpretation of this doctrine, is an intention that was formed in a mind that was in some sense yourself—strictly speaking, that bears the same relation to your present intentions as your own past intentions of a year ago bear to it. This means that any conflict between what you presently want and what you are getting is indeed to be interpreted as a conflict between two contrary intentions, but not between two conflictual beings or two conflictual wills; it is not God's will versus my will, "thy will not mine be done," but a self-conflict no different in kind from that which is happening at any moment of conscious life; a conflict of past and present intentions. The recalcitrance of reality against which my present will is butting its head is not intentionless matter, or chance, or chaos, or Dao, to be sure, but it is also not an alien will (divine or otherwise) opposing my own: it is merely an inner conflict among my own multifarious desires and intentions at different points in time.

Indeed, this leads us to 3) the direct-indirect question. For though it is true that in the karma theory it is intention that really makes things happen, what it makes happen is not what is intended! That is, the efficacy of intention is not direct: what my intention brings about is not the thing it consciously conceived and desired and intended, but an undesired by-product. This is really due to the fact that the efficacious intentional purposes in this case are not infinite and omnipotent, as in the God/*Noûs* case, but finite and confused and not really in control: indeed, they most often backfire and produce the opposite of what they intended. No single cause is sufficient to cause an effect, and this applies to every particular act of intention as well. My

desire to harm others (and the purposeful action of then going ahead and doing so) in a past life may be the cause of my being harmed in this life; but what I desired was not to be harmed, but rather to harm.

The upshot of all this is that the animism of the karma idea, the premise that purposive consciousness is the cause of all reality, has precisely the opposite effect of the animism of the God idea: it actually leads to a reconfiguration of the idea of purposive consciousness itself. That is, it requires us to feel and experience our own conscious purposes differently, and to reevaluate the very idea of having a purpose. Purposive consciousness is shown to be self-defeating! That is the upshot of the Buddhist theory of karma: it is not to celebrate the animistic power of intentional consciousness, karma, to serve as the cause of all outcomes; rather, the whole point is to escape the dominion of karma, the delusion that grounds the perpetuation of karma, by realizing that purposive intention is always self-defeating. This is precisely because of the multiplicity of causes that is the real matrix of all effectivity: what makes things happen is never any one thing, and hence never any one intention. Thus all intentions are doomed to be frustrated: none ever gets precisely what it wants. This is why conditionality as such is suffering, in spite of the animistic premise that purposive conscious is what really brings things about: because whatever kind of causality may be in question, whether unconscious material causes or mathematical groundings or formal causes or conscious intentions, dependent co-arising is the name of the game: multiple causes, multiple effects, always, everywhere, no exceptions. That is why all action is suffering, that is why the real root of the problem is desire itself, the insistence that one's intentions be sufficient to bring about precisely what they intend—i.e., the problem is conscious intention itself. Buddhism is an attempt to escape the tyranny of purpose, rather than to consolidate or justify it.

This means that the moral implications of these two versions of animism are wildly different. First, and most obviously, the God idea means that moral retribution is really something that is Good, is justified. Indeed, monotheists actually worship and praise the agent, the enforcer, the legislator of their own punishment. They are asked to adore their own hangman, in the name of justice. The Buddhist case is the opposite: they are not singing hymns of praise to karma, but on the contrary urgently seeking to escape it. It is not an agent with whom one has an

interpersonal relationship of any kind; one cannot even hate it, let alone love it. But one thing is perfectly clear: it is a drag, this "justice," this constant inescapability of the consequences of intentions, and our whole endeavor has to be to get rid of it.

Further, the multiplicity of causes and infinite of past and future time means that any moral consequence is always in principle reversible, always part of a larger story—and hence that moral exhortation is always only provisionally valid, within some limited local context. This suffices to provide a handle to social morality (and we may assume that any doctrine that survives over a long period of time must have been perceived to have delivered something of the sort), but also undermines the possibility of any total control on the part of wielders of the karma doctrine. X may lead to consequence Y, but Y is also a cause which leads to consequence Z, which means X also in some way contributes to consequence Z. If X is an evil intention and Y is a painful consequence, but Z is a pleasant consequence, this means that it is true that there is karmic retribution of X, punished by bad result Y, but also that X was rewarded, when combined with other causes (as is always the case), by pleasant consequence Z. And so on ad infinitum. We see many many examples of this kind of moral complexity even at the most popular level of Buddhist lore, and we will see this idea deployed to great effect in texts like the Lotus Sutra below. We may note here how the diametrically opposed idea of a Last Judgment comes to fit so snugly into a monotheist picture of the world, almost inevitably: time may not go on forever, because consequences have to be given a single moral valence, and this requires a final point of adjudication. The oneness of God and the oneness of the final judgment go hand in hand.

4. Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas as Promethean Counter-Gods, Whether Real or Unreal

The superhuman bodhisattvas of Mahāyāna Buddhism, as objects of devotion, granters of prayers, and purveyors of supernormal salvific powers, raise many interesting questions in the philosophy of religion. Basic Buddhism had always unproblematically accepted the existence of all kinds of gods and spirits who were capable of influencing human affairs as part of the samsaric economy. It was in the saintly realms of so-called Nibbanic Buddhist practice—the mainly monastic practice of meditation and cultivation of wisdom for the sake of attaining

Nirvana and transcending all karma and rebirth, rather than the much more widespread lay practices of seeking to improve karma and gain improved rebirths--where these gods and their supernatural powers became less directly relevant; the saints themselves neither depended on these gods nor aspired to become them. Whether the gods existed or not seemed to play no important role in the key mechanisms of the scheme of salvation—and perhaps this was part of the point of the indifferent attitude to either establishing or denying their existence.

The Bodhisattvas, however, are not gods. They are sentient beings who have given rise to bodhicitta, the aspiration for Buddhahood, as opposed to the aspiration merely for the end of suffering and of rebirth in Nirvana, the state known as Arhatship. That means they voluntarily stay in the world out of compassion for sentient beings, reborn again and again, through the accumulation of their practice and experience gradually gaining the power to assume whatever form is most beneficial for leading both themselves and other beings closer to achieving Arhatship or Buddhahood (depending on the aspirations of those beings). They were once deluded. They have their past, their karma. You can invoke them to help you. They are not omnipotent, but very powerful. They have effectively infinite time to deliver the promised help, so their help and non-help are empirically indistinguishable. Often and in general, they do not presume to provide their specific help if not asked for, certainly not to show themselves explicitly as the agents of the action, but their unconditional compassion extends to all. Invoking them alerts them that you are interested in being on the Buddhist path and acknowledge that Buddhist practice leads to extraordinary powers.

In most Mahāyāna sutras, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are (innumerably) many, not one, with particular elective affinities, and of course none of them are ultimate. As in a polytheism, they all revert to something beyond themselves, something non-personal and non-purposive, the Dharma-nature or Emptiness or Buddha-nature or Dharmakaya, of which these many personalities are alternate personal intentional expressions or realizers or aspects. Moreover, no one in the universe is a Buddha or a bodhisattva from the beginning; all begin as deluded, suffering sentient beings, and gradually gain the powers and virtues that make them fully supernormal bodhasattvas and Buddhas. In that sense, they are not even really thought of as supernatural: the whole idea is premised on the widespread ancient Indian belief that all living

beings have extremely malleable limits to their potential abilities, and that certain practices—usually meditation and ascetic deeds of one kind or another—can produce huge changes in a human being, not only in his subjective experience of the world but also in his powers. It goes without saying that this seems quite fanciful and unlikely by modern standards, and at present could only be believed on the basis of wholly unsubstantiated faith—no less unsubstantiated than monotheist faith in God. But what matters for us here is not the basis but the consequences of this unsubstantiated belief. The extreme malleability and multiplicity of transformations of which a sentient being is capable is an idea that consorts nicely with the specifically Buddhist ideas of karma ("action") as the determinant of what one is, and the further radicalization of this idea in the notion of Nonself, which suggests there is no central unchangeable core to any being: it is just the result of its prior actions, so it could eventually be anything. More to the point, for the purposes of our discussion here, is that in no way is the personal the ultimate, even when these deities intervene in very deliberate and providential-looking ways. Indeed, we may say that in the specifically Mahāyāna case, the assumptions that undergird the existence of these numberless bodhisattvas are the following very radically atheist premises:

1. Infinite time and space. As we have seen repeatedly, the notion of limitless time and space is again and again pitted against the notion of God, which, as we've just noted, tends naturally to a belief in a creation and an end of the world—and even in the case of Aristotle, who argues forcefully for the eternity of the world (much to consternation of medieval monotheist theologians), this infinity requires the additional limitation in space to make teleological form necessary, as against the creative power of infinity itself as proposed by the Epicureans. Thus in Buddhism there is no loophole to the uncloseability of all being. Being can never arrive at a final state, and can never have had an initial state. As in Nietzsche, we have some idea here that if the universe as a whole could arrive at a final state, that state would already have arrived. Conversely, given the Buddhist premise that no single cause can produce an effect, if the universe as a whole could have an initial state that was in any sense a unity, i.e., in any way monolithic enough to count as "a state," it could never have left that state.

2. No creator God, no single controller of the world. There is a Promethean dimension of the Mahāyāna, considered as a form of Compensatory Atheism. We are going against the grain

of what the universe does when left to its own devices. It has no purpose, but we set up a purpose for ourselves. Because there is no God, there is no one to stop us. Since ancient times, the gods have generally been the limiters, the one's who punish hubris, the ones who set the measures beyond which man cannot go, who want to enforce the division between humans and gods. We see this in both pagan and monotheist myth, e.g., in the stories of Prometheus and of the Tower of Babel. In a universe with no God, anything is possible—a prospect noted with horror by Dostoyevsky, deeply steeped in monotheist sensibility: if there is no God, everything is permitted. Is an evil superpower also possible? Yes. So we keep at our infinite task. Both bodhicitta (the aspiration for enlightenment) or the infinite malicious will are possible, and either one will, given infinite time, lead to acquisitions of the powers to carry it out in some cases. The only truth is impermanence, atheism: no victory can be final, not even that of evil. The will to finish the world, to reach an eschaton, is the only thing that we can exclude a priori. So there will always be room for this task, and for the increase of powers to accomplish this task. But the task itself will never be complete. (Can we construct from this an ontological proof for the existence of Bodhisattvas? It would be the flipside of an ontological proof for the nonexistence of God, ala Spinoza.)

3. Compassion as an epistemological category: I have had the thought of bodhicitta—the determination to become a fully-fledged bodhisattva, to do whatever it takes to acquire the necessary superpowers, and to bring liberation to all sentient beings without exception, to become a Buddha and allow all of them also to become Buddhas. If I can have this thought, however it may have come about, it stands proved that it is possible for it to occur. Given infinite time and space, then, I can assume that others have had it too. If others can have had it, given infinite time and space and no God, then infinite beings have had it. Since there is no God, there is no way to limit what is possible throughout all time. Thus, given the intention to discover a way to save all beings and acquire the necessary superpowers to do so, sometime someone will discover a way to do so. Those beings must exist. But since there can be no end, they will keep coming into existence eternally, and there will always be infinite numbers of them alive and working for the benefit of all sentient beings with all their supernormal powers at any given moment, and in every conceivable way.

So even if we take the Bodhisattvas in their most literal sense, as fully real beings in the world, functioning in realtime, we are dealing with a further advance of atheist premises, not at all a capitulation back into a modified form of theism. They remain part of the Compensatory Atheist project, as part of its paradoxical approach to eventual Emulative Atheism. But it is just in those forms of Buddhism where the relatively realist Abidhammic ontology was being replaced with a more thoroughgoingly anti-realist ontological position, usually associated with the Nagarjunian and *Prajñāpāramitā* motif of *śūnyatā* ("Emptiness"), that specifically Buddhist figures of supernatural power, the Bodhisattvas, begin to assume a much more prominent place in Buddhist thought and practice. This is surprising only if we assume that deities are conceived of as more real than ordinary reality, as having something to do with *ens realissimum* and even as guarantor of epistemological realness, on some sort of vaguely Platonic-Christian-Cartesian model. This would lead us to expect that that ontological skepticism and anti-realism would entail the rejection of gods and all other non-empirical realities, just as it rejects the reality of empirical presences that seem to be but are not realities, like tables and chairs and momentary dhammas, all of which are shown in this Buddhist context to be mere abstractions, mere conventional designations. Because we associate skepticism with Humean empiricism and reductive ideology-critique, we think of the deconstruction of selves and universals as inevitably related to the deconstruction of religious mythologies, above all a deconstruction of belief in unseen gods. But in Buddhist contexts, the linkage of an expanded cypto-theistic palette and a seemingly nihilistic rejection of all reality is not surprising. The Abidhammic realism was a realism of momentary non-personal events, which was decidedly hostile to the ultimate reality of persons, whether mundane or supermundane. In this sense, the realism of Abidhamma actually militated against the equal status of persons and gods, since they were looked on as more illusory than something else: i.e., persons were more illusory than the momentary impersonal dhammas. Once the Madhyamaka critique of the ultimate reality of dhammas is in place, however, the dhammas are put on equal footing with persons. Neither the person nor the impersonal elements into which personality can be exhaustively reduced through analysis is more ultimately real.

Personhood is made just as ultimately real as anything else—which is to say, not at all real, but this loses its bite if there is literally no exception: in the absence of a real, "illusory" ceases to be a pejorative. By pushing the Abidhammic derealization all the way to the dhammas themselves, space was opened for a stronger role for personal beings. Do gods exist? Do persons exist? Do miraculous wish-granting bodhisattvas exist? Prima facie, just as much as anything else does and doesn't. Previously, a table was less real than the dhammas that composed it, and a person likewise. Now, table, dhammas, person, gods, bodhisattvas are all equally real—that is, not ultimately real at all.

This move goes hand in hand, in Indian Madhyamaka, with the Two Truths doctrines, which consolidates the same result. For though the bodhisattvas are not ultimately real, they are as real as tables and chairs and you and me, and all those momentary dhammas into which they can be analyzed: they are conventionally real. In most forms of Two Truths theory, this applies to some but not all possible entities, and we end up with a relatively commonsensical notion of what counts as conventional truths. To some extent, this is a merely empirical question: tables and chairs are actual terms used by language communities, agreed upon and serving to facilitate communication, whereas perpetual motion machines and unicorns are not. In principle, the judgment on what does or does not count as real in the conventional sense is rooted in a pragmatic criterion concerning what does and does not facilitate liberation or serve as a means to reaching Ultimate Truth, which is to say, serve to reach beyond conventional truth. Conventional Truth is to be like a raft: it is a good raft if it makes rafts unnecessary. Similarly, a good and valid Conventional Truth is one which makes Conventional Truth no longer necessary. It must lead beyond itself. So tables and chairs and you and me count, since we need these ideas to communicate about Buddhism and get beyond all conventional truth. These things have actual efficacy, precisely as attributed to them, within the schema of conventional truth. The same must be true of the superpowered bodhisattvas: they must be in the world in exactly the same way as tables and chairs—not in the same way as unicorns and the ether and Atlantis and atoms and creator Gods are in the world (i.e., as mere false imaginings), for in Indian Madhyamaka, these are not even conventionally real. In this sense, there is a relatively strong claim about the bodhisattvas: they exist in a way Yahweh and Allah and Zeus do not, just as chairs and tables

exist in a way a perpetual-motion-machine and Atlantis do not. The bodhisattvas are really there and can really help you, while Zeus is not, just as you can really sit on a chair, but cannot really operate a perpetual-motion-machine or rent an apartment in Atlantis. Why? Because the Bodhisattvas are conventional truths that lead beyond conventional truth, that are useful in the project of realizing the non-attachment to purpose and person entailed in ultimate anti-realism and atheism, while Zeus and Yahweh and Atlantis are not. Here too we are situated in the same basic model paradoxically combining Compensatory and Emulative Atheism. The universe itself is deeply unowned, non-self, non-purposive, non-controlled. We mistakenly think otherwise, like a Compensatory or Emulative Theist, or a non-paradoxical Compensatory Atheist, and this is the cause of all our suffering—either because we ourselves are trying to achieve purposes of our own, or are projecting ultimate purpose onto the cosmos, or are seeing our own purposes as reflections of purposes built into the cosmos. We use Conventional Truth, including things like Bodhisattvahood and its elevation of purpose and Vow, to dispel that pernicious illustion, to be more like the godless universe, which frees us of our suffering and our purpose-obsessed delusions. The Two Truths is simply a clarified expansion of the Raft model that combined Compensatory and Emulative Atheism as means and paradoxical end.

5. Being Born On Purpose in an Atheist Universe

Buddhism can thus initially be categorized as a Compensatory Atheism designed to transcend itself into Emulative Atheism. This comes to play out in the Mahāyāna in the idea that there are indeed certain beings who are created by a single purpose, who are born because of someone's specific design for them to be born, whose creation as this or that entity is determined by a single specific prior intention, and whose existence is thus entirely rooted in and beholden to this single pre-conceived purpose. Bodhisattvas choose to be born in such and such a form: they are born in a particular body because they themselves intended to be so born. Moreover, Mahāyāna sūtras are not shy about saying that some of their readers might be precisely these Bodhisattvas—and that this is demonstrated by the very fact that they are reading that sutra! And in some cases, that this was precisely the reason, the purpose, that got them born here: so as to

re-encounter and help transmit the Mahāyāna as depicted in the sutra they are reading right now. The Lotus Sutra, of which much more below, after disclosing the idea that one might be a bodhisattva without knowing it, then floats the idea that anyone who gets involved with the Lotus Sutra in certain ways is in fact already from long ago one of these bodhisattvas who, although already having reached a stage of cultivation that would allow them to be born in various more glorious forms, or to be beyond rebirth altogether, have instead chosen pre-natally to be born as this lowly ordinary being, i.e., you who are reading this text, in order to practice and promulgate it in the world now. You were born with this purpose, which you yourself vowed to work toward before your own present birth, which is existentially fundamental, the actual ground of your being, the cause of your present body and circumstance and life, and which you can now discover after the fact and live in accordance with. To a very significant extent, such a conception overlaps functionally with the idea of purposive existence that might be entertained by a monotheist: you were born for a reason, for a purpose, and that purpose was the key factor in making you just as you are: to live a good and happy and "meaningful" life, what you must do is discover and fulfill this purpose that made you. In each of these instances, monotheist and Mahāyāna, there is perhaps at once something creepy and manipulative and something powerfully transporting and energizing—the very essence of religion as self-perpetuating ideological brainwashing, for better and for worse.

However, what is most notable here is how completely different the implications are in the monotheist case and the Buddhist case, simply due to their radically different premises. First, most obviously, in the monotheist case, the intention and purpose that created you, and that you must discover and live up to, are God's intention and purpose, not your own. You were created to serve someone else's aims—someone who is by definition "else" to you, someone who must be other than you in the strongest possible ontological sense, because the abyss between creator and created must be absolute. In the Buddhist version, on the contrary, the intention that created a pre-natal vow made by someone who is as much you and as much not you as the you of ten years ago: another version of the general neither-self-nor-different structure of causality and self-creation that Buddhism sees going on at every moment of existence. One is always creating oneself, becoming other, becoming an other who is also causally continuous to varying degrees

with one's present and past selves of yesterday and a trillion years ago, a continuity that is neither complete sameness nor complete difference (these two ontological conceptions of pure sameness and difference, construed as dichotomous, being precisely the deepest ignorance which all of Buddhism is aimed at overcoming). But the purpose that creates you as bodhisattva is not that of the ruler of the universe, but rather that of that constantly self-modifying stream of causal process that you are currently calling "you." You are asked to recognize yourself in it in the same way as you may recognize yourself in a forgotten diary from your youth: that was me, that was how I thought then, that is how I got here. I wanted to be born here as this person to take up this Buddhism again. That is what I'm here for. This obviously has some overlap with the "you were destined to this" form of recruitment that would apply also in the monotheist case, perhaps in a slightly Calvinist form, which might say in effect: "You should accept this because it was what was chosen for you before the creation of the world, the very fact that you're standing here listening to me preach proves that God put you here, and the twinge of acceptance you feel proves that you are and always have been one of the elect." In the Bodhisattva's case, however, the pitch is rather: "You should accept this because your very presence here proves that you already have accepted it, and that you have a deep investment in it, that you have already long ago fallen in love with these ideas, and that you set this up for yourself to find them again now." The sutra is a post-it note reminding a groggy man of his intended schedule for the day of his hangover, for fear he might have forgotten.

But the difference is further exacerbated by the nature of that schedule—what it is to be a bodhisattva—and the kind of universe it exists within. For the self-created purpose of the Buddhist exists in a universe that, once again, was not itself created for a purpose, and is not one cog in a larger universal purpose standing at the root of all existence: it is a temporary purpose, a purpose surrounded by purposelessness, and ultimately grounded in its ability to transcend all singular purposes (and in the case of the Lotus, not to discard all purposes but to embrace all possible conflicting purposes). It is again Compensatory Atheism writ large. This is an ingenious move, in that it can deliver the religious attractions of "living for a purpose" and answer the question "why am I here?" sufficiently to give this sort of "meaning" to those who may be in need of it, but without poisoning the universe with purpose into the bargain! The bodhisattva is

to think of his actual being as really deriving from the purpose embodied in his religious calling, just as must be the case for all creatures in a monotheistic universe—yet in this case without metastasizing into a domineering hegemony of one overriding purpose applying to all things. A bodhisattva makes no claim about what the purposes, or lacks thereof, of other living beings may be, whether they were born for any purpose and if so what that purpose is; she does not judge them to be at odds with their own real purpose if they should turn out to have completely other purposes from hers, or to recognize no purpose at all.

So it is not only that the nature of her religious vocation is intrinsically self-cancelling, designed to culminate in the deep openness to otherness bodied forth in the uncreated purposelessness of the real world of Emptiness, but also that even this temporary vocation itself is understood as a voluntary personal vow, one intentionality among many. The religious vocation will indeed become the center of gravity and guiding string of this person's life, inasmuch as it is credited with the causal primacy of a purposive self-creation: it is what she's here for, and causally speaking it is why she is here, literally. But the nature of the bodhisattva vocation, as demonstrated by this very structure of self-reminding and re-creation, is such that this does not translate into the literal fanatical monomania that goes with a monotheist notion of what purposive creation is, i.e., creation by the Self of Selves, God, a fully conscious, fully purposive, never-sleeping Being. God as creator is conscious and purposive from top to bottom, at all moments: agency is absolute, is the absolute principle. The self-creating bodhisattva, conversely, is self as non-self, non-self as self: her vow is itself a temporary emergent froth of agency in a sea of non-agency, itself illusory in the same way all other existences are, saturated through and through with non-agency, non-purposivity, non-self, with which it is in fact committed to reconnecting and reintegrating. Its purpose is to transcend the very dichotomy between purpose and purposelessness.

To put this point more technically, causality in Buddhism is never single-causality, and thus for Y to be caused by X is not the same as for Y to have all its characteristics fully determined by X alone, to be ruled by X. We may say that the whole point of monotheism is to conflate "creation" and "ruling." The whole point of Buddhism is to separate these ideas, to show that, while they appear to be synonymous due to the structure of our misunderstanding of

our own agency, the notion of self as creator and ruler of our own actions, projected into the notion of God or into the notion of Nature or world, in fact they are actually mutually exclusive, literally contradictory. Creation is not ruling. What creates is not what rules. Nothing rules, because nothing in isolation is able to create. This applies to purpose as cause as well: one's purpose does not rule over one in the same way that it would in an ontology where single-causality is taken as ultimate, and where agency for both God and man is modeled on this conception. The bodhisattva's vow is purpose as cause, but in the specifically Buddhist sense of causality. For a very advanced bodhisattva, it is perhaps the chief or decisive factor, but it can never be the only factor. This applies to the way it operates as well as its etiology: one does not expect everything to be arranged under the command of a purpose as a fully subjugated means to an end.

So even a bodhisattva who recognizes herself as self-created just to be here to do Buddhism will not need to do Buddhism all the time, or to instantly subjugate all other sprouts of intentionality toward the Buddhist end. For the bodhisattva's will is never ex nihilo, and never omnipotent: he vows what he vows explicitly in terms of a response to the prior and defining desires, beliefs, attachments, sufferings and needs of sentient beings, created by their own conflicting intentions. Both God and the bodhisattva's own prior will "work in mysterious ways"—in both cases the purpose is expected to be partially concealed at any time. But in the case of God, this is merely a consequence of the finitude of the creaturely intellect: it is not mysterious to God himself, because he is really fully in control of all the parts of the plan. It's just that we don't know all of them. In the bodhisattva's case, the mystery is the nature of the case: no one is fully in control, and no one can fully know what is happening or why. The epistemological and ontological conditions converge here: as it is is as one knows, always incomplete, and that incompleteness is fully present and immanent in the here and now of the bodhisattva's action, even of his control. Even in his own case, he, the creator of himself, did not know when he was born that he was the creator: the creating consciousness does not remain constant, transparent to itself, always present. This purpose of his own, which created him, is a past that combines with a present and with infinitely many other pasts, with infinite futures, manifesting anew in a new configuration at each moment, some of which reveal its purposivity

and some of which do not, and that irreducible multiplicity is its most fundamental being. The creator (the bodhisattva "himself"), like the created (also the bodhisattva "himself"), sometimes knows and sometimes does not, going through phases of forgetting and recovery as an intrinsically interactive and multiple being. In the theistic case, the epistemological and ontological conditions also converge, but only in God, and only in exactly the opposite way, as in both cases complete: real control and real knowledge are both always total in God. The believer on the other hand is epistemologically at odds with his own being: he has incomplete knowledge of his purpose, but his being is completely controlled by this unknown but absolute purpose.

The thinking of the theistic believer would thus be, "God created me in this body and life and situation in order to serve and know and love him: what is happening now doesn't look like it's leading that way, but really it is: God works in mysterious ways. What I need to do is always direct my consciousness toward fulfilling God's will, align my will with his. Whenever I don't, I am disobedient, and that is sin. Any time I'm doing anything other than obeying God's will, I'm falling away from the purpose that created me. I need to strive to do this all the time. He is watching and guiding me. If I'm sitting alone at home eating popcorn and watching a movie, I had better make sure it is in accord with his commands, and pleasing to him, and thus fulfils of the purpose which created me."

In contrast, the thinking of this kind of bodhisattva would be, "I created myself in this body and life and situation, through a vow in a previous life, in order to continue my self-imposed task of liberating all sentient beings from suffering. What is happening around me naturally doesn't look much like it's conducive to liberation from suffering, because it isn't—why should it be? It is mainly produced by the misguided activities of benighted sentient beings, precisely the ones I have vowed to liberate from precisely this. I should at all times try to open their eyes—and any time I'm doing anything other than working to liberate both self and others from ignorance and suffering, I'm falling away from the purpose that created me. All Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the universe are watching and guiding me. If I am sitting alone at home eating popcorn and watching a movie, I might be wasting time that should be spent energetically trying to liberate sentient beings. But just as possibly, I might be doing something

that will contribute to that task—for example, learning something about this community, about human psychology, about my own craving for pleasure and recreation and thus the craving of other sentient beings—all of which will no doubt become useful to the infinite task of liberating all sentient beings, in all their variety, that still lies ahead of me for countless eons. Because I cannot accomplish this task unilaterally, because it is remedial to a pre-existing condition of karmic delusion in infinitely diverse sentient beings, to whom I must learn to respond in the maximally appropriate and effective ways, I cannot expect immediate results, I cannot rush. This is a long haul, not in anyone's unilateral control, with an infinitely complex matrix of contingencies rooted in the idiosyncracies of infinite sentient beings, and there will necessarily be many pauses and detours, many episodes that I cannot yet know the meaning of or use for but which may be later skillfully brought to use as tools for the task. Since the task is infinite, the number and kinds of tools are infinite, and that means anything and everything can turn out to be a tool. Anything and everything can contribute to that task in all its multifariousness—and no doubt one of those bodhisattvas who is watching and guiding me has something analogous to this in his or her infinite experience of infinite lives, and knows how best to utilize it toward our shared task of liberating all sentient beings; I will hope for his or her guidance."

What is at stake here is what Nietzsche called the "innocence of becoming": the non-self-createdness and non-ultimacy of a purpose which nonetheless created you as you exist in your current state saturates existence with meaning, while also embedding that meaning in a surrounding structure of openness to other meanings, of ultimate purposelessness and meaninglessness. More searchingly, it points us back in its own way to the asymmetry of purpose and purposelessness noted in Part One: for it gives us a purpose to existence which at the same time discloses the non-dichotomy between purpose and purposelessness, rather than foreclosing this convergence of these opposites forever, fighting rather to separate them as perfectly and cleanly as possible, as both monotheism and more usual forms of Compensatory Atheism do.

It is in this context that we may further reconsider the implications of "compassion as an epistemological category," alluded to above. For this idea opens our view to a particularly tantalizing situation in the phenomenology of religion. Imagine that I am someone who feels that

no one understands me correctly, that I cannot explain myself to others, that my particular problems are so specific and hard to describe that I despair of anyone understanding or helping me. A monotheist can of course then suppose that God alone understands him, can solve his problem, can save him—since God created him, and is also omniscient and omnipotent. But a Mahāyāna believer could instead here make the vow to be the bodhisattva caring for all beings but especially attuned to people of his own type, however rare they might be, whenever they occur in the infinite future anywhere in the infinite universe. Though he does not presently know the solution to his own problem, and feels that no one else does either—indeed, that no one who has not experienced what he has experienced can even understand what he's going through—he vows to discover the solution, become a superpowered bodhisattva, and help liberate and resolve precisely this problem for others in the future. If he is irrationally obsessed with some random fetish, keeping rotting fish heads in his car for example, and cannot seem to resolve this problem or understand it, he vows to be the Bodhisattva of Fish Heads, specially attuned to the intricacies of Fish Head obsession and also to its solutions, discovered (he still has no idea how) only after eaons of contemplation, helping all those with this problem in the future. Now the more he commits to this compassionate vow, the more fully he embraces the endeavor of somehow—at present he has no idea how—acquiring this solution and the magical powers to implement it, not for his own sake only or mainly, but for the sake of others with precisely this sort of psyche and problem throughout the future universe, the more certainty he is entitled to feel that there are presently Bodhisattvas of Fish Heads, who in their previous deluded state were deluded in just the way he was, who were equally incapable of understanding themselves or solving their own problem but simply vowed to do so for others in the future, who understand his situation perfectly because they have lived it, who see his point, who take his side, not from an objective standpoint or the standpoint of an omnipotent creator, but from the standpoint of himself and his own peculiar and inexplicable obsessions and obstructions. The more committed he is to his own vow, the more evidence he has that it is indeed possible to be committed to this vow, to be willing to see it through and acquire the necessary powers at any cost. He is in essence praying to an apotheosized permutation of himself in his most intimate and uncommon aspects, and committed to saving other versions of himself, not in the general sense of "a person" or "a

sentient being," but in his precise form of trouble, idiosyncracy, and delusion. The religious experience created by this notion, fully and deeply atheist, profoundly egalitarian and yet self-tailored to each individual in the most intimate realm of his own private hell, all-embracing and yet individualistic, relativist and yet universalist, giving due consideration to each and all as both particular and universal, can easily be imagined to have profound experiential effects that are perhaps unique in the history of religious consciousness.

And as we've seen in several contexts already, with reference to Kant's Critique of Judgment, there is another name for the coextensiveness of purpose and purposelessness, of universal and particular: it is called beauty. This motif of the full identity of the opposites of being and non-being, of universal and particular, of relativism and universalism, as well as that of purpose and purposelessness, this ontological structure of beauty as the omnipresent texture of all possible existence, is perhaps most extensively developed in the Tiantai School, to which we have already often alluded. We must here pause to say a few more words about the treatment of the atheist Mahāyāna deites in that school, further exemplifying this point.

6. Tiantai on Bodhisattvas: Fully Real, Fully Unreal

There is only one school of Mahāyāna Buddhism that does not accept some version of either a One Truth or a Two Truths epistemology, stipulating that "truth" is of one or two kinds (e.g., Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth). That is Tiantai Buddhism, which instead posits Three Truths, three forms of truth, three senses in which something can be considered true. Tiantai, like most of the Two Truths advocates, is deeply committed to Nagarjunian emptiness dialectic, which attacks at its roots the most fundamental premises of all absolutism and naïve realism, that is, the sort of One Truth realism that is shared by almost all non-Buddhist epistemology, which takes it as axiomatic that there is only one kind of truth, that the term truth is univocal and fundamental, and that there is a straight dichotomy between true and untrue. Like Two Truths Buddhism, Tiantai rejects this. In Tiantai too, there are no ultimately real determinate entities, so the ultimate reality of bodhisattvas on the model of gods that simply exist, full-stop, as opposed to simply not-existing is out of the question. But Three Truths theory

changes the nature of Conventional Truth so that the easy Two Truths solution suggested above is no longer an option: it can no longer be the case that a bodhisattva like Avalokitśvera (Guanyin) is more real than Zeus, nor for that matter that a chair is more real than a perpetual motion machine. And yet Tiantai is deeply devoted to the religious significance of the interaction between ordinary mortals and these Bodhisattvas, especially Guanyin (Avalokitśvera). How can this work?

The crux of the matter has to do with the distinctive Tiantai handling of two seemingly only distantly related questions: the epistemological question of the subject-object relation, and the ethical question of compassion as part of the bodhisattva practice, embodied in the compassionate bodhisattva's relation to the suffering sentient being. These questions in Tiantai are one question: the question of self and other. The question is how a consciousness relates to what is putatively external to that consciousness, whether that is an object of cognition or another being serving as source of recognition, compassion and assistance. Another thing (object) or another self (bodhisattva)—in both cases, we are talking about the basic ontological question addressed by the Tiantai Three Truths. That question is the basic question of ontology: what does it mean to exist? What does it mean to be determinate? What is the nature of a determination for any finite entity, real or imagined, concrete or abstract? What does it mean for something to be X, as opposed to not-being-X? How does being X relate to not-being-X?

The Tiantai answer, which we've glanced upon several times above, goes something like this: To exist is to be determinate, to be finite, to have some among the set of all possible characteristics but not others, to be somewhere but not everywhere, to be sometimes but not all the time, to be some of what is possible but not all of what is possible. For it would be impossible to meaningfully claim "existence" for anything that did not meet these criteria, since its existence would ipso facto be indistinguishable from its not-existing. To exist is to be non-all, which is to say, to have an outside. But this having-an-outside, the necessary condition of all existence turns out be problematic, and ultimately unintelligible, even impossible: no unambiguously distinct and self-standing entities can arise in counterdistinction to "other" entities, including their putative causes, since it is logically impossible (according to Madhyamaka dialectics) to construe how it can both have an efficacious relation to its defining

or causal "other" and yet be genuinely and wholly distinct from it. The relation to an outside will thus be shown to be both the necessary and the impossible condition of all being. To describe this situation, and the convergence of this necessity and this impossibility, is the thrust of the Three Truths, which are a way of describing the always inconceivable relation of any self to any other, any inside to any outside, a relation that is deeply misconstrued in our ordinary consciousness, which bifurcates self from other and also, perhaps more importantly, bifurcates the necessity of otherness and the impossibility of otherness.

The relation between Guanyin and a sentient being is presented in terms of the category of "eliciting and responding" (*ganying* 感應). The basic model here is that the sentient being, through her suffering or devotions, "elicits" (*gan* 感) the bodhisattva Guanyin, who then "responds" (*ying* 應) to the sentient being with upayically appropriate sensations, circumstances, encounters or teachings. By definition these are different roles and different functions. Guanyin is not me, I am not Guanyin: to elicit is not to respond, to respond is not to elicit. How are these two different beings, the eliciter and the responder, related?

Tiantai's answer is emphatic: they are neither one nor different. By this is meant, as noted above, that their difference is at once impossible (Emptiness 空) and necessary (Conventionality 假)—and indeed that this necessity is just this impossibility, and vice versa (Middle 中). This is exactly what Tiantai says about any relation between two putatively different entities: cause and effect, mind and its objects, self and other, Dharma-nature and Ignorance, good and evil. In this case, the relation is explicitly not ordinary cause and effect, but specifically "eliciting and response." The form of "neither one nor different" taken here is explained as the "intertwining of the paths of eliciting and response" (*ganying daojiao* 感應道交) in the *Guanyinxuanyi* 觀音玄義, a work by Zhiyi, the founder of Tiantai, devoted specifically to this topic. Zhiyi here applies the straight Madhyamaka explanation of emptiness, through the negation of the tetralemma, regarded as exhaustive: the bodhisattva and the sentient being beseeching her cannot be the same, nor can they be different. The response of the bodhisattva to

the sentient being cannot be caused by only the sentient being, nor only by the bodhisattva, nor by both acting in tandem, nor can it be uncaused.[40]

That is just what it means to say that the bodhisattva and all experiences and thoughts about the bodhisattva are, like anything else, Empty: never actually produced as such, not an actual separable or self-standing entity at all. What then? "The sage (Guanyin), by means of the fact of everywhere equal non-dwelling, keeps free of any dwelling in the [sentient being's] eliciting (*shengren yi pingdeng wuzhu fa buzhugan* 聖人以平等無住法不住感), thus responding according to the triggers in whatever way is appropriate, that is all." Zhiyi presents the

---

Q: Are eliciting and responding one or are they different? If they are one, eliciting is responding, the ordinary deluded being is herself the sage (Guanyin). But if they are totally different, they can have no real relation. A: We must speak of the eliciting and the response as neither one nor different.
…. Q: The sage (Guanyin) is what is elicited; the ordinary deluded person is what does the eliciting. The sage is the responder, while the ordinary person is the responded-to. The eliciter is not the elicited, and the responder is not what is responded to. So how can you claim that "the courses of eliciting and response interpenetrate 感應道交 (and thus are neither one nor different)"?
A: The elicited is actually without any eliciting; the term "eliciting" comes only from the side of the eliciter. Thus the sage is described as the elicited. The responded-to is actually without any response; the term "response" comes only from the side of the responder. Thus the ordinary person is described as responded-to. Further, being-elicited just is the responding, and responding just is being-elicited, and likewise being-responded-to just is eliciting, and eliciting just is being-responded-to. Thus there is neither actual eliciting and responding, nor a real difference between the eliciting and the responding. In this way response and eliciting are different though not different, i.e., the sage is given the designation of the responder just by eclipsing the idea of being the elicited, while the ordinary person is given the designation of the eliciter just by eclipsing the idea of being the responded-to. Thus we say the paths of eliciting and response are interpenetrating. But we can further critique this explanation. If there is actually no difference between eliciting and responding, why is it that now we say the sage eclipses the side of eliciting and the ordinary person eclipses the side of responding, rather than the other way around? If you could reverse them, then there would really be no difference between the sage and the ordinary, but if not, they are in this sense truly different—how can we say they are not different? Moreover, if the eliciting can be called the eliciting in spite of having no actual eliciting to it, why can it not just as well be called the responding? If the responded-to has nothing actual to it, why not call it the elicited instead? If you could do this, then there would be no eliciting and response at all, but if you cannot, they are clearly different. How can we say they are not different? A further difficulty is the following: if we take the eliciter to be the responded-to, and the elicited to be the responder, this is the idea of being "self-caused" (the first of the four alternatives denied by Madhyamaka Emptiness critique, i.e., just by eliciting itself, there is response, eliciting is the sole cause of response, it itself fully accounts for or causes it). Again, if the responder just is the responded to, or the elicter just is the elicited, this is also the idea of self-cause. But if the responding produces the being-responded-to and the eliciting produces the being-elicited, if the eliciter produces the elicited or the elicited produces the eliciter, if the responder produces the responded-to or the responded-to produces the responder, this is all "produced by an other"—is it not [the error] of other-production? If the production is through the two together, this combines the two errors. If the production happens without either self or other, we fall into the error of causelessness.
Q: In that case, there is no eliciting and no response!
A: The sage (Guanyin) by means of the fact of equality and unattached non-dwelling keeps free of any dwelling in the eliciting 聖人以平等無住法不住感, thus responding according to the triggers with the four siddhantas, that is all. 觀音玄義, T34n1726_p0890c29- T34n1726_p0891b10 (T34.890c-891b).

bodhisattva's upayic response to X as nothing other than the very emptiness of X, precisely as equality and non-dwelling itself. That is, the emptiness of any entity is the sagely upayic response to that entity, because this emptiness means "equality" and "non-dwelling"—which is to say, unstuck anywhere and equally distributed everywhere. Let us try to understand this.

According to this stock Madhyamaka analysis, the arising of response of Guanyin cannot arise 1) caused by oneself, 2) caused by something other than oneself, 3) caused by both self and other working in tandem, or 4) uncaused. This of course would apply for either Guanyin or the eliciting sentient being. Guanyin alone does not cause her response, nor does the sentient being, nor do both together, nor does it arise without a cause. Similarly, the sentient being does not produce the response of Guanyin, nor does Guanyin alone produce it, nor do both, nor neither. Hence, by the usual Madhyamaka logic, we conclude that it does not arise. This exhaustive rejection of alternatives is meant to demonstrate that no arising takes place, that the response of Guanyin is simply not produced—it is quiescent, nirvanic, in its very nature.

However, the implications of this conclusion are different in Tiantai, with its Three Truths epistemology, than they were in Madhyamaka, with its Two Truths. In Tiantai, "not produced" is a shorthand way of saying, "non-dwelling anywhere and equally distributed everywhere." Emptiness is also the middle: non-arising is also omnipresence and unconditional presence unlimitable to any specific form or essence. To say of Guanyin's response that it is empty is thus to say all of these about it. The Tiantai thinker Siming Zhili (960-1028) explains this passage in his Guanyinxuanyiji:

The great sage (Guanyin) has perfectly realized all of the Three Thousand [a Tiantai term of art meaning every possible determination and every possible view of every determination] both as principles and as phenomena. Because these all reside equally in her one mind, her one mind treats them all equally, and because she understands each and every one to be empty, provisional and the Middle Way, her mind dwells in none and attaches to none. It is this mind of equality and non-dwelling [=non-attachment] that the sage makes use of in responding to sentient beings, and hence she does not dwell in or attach to the stimulus to which she is responding, instead merely following whatever is appropriate to the pleasures and desires of the beings of the ten

realms to overcome their evils and bring them into liberating principle. This is done by freely responding according to the four types of eliciting, with the four types of responses [described in the four siddhantas], namely 1) according to shared conventions of the world, 2) tailored idiosyncratically to go along with a particular individual, 3) tailored therapeutically to oppose a particular individual, and 4) in terms of the ultimate meaning. How could this sort of eliciting and response be conceivable in terms of self, other, both or neither? But then again, if any sentient being is benefitted, in any of these four ways, by the idea that eliciting and response are self-produced, we can also legitimately say that it is oneself that elicits and oneself that responds. And if any sentient being is benefitted, in any of these four ways, by any of the other three stances, we can also say that the eliciting produces the response, or that the response produces the eliciting, or that [the sentient being and Guanyin] together produce the eliciting or together produce the response, or that the eliciting is produced by neither or the response is produced by neither. All of these can be validly said; as long is there is no attachment to any of the four, all four can be validly said. Hence the scriptures and treatises, when describing how eliciting and response take place, never exceed these four alternate descriptions."[41]

Notice first that the rejection of the four alternatives, and the conclusion that this response thus never "arises" and is not "produced" is not a rejection of the reality of Guanyin's response; rather it is a proof of its inherent entailment in reality, and in an infinity of forms, none dwelt in, all treated equally—stuck in none, not constrained to any specific limited location or direction, distributed through each of them equally everywhere, and indeed distributing each of them equally everywhere, as we shall see. It does not "arise" because it is always already going on, wherever or whenever it is sought. Guanyin's state of enlightenment is the Three Thousand (i.e., all things viewed in all ways, including ourselves and everything we do, all our "elicitings")

[41]大聖圓證三千理事。同在一心故心平等。一一皆了即空假中。故心無住。聖既用此平等無住為能應法。故不住著所應機感。但隨十界樂欲便宜破惡入理四機扣之。即以世界為人對治第一義四種之法。任運而應。此之感應豈可以其自他共離而思議邪。又復眾生於自生感應。有四益者。亦可說言自感自應。若於三種有四益者。亦可說言由感生應由應生感。共能生感共能生應。離二有感離二有應。皆可得說。既無四執隨機說四。故諸經論談於感應。不出此四也. T34.920b.

as one instant of her own experience: the famous Tiantai *yiniansanqian* 一念三千, "three thousand quiddities in a single moment of experience." According to Zhiyi's formulation of that doctrine in the *Mohezhiguan*, that means that we are not outside her mind, nor produced by her mind, nor merely included in her mind, but that each of us is rather a constituent part of her mind, of each moment of her experience (just as she is a part of each of our minds). Her mind has the same relation to all that is putatively "other" to it that, according to Zhiyi, every moment of every sentient being's mentation has to all its contents, all that seems to stand opposed to it: "just this mentation is all phenomena themselves, just all phenomena are this mentation itself." : 秖心是一切法。一切法是心.[42] This "is" is to be understood in the manner outlined above, of course: neither same nor different, same as different, different as same, necessarily and impossibly one, necessarily and impossibly different. As a description of a mind that has explicitly realized this, her mind is thus all of us, all of us are her mind, but without reducing to—"dwelling in"—any one particular identity, hers or ours. Her mind does not dwell in just being "her mind," nor for that matter in just being "mind" or just being "Guanyin": it is equally distributed through all of us, minds and bodies, good and evil. Moreover, according to that exposition, this means experiencing all those constituent parts not merely as "parts," as mutually exclusive elements, but as interpenetrating, both with each other and with the "one moment of experience" which is Guanyin's own mind at any time, for to refer to the one (her mind) is always to refer the many (all of us), and to refer to the many is always also to speak of the one. Hence, to point out any one of us, any of the elements of her mind, is also to point out the oneness itself, to make that the central point that subsumes all other content, not-dwelling itself, equally distributed through all other contents.[43] Any one of those elements is the subsuming "one" against the remaining others as subsumed, including Guanyin as subject herself.

---

[42] T46.54a.

[29]心與緣合則三種世間三千相性皆從心起。一性雖少而不無。無明雖多而不有。何者。指一為多多非多。指多為一一非少。故名此心為不思議境也。若解一心一切心。一切心一心。非一非一切。一陰一切陰。一切陰一陰。非一非一切。一入一切入。一切入一入。非一非一切。一界一切界。一切界一界。非一非一切。一眾生一切眾生。一切眾生一眾生。非一非一切。一國土一切國土。一切國土一國土。非一非一切。一相一切相。一切相一相。非一非一切。乃至一究竟一切究竟。一切究竟一究竟。非一非一切。遍歷一切皆是不可思議境。觀音玄義記 T46.55b.

According to Zhili's explanation, our own eliciting is one of these three thousand as phenomena 事, as mutually exclusive determinate events occurring only at a specific place and time—that's how we experience them ourselves—and also one of these three thousand as "principles," 理, i.e., as three thousand different versions of the Three Truths, each determinate one of which is omnipresent and omnitemporal. In the former sense, as phenomena, they are all treated equally, since all are equally embraced in her one moment of experience, her "regarding of the sounds of the world." In the latter sense, as "principles," they are each Empty, Provisionally Posited, and the Middle, and thus "not-dwelt-in"—being present as X is Provisionally Positing, not attaching to this X as X is Emptiness, and equally presence of X in X and non-X is the Middle, the non-dwelling of X exclusively in X. That is, my eliciting—my good or evil thoughts and actions, my pleasures or sufferings—are equally parts of Guanyin's present moment of experience, no more and no less than her own experiences are: her mind comprises awareness of both herself and me, and in both cases she is not the sole cause or owner of that awareness. The me she is aware of also comprises awareness of both me and her. That is my eliciting as one of the Three Thousand *shi*, phenomena. But my eliciting, my good or evil thought and action, is also present in her mind's experience of every element of this whole 3000, which is her one moment of experience, is intersubsumptive with all the others. So all the other 2999 forms, to speak figuratively, are intersubsumptive with my eliciting deed: the not-dwelling of my deed in my deed undermines its finiteness, reveals the non-attachment to itself which is synonymous with its presence (the emptiness that is synonymous with its provisional positing), and thus allows it to be read simultaneously as any of the other 2999, calling forth its omnipresence and hence its unconditionality (the Middle). When I am aware of her, this awareness of hers is what I'm aware of. Every otherness to which my action or thought is contrasted, the contrast with which alone gives it its determinacy, is thereby intersubsumptively present in it. My suffering intersubsumes with the bliss which it is established by excluding. My selfishness instersubsumes with the compassion which it is established by excluding. This is precisely Guanyin's salvific response to me.

We can see now that this is all about the implications of emptiness as equality and non-dwelling. These are here meant as synonyms of "emptiness": they mean the non-arising of the

two allegedly singly located not-all finite entities we are calling “Guanyin’s response” or “the sentient being’s eliciting.” To be non-arising as finite is to be inherently entailed as non-dwelling and equally present to all locations. Non-dwelling means unstuck to any specific identity, able to appear in any form, ambiguity that manifests inexhaustibly in a variety of different forms, since it dwells definitively in none: it means there is no definitive answer to what or who I am, and thus that I can be anyone, and already am as much anyone else as I am myself—which is to say, not definitively the others any more than I am definitively me, but by the same token, not definitively not the others any more than I am, in my present reality, definitively not me. “Equality” means equal distribution, non-restriction to any single location: it is omnipresent (to exactly the extent that it is present anywhere)—because omniabsent (to exactly the extent that it is absent anywhere). To be empty is, in the Three Truths, identical to being the Middle: transformation (having no single stable identity, non-dwelling) and omnipresence (the presence of this non-stable non-single identity everywhere equally). But omnipresent transformation is precisely what Guanyin’s salvific response was always supposed to be. The “wondrous” function that is Guanyin’s upayic salvific response to our eliciting is everywhere, but what is everywhere is no single identity (some particular being named Guanyin), but rather precisely that non-dwelling ambiguity and transformative power which is ourselves. We are saved from ourselves, though, by being ourselves: the omnipresence and ambiguity of me undermines the putative single location and definiteness of me, which were what in fact, on pan-Buddhist premises, account for my suffering. My suffering is cured by the response of Guanyin, which is just my suffering undermining its own finitude, undermining my specific non-all attachments and mutually exclusive ways of being: my suffering and joys, my good and my evil. That is, Guanyin’s response to me is just me myself seen in a different way, but that also means Guanyin seen as my own otherness to myself. Hence I can describe it equally as “Guanyin is really just an aspect of myself” or “Guanyin is really other to me.” That is, “Guanyin’s response is just my own activity viewed in all contexts, unstuck, equally connected to all other things—but that means equally that Guanyin’s response is the undermining of, the reversal of, the wholly other to, my own activity as originally conceived by me.” And this entails, equally, that I can say, “I

am just an aspect of Guanyin." We are intersubsumptive (the Middle), each an aspect of the other, reducible exclusively to neither side.

Notice also that this rejection of all four explanations of how this happens is equally an allowing of all four explanations—on this level too, equality and non-dwelling are applied. It is equally valid to say self-caused, or other-caused, or both-caused, or uncaused, as long as one dwells in, is attached to none of them. It is non-dwelling that allows one to smoothly move from one to the other, treating them all as equally valid. Actually, by Three Truths logic, this same equality and non-dwelling also applies to what Zhiyi says in the first discussion, namely that it the response of Guanyin is empty and never really arises. This fits, in fact, in the fourth siddantha, the "ultimate meaning," which is itself placed along the other three as nothing more than one more siddhanta, basically on even footing with the other three forms of conventional truth (first siddhanta) and *upāya* (second and third siddhanta). Put another way, the same non-dwelling equality applies to the question not only of how Guanyin's response happens, but whether it happens.

This is worth pausing over, since this is the basic question about the reality of the bodhisattvas. The issue, in modern terms, is whether Guanyin really exists or not, i.e., when someone says Guanyin is helping out and responding to them, is this all something in his imagination? For that is what "self-caused" would amount to here: there is no external Guanyin, when I think Guanyin has produced some response to my need (for example, some event in my life that I am interpreting as an instructive *upāya* designed for my edification), I am just reading it into a random event. "Other caused" on the other hand would mean Guanyin really exists out in the world separate from me, outside of my imagination, independent of my hermeneutic intervention; this would be the way gods or God are generally assumed to exist in non-Buddhist contexts, i.e., they are "really out there," and exist independently of what I believe about them. Both of these accounts are rejected, and both are accepted. According to this analysis, the following five descriptions are all equally true and equally false:

1) Guanyin is a figment of my imagination, entirely caused by me (or by cultural processes, traditions, narratives—in any case, the effect I am attributing to her is really caused by myself or ourselves). Guanyin is an effect of a particular set of

illusions, lies, hermeneutic choices, attachments, wishful thinkings, desires. Her effects on me are a figment of my own activity.

2) Guanyin is an actual entity existing in the world outside me, independent of me and what I think, and indeed independent of any cultural practices, any traditions, any beliefs of others. She makes things happen through her own real action. Her effects on me are caused by her real presence outside me.
3) Guanyin's effects on me are a joint product of her and me.
4) Guanyin's effects are not produced by Guanyin, nor by me, nor by both, but spontaneously and miraculously occur for no particular reason.
5) Guanyin's effects are actually not produced at all, never occur, do not arise. There is no discoverable identifiable entity called Guanyin's response.

How is it possible for all of these to be true, and all of these to be false?

To answer this, some remarks are in order here to frame this issue in a comparative context.[44] In most Western philosophical traditions, activity that is not mechanically or physically caused is thought of as something coming from a mysterious quality called Free Will, which is generally linked to a self or a personality, and thence to teleology: it is something that has no mechanical, efficient cause, so it must have a final cause, it must be done by someone and done for a specific purpose. Freedom from mechanical causality—from efficient cause—lands us in subordination to final causality, to personality, to purpose. The only alternatives are "it is mechanical and therefore unfree and impersonal" and "it is purposive, freely done by a person, a deity." In stark contrast to this, the Tiantai rejection of mechanical causality and causelessness (as seen in the refutation of the four alternatives, self-caused, other-caused, both, neither) rejects also "spontaneous arising" and the specific type of "miracle" that is usually associated with divine intervention, i.e., a kind of miracle produced by Someone's free will and purpose. The result of the supersession of causality, of causelessness and of purposive miracle is "inherent entailment," that is, the insight that what had appeared to be a caused effect, occurring at a particular time and place, is in fact an inextricable and eternal law of the universe, that is actually

[44] In the following several paragraphs I freely quote from my previous work*, Emptiness and Omnipresence*, pp. 228-231, where a parallel topic is discussed.

instantiating at all times and places, but in an infinite variety of forms. What it is is, in fact, the Absolute itself, the Middle Way, the Buddha-nature, the source and end of all other dharmas, ever-present, eternal, always operating and responding and producing itself as all other dharmas. This is the "wondrousness," the "inconceivability" of all dharmas in Tiantai context: a transcending of mechanical causality that does not revert in any way to a concept of Free Will or purposive intervention, rather just the opposite.

Free Will is primarily a juridical concept. It evolves in the context of this notion of a deity as personal, as purposive, as conscious only, with a single notion of the Good. Christian theology required an absolutist conception of Free Will, from Augustine onward, in order to square two conflicting planks of its theological platform: on the one hand, God is to be omnipotent and omnibenevolent, but on the other hand the Christian scriptures, in particular the words of Jesus Christ in the Gospels of the New Testament, threaten eternal punishment or annihiliation to some human beings. This requires some notion of genuine, absolute guilt and total responsibility to justify such punishment: the sinner must be really and fully responsible for his sin if God is not to appear unjust; for if God is in any way responsible for the sinful actions, God appears to be punishing unjustly.

In Buddhism, there is no concept of Free Will in this juridical sense. When we refute the absoluteness of the concept of efficient causality, we arrive at a kind of miraculous manifestation which is not equivalent to the freedom of purposive activity of a self. Quite the opposite. What we have here, I will argue, is precisely miracle in a distinctly atheist sense. Guanyin is an atheist miracle, in the sense that matters most. Person is always something other than the last word, except in the way that any and every false (=provisional) construct is also ultimate, also the last word. This goes for Guanyin as well: her activity is personal and impersonal, miraculous and caused, both.

One reason for this has already been touched on: as omnipresent transformation, "Guanyin" cannot be the name for any specific essential entity. This is really just an entailment of basic Buddhism: "Guanyin" (like any other determinate being) is an interpretation of certain data, rather than being a brute datum itself. Guanyin is omnipresent, but what is omnipresent cannot be just "Guanyin" in particular: Guanyin is one particular interpretation of what is

omnipresent, just as “table” is one particular interpretation of the array of data going on under my computer right now. Guanyin is transforming into all forms appropriate to the liberation of all beings, but what is transforming is not some specific constant entity called “Guanyin.” That would, indeed, undermine the thorough omnipresence of transformation, leaving at least one datum untransforming (the essence, the identity, of Guanyin). Rather, Guanyin is a name for the omnipresence of transformation which is identical to and also transcendent of all suffering, and ipso facto cannot be any one specific being.

Another reason for this understanding of the atheistic miracle of Guanyin’s responses is that this is the Tiantai understanding of all phenomena without exception: they are all to be contemplated as “atheist miracles” in just this sense, “wondrous,” 妙境 or “inconceivable” 不可思議境. This is precisely what is meant to be realized in Tiantai meditation practice. For this means to reveal, for any content present to consciousness, that, though it is present, it is also impossible. “Impossible, and yet there it is!” This is Georges Bataille’s atheistic formula for “the miraculous”—meaning something that breaks out of the rule of the concatenation of cause and effect, the anticipation of consequence, the subordination of effect to cause, or of means to end. That is, something that escapes the subordination of the past to the future, the subordination of labor to the accumulation of desired consequences—all work, all desire, subordination of time. The more general word for this sudden escape from subordination, particularly the subordination to time (both past and future), is for Bataille “sovereignty.” This is miracle in the specifically atheist sense: not the breaking of the chain of mechanical causality to allow the epiphany of another kind of causality, i.e., intentional, deliberate, teleological, purposive causality produced by the Free Will of a deity. That would be simply escaping one subordination—that to mechanical causality, to the secular order—to land in an even worse one: that of purpose, of personality, of Free Will imposed by the person of God and with it the demand for accountability through our own Free Will. Miracle in the usual, theistic sense means going out of the frying pan of mechanistic causality into the fire of final causality, free will, reward and punishment, the inescapable authority of God. The atheist miracle in Tiantai’s Guanyin is much closer to Bataille’s notion of sovereignty. For again and again, Tiantai stresses that the miraculous compassionate responses of Guanyin and all other buddhas and bodhisattvas is precisely not

done on purpose, not the result of Free Will, not deliberate, not intentional, not the result of any special decision or effort:

> Next, we explain the True Nirmanakaya, or Response Body. "True" means unmoving and not false. "Response" means appropriately matching the roots and causes of sentient beings. "An accumulated store of something" is the meaning of "a body." If one can perfectly accord with the unmoving, never-false principle, then one is able to respond in perfect accord with the triggering situation. It is like a mirror: as soon as a visage is placed in front of it, that visage takes shape within the mirror instantly. This true response is necessarily always going on, inseparable from [the bodhisattva doing the responding]. Although ascetic non-buddhists can perform miracles through the application of deliberate intention (作意), they are like stones and tiles (rather than mirrors), which manifest nothing in themselves when confronted with light and shadow. How could this be considered what we presently mean by response? They have not even yet transcended the four dwellings (i.e., the four accounts of causality, the ideas that effects are caused by oneself, by another, by both or by neither) to manifest the still one-sided so-called "true principle" (of Emptiness)—how could they have reached the True Response of the Middle Way? As for the Two Vehicles, who practice the arts of miraculous transformation, what they thereby attain is also not this response we speak of here. Their case is like someone drawing an image, brought to completion through deliberate activity, but not really resembling fully its model. It is different in the Mahāyāna. Obtaining the truth of the Ultimate Reality is like obtaining a bright mirror: one no longer needs to do anything deliberately or with effort, and yet all the material forms in the entire universe are responded to perfectly the instant they are placed in front of it, like a mirror delineating an

> image, its appearance is always completely the same as the real thing in front of it. [45]

Non-deliberateness, effortlessness, *wuwei*, is a result of inherent entailment of all three thousand, good and evil, in the nature. Because it is all-inclusive and absolute, it is able to be non-deliberate, non-personal, non-purposive and yet maximally effective, maximally responsive, maximally present. This is the key to the notorious Tiantai doctrine of inherent ineradicable evil in the nature of Buddhahood:

> If at the stage of Buddhahood all evil was eliminated, the use of evil manifestations to transform sentient beings would require the deployment of miraculous powers. But then this would mean one could only do evil deeds by making a deliberate effort to do so, like someone painting pictures of various forms—it is then not spontaneous and effortless. Conversely, when a bright mirror, though not moving, allows all the various forms and images to take shape in it naturally and of their own accord, this is like the inconceivable principle's ability to respond to and with evil. If deliberate effort is made, how is that any different from the non-Buddhists? Thus we now explain that just as the [most evil being like the] Icchantika can give rise to goodness when he encounters good conditions, since his inherent virtues are not destroyed, similarly the Buddha enters the lowest hell and participates in all evil deeds to transform sentient beings when the situation calls for it and as saturated by his own power of compassion, because he does not eliminate his own inherent evil.[46]

---

[45]釋真應者。真名不偽不動。應名稱適根緣。集藏名身。
若契實相不偽不動之理。即能稱機而應。譬如攬鏡像對即形。
此之真應不得相離。苦外道作意修通雖能變化。譬如瓦石光影不現。豈可以此為應。尚未破四住顯偏真理。那忽有中道真應。 若二乘變化修通所得此亦非應。 。大乘不爾。得實相真譬得明鏡。不須作意法界色像即對即應。如鏡寫像與真不殊。 (T34.879c)

[46]若佛地斷惡盡作神通以惡化物者。此作意方能起惡。如人畫諸色像非是任運。如明鏡不動色像自形。可是

Guanyin does not have to try to be compassionate, does not even have to know she is compassionate; she has no will to be compassionate. Rather, it is in her nature, as is the evil that she responds to, and with. To say it is her "nature," however, really just means she has no nature, her nature is "empty," which as we saw above means that it is non-dwelling and equally distributed—that is, that it is everywhere and it is confined to no single identity, that it is the omnipresent ambiguity and transformation: it is nothing but the inexhaustible and irresistible process of transformation into all forms everywhere, and this itself, rather than a particular being, much less a purposive ideation or intention, is what may be legitimately called liberating compassion: it the feels the pain of all conditional being because it is all conditional being, and it liberates all conditional being from conditionality because conditionality is itself to be inseparable from all other conditionality, to have a necessary outside, the externality of which is also impossible, and just this is the true unconditionality, the true liberation. Because all things and the response to all things are her nature, and that nature is this inner-outer Three Truths, it is the precise opposite of both mechanical causality and free will theistic miracle. It is "sovereign." It is spontaneous, but not acausal. We might say "autotelic"—no longer subordinated to a goal external to itself. But more precisely, rather than describing this as the disappearance of the entire construct of ends and means, or else, alternatively, as this thing being its own end, an end in itself, it signifies that the ends and the means are reversible: it is intertelic, each is the means to the other, each is the end of the other. Even more precisely, it is omnitelic. In Tiantai, we must view the meaning of "Center" 中 as meaning "the source of all other dharmas, subordinated to none" and "the goal towards which all other dharmas tend, the ultimate end sought by all their activities, revealed at last." To see it as Center 中 is not just to see it as coming from nowhere, going nowhere, outside the chain of causality—i.e., as "unconditional" in the older Buddhist sense of Nirvana, but to see that unconditionality also cannot be the total exclusion of causality. It is explicitly denied, in the meditational technique as derived from Nagarjuna's rejection of the

---

不可思議理能應惡。若作意者與外道何異。今明闡提不斷性德之善遇緣善發。
佛亦不斷性惡機緣所激慈力所熏。入阿鼻同一切惡事化眾生. (T34.883a.)

four alternatives, that anything arises "from itself, from something else, from both itself and another, or from nothing at all." The claim here is not that it arises from nothing at all, then—not that it just springs spontaneously into existence for no reason, free-floating, a burst of miracle. Rather, it redefines miracle to include causality—redefines unconditionality to include conditionality. How? The alternative is not between "no causality" and "one unique chain of causality" but between "one unique chain of causality" and "all possible chains of causality"—unconditionality is actually omniconditionality. The key lies in the change from Two Truths to Three Truths. In Two Truths theory, conventional truth (and *upāya*) is a raft used to get beyond rafts. It ability to lead beyond itself is the criterion of its validity. In Three Truths theory, conventional truth is the only kind of truth-content there is. All truths are conventional truths (even Emptiness and the Middle are also conventional truths). But, vice versa, conventional truths are now seen to have the property of also being Empty and the Middle. That is, they still lead beyond themselves, but they themselves are this beyond. How? Each truth—each content, each proposition, each percept—is still a raft. But the raft does not lead beyond rafts—there is no such beyond. Rather it leads to all other rafts. It leads to the raft factory from which all rafts are made (Emptiness, the Middle) and the infinite rafts, including back to itself, that are produced therefrom. The raft factory, in fact, floats on every raft; to be a raft is to be equipped to transcend itself and create other rafts. The raft of conditionality leads not to the "other shore" of unconditionality, but to the "raft factory" of the Lotus Sutra, the creation of infinite rafts. This has an analogue in that Sutra and its huge jumps in causality, or in the final stage in Zhiyi's descriptions of various meditation regimes, where any cause can lead to any effect—because any cause can always be further contextualized by some further factor that will retrospectively change or extend its effect (set-up/punchline). That is, the liberation from subordination of means to end, or present to future, is found not in the isolation of all moments (or entities), but of the end of one-way subordination. The overcoming of subsumption is not fragmentation into atomistic momentariness, but intersubsumption of all moments as eternities, each consisting of all other moments.

Applying this to the present case, we can see that accepting any one of these rafts leads to all the other rafts. In other words, to fully see that Guanyin is just a figment of my

imagination, or a cultural construct, is what leads me to seeing that Guanyin is an ultimate independent reality, and both, and neither. Similarly, regarding Guanyin as an existing deity is the way to get to see that she exists only in my own mind, as my fantasy. The omnidirectionality of all rafts to all rafts is the epistemological basis of certainty of the reality of Guanyin: if I can conceive of Guanyin, imagine Guanyin, fantasize about Guanyin, in the mode of "not-me" and "not-present" and "not-real," it is just that fantasy, viewed the other way around, which is Guanyin's real presence and real compassion. Yearning for a compassionate omnipresent hearer of my cries is, if I remove the categories of "dwelling" and "non-equality" that limit my understanding of this experience of yearning, the compassionate omnipresent transforming hearer of my cries. For the distinction between "real" and "imagined," like the distinction between "giver" and "receiver" or "eliciter" and "responder," is a kind of "dwelling" and "non-equality" applied to an experienced mentation: it confines our view of it to one side rather than another, to one narrative sequence rather than another, to one modal format rather than another. My feeling of yearning can be interpreted equally validly as 1) my own feeling of Guanyin's absence, 2) Guanyin's active presence impacting me with the thought of Guanyin as a way of manifesting her exact characteristics in my experience precisely in searching for and failing to find them, 3) both and 4) neither. To have the thought, "May all beings be happy," as Buddhists do in the Loving-kindness (Metta) meditations of the Four Brahmavihārās, is to make it be true that there are beings in the universe who have the thought, "May all beings be happy." To take the Bodhisattva vow, saying, "I will exert myself for as many billion years as it takes to make sure that I will have the ability to be present to all sentient beings in distress, and transform myself and my teachings into just such a form as will allow their suffering and delusion to be dispelled," is to make it the case that there are beings in the universe who take that vow. Is the one sending out that vibe of indefatiguable compassion me, or is it another? Are its recipients me, or all other beings? In the first instance, I am the sender, not the receiver, of that compassion. But as we have just seen, this cannot stand as a hard-and-fast distinction. If I am really perceiving the non-dwelling and equally-distributing character of the mentation of this vow, I must include myself also in the receivers, and others also in the senders. Hence by vowing to envelop all beings in my compassion, I find myself enveloped in the salvific compassion of

these heroes of Buddhism, the great bodhisattvas, filling the universe. In the *Lotus Sutra*'s story of the lost son, the riches I was counting, thinking they belonged to another, are revealed to have belonged to me all along: those miraculous descriptions of the bodhisattvas in other Mahayana sutras were actually describing me, who am a bodhisattva without having realized it. Entailed in this, on the Tiantai reading, is the reverse as well: my small endeavor to be compassionate belongs to others as well, is the activity of the bodhisattvas bestowing their compassion also on me. In the present case, a further step is taken: here I am not offering compassion, but yearning for it: I am suffering. But the same reversibility that applies to self and other in the case of bestowing and receiving compassion also applies to the modes of wanting and receiving in the case of the receiver: his wanting is his receiving, the two cannot be definitively separated, even in thought, each being a one-sided description of a total experienced datum that includes both an awareness of the desire and of the desired compassion, present to awareness at the very least in the mode of "not-present." It is again this non-dwelling and equal-distribution, omnipresence and ambiguity, that guarantee that whatever happens to me will be the asked-for compassionate response: at the very least, receiving the response to my yearning in the form of the third siddhanta, the 對治 or "remedial": not getting what I want is also a way of getting what I asked for, a liberating response, a datum in which compassion can be read, an undermining of an attachment. Anything at all that happens has the nature of necessarily being readable as Guanyin's compassionate liberating response to my suffering.

Perhaps someone will respond to this: "But this is madness! An outrage to common sense! A manual in wishful-thinking! An invitation to schizophrenia! The all-important lines between fantasy and reality fatally blurred! Not to mention meaningless: incapable of disconfirmation!" We are hoping to undermine not the observations that lie behind these complaints, but the assumptions about what is desirable and possible that underlie them—and we surely cannot take even a single step into Buddhist thought, and Tiantai thought all the more so, without being willing to suspend our unquestioned faith in precisely these assumed premises about common sense and wishful thinking and madness and sanity and fantasy and reality and true versus false. A remark of Bertrand Russell's that I have quoted before in a similar context again comes to mind here: "From a scientific point of view, we can make no distinction between

the man who eats little and sees heaven and the man who drinks much and sees snakes. Each is in an abnormal physical condition, and therefore has abnormal perceptions." As before, I suggest we replace the contentious word "abnormal" with the more neutral "unusual," and replace the causative "therefore" with a merely correlative "concomitantly." With those adjustments, we may adopt a similar statement about Guanyin, but without the dismissive implications of Russell's remark. We become aware of Guanyin due to causes and conditions—including the unusual state of our body in severe ritual practices, in states of stress and deprivation, in extreme distress or exhaustion or discouragement. Like anything else, Guanyin is the product of causes and conditions, and the same is true of any particular manifestation of her. But to be conditional in this way, says Tiantai, is to be provisionally posited. To be provisionally posited is to be Empty. To be empty is to be the Middle Way. To be the Middle Way is to be Non-dwelling and present equally everywhere. Guanyin is entirely an illusion, like all of us, and just this is what makes her activity so efficaciously upayic and salvific. Guanyin now appears before me as my coffee cup. My coffee cup can also appear to me as Guanyin. "Guanyin" signifies the experience of the equality and non-dwelling of my coffee cup and all other phenomena, hence my coffee cup's presence in all things, including Guanyin, and Guanyin's presence in all things, including my coffee cub. All I have to do is think of Guanyin—to say the name Guanyin--to put my coffee cup into the context of connections which reveal both of these at once—and precisely that is Guanyin's salvific response. This is Guanyin in the Tiantai reading: fully a fantasy, fully a reality.

7. Just This Is Divinity: There Are Gods but There Is No God

But this is the really important point of all this, the crucial contrast between "atheistic" polytheism and both monotheism and "monotheist" polytheism. Mahāyāna Buddhism is an atheistic polytheism in that the personal element is always multiple, and rests on a deeper principle which is impersonal. It seems to me that among Hindu theologies we find both atheistic polytheisms (Samkhya, Mimansa, Advaita Vedanta, etc.) and monotheist polytheisms, the latter being systems where a single ultimate principle that is itself to some extent personal, purposive,

intelligent, mental, and deliberately creative in something like the sense of *Noûs*, nevertheless can manifest Godself in many different personal forms, all of whom are avatars of Godself. The Abrahamic religions are here monotheisms full stop, with some complications for the Christian trinity and Jewish Kabbalah and the like. But the Mahāyāna case, particularly in its Tiantai form, gives us the clearest understanding of why this matters at all, i.e., where the immense religious benefits of this kind of polytheism lie.

For in the above I have been speaking about one bodhisattva: Guanyin, i.e., Avalokiteśvara, who is (as the name suggests) a very clear stand-in for the Big-Other overseer of the world (Iśvara): essentially Avalokitśvera is the Mahāyāna's candidate to fill the position of big G God. But in the Tiantai universe, which is the standard Mahāyāna universe, simply by virtue of the power of raw infinity, there are literally an incalculable number of bodhisattvas, each of whom has his own distinctive history, vow, orientation, areas of special concern. This means there is every imaginable type of deity out there, and all of them are in their own ways identical to Buddhahood and identical to all other sentient beings. The meaning of this in the Tiantai metaphysical view is that there are an infinite number of different value systems in the universe, and that all of them are deifiable. Any orientation, any obsession, any point of view, if fully realized, expanded into all-inclusive unconditionality, is also divinity, Buddhahood, salvation. There is a bodhisattva for every single orientation: that is, there is someone who has done the work of realizing the inherent Buddhahood of precisely that set of desires (for value-orientations are nothing but sets of arbitrary one-sided conditional desires). There are these infinite alternate conduits of ultimate value; more precisely, not only are there are infinite alternate ways of assigning value to things, but each one of these is the ultimate, God's-eye judgment of what is ultimately valuable. Now from the point of view of the devotee, the practitioner, the ordinary being in delusion, that means that there is somewhere out there at least one bodhisattva who totally gets me, in the sense of sharing my innermost, most perverse and idiosyncratic value orientation. As Zhuangzi had pointed out, there is some imaginable point of view from which any and every action, cognition, or person, is right. The Tiantai bodhisattvas are embodiments of these infinite points of view, and the religious task is to connect with the bodhisattva from whose point of view your own peculiar form of delusion, obsession, blindness,

greed, anger, foolishness, has been realized as the conduit to its own universalization, the unique form of his or her vow and realization of identity with unconditionality, with Buddhahood. Here we have a thoroughgoing realization of Nietzsche's sought-after "innocence of becoming," for here every action and thought and deed really is ultimately innocent, pure, even salvific if looked at in the right way. The trick is finding this "right way." The religious faith of a Tiantai Buddhist is that there is some being in the universe who has lived the specific self-made nightmare that is my own plight, and has made good on it, has found the contextualization that allows its inherent Buddhahood to shine forth, and that this being has vowed to connect to other sentient beings in the universe suffering from a similar set of values, i.e., set of delusions, and to respond to their special needs by helping them contextualize this in a way that will again open up its eternal Buddhahood, will show that this folly has itself always already been Buddhahood. My good faith is ultimate and unimpeachable: I am being what I am being. Even though that inevitably goes wrong and hurts everybody, including me, that does not mean it has to be abandoned and replaced with someone else's values, i.e., someone else's folly, someone else's obsessions and one-sidedness—whether that someone else is a Buddha, or the Lord God, or a wise man, or an ethicist, or a jurist representing society. The divine has no values! That is atheism! But that means all values are equally divine—if we can find the way to divinize them—and that is the challenge, the sole religious task! Hence Nietzsche: "Just this is divinity, that there are gods but no God." Any deity that does not share my bottomline values—my stubbornest nonnegotiable unjustifiable obsessions and follies, that is—is one I can disregard. The only deities relevant to my religious task are those that really love and respect me, identify with me, because they have lived what I have lived, my precise folly and evil, and thus truly understand it from the inside. They have also lived out its full realization and revelation as Buddhahood. All things can be divine, all follies and all values are roads to divinity: the polytheist Buddhist finds and relates himself to the deity who has divinized precisely his own folly. This is why atheism matters and why atheist mysticism matters even more. If the ultimate principle is personal and/or purposive, there is one privileged set of values, one particular folly to which all other forms of folly must be subordinated, or which must even judge or replace all other forms of values/follies. But secular atheism leaves all these values undivinized, a war of all against all where indeed all values are

wrong, because all fail to accord with the real truth, the valuelessness of the ultimate principle, of the impersonal material or otherwise person-transcendent source. Atheist mysticism, however, allows an infinity of alternate values, but all of which are ultimate and ultimately true, all of which are pathways to divinity, and not just pathways, not just ladders to be cast aside when divinity is reached, not just rafts to be abandoned on the other shore, but in keeping with the Tiantai identity of means and end, themselves are what is found at the end of those pathways: every set of fool values is itself the content of Buddhahood, and there is a Buddha-bodhisattva who has lived that realization, and dwells forever in the universe to help out others, like yourself, with analogous obsessions. As the Bodhisattva Never Disparage says in Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, "You do not need to change your course: you are practicing the bodhisattva way, and you will be a Buddha."

Theists have the lovely comfort and the great bulwark of individuality of saying, "Well, everyone might think I'm wrong, all of society might condemn me, no one understands my passion and my plight—but God knows my heart." This is a fantastic contribution to the world which is lost forever by secularism. But in monotheism this comes with too high a price: for in finding one's independence from all worldly values, one has sold oneself out to God's values. No one can judge me—except God. That looks like a gain in autonomy and individuality, but in the long run is a loss. It is borrowing from Peter to pay Paul, no pun intended. For I am always still in danger of being condemned by God, and I must twist my own individual values to make it seem—above all to myself—that my defiance of society is in the name of some "holy" values that in some way accord with what revelation tells me God wants. There's another problem, a big one. You don't understand me—I'm really doing this for God, and my values are God's values. The corollary of course is that your values, since you oppose me, are the devil's values, or the world's values, the unholy world: "He who is not for me is against me" (Matthew/Mark). So for this gain in individual autonomy, I must also become 1) a hypocrite and 2) a bigot—the twin curses of monotheism. I must deceive myself about what I really want, or else subject myself to an endless cycle of self-condemnations, temptations and repentances, and I also must vilify all the values of all the people who do not get me and do not approve of me.

Polytheist mysticism of the atheist Tiantai kind gives the real satisfaction of this impulse while circumventing the price. Indeed, no one knows me, no one understands me, everyone condemns me, everyone hates me, my parents disown me, my children despise me, my colleagues revile me, the whole of society is up in arms and calling for my destruction--while there is one supernatural being who alone knows my real value, who understands my innocence and my good intentions within the distorted shell of my obsessions, that my violence and selfishness are themselves my own twisted forms of love and compassion. This deity knows it because he shares it, ineradicably: it is exactly what he went through, and it ended up being repurposable by him to become a cause of his own accomplished Buddhahood, and this deluded cause remains forever inherently included and functional in his presently accomplished Buddhahood. This Buddhahood is manifest as his bodhisattvahood, but which is specifically the bodhisattvahood of this particular form of delusion. Part of what is realized in this, of course, is that the same applies to everyone else's delusions, so I am freed of the necessity to be a bigot or to conclude that all who oppose me or misunderstand me are of the devil's party: no, they too are right from some angle, and there exists a bodhisattva who sees them that way, and will help guide them on that path to Buddhahood. Nor do I need to divide against myself or tell myself my values are really those set forth in the holy books: no, my values are just what they appear to be, these specific obsessions and perversions and selfishnesses and deluded distortions and stubborn fixed ideas and prejudices. But precisely those are exactly the divine values as realized by that specific bodhisattva who is my only friend in the universe, a bodhisattva who is also his own prospective Buddhahood as I am also both.

This claim that Buddhahood is always inherent and ineradicable also in any kind of delusion and evil is of course the mutually entailing flip side to the opposite claim that evil is always inherent and ineradicable in Budhahodd--the famous Tiantai idea of "inherent ineradicable evil even in Buddhahood." This idea of inherent evil developed in Zhiyi's treatment of the nature of the bodhisattva's responses to deluded sentient beings had enormous effects on the Tiantai view of the experience of undesired states—a key atheist mystical issue, as we have seen in Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bataille above. We may pause here to survey where Tiantai lands on this crucial question.

1. Early Buddhism regarded the ending of the three poisons—greed, hatred, and delusion—as liberation. But according to Zhiyi, a bodhisattva has not less of these than the ordinary person, but infinitely more: what he calls "great greed," "great hatred," and "great delusion." Great greed is the insatiable desire, the implacable vow, to live all possible lives, to suffer all possible states, to take to oneself all possible beings, to learn infinite modes of practice and teaching. Great hatred is not just the denial or rejection of some things, but the resolute vow to annihilate all things—that is, to negate the reality of every possible entity without exception, to fully realize the absolute emptiness of every entity; not only every ordinary state and being, but even of emptiness itself must be shown to be empty, to be nothing real; even Buddhahood and nirvana must be exposed as nothing but empty names—a destructive rage that negates any positive datum, denies self-nature and subsistence to all. Great delusion is not just ignorance about some things, but a deep apprehension of the unknowability of all things, that any conceptualization of reality fails, that all things are beyond thought. The problem was not greed, but the partiality of greed: greed applied universally is its own overcoming. The problem was not hatred, but the partiality of hatred; hatred applied universally is its own overcoming. Partial greed is different, indeed opposite to, partial hatred: greed is a desire to establish and possess something, while hatred is a desire to demolish and get away from something. But hatred universalized reveals itself to be indistinguishable from universal greed, and the greed universalized reveals itself to be indistinguishable from universal hatred. The indistinguishability of the two opposites, greed and hatred, reveals their inconceivability, and the same applies to all things—thus revealing the great ignorance.[47]

2. Tiantai propounds the idea of ineradicable inherent entailment of all states and qualities, including even evil ones, in any state or quality, including even Buddhahood. All things are causes and effects of each other, nothing is eradicable, all things are essential to the being of all other things, all relations are both external and internal, because externality itself is internal. Since the existence of each thing necessarily depends on other things, otherness is

[47] *Taishoshinshudaizokyo* 大正新脩大藏經 [The Chinese Buddhist canon as compiled in the Taishō reign], ed. and compiled by Takakusu Junjiro, Watanabe Kaigyoku, et al. (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankō Kai, 1924–34) (henceforth cited as "T"), 34.929c.

internal to the constitution of each thing, and impossible to exclude from any identity. But if "otherness" per se is necessary for the establishment of any entity, even the new entity constituted by the original entity and the finite set of othernesses immediately required for its existence, thence considered internal to it, must have a further otherness to exist. The entity identified as A turns out to requires some specific otherness, B, to exist as A at all. But this means B pertains to its essence, which means that what we were calling entity A is really A+B. But this new entity A+B requires otherness too: it is really A+B+C. And so ad infinitum. Each otherness newly considered internal to the entity will require still further othernesses, legitimately viewed alternately as internal to or external to the original entity. There is no non-arbitrary stopping place for this proliferation of inside-outsides: it is in this sense that each thing is all things. Hence each thing is both internal to and external to every other thing, and in this sense on the one hand maintains its distinctive difference from all other things and on the other hand pervades all times and places, is absolute, can never be definitively eradicated. This includes all evils, greed, hatred, and delusions of all kinds, which are not only expanded practically as part of bodhisattvahood but are even essential to, and ineradicable from, Buddhahood. The same applies to bodhisattvahood and Buddhahood themselves, ostensibly a mutually external pair of cause (bodhisattva practice) and effect (resulting realization of Buddhahood). In fact, Buddhahood is nothing but eternal bodhisattvahood that recognizes this very inescapable inherent mutual entailment of the two, that being a bodhisattva both is and is not already being a Buddha.[48]

3. With this we are poised for a completely reconfigured relation to desire and will, which means a rethink of the entire Buddhist program of ending attachment to desire. For now the goal of overcoming desire cannot be done by simply eliminating desire, which on these premises is impossible; like any other putative entity, real or imagined, desire—even my specific desire right now--is inherently included in all things, ineradicable from every other thing. It can thus only be by willing all things, desiring all things equally, desire made universal and exceptionless, the Great Greed, that attachment to desire is overcome: desire is seen thereby to

[48] For a full exposition, see Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good: Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 112–98, 240–60.

always already be not-desire, to be indistinguishable from Great Hatred and Great Ignorance. But as biased conditional things we cannot will all things equally simply by fiat: even our aspiration to do so is a biased desire for one state ("Great Greed") over any other. Willing is after all a kind of imbalance of cathexis, an investing of more energy and attention here than there. It is the opposite of an even distribution of attention, requiring some sort of wall of tension to prevent free-flow evenly in the totality of awareness: some thing must be focused on and obsessed over, while other things are neglected. To desire nothing means equilibrium, evenness of distribution; but to desire everything equally also means evenness of distribution. Perfectly even distribution of energy and attention, however, is impossible, or rather is literally death. To be alive is to be a partial, finite, contingent being, always off-balance, always preferring one thing to another. Instead of a static evenness, then, what we have here is flow, unobstructed non-dwelling and promiscuous transmission in unpredictable directions: at any given moment, one thing is singled out, but that one thing is always in the process of becoming more, becoming less, becoming other. We are always willing, we cannot help willing, but willing any one thing also brings with it the moreness, the rest, the inescapable otherness that it entails.

What we need, then, is a way to will all things by willing one thing. This is just what the above points make possible. The previous point stipulates that each thing inherently includes, and is ultimately identical to, all other things. But also included in each thing being itself is the ignorance of sentient beings that see it as "this" and nothing besides, to the exclusion of all other things, and this deluded-view-of-it too is essential to the being of this thing-which-is-all-things (i.e., this limiting deluded-view-upon-it is another of the "all things" that is inherently included in its own being). In the Lotus, bodhisattvahood is sometimes accomplished by willing its opposite, nirvana—by willing the end of willing. The parable is told there of a group of climbers seeking a treasure; they grow weary and want to turn back, so their guide conjures an apparitional pleasure-city ahead of them. This lures them forward. But each step toward that illusion is actually also a step toward the treasure that is situated far beyond the illusory city. It is only by not knowing that they are heading toward the treasure that they are able to move toward it. Each step is consciously willing one thing—the pleasure city—but actually also, thereby, accomplishing the journey toward something else—the treasure, here denoting the accomplished

state of interpervasion of all things.[49] In the sutra these arhats who learn that they have really been bodhisattvas all along, that they have been practicing the bodhisattva-path, unbeknownst to themselves, precisely by denying it and trying to be arhats, declare: "We attained it without seeking it."[50] But this means that we did not, as is usually believed, attain what we willed by means of willing it. But nor did we, as in early Buddhism, attain what we really wanted by willing nothing, by putting an end to all willing. It means instead we attained X by willing Y.

It is here that we can perhaps pause to relate this motif more closely to some of the mystical atheist thinkers addressed in the body of this book—in particular, to Nietzsche's idea of Eternal Recurrence. The conjunction of the global purposelessness with emergent multiplicity of purposes that express it and complete it can be found also in Spinoza and Hegel. On some readings, we can also find there an absolute affirmation of the infinite not only in each and every thing, but also in each and every purpose—and not because any of them are uniquely the purpose of the universe as a whole, the will of God, but precisely because none of them is. But these are somewhat esoteric readings of Spinoza and Hegel. There is perhaps a more immediate analogy here to the Nietzschean approach to this problem in the idea of the Eternal Recurrence. In both the Tiantai and Nietzschean cases, we have an attempt to remedy a certain kind of purposivity, and a certain relation to time: that is, the subordination of the present to the future, the present used as a means to attain a future goal, a purpose, or the displacement of value in an otherness, a future, standing over against every present, and with it the unchangeability of the past. In both cases this is seen as something structurally necessary and irresolvable, given the ordinary relation to time: the relation of will and desire. In both cases, too, the obvious first stab at a solution to this—the attempt to make each moment autotelic, a value in itself, freed from subordination to a future, is quickly seen to be impossible: to be free of (future) goals, to live in the moment, to transcend willing, is itself a goal, requiring another moment, and a willing therefore of the future. So both have a deep and abiding insight into the double-bind of will and will-lessness. This already puts them rather close together in orientation, when contrasted to alternate responses to this problem. More usually, when this double-bind involving future goals and past

[49] T9.22a.
[50] T9.16b.

unchangeableness is recognized, and the obvious solution—to make each present moment its own goal, and seek nothing besides—is seen to be structurally self-contradictory, we have the self-consciously impossible attempt to regain the sovereignty of the present pursued down new and often brilliantly convoluted paths of self-reference and self-laceration—itself possibly also fruitful in its own way. But this also inevitably makes "sovereign moments" (Bataille) or "enlightenment experiences" (Zen) into goals to be pursued in the future. This paradox itself can be made use of, and that is where the subtlety and artfulness of these traditions tend to lie. Another approach (Simmel, Heidegger, Sartre) is to simply accept the desiring, future-projecting, self-transcending structure of time and consciousness as unavoidable, thus abandoning the notion of autotelic moments as inauthentic or illusory, and working from there to create an alternate ideal. But the cases of Zarathustra and Tiantai go in another direction Both offer a solution to the dichotomy of will and will-lessness in the idea of "willing all," based on two insights: (1) the strict structural equivalence of "willing all" and "willing none," inasmuch as "will" per se implies a preference of one object over another and is thus constitutively "willing non-all"; and (2) the concomitant impossibility of "willing all" unless we can somehow will all by willing some one thing. In Nietzsche, as I read him, this means the apprehension of a single joy or beauty, a great noontide, that is deep enough to affirm the willing of all the pasts and futures which are causally interlocked with it in the Eternal Recurrence. Knowing this doctrine, it would seem, allows one to will backward in the depth of a moment of joy to affirm one's entire being, and the eternity of all things, with all one's will. In the Tiantai case, we have rather a case of "willing whatever you are already willing"—not a decision to will, but a predisposition to the liking of something. The great Song dynasty Tiantai thinker Siming Zhili said, when challenged about his intention to satisfy his persistent and unjustifiable desire to set himself physically on fire, that he had no reason for this particular obsession other than that the thought kept occurring to him. He therefore supposed it "must be a vow I had taken in a former life, eh?" and straightaway set about pursuing this desire as his main mode of Buddhist practice. The reference to past karma was here invoked not as a justifying ground of the rationality or wholesomeness of the proposed deed (which Zhili admits elsewhere in the same correspondence to indeed be a result of, as his interlocutor charges, "a demonic teaching"), but rather precisely as an instance of

inescapable delusion that was nonetheless incumbent upon him personally to honor and obey. Zhili explained, "Whatever happens to please you is what is appropriate to you, and it is by cultivating that one thing that you will be enlightened." *suilesuiyi suixiusuiwu* 隨樂隨宜隨修隨悟 [51] Desire is here arbitrary, ungroundable, specific, a brute datum about which we can only surmise an unknowable unconscious prior cause, which in Buddhist mythological terms means that somewhere in my infinite past lives I must have decided, for some reason I now neither know nor have to know, that this was what I would vow to do: in plain English, I happen to like X, not Y. My present strange desire to do it is the sole criterion allowing me to judge it as a manifestation of my forgotten prior vow, and this is sufficient to justify it as my specific mode of practice. But recontextualizing this will with the further knowledge that I am always doing more than I know, and willing more than I know, that otherness leaks into both the subject and object of every act of willing, I find that in willing this one thing and denying all others, I end up also affirming all others: as I accomplish my will, I find that, just as pessimistic early Buddhism promised, it isn't what I wanted. It is, rather, also everything else. I need not know this when I will it: in fact, to will it is to willfully deny explicit knowledge of its nonexclusion of what I don't presently want. The Lotus propounds a necessary rhythm of nonknowing and knowing: I must not-know what I'm doing for awhile, and only then can I realize what it was I was formerly unknowingly doing and willing. Is this functionally the same as Zarathustra's drunken song's desire for graves and despair and failure? I ask this question in particular with respect to the status of knowledge in both cases: Does Zarathustrian joy that wills with all its will have to know about the Eternal Recurrence? Or does it need also to sometimes forget? There seem to me to be some basis for both readings in Nietzsche's texts. We may think here of the second Untimely Meditation, "On the Use and Abuse of History for Life," which puts the necessity of forgetting front and center to its revaluation of the historical consciousness, but even more crucially, we might want to ponder again the third of the three "Transformations of the Spirit" delineated in

[51] T46.900a. This is not simply an endorsement of unrestrained antinomianism: the key is that "practice"—the application of the specific Tiantai contemplation of the "Three Truths" revealing the local coherence, global incoherence, and intersubsumption of any determinate entity—must be applied to this determinate entity to make it reveal its liberating force. But any determinate entity that engages one sufficiently will serve as the object of this practice. For a full discussion, see Ziporyn, *Evil and/or/as the Good*.

Zarathustra's very first discourse: from a camel to a lion to a child. The final stage, the new beginning, the source of yea-saying and absolute affirmation, is that of the child, which is explicitly described as a "forgetting, a beginning anew, a play, a self-propelling-wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yea-saying." The camel wants the heaviest burden, says an obedient yes to accepted values and the duties they impose; the lion speaks a destructive "nay" to all that has existed, the holiest as well as the lowliest of values and wills on earth. But the child stands for neither an acceptance nor a rejection, neither a preservation nor a destruction of the putative values of the received world, of the contravening willings of tradition, of history, or even, we may say, given Nietzsche's occasional forays into a mythical cosmology of the will, the entire existent world, both natural and cultural, as an ocean of conflicting wills. Rather, the child is a forgetting, and forgetting is presented here as coextensive with the highest form of affirmation: the creative will. This consideration perhaps provides us with a vantage point from which to reconsider the question of creativity itself in Buddhist tradition, in particular in Tiantai, under the aegis of the notion of *upāya* ("skillful means," including both various teachings and various transformations of oneself, created by a bodhisattva to communicate with and liberate sentient beings), *upāya* as a function not only of knowing exactly what one is doing, as in the majority of normative Mahāyāna presentations of the concept, but with the distinctive Tiantai twist: *upāya* as a responsiveness to and transformation of the preexisting world, both cultural and natural, which derives its effectiveness precisely from not quite knowing what one is doing.

8. Intersubsumption of Purpose and Purposelessness, Theist and Atheist Versions: Hegel and Tiantai

I promised way back in Part One to supplement the fourfold list of positions with respect to the world's purpose or lack thereof and our own (i.e., Emulative Theist, Emulative Atheist, Compensatory Theist and Compensatory Theist) with two more, more intricate categories: Emulative Intersubsumptive Theism and Emulative Intersubsumptive Atheism. We are now in a position to do so.

Emulative Intersubsumptive Theism is what we find in some interpretations of Hegelian theology, in particular of the Hegelian interpretation of the Christian Trinity. On this view, what is ultimate is Spirit, which is both Substance and Subject—or more strictly, is that whose substance is its subjectivity and whose subjectivity is its substantiality. "Subjectivity" here means a rethinking of *Noûs* in terms of Fichte's notion of "self-positing," which itself can be most thoroughly understood by tracking it back to Kant's Practical Philosophy in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, but which for now we can briefly indicate by an easily-grasped reference to its more distant roots in Descartes's *Meditations*. Descartes proposes to doubt everything without exception that is in any way dubious, anything that can be doubted. This ability to doubt is the activity of subjectivity: it steps beyond any given content and puts it into question, relating it to other contents, including possible entities and possible future disconfirmations. There is no content to which this cannot be done, and thus there would seem to be no possibility for certainty about any particular facts. Subjectivity undermines and dislodges all determinate content—indeed, it is this activity of undermining and dislodging, connecting and disconnecting and reconnecting various actualities and possibilities. But then Descartes notices that there is one thing he is literally unable to doubt: this activity of doubting itself. For to doubt *that* would only further instantiate it. It literally cannot be lacking, since it manifests even in, as, its own negation. "Cogito ergo sum" really means "dubito ergo sum." Subjectivity undermines all "substantiality"—ultimate and undoubtable determinations that can in principle be known with absolute certainty, independent of any further confirmation or disconfirmation—but this activity itself then steps forward as what alone is substantial, certain. And it is from here that, for Descartes, it can begin to rebuild certainties, rooted in the certainty of the activity of doubting—of uncertainty—itself.

The German idealists I have in mind here do not follow Descartes very far through the further steps of his derivations of certainty from this starting point, but this notion of substance-as-subject, negativity-as-content-rejecting-and-content-generating-certainty, continues to inform Hegel's notion of the Absolute as Spirit. God is Spirit in this specific sense, and the purposivity of primal *Noûs* inherited from the Greco-Christian traditions must here also be understood in this way, with "purpose" integrated into this picture with some help from the analysis of subjectivity

in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (i.e., the derivation of this self-positing-as-self-negation from the transcendental unity of apperception) and its application to the question of purposivity (i.e., purpose as the generation of content through concepts, which are rules for unifying particulars rooted in that same transcendental unity of apperception) in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, as we've addressed above. But because Spirit just is its own self-positing self-certainty through self-negation, since it is precisely the undermining of self that remains itself in becoming other to itself (as doubt remains doubt all the more precisely in doubting any possible content it might give to itself, including itself considered as a content), this Spirit is no longer simply other to the world, and to humankind, as is usually understood to follow from the creator-created relationship in classical theism. The world too, and man in particular, are also really Spirit in essence. Spirit is the certainty at first merely felt in its indubitability as doubt, as pure abstract subjectivity: that which is certain in its negation, negative in its certainty. It is substance as subject, subject as substance. All its activity is a way of making good on this fundamental self-certainty of positing itself in its own negation, negating itself in its own positing. When man realizes that his own mind is Spirit in just this sense, having gone through every lesser "other" and "opposite" and finding himself present in it precisely through his negation of it, he finally reaches the standpoint where he can look to his most forbidding "other," God, infinite spirit as such, as his own self-posited essence, persisting in its very negation: the created non-God world, including the created non-God human being. Here the relationship to the other becomes reciprocal in the most thoroughgoing way. Because it is after all Spirit, even finite Spirit sees itself in its utmost opposite, which is infinity. Because it is Spirit, infinite Spirit sees itself in its utmost opposite, which is finitude. When God looks to man, he sees his own self-posited essence, persisting in its very negation. Man is like God in seeing himself in his other, in what is unlike him. God is like man in seeing himself in the unlikeness of Himself in Man. Man thinking of God is God thinking of Man. And it is this that Hegel sees figured in the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity, speculatively understood. Spirit is thinking, understood in this precise sense. When I think of thinking, thinking also thinks of me thinking of thinking. For Hegel, this is the real meaning of Aristotle's "thinking thinking thinking."

Purpose is here understood not in the usual sense that attaches to *Noûs* in the traditional account of divine design, i.e., the prior embrace of a desired determinate content in idea, which then acts as the cause of the production of an isomorphic reality. Purpose instead becomes a name for the very essence of thinking in its new meaning (though Hegel will claim that this is what *Noûs* meant all along, implicitly): doubt as certainty, subject as substance, negativity as content-production. In online appendix A, supplement 11, "Europe's Missed Exit," we have already explored this idea of purpose in some detail, and how far it departs from our everyday meaning of purposive activity. Here we can note that, if Spirit is purposive in this sense that involves unification with its opposite, it is so precisely through its relation to purposelessness, its own proper opposite: it involves an indivisible unity of purpose and purposeless, and that this is found on both sides of the human/absolute relation. But something funny happens here. In Schelling's early version of this idea (*System of Transcendental Idealism,* 1800), both God and man are this spiritual activity as a unity of purposive and purposeless: Nature's apparent purposelessness is taken up into God's purposive-purposeless unity, and man's activity reaches the same purposive-purposeless unity in the activity of artistic genius. Both purpose and purposelessness must be found on both sides of that relation: it is a kind of activity that is not purposive as a craftsman is purposive, with a clear prior idea of his goal, but as an artist is intentional without ever quite knowing what he's doing. We can no longer think either "God is purposeful to the exclusion of purposelessness, therefore man should also try to be as purposeful as possible" (Emulative Theism), nor "God is purposeful, therefore man should relinquish his own purposivity" (Compensatory Theism), nor indeed "God/World is purposeless, so man must establish purpose" (Compensatory Atheism) nor "Dao is purposeless, so man should also be purposeless" (Emulative Atheism). For Schelling at this time, God is the artistic genius of nature, whose works proceed by means of the simultaneous-purposelessness-and-purposivity of a genius: not acting randomly, always driven by a strong sense of purpose, but like a great artist also unable to clearly articulate even to himself what he's doing, never able to be quite sure in advance what he's driving at. God does not know everything, even about himself, even about his own will. This is the full convergence of consciousness and unconsciousness, of purposive spirit

and blind nature, and man should strive to be as much like that as possible (hence we have a modified Intersubsumptive Emulative Theism/Atheism).

But in the mature Hegel, from 1807's *Phenomenology of Spirit* onward, this picture has changed in a small but decisive way. Now the goal is to reach a position where man's relation to Nature and to his own creative activity is always to be priorly mediated by the relation to God, in whom the unification with purposelessness has already taken place such that it is already known to have been sublated. There is no legitimate place left for a direct relationship with either man's own purposeless aspects or the purposeless aspects of nature— just as in classical theism, all are known as simply indirect expressions of the divine purpose (even though purpose here is no longer "external purpose" as in traditional theism). Purpose seems to have regained the upper hand here. The religious implication of the final Hegelian position was well-expressed by a young David Strauss in 1835, before he had crossed over from a "Right Hegelian" to become the first "Left Hegelian": "

> When it is said of God that he is [Spirit, Geist], and of man that he also is [Spirit], it follows that the two are not essentially distinct. [Strauss's brackets: It is the essential characteristic of Spirit to remain identical to itself in the distinction of itself from itself, that is, to possess itself in its other. Thus to speak more precisely, it is given with the recognition of God as Spirit that God does not remain as a fixed and immutable infinite outside of and above the finite, but enters into it, posits finitude, nature, and human spirit, merely as his alienation of self from which he eternally returns again into unity with himself.] As man, considered as a finite spirit, limited to his finite nature, has no truth; so God, considered exclusively as an infinite spirit, shut up in his infinitude, has no reality. The infinite spirit is real only when it discloses itself in finite spirits; as the finite spirit is true only when it merges itself in the infinite. The true and real existence of spirit, therefore, is neither in God by himself (*für sich*), nor in man by himself (*für sich*), but in the God-man; neither in the infinite alone, nor in the finite alone,

> but in the interchange of impartation and withdrawal between the two, which on the part of God is revelation, on the part of man religion. [52]

If Strauss has correctly characterized the implicit religious position of the mature Hegel, as I think he has, we now must say, not as in early Schelling (and early Hegel), "God is Purposivity without specific Purpose; Man should be (in some sense) that way too—preferably a romantic creative genius," but rather, "God is Purpose positing but sublating its opposite, purposelessness; Man should see the apparently purposeless aspects of his own experience as an aspect of his own nature as Spirit, i.e., in the intersubsumptive relationship between finite and infinite spirit that is intrinsic to the nature of Spirit as such." Since we are to relate to Nature both in ourselves and in the world purely through the mediation of its relation to God, we have come back to "Not my Will but Thine be done" as in Compensatory Theism. So we may say that while the early Schelling's version gives us Emulative Intersubsumptive Theism/Atheism, Hegel's tilts toward Compensatory Intersubsumptive Theism; in both cases, the demon seed of theism continues to infect the results, even with these enormous revisions to the basic conception of God, no longer a temporally prior creator at the beginning of the world, no longer a self-standing transcendent consciousness, and yet still prioritizing and absolutizing a single purpose for the world. (I am speaking here of the theological application of Hegel's view within the sphere designated as Religion, wherein speculative truth is still depicted in the "inadequate form" of picture-thinking appropriate to the understanding; to what extent this still applies even to the same view when that inadequate form is surpassed, in thinking of Reason proper to the realm of Philosophy itself, has been taken up in online appendix A, supplement 11, "Europe's Missed Exit to Atheist Mysticism: Spinoza Introduced by Schelling to Kant in the Mind of Hegel in 1801.")

In contrast to both Emulative and Compensatory Intersubsumptive Theism, we have Emulative Intersubsumptive Atheism: Tiantai Buddhism, which I have addressed in some detail elsewhere. But to provide an orienting point of contrast, I will here give a succinct but relevantly

---

[52] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, translated by Marilyn Massay, based on the translation of Marian Evans (George Eliot), in The Young Hegelians: An Anthology, edited by Lawrence S. Stepelevich (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983), pp. 44-45.

contrasting passage from this tradition, translated a bit expansively so as to avoid too many further technical details:

> Beginninglessly there has been nothing to you [or any sentient being] but afflictive delusions, self-defeating volitions (i.e., karmic action), and suffering--nothing besides! But all of this is precisely the inextricable and omnipresent Threefold Buddhanature, [i.e., the Three Truths: Emptiness, Provisional Positing, and the Middle which is their Intersubsumption]. When you have not yet aspired to realize it or taken up any practices conducive to doing so, the inextricable practical and cognitive causes of that realization are together called merely "the inextricable nature of all things, as such," [i.e., considered at first only as the intrinsically omnipresent Three Truths objectively available to be realized, rather than any explicit process of cultivations and cognitions constituting this realization itself, which you will *afterwards* discover you have also always been engaged in]. This is why we merely say "All sentient beings have the inextricable [Buddha]nature per se [i.e., as objective 'substance' to be known, whereas in reality each psycho-physical organism that either knows or doesn't know it also is the Threefold Buddhanature in its entirety, i.e., the Three Truths, both active and cognizing (i.e., as 'subject') as well as object to be cognized." Once it is accepted that one's own mind [i.e., one's delusions and self-defeating volitions and sufferings, which, because determinate, are also Provisional Posits, and thus are also Empty and the Middle, i.e., are the Threefold Buddhanature] "possesses" this inextricable nature, we then show that this nature has no insides or outsides. It thus pervades all space, the same through all Buddhas, equally there through everything in the entire field of possible experience [Dharmadhātu]. Once its omnipresent pervasion is accepted, we show that whatever it pervades is also inextricable from it at every locus. Since it is the same through all Buddhas and equally there through everything in the entire field of possible experience, the

> bodies of all Buddhas are inextricably present at every locus in this omnipresently pervasive nature, such that one body being given, all beings are then aspects of this body. The same thus goes for the surrounding environment thus brought into being around each of these Buddha-bodies: one environment being given, all things are then aspects of that environment. Thus are the body and its environment identical to one another, i.e., intersubsuming, such that to speak of the body is to speak of its environment. The same goes for the intersubsumption of large and small, or of one and many. Because we possess such a nature, it is said that we have Buddhanature.[53]

It would take some time to unpack all that is going on in this passage. But for the moment we may just say that what is primary in this view of the world, both temporally and logically, is simply deluded volitions and suffering of innumerable conditional sentient beings, going back through endless time, not created for any reason and not endowed with any special divine faculty, just suffering beings blindly flailing around trying to avoid suffering in all sorts of stupid ways. They are as stupid as the universe that produced them, and for this reason their actions have no rhyme or reason, and never work out, always leading to self-perpetuating patterns of suffering. Purpose itself is one of the aspects of this stupidity. It is nothing more than what is here called "volitions"—not a single purpose, and not a wise purpose, but an infinity of conditional and futile desires and intentional actions, which are the very core of this suffering—all rooted in the deluded idea that there is some purpose worth pursuing, i.e., desire. It is the nature of "conditionality" as such (i.e., elaborated in Tiantai thought as the "Three Truths") which does all the rest of the work, allowing these originary multiple, partial and misguided purposes to be seen as identical to something else. What is that something else? Not a grand

---

[53] Zhanran, *Jingang'pi*. 汝無始來唯有煩惱、業、苦而已。即此全是理性三因。由未發心，未曾加行，故性緣、了同名正因，故云眾生皆有正性。既信己心有此性已，次示此性非內外，遍虛空，同諸佛，等法界。既信遍已，次示遍具。既同諸佛，等於法界，故此遍性具諸佛之身，一身一切身，如諸佛之感土，一土一切土。身土相即，身說土說，大小一多亦復如是。有彼性故，故名有性

purpose, certainly, but something that is perhaps comparable to "realizing the nature of Spirit as self-positing in self-negating." But here this self-positing-as-self-negating is *not* simply a conception of Mind cleared of the implication of *Noûs* and hence of the purposivity associated with Spirit (the kind of mental entity, to be discussed below, that we see in the Chan/Zen Buddhist idea of the pure mind of desireless universal awareness--somewhat similar to the Tibetan Dzogchen idea of *rigpa* or the Vedantic notion of Brahman as *sat-chit-ananda*). Rather, it is also cleared of any special association with consciousness or subjectivity as opposed to matter or objectivity. What is it then? Simply the inextricable nature of conditionality, entailing that any conditional being "has neither inside nor outside." The Tiantai name for this explication of the meaning of conditionality as such is "The Three Truths," or perhaps better, "The Threefold Truth": local coherence as global coherence as intersubsumption. This means something similar to the Hegelian reading of the Spinozistic conception of what finitude means: to be finite is to be something whose essence does not involve its own existence, such that its existence depends on something other than what it is, something other than its own essence, on what is essentially other to and outside itself: in Hegelese, that it has its own essence outside itself (as in Spinoza only the Absolute, Substance or God, is self-caused, meaning that its essence is its existence, something for which *what* it is guarantees *that* it is—for its essence is simply infinity, which can be conceived of only as existing, just like the Cartesian *dubito*, which becomes here Thought, one of the attributes of Substance, expressing precisely this essence: infinity). And to be determinate, to be any definite essence whatever, is to be finite: "all determination is negation." What this means here is, again, that whatever is, is conditional, because to be is to be determinate, which is to be finite, which is to be necessarily conditioned by what is not itself. But this otherness is necessary to its existence, and hence is inextricable from it, is what makes it what it is, is internal to its most basic definition. "To have an outside" is its own internal essence. It essence is to-have-an-other-which-is-mutually-exclusive-with-it-but-which-is-the-necessary-copresent-condition-of-its-existence. That is, its essence is to have a mutually exclusive entity which is also coextensive what makes it count as what it is, i.e., with its own essence, with its ownmost being. Anything regarded as mutually exclusive to X, any and every non-X (whether what precedes or succeeds it temporally, what composes it mereologically,

what contrasts to it conceptually, or what is alternative to it in imagination), cannot be said to be either internal or external to it, identical to it or different from it—which is to say, it itself is equally identifiable as X or as non-X. That is the "inextricable nature" of all conditioned, finite, determinate things: to be what they are not, not to be what they are, just by being entirely what it is. This is the "neither inside nor outside" that leads to the evocation of intersubsumption in the passage just quoted.

I realize this will too-brief explication will not be very illuminating without a full exposition of all that is entailed in Tiantai thinking in all its intricate details, which is of course offered elsewhere. But for now I just want to point to the way the relationship between purpose and purposelessness, and the very different relation between deluded sentient beings and enlightened Buddhas, is presented here. Purposes (i.e., desires) are a result of trying to blot out this nature, to make things simply determinate as one thing rather than another—for that is the nature of desire, to prefer one outcome over another, where the two outcomes must be mutually exclusive to have any meaning. Purpose is desire, which is what attempts to disambiguate and clearly divide entities, always doomed to failure precisely because of this nature, because of which nothing can really be simply "inside" or simply "outside" any proposed boundary. This is precisely why all desire is deluded, and precisely why it is always inevitably doomed to failure and frustration, why all deluded desiring finite existence is suffering, why all purposes, qua purpose, are themselves causes and effects of suffering.

The realization of this nature means seeing that any particular entity itself—even my own moment of suffering or deluded desire—is always already also outside itself as something other, uncontainable in any delimitable conceptual space or essence. Because my delusion pervades all its othernesses, it also pervades the realm of another specific entity—a Buddha, who is someone who simply the idea (real or imagined) of someone who has realized just this uncontainability and lives it. Here too, as in the above account of the God/man relationship in Hegel, Buddhas overflow into sentient beings, and sentient beings into Buddhas, precisely because of their shared nature. But this shared nature here is not "Spirit" but simply conditionality itself, which is to say, finitude, determinacy itself. "Infinite-qua-finite, finite-qua-infinite" is shown to be the nature of finitude as such, and of infinity as something definite,

distinct from finitude as well. The same point is made by Hegel, in slightly different terms, above all in the *Science of Logic*, and it is still clearly discernible in the contours of Hegel's theology as described by Strauss above. But the difference is seen clearly, when the dust settles, in the status of purposes. For in Tiantai, the infinity of deluded futile purposes that begin the process are retained in the final intersubsumption such that each is now the absolute purpose-purposelessness itself. *Each* purpose becomes the absolute purpose, precisely through its coextensivity with purposelessness, which also guarantees that purpose is always multiple, never reducible to a single purpose. There are directions, infinite directions, each absolute, each subsuming and subsumed by all the others—but there is no one direction, and nothing can ever be superseded once and for all. When a sentient being thinks of a Buddha, he thinks of the Buddha thinking of himself and all other sentient beings, and every moment of their sentient experience including this one, as internal-external to this very thought of his, in the manner described above. Thinking of a buddha thinking of me and all other sentient beings each thinking of a buddha and of all other sentient beings, each irresistibly flowing out in all directions into all that is other to itself due to their very nature as limited to themselves, is both the Buddha thinking of me and me thinking of the Buddha—but it is also all sentient beings, indeed every moment of sentient experience, experiencing every other moment of sentient experience. My purposefully taking up the intention to think of a Buddha is a deluded desire that overflows into what it does not intend, because like all entities it is essentially also what it is not. My intending the buddha intending me and all other sentient beings is also the buddha and all other sentient beings intending me and each other, intending every possible intention. My purpose is all purposes, even those that contravene it. The world is now seen to be purposeful as purposeless as omnipurposively intertelic.

This is the *ne plus ultra*, I would say, of the way in which the primacy of purposelessness guarantees the irreducible multiplicity of purposes, even when its perhaps one-sided but thoroughgoing initial form in Daoist *wuwei* is developed in Tiantai to the convergence of purpose and purposeleness, and indeed the absolute inextricability of all of these purposes in all of nature, and their intersubsumption with one another. Here as in the Hegelian theology discussed above, it is the essence of a finite consciousness (man in Hegel's case, all deluded

sentient beings in the Tiantai case) as well as of a perfect consciousness (God, or Buddhas) to regard and in a certain sense subsume the other, where the perfection of the latter is not compromised by its necessary relation to the imperfect consciousness but is instead constituted and indeed perfected by it. But of special note in comparing these two Intersubsumptive visions is the difference that is made precisely here, in the difference between the concept of "God" and the concept of "Buddha." The first is a conscious, purposive source of all things, including the finite consciousness, and though this primary meaning is radically modified in Hegel's reconstruction, it is not wholly left behind. The second, however, is something quite different. A buddha is a conditioned sentient being who has gone on to realize the nature of his own conditionality, and of conditionality as such, as something that intersubsumes with unconditionality, and thence with all other conditioned entities. The existence of this being is stipulated not as the source of the world, but as a necessarily thinkable thought in negative response to a negative response to the world—a very low bar indeed. Here is Zhiyi telling us what is thinkable, by which he means what is conceivable in terms of oneness and difference—as a way of going on to tell us how thinking through these thinkables allows us to contemplate his real target, the deluded conditional mind that produces this thinkable thought, for *that* is the unthinkable: what is neither identical to what it is constitutively contrasted to, what it is defined as excluding, nor different from it. That deluded mind is what Tiantai meditation focuses on, in order to reveal that this conditioned deluded mind itself turns out to be, upon examination, inconceivable and unthinkable in such terms, the truly conditioned as the truly unconditioned that intersubsumes all conditioned phenomena, including the Buddha that it has thought up. Here is how it comes to think that up:

> Our first object of contemplation is the mind as the unthinkable object. But this object is hard to talk about, so let us first talk about thinkable objects, to make it easier to present the unthinkable object. Even the Hinayanists say that mind generates all phenomena, by which they mean the causes and effects of the cycle of the six paths of samsara [all generated by the intentional karma of sentient beings]. They then reject the ordinary and aspire to sageliness, dropping all this

and emerging above it all, leaving only a withered body and extinguished consciousness. This is the Four Noble Truths considered as deliberate activity, with beginnings and ends in real time. All of these are to be considered thinkables.

Now in the Mahāyāna it is also said that mind generates all dharmas, by which is meant rather the Ten Dharma Realms [i.e., the prior six plus śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas and buddhas]:

Contemplating the mind as existent, it is then regarded as having both good and bad mental states. The bad are the causes and effects of the three evil paths of hells, hungry ghosts and animals, while the good are the causes and effects of the three paths of Asuras [ferociously competitive titans], humans and gods. These six types are then contemplated as all being impermanent, arising and perishing constantly, and the mind that does this contemplating is also seen as changing with every thought, never dwelling for a moment. Further, both what contemplates and what is contemplated are generated conditionally, and what is generated conditionally is Empty of self-nature. Such are the phenomena of cause and effect for the two Dharma-realms of the Two Vehicles, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Contemplating this sort of Emptiness [of the Two Vehicles] and this sort of Being [of the Six Paths of Samsara] as both trapped in the dualistic morass of two extremes, either sinking into nothingness or obstructed by being, great compassion arises, and one enters into the Provisional to transform and liberate beings. Though there is no body in reality, one provisionally creates a non-literal body. Though there is no emptiness in reality, one provisionally speaks non-literally of emptiness. Thus does one guide and transform them all. These are the phenomena of cause and effect of the bodhisattvas.

> Contemplating all these phenomena, of both liberators and liberated, as all precisely the dharma of the Middle Way Ultimate Reality, all of them thus ultimately pure, who is good and who is evil? Who exists and who doesn't exist? Who is liberated and who is not liberated? All dharmas are like this. These are the phenomena of the cause and effect of the buddhas.
>
> All these ten dharma-realms, in all their tangled connections, from the shallow to the deep, emerge from the mind. Although this is all to be classed as belonging to the Innumerable Four Noble Truths of the Mahāyāna, it is still the thinkable. This is not the focus of our present contemplation. [He then goes on to describe the "inconceivable" or "unthinkable": all these Three Thousand as any single moment of mentation.][54]

"Buddha" emerges as a thought that negates the negation of the negation of the negation that is conditionality, the world of finitude. Finitude is itself the realm of negation: to be finite is to negate or exclude another finite thing. Determination, conditionality, is negation. The "Two Vehicles" are the negation of this negation which defines the conditioned, thereby positing the non-conditioned, the Unconditioned. The "Bodhisattvas" are the negation of this negation of negation, seeing it as equally conditioned, inasmuch as it negates and therefore excludes something: to exclude is to be conditioned. The idea of "Buddhas" is the idea of reaffirmation of the ultimate reality of every conditioned phenomenon, by negating this triple negation. But the

---

[54] Mohezhiguan, T46…… 一觀心是不可思議境者. 此境難說。先明思議境。令不思議境易顯。思議法者。小乘亦說心生一切法。謂六道因果三界輪環。若去凡欣聖則棄下上出灰身滅智。乃是有作四諦。蓋思議法也。大乘亦明心生一切法。謂十法界也。若觀心是有有善有惡。惡則三品三途因果也。善則三品脩羅人天因果。觀此六品無常生滅。能觀之心亦念念不住。又能觀所觀悉是緣生。緣生即空。並是二乘因果法也。若觀此空有墮落二邊沈空滯有。而起大慈悲入假化物。實無身假作身。實無空假說空。而化導之。即菩薩因果法也。觀此法能度所度。皆是中道實相之法。畢竟清淨。誰善誰惡。誰有誰無。誰度誰不度。一切法悉如是。是佛因果法也。此之十法邐迤淺深皆從心出。雖是大乘無量四諦所攝。猶是思議之境. 非今止觀所觀也.

power of negation itself derives from, indeed just is, the conditioned nature of the conditioned. The result is a view of the world that sees each thing as equally the ultimate reality, i.e., as the Middle Way that falls to neither of any two extremes (e.g., liberator versus liberated, conditioned versus unconditioned, neither-conditioned-nor-unconditioned versus conditioned and unconditioned, good versus evil and so on), nor of the simply negation of the two extremes in a oneness that underlies or supersedes them. Both of the contrasted qualities are produced (negating the negation of the duality that would blur the distinction into a oneness) but neither can land definitively in any one locus, on any one side or the other (negating the duality as well as preserving it). Hence the Buddha realm is expressed not as negation or as affirmation on any level, but simply as "who is X, who is non-X?" This "who?," rather than a stably identifiable "unconditioned" as definitively opposed to the conditioned, is what it means for them to really be unconditioned, omnipresent, mutually intersubsumptive.

But even this point of view, the way a buddha views the world, which emerges from this immanent structure of negation built into the very negativity of conditionality itself, considered as a particular single thought, one viewpoint among others, is produced as a thought in the conditioned mind, and though in its "who is X, who is non-X?" this perspective has reached the point where nothing is "thinkable" as either any X or any non-X, it itself, as one particular way of thinking as opposed to others, is still counted among what is "thinkable." The text goes on, in the passage after this passage (not translated here), to show in contrast that the mind that produces these various viewpoints is itself intersubsumptive with all these (deluded, thinkable) thoughts and viewpoints it produces and negates: it is viewed by its own thought as much as it views its own thought. In viewing itself as viewed by the view that views it as absolute, and as intersubsuming all other perspectives, it experiences this same absolute "who?" with respect to its own (deluded) experience. My viewing the Buddha that my mind produces is the Buddha viewing me, produced by his own mind (for my mind produces the thought of the Buddha thinking of other sentient beings, including me, producing them with his mind as I produce him producing them with mine).

So in a sense I produce the Buddha and the Buddha produces me. We are here already very far from the idea of God unilaterally producing man and world, and equally far from the

idea of man unilaterally producing God and world, or world unilaterally producing God and man--as we are already far from any of that with Hegel. Each can be said to produce the other. But further, neither man-producing-Buddha-and-world nor Buddha-producing-man-and-world nor world-producing-man-and-Buddha is done for a purpose: it is an inevitable involuntary by-product of simply being a conditional being to "produce" its negations in this way. And indeed the whole point here is the undermining of any possible definite endpoint or starting point, any single source or single telos. Who is liberated, who is liberating? Who is the source, who is the product? Thus does an atheist version of intersubsumption of infinite and finite mind play itself out, in sharp contrast to the Hegelian, (post-)theist version. We still hew to the basic Buddhist structure here: yes, there is a telos (do the contemplation of the inconceivable object in order to realize this vision of universal absoluteness), but that telos is precisely the overcoming of all particular teloi into the atelic, the omnitelic, the intertelic.

Now it is possible, as touched on in online appendix A, supplement 11, to see Hegel himself to have reached this vision as well: what he calls "the absolute Purpose" is no specific purpose, and is realizing itself at every moment in every event. The purposive work of history and of the dialectic practiced by the individual philosopher to think all this is then analogous to the Buddhist case: to reach the point of this self-cancelling vision of teleology. May it be so. But even if that is what Hegel does intend (a still very controversial hermeneutic claim), the hangover of theism continues to haunt the final overcoming. I think this can be best pinpointed by considering the status of the idea of "intellectual intuition" in the context of these two contrasted systems.

Intellectual intuition is Kant's term; "intellect" and "intuition" are both meant in the Kantian sense here. For us finite beings, the "intellect" (*Verstand*) is the faculty of universal concepts, involving necessity and universality, none of which can be derived from particular empirical data. These necessary and universal concepts are transcendental (a priori), not derived from empirical data but instead the condition of the appearance in experience of all empirical data, and in this sense linked to the spontaneity of autonomy. "Intuition" on the other hand is what we directly perceive, for example in particular given sensory experience arising at a particular time and place: the experienced empirical content for which the universal and

necessary concepts serve as rules of unification, which is the condition of the appearing of these experiences. Since we are finite minds, the universal concepts of our intellect, which in a sense we do produce ourselves in that it they are inherent to ourselves, are empty without a "given" field of sense experiences that we do not produce. Whatever possibilities we may produce in our minds, we must wait for external data for anything to count as actual. A gulf lies between conception and perception. For the infinite mind of God, if it exists, however, intellect and intuition converge and are coextensive: what He conceives is also immediately ipso facto produced as real. He says "Let there be X" and ipso facto there actually is X. Just to conceive of something is for Him to produce it.

Fichte notes that we do have one instance of intellectual intuition even as finite beings: the thought "I." To think of it as possible is to make it actual. We are back to the *cogito*, the *dubito*, where merely thinking it proves, nay accomplishes, its reality. This self-positing of the "I" is for Fichte also precisely the ground of all other knowledge, the transcendental unity of apperception, and also the autonomous will of Kant's practical philosophy, his ethics. When all knowledge is seen as rooted in and instantiating this intellectual intuition, we have arrived at true knowledge. Early Schelling and Hegel see this further developed in the purposivity without purpose as beauty in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, and indeed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself in the antinomies: the very thinking of these antinomies is the actuality of the Ideas of Reason. And Hegel's mature project in the *Logic*, and from there into the rest of his system, may be viewed as a full playing out of the implications of this claim to its furthest implication, showing how thinking produces all its contents immanently, until all the contents one might encounter in "intuition"—in ordinary perception of the world—have been shown to be autonomously produced by the self-movement of the transcendental categories themselves, developing into one another through their immanent dialectic. This reaches an impressive level of fine-grained detail: all the phenomena of thought, of nature, of society, of institutions, of politics, of history, can now be experienced as the full expression of one's own self-positing as self-actualizing, self-negating, self-developing, making itself actual by the very nature of its thinking. The various sections in the dialectical system represent concepts of increasing concreteness, and these concepts are themselves contents. Concepts do then generate all

contents, and this is why Hegel can continue to speak of teleology amidst all this, since "teleology" originally just means "concepts actually producing their own contents," as discussed in online appendix A, supplement 11.

But two things are to be noted about this here. One, these concepts which are also contents stand in a certain definite relation to one another, such that their subsumption always goes in one direction only, from more abstract to more concrete. Their derivation follows a strict single sequence, which is just what the system lays before us. It is true that the abstract categories at the beginning of the system "implicitly" include the later categories, just as the later categories "explicitly" subsume the earlier ones. But this directionality of implicit to explicit is fixed and determinate—a point of particular pride for Hegel, and understandably so.

Two, fine-grained as Hegel strove to make the system, there are in the end a finite number of these categories. Far more than Kant's measly 12, to be sure, and now provided with their immanent convertability into one another spelled out in its precise contours, and (even more admirably), including not only alleged facts but also (in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) all sorts of deluded ways of experiencing all facts--but still a finite number. Not every passing thought of a content, or every perception, is a category. Hegel will claim that his net is finely enough meshed to catch everything, but some particulars nevertheless resolve into their adjacent universals more quickly than others, and some serve only as subsumed, never as subsumer. For example, this pen on my desk could be absorbed into and thus instantiating the various a priori categories of mineral matter from the Philosophy of Nature, and the a priori categories manufacture and commerce from the Objective Spirit portion of the Philosophy of Spirit, while my current perception of use of it could be instantiate a priori categories of my current historical shape of Spirit, and of cognition and will also from the Philosophy of Spirit. All these categories are immanent transformations and self-concretizations of the primary a priori categories of Being, Nothing, Becoming and so on up to Mechanism, Chemism, Life and so on from the *Logic*. When I see it thus, the pen could be experienced by me as rational, i.e., as expressing my own spontaneous inmost nature and the inmost nature of all existence, and of Absolute Spirit, my own substantiality as subject and my subjectivity as substantiality, rather than as something arbitrarily imposed upon me. I would then be seeing the pen just as a Kantian could experience his own

moral freedom, or indeed his scientific cognitions according to cause and effect and the other categories, which come from and express the inalienable nature of my own mind. Then I would be "at home" with this pen. Now if I happen to notice a slight sparkle reflected off the metal of the pen in a pensive moment and be reminded of the sunset reflected off the window my childhood home, this might be absorbed into the categories of Poetry, under the category of Art in the Philosophy of Spirit, and the categories of optics and light in the Philosophy of Nature—so I could be at home with that too. If I pick up the pen and stab my brother in the neck with it, it would show me the categories of Crime and prospective Punishment from the Philosophy of Objective Spirit, perhaps also of love and family and society and so on as well. Then I could be at home with all that too. But the specific manner of my being at home and recognizing myself in all these things goes through a single determinate line of developments, with one category connected to all the others in a strict single sequence, with no skipping around and no leapfrogging over intervening categories. Further, whether or not the full particularity of my pensive encounter with the gleam of the pen or my violent misuse of it, and whatever other further contingent associations may inform my moment-to-moment experience, is captured in the meshes of this net is highly questionable. At best, I think, Hegel resigns himself to relegating whatever does not get articulated somewhere in the system to the (to be sure, necessary) a priori category of "contingency." But this might include the entire moment-to-moment sequence of my everyday experiences, prior to their being rethought and rearranged into the order of the categories of the system. A truly heroic attempt is made to give due weight to the category of contingency; the universal Idea needs some contingency as its vehicle, and this is presented to us as the full integration of the universal and the particular in the singular, the individual, fully suffused of both, sublating the abstractions of either a pure universal or a pure particularity. To put it crudely, when the World Spirit has reached a certain point in its development, it must transition and sublate into the next phase. Some contingent individual or event appears—Napoleon, let's say, or Trump, or the Beatles, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand—and a world conflagration ensues: this required both the universal world spirit on one side and the contingent individual, who happened to be in the right place at the right time and have the right character to trigger what would have to happen sooner or later. If this individual didn't appear, another one

would have soon before or after. But the roles of the universal and the individual here are wildly asymmetrical. The Spirit wins out no matter which contingent person or event serves as its trigger, even though there must be one—and who or what will be able to so serve is determined by the criteria developed by the sublation needs of the Spirit, making use of the contingent desires of the individual but not elevating precisely these to the status of the criterion of sublation. Now what makes that event or person contingent rather than necessary is that not all of his or its characteristics are necessary to spark the conflagration. So any two workable candidates must differ in some contingent respects. But these respects do not matter. They are wholly inessential, purged in the process of the sublation. A true synthesis would require that difference on either side would alter the outcome—i.e., we would have had a different next phase of the Spirit's own development, its next step of sublation, if the Rolling Stones rather than the Beatles came to America first, or if Giuliani rather than Trump had been the figurehead for the rightwing resurgence in the USA, or if Franz Ferdinand had been only crippled but not killed at Sarajevo. A Stones-led sixties would also have been the Spirit, would have been a different unity of universal and particular. I don't think Hegel will allow this; rather, even if the first few months after Ed Sullivan looked a little differently, the ensuing upheavals would finally find their level, giving us in the end much the same picture as we have from the Beatles-led sixties. The universal requires the contingent particular and will modify the particular, bending and breaking and using it up through its assumption of the mantle of the universal, and the particular contingency certainly also requires the universal—but, from a Tiantai perspective, the particular contingency should also modify the universal. Yet this is not what Hegel gives us. *Noûs-as-Arché* slips in the backdoor: universality must win if only by dominating and determining the content of the synthesis that sublates it, and the alleged union of necessity and contingency ends up excluding from the result the determinative power of the contingent, its power to modify the universal.

Now in Tiantai, neither of these two final limitations—the finite number and the definite order of the a priori categories--apply. On the contrary, every experience reveals a new a priori category. I could not have the experience if there were not in my mental apparatus the prior ability to "see-as" in this particular way. I may be shown three dots a million times and not "see" a so-called "triangle" there: for the latter, I need to be able to form the necessary Gestalt of these

dots. Now it's true that I can be instructed and guided to come to see them; but this must start from something already in me, which can then be shown to have further forms of expression and applications, much as the knowledge of mathematics is shown to the slave boy in Plato's *Meno*: I will have to be made to discover something more about what is "in" me already to really see what is meant. Whatever comes into my experience, in whatever sequence, is thus inherent in my own mind. But since this goes for any determinacy whatsoever, this applies to the sequence itself as well, and any random combination of elements or links may be focused upon. If I see them, they have always been there—but in an inexplicit form, which is to say, in the form of whatever I was priorly experiencing instead, fully present as this something else. Further, they will be there in and as whatever experience replaces them. This is why there is no finite number of these categories. Further, like the 12 Kantian categories, each of them applies to all experiences qua experiences—they can be found priorly informing each and every one of them, if I only know to look for them. I learn to look for them by having them as explicit experiences. This might be said of Hegel's longer list of categories as well, in that what is explicit in the later ones is implicitly present in the former ones, but still, Hegel's commitment to unilateral development in a single direction—the theistic hangover—means that he will stop short of allowing us to claim that a specific human category—say "constitutional monarchy"—also can be found in, say, molten lava or a pile of sticks. In a certain sense yes, but in the more important sense, it seems to me, no. Here he is in line with the early Schelling of the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, in the Introduction to which, after establishing with Kant that we could never even have the idea of an organic being if it were not a priori derivable from our own nature--that it could never get into us simply from outside, that we would have no way to derive it simply from unmixed empirical data if we didn't have some prior forms of the understanding by which to conceive it—he nevertheless rejects the idea that we are randomly projecting these categories onto nature. If so, he asks, why do we only project in some places, onto some beings, and not others, not all? For this he needs a kind of Pre-Established Harmony, not in Leibniz's naively theistic sense but in the sense he tries to establish in his philosophy, where nature and spirit recapitulate each in their own way the same primal a priori developments, such that each is the fulfilment of the other (spirit is realized nature, nature is realized spirit, both deriving from the Identity point which is

neither and both). But this means the conception of nature—and by extension of history—is still the "big story" presented by pre-philosophical common sense: some beings are organic, others are not, period. Some things are piles of sticks, others are not, period. This is of course convenient for the continued practice of science and morality as commonly understood, and for many this will therefore seem a feature, not a bug. But this is where the Tiantai version of Intersubumption differs: there everything is in some sense a pile of sticks—even a pile of sticks is a pile of sticks only "in some sense." There are no entities that either are or are not some specific determinacy simpliciter, just as "causality" is not a simple empirical entity, a particular experience, simpliciter, but rather a way of reading all experiences. That is, each is both a content and a category—both a fact (which can be expressed in any style) and a style (in which any fact can be expressed).

This is also why the Tiantai version does not collapse back into a kind of Leibnizian monadology picture, in spite of the fact that here, as in Leibniz, all the representations I experience are a priori in the sense that none come from outside me, all are built into my nature. For the next step in Tiantai is to reject both inside and outside as sources—for these two would have to be understood simpliciter for anything to come exclusively from one or the other, or indeed from both or neither. All experiences I have are inherent in me—but I myself am not inherent in me. The post-theistic version of this point would be to consider my own soul, with all its built in representations, as created by something else, by God. But then God has to be something simpliciter, a determinate datum with a conceptual inside and outside. The Tiantai version rejects this. All my experiences are inherent in me as a priori categories of my own mind, but this mind itself is but a category, discoverable everywhere if I'm looking for it and nowhere if I'm not. Thus all my experiences, in their exact sequence, saturated as they are with all my contingent delusions and all my accidental and misguided lusts and hatreds, are found to be inherent and ineradicable a priori categories operating everywhere and everywhen as much as they are ineradicably operating in and as me. This is the Tiantai doctrine of "inherent entailment," including also "inherent entailment of every delusion and evil." And as seen above, it is precisely because these contingent conditional evils are seen to be ineradicable everywhere that they are seen to be unconditional—and hence to be Nirvana, liberation, Buddhahood itself. I

am not asked to straighten them out and rearrange them according to an alleged objective order, as seen in the eye of God or Buddha as arranged by his infinite wisdom; Buddhahood is not a creator in that sense, the purposive creator, but only in the same sense that I am the creator of Buddhahood, in the sense that all entities create each other. Similarly, Buddhahood neither creates nor perceives an "order" to things in the theistic *Noûs-as-Arché* sense of an arrangement made by and according with a single purpose; rather, every moment of every being's experience is its own deluded configuration, and it is the ineradicable intersubsumption of these that is realized in Buddhahood. That also means we retain here, and even expand to infinity, the characteristic virtues of atheism: the meanings of things, the orders of things, the characters of things, are infinite in number, and infinitely intertwined. What becomes absolute, and salvific, is my own version of the world (still transformed, insofar as it becomes unconditional, but not replaced by some other God's-eye order and meaning), the narratives and significances and meanings that emerge from my own peculiar contingent conditioned experience of things, my own delusions, my own obsessions, my own quirky misreadings, my own flavors and scents and colorings of things. These are now the omnipresent ordering and meaning of the world, that all beings take in and express and realize in their own realizations of their own quirky orders and meanings, as I realize theirs. That is the religious vision of Emulative Intersubsumptive Atheism.

9. Universal Mind in Early Southern Zen: Another Opposite of God

Tiantai, like Spinoza, like Nietzsche, allows all purposes as aspects of the one purposelessness that is also every purpose and crosspurpose. There is, however, another interesting Buddhist approach to the purpose/purposelessness problem in light of the *Noûs* versus raw infinity problem. For another version of universal Mind which however is not a person and has no purpose at all, is presented by certain Chinese Buddhists, who moved from the disparagement of mind in early Buddhism (mind is constantly changing, temporally finite in the most severe way moment to moment, even less of a "self" than the relatively stable body), to an appreciation of the impersonal spacelike infinity of mind. Many Chinese Buddhist systems advocate some teaching of "mind-only" 唯心, positing the existence of a universal, omnipresent

mind, and many seem to assert a strong sense of omniscience in their treatment of the enlightened mind of a Buddha. These features might tempt an unwary reader to assume that we have here something resembling the *Noûs as Arché*, proto-God-centered views of the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* and of Abrahamic monotheisms and their theologies. But Chinese Buddhist mind-only doctrines are again not only not close approximations of God theories, but the exact opposite: they are radically atheist. The reason for this can be stated simply: the universal "mind" in all such Chinese Buddhist systems is not something with "intention," "a will," "commands," "favoring of the good," "control," or "ideas," as the mind of God is supposed to be, but rather, is precisely the lack of all of the above. For all of these features—favoring, intending, willing, controlling, the holding of views--are in pan-Buddhist thought precisely aspects of desire, which are the very antithesis of the enlightened mind. The problem of course is that Mind as Purposive cannot be all-inclusive; by definition, purpose, intelligence, is selective. That means that "infinite mind" can really only work if mind is also, equally, not-mind. We saw a version of this idea in the later development within Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism, the idea of "the Mind of Heaven and Earth," which is "mindless mind." There this phrase signified purposesless purposivity, intentionless intention, the telos of ateleology: the intention only to keep going, the goal of having no specific goal. Here in the earlier, Chinese Buddhist version too, we find that this universal mind at the root and heart of all things is equally no-mind, in a different but related sense that we will now consider.

The term for all these aspects of purposive dualistic controlling mind in this tradition is generally *nian* 念, determinate mental events that arise and perish, and that seek or intend something. The universal enlightened mind, which sometimes plays a foundational ontological role, is on the contrary consistently understood to be awareness, not as the doer or controller or mover of thoughts but as the field or space in which any of these thoughts or desires might arise and perish, both enabling them and remaining unstained by them. In the typical formulation of the Dasheng qixinlun 大乘起信論, hugely influential for Chinese Zen, "the nature of mind is free of *nian*" 心體離念. This freedom from the divisive character of mind as intentional is also what allows for its immanence: the universal mind is all of our minds, the nature of every mind qua mind, not as a self-positing activity but precisely as the undivided neither-one-nor-different

illimitable space in which all positings can arise, which is present in every sentient being. In some versions, these thought-desires are to be eliminated; in others, they are to be allowed to come and go, but without being clung to, so that they don't obscure the underlying field of which they are mere transformations, like waves arising in water. In the former versions, all characteristics of the Godlike mind are definitely excluded from this highest value and deepest ontological source; in the latter versions, the universal mind may have thoughts and desires and even personalities, but what it can never do is cling to any single personality, one single system of consistent desires and thoughts. It is either no person/thought/will or it is all persons/thoughts/wills; what it can never be is one person with one will and one idea of what is good. Space limitations forbid a full exploration of this theme here; for that I ask the reader to consult my other works on the topic. But it is hoped at least that the sharp antithesis between the enlightened universal mind of Buddha and the mind of God can be easily observed by any reader of the most representative texts in this tradition.[55]

Consider, for example, the following passage about the infinite mind from an eighth century Chinese Buddhist text, developed under the aegis of a radicalized atheist vision of religion:

---

[55]Again, the idea is perhaps most clear in texts like the *Dasheng qixinlun*, which states, "The meaning of enlightenment/awareness (覺 jue) is that the essence of mind is free from thoughts. To be free from thoughts is to be equal in extent to the realm of space, pervading all places, the one characteristic which is present throughout the Dharma-realm, which is precisely the Tathagata's Dharma-body of equality. It is this Dharma-body that is referred to as Original Enlightenment." 所言覺義者，謂心體離念。離念相者，等虛空界無所不遍，法界一相即如來平等法身，依此法身說名本覺. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [A standard collection of the East Asian Buddhist canon], edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次朗 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭, et al., 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1932 (henceforth "T"), 32.576b. This refers to the space-like field of awareness contrasted to "thoughts" (念）--i.e., specific mental events, concepts, perceptions, actively directed toward some focal point, seeking some object of desire. *Nian* is purpose, thinking, ideas, desires, seeking. To put the contrast most succinctly: the mind of God is *nian*, nothing but *nian*, *nian* writ large, while the mind of original enlightenment is the freedom from *nian*. It is this same conception of universal mind that is pinpointed by Guifeng Zongmi when he famously declares, "The single word 'knowing' is the gate to all wonders." (知之一字， 眾妙之門) (禪源諸詮集都序, T48.403a). Knowing 知 here is not thought, not knowledge, not ideas, not the grasping of essences: it is the space-like, nian-free awareness of the *Awakening of Faith*, the opposite of the mind of God. The mind that all things arise from is simply "neither existence nor non-existence," neither any thing nor the exclusion of anything: it is like space which is equally existent where it is absent. It is the opposite of any kind of "mind" or "reason" or "purpose" or "knower" of the God type. We see a similar trend in *Surangama Sutra* 楞嚴經 and in the teachings of Huineng given in various versions of the Platform Sutra.

All Buddhas and all sentient beings are nothing but the one mind. There is no other thing. This mind is beginingless, neither born nor extinguished. It is neither green nor yellow, without any form or characteristic, belonging neither to existence nor to non-existence, thinkable as neither old nor new, neither long nor short, neither large nor small, transcending all limit or measure, all names or designations, all traces and all opposites. It is just whatever is before you, but any movement of thought about it departs from it. It is like empty space, without boundary or limit, impossible to measure or fathom. This mind alone is Buddha. Buddha and sentient beings are not different, except that sentient beings cling to finite characteristics and seek something outside themselves. In seeking it, they lose it, making the Buddha search for the Buddha, using mind to try to grasp mind—which can never succeed even to the end of all forms in infinite eons. They don't realize that if they simply ceased giving rise to seeking thoughts and purposive deliberations the Buddha would naturally become present. For this mind is itself none other than Buddha. Buddha is precisely none other than sentient beings. When it becomes sentient beings, this mind is not diminished, and when it becomes the buddhas, it is not increased….This mind is precisely Buddha, and there is no other Buddha and no other mind. This mind is bright and pure, like space itself, devoid of even the slightest characteristic or appearance. But when the mind is raised and seeking thoughts move, its essence is violated, for it becomes attached to specific characteristics….If you just awaken to this one mind, you will see there is not the slightest phenomenon there to be attained. This is the true Buddha. Buddhas and all sentient beings are just one mind, with no difference between them, like empty space without the slightest admixture and never decaying. It is just like the sun shining in the sky: when the sun ascends and shines universally on all the world, the space is not itself brightened, and when the sun descends and darkness covers the world, the space itself is not darkened. Brightness and darkness are characteristics that exclude each other, but the nature

> of space is openness that never changes. Buddhas, sentient beings and the Mind are also thus. To see the Buddha as characterized by the pure light of liberation and sentient beings as characterized by the filth and darkness of samsara involves you in a view that will never liberate you, even in as many eons as there are grains of sands in the Ganges river—because it is attached to characteristics. There is only this one mind, beyond which there is not the slightest atom of any phenomenon to be attained. Just this mind is the Buddha. Because students these days do not awaken to this mind, they produce a state of mind seeking the mind, seeking the Buddha outside their own minds, and try to practice Buddhism in attachment to characteristics. All of this is unskillful practice which does not lead to awakening. To give offerings to all Buddhas throughout the ten directions is actually not as worthwhile as supporting one practioner of the Way without any intention, for to be free of intention is to be free of all mental attitudes, like the substance of Suchness itself, internally like wood or stone, unmoved and unshaken, and externally like empty space, unobstructed and unblocked, without subject or object and without position or direction, without form or appearance and with neither gain nor loss.[56]

It is crucial for our purposes to see how directly opposed this idea of infinite mind is to the *Noûs* idea of infinite mind, God or intelligence as infinite. Unlike the dialectical emulative atheism of Tiantai or the early Hegel, where the non-personal manifests itself in and as all personal purposes, but like Bataille in his paradoxical quest for the pure unmediated experience of chance and chaos, these doctrines of universal mind as awareness often involves in the rejection of thinking and purpose, for these are the very mechanism of non-all-inclusiveness. In this way, it tries to exclude the excluder, and can sometimes run into a serious philosophical impasse. This is a problem of certain forms of Chan (Zen) tradition, in my view, which however are still fine exemplars of a certain dimension of thoroughgoing emulative atheist mysticism.

[56] T48.379c.

That tradition is very inventive, and sometimes finds intriguing solutions to the problem it has created for itself.

This is accomplished in some of the successors to this idea by a further God-less refinement: not only is the universal mind of awareness understood to be the antithesis of *nian*, of purposive and differentiating thought, but it is also understood to be not only mind, but to be "mind as not mind," to be empty of any specific essence or characteristic which makes it mind. Indeed, mind has the paradoxical essence of non-exclusion of all objects, like a mirror (an image derived from the Zhuangzi, as we'll explore below, and which was put to a somewhat different use in Zhiyi's discussion of unintential bodhisattva activity, as we saw above), which alone is what allows it to be aware, to non-exclude the objects of awareness. We find this in texts like the **Surangama Sutra* (*Lengyanjing* 楞嚴經) and in the "Southern" Chan teachings of figures like Mazu and Huangbo, who typically first assert the presence of this universal awareness, but then tell us that it is called mind or awareness at first only as a temporary expedient; in reality, there is no mind without object, and we must advance from "just the mind is Buddha" to "neither mind nor Buddha nor any other thing."[57] It is in reality no more mind than object, no more this than that: real mind is not mind as opposed to object, but object and mind both, neither mind nor matter nor any other determinate entity or essence at all.

This is what accounts for the surprising reversal found in all the "Southern" Chan materials from "Huineng" forward, and most clearly in writings associated with the Chan master Linji Yixuan: this pure awareness thus ends up being not a motionless field but rather the ceaseless activity or "function" of the thoughts, *nian*, themselves, never settling into any static consistent system of presence—and there is in this view no other "substance" (*ti* 體) to the pure awareness above and beyond its "function" (*yong* 用) as any presently given *nian*. Here we may indeed have what would be described as thoughts and desires of the universal mind: but all thoughts and desires are its thoughts and desires, as are any other "functions" occurring anywhere, including rolling on the ground and raising the eyebrows, or the wriggling of any

[57]僧問。和尚為什麼說即心即佛。師云。為止小兒啼。僧云。啼止時如何。師云。非心非佛。僧云。除此二種人來如何指示。師云。向伊道不是物。T51.246a.

insect. For in this stage of Chan thinking, the "background" of stillness, the unmoved awareness, has fallen away: instead, we have the non-dwelling (*wuzhu* 無住)[58] freefall of *nian* after *nian* as the sole reality of the Buddha-nature. These pure mental events with no substance behind them are then themselves said to be non-*nian*; a reversal occurs when each *nian* is utterly separated from any relation to any other *nian*. The fluidity of thoughts is pushed to such an instantaneous extreme that it is freed from the relation to either a static background awareness or to any other thought. Thus lacking any static point of reference or link to form mediated chains of premises and conclusion or to contrast one thought to another, or to anything other than thought, anything other than the experience itself as it is happening, there is nothing making it determinate as a *nian*. It is no more *nian* than non-*nian*. The great central insight of Southern Chan is that while it may be true that the essence of mind is free of thoughts, what can alone be realized in experience (and in fact is never lacking from any experience) is that each *nian* itself, considered in strict isolation as the pure activity of nianing, is itself already free of *nian*. Mind cannot see mind, as the eye cannot see itself, so anything seen is not the essence of mind; whatever is posited as the essence of mind, mind as mind, is ipso facto not it. As the Surangama Sutra says, "When seeing sees seeing, this seen seeing is no longer the real seeing: seeing is free even of seeing." 見見之時，見非是見，見猶離見。 The real seeing, the real mind, is just the emergence of function itself, the constant emergence of determinate thought after determinate thought, object after object, experience after experience. The mindiness of mind lies not in any characteristic of "mentalness," nor in spacelike contentlessness, but in the non-dwelling flux of all contents. The real Buddha is this moment of function, of your own mind's activity, which constantly makes and breaks Buddhas.

Hence any function is the entire Buddha nature: it is now any deed, including the deed of determining and naming, not any one specific determination or name, the deed of meaning-making (and meaning-destruction), not any single consistent meaning.[59] The upshot here is that true action as opposed to passivity, true mastery as oppose to servitude, true subjectivity as opposed to self-alienation, true life as opposed to death, cannot have any single determinate

[58] T48.338c.

[59]能與一切真俗凡聖安著名字。真俗凡聖與此人安著名字不得。T47.498a.

purpose. Each action is the action of the whole, and the action of the whole cannot have a purpose. To have a purpose is to be subordinated to something, i.e., to that purpose—"to be deceived by others."[60] The alleged omniscience of the Buddha as this universal mind is thus the precise opposite of the omniscience of the single-purposed, single-minded God. The one mind is no mind.

10. The Lotus Sutra: Monotheism Buddhified, i.e., Destroyed

The above is one surprising way atheist Buddhism is developed, one that is easily mistaken for a theistic turn and thus in clear need of being addressed in the context of our present discussion. Another example is found in the rich and strange text known as the *Lotus Sutra* (Skt: *Saddharmapundarīka sutra*; Ch: *Miaofalianhuajing* 妙法蓮華經). This text can be interpreted in many ways, and indeed, with its odd displacements of emphasis, its outrageous left-turns and hyperbolic effusions, its unexplained inflations of consequences of seemingly insignificant actions and states, its confusing hints and innuendos about its own implications, it rather begs to be. It has special relevance for our discussion, though, because it's one of a handful of places in the Buddhist canon where someone might be tempted to see something resembling monotheism in the Buddhist canon. Indeed, we cannot rule out the availability of Gnostic, Christian, Jewish, Zoraostrian ideas in the milieu in which the text was produced; as many have suggested, the monotheist idea tends to be concomitant with the earthly advent of a single dominating and unifying emperor, and indeed the text was probably produced at a time when some form or another of monotheist idea was in resurgence in many places in the world (in the Roman Empire, in the Han Empire, in the Persian and Indian ventures into Empire), which would likely have been making themselves felt in Indic cultural spheres. Is this text showing an infiltration and acceptance of the monotheist idea, boldly brushing away all past Buddhist ideas with the broom of *upāya* ("skillful means," the raftlike temporary and disposable measures meant to lead beyond themselves) and finding a thin reed or two on which to hang a Buddhist monotheism, with its

[60]Cf. 秖要爾不受人惑。要用便用。更莫遲疑。T47.497b. Cf. also: 大丈夫漢更疑箇什麼。目前用處更是阿誰。把得便用。莫著名字。T47.500c.

own incarnational story, and its own eternal world-fathering, world-watching deity called Sakyamuni Buddha? This would be almost impossible to do within the context of traditional Buddhist interpretation, and as far as I know no traditional school or commentator has taken it this way. Reading it within the context of prior Mahāyāna mythology, with its infinite multitudes of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas living in the atheist universe we have described above, makes this almost impossible. The Mahāyāna Buddhist anti-realist ontology of Emptiness, which is even more deeply atheistic in its implications, discourages such an interpretation even more vigorously. We have seen the way in which Tiantai teaching, and even general Mahāyāna Emptiness and Two Truths thinking, deal with the personal Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and their supernormal powers. The same generally applies, mutatis mutandis, to the way the big world-engaging supernormal "eternal" (actually, very very long-lived) Buddha figure in this text is interpreted. But here I'd like to do a thought experiment for illustrative purposes, to demonstrate that, even if someone were to try to read the text in the most context-neglecting possible way, maximizing its similarity to monotheism, the result would still be deeply and eye-openingly atheistic.

The interpretative problem that concerns us here has to do with the status of the "Long-lived Buddha Sakyamuni" as presented in that 16th Chapter, because such a fanfare is made about his revelation of the length of his life, and his claim that all the other Buddhas of whom he has spoken were really just versions and emanations of himself, and that only now is the real truth being presented. This allows some marginal leeway for a monotheism-craving interpreter to dismiss all the usual entailments of Mahāyāna mythology as mere *upāya*, as well as its traditional anti-realist Emptiness ontology which would equally dismiss any attempted Father-of-the-World Godlike Buddha, leaving standing only the core teaching of Chapter 16 itself as the real truth. For there, Sakyamuni seems to be claiming that only he is the real Buddha, that he's the father and proprieter of the world, and that all other Buddhas are just upāyic parts of his own teaching. The question is, does this include the Buddhas that he had predicted all sentient beings would become, in the first half of the sutra, and all the other Buddhas in the universe, past and future? Are they all just his own partial embodiments, his own upāyic self-presentation? What would be the final upshot, if so?

To begin to answer these questions, here is a quick outline of what happens in the Lotus Sutra, insofar as we deprive it of any of the interpretative tidyings that try to make sense of it:

The Buddha shines a light from his head and sees lots of Buddhists doing lots of different Buddhist practices all over the universe. The Buddha emerges from a meditative state with the name "Place of Infinite Meanings," and then, uninvited, announces he is going to say something very important. He praises the immense mysterious inconceivability of being a Buddha, saying how far beyond anyone's conception of it it really is. In particular, it involves two things: only a Buddha "together with a Buddha," knows what's really going on, what the ultimate reality is of any and all phenomenal things, how they look, what their nature is, what they're made of, what they can do, what causes and effects they have, and what sort of consistency they have from beginning to end of this multifarious causal process, or indeed, in some versions, their "equality and ultimacy from beginning to end" of this process, their ultimate equality and their equal ultimacy. He also particularly stresses the role of *upāya*, or skillful means, in making a Buddha what he is, and how far beyond anyone's conception this is. Then he says that all of his disciples are really Bodhisattvas, that is, Buddhas-to-be, nascent Buddhas, beings committed to becoming Buddhas and postponing their own Arhatship (their ending of their own suffering and rebirth) to liberate all other sentient beings as well. This goes even for the śrāvakas ("voice-hearing disciples") who are, as far as they know, only shooting for Arhatship, the end of suffering and rebirth. In fact, śrāvakas are disciples who explicitly reject the option of becoming Bodhisattvas. But now we are told that they are Bodhisattvas too. In fact, all Buddhas appears in the world for one reason only: to display what it's like to be a Buddha, and thereby to allow all sentient beings to experience being a Buddha. All Buddhist practices lead to this eventually, given infinite time. It turns out there are no Arhats and there is no individual Nirvana—all of that was just *upāya*. There is no such thing as individual nirvana as the ending of desire; in fact, what looked like the end, the goal, the state of the arhat freed of life-and-death, is itself always no more than one more means. Alleged nirvana of the arhat—freedom-from-life-and-death—is really a part of the bodhisattva path. The ends-means relation is reversed: it is not that desire is a means to the attainment of desirelessness but rather that apparent desirelessness is one more state of desire, is itself a means toward an even more greatly

expanded state of vow, of bodhisattvahood, of desire.[61] The Buddha tells a parable to illustrate this, and to clear himself of the charge of deceit: it's not lies, it's *upāya*, even though it's not literally true. *Upāya* is the main virtue of the Buddha, the means by which his wisdom and compassion are perfectly expressed, and it has this paradoxical form. Some of the erstwhile śrāvakas say how happy they are to learn this, and tell a story about this. Then we get an expanding series of "assurances of future Buddhahood." These are a traditional prerogative of a Buddha: he recognizes bodhisattvas, and sees into their future. He sees the Buddha they will become. These are very specific, telling what the name and lifespan of that future Buddha will be, and what his "Buddha-land" will be called, what it will be like, what kind of sentient beings will inhabit it, and so on. This is first given to the key śrāvaka-disciples, those who had denied the quest for Buddhahood for themselves. Then it is suggested that all sentient beings who hear this very teaching—about the Buddha's sole purpose, that of modeling for sentient beings what it's like to be a Buddha and finding ways to get them to an equal experience of it eventually—are thereby all given the assurance of future Buddhahood. We're told that this teaching itself is "the entire body of the Buddha."

Then lots of magical effects take place. A stupa emerges from the earth. It contains a long Nirvanaed (i.e., deceased) Buddha—even though we've already been told there is no Nirvana-as-decease except as an *upāya*, a skillful means—who says he once made a vow to show up and be alive again whenever the Lotus Sutra was preached. But the stupa will only open up to reveal the "whole body of a Buddha" (as the teaching itself was described) if this present Buddha who is preaching it, Sakyamuni, gathers in one place all his "separate partial embodiments" (in Kumarajiva's Chinese, 分身)—a term that hadn't been mentioned before. It turns out there are Buddhas all over the universe who are Sakyamuni's "separate partial embodiments," and they all come to this world, clearing out all other sentient beings temporarily to make room (except the congregation). Then the stupa opens up, and Sakyamuni enters, and the two sit side by side in there for the rest of the story.

[61] We may perhaps here recall Nietzsche's dictum in *Genealogy of Morals* III: Man would rather will nothingness than not will—and indeed that thereby the will is saved.

After the surreal scene in the Sutra where the two Buddhas come together, the crowd is all riled up. Traditionally, only one Buddha can exist in any world system at any one time. Two of them sitting in a single stupa is meant to be something of a scandal, but also meant to be something of a revelation. With the Buddha of the distant past, long dead, and the Buddha of the present, with billions of his now reunited partial embodiments from all over the universe, gathered together in one place, we have a concrete demonstration of that mysterious phrase from Chapter Two: "Only a Buddha together with a Buddha" can realize the ultimate reality that each thing is. So the crowd is all riled up. They want to put this Sutra into practice here in our world, and ask how it's done. The Buddha answers, in Chapter Twelve, saying well, the way one would do that, if it had to be done, would be with a fairly standard set of Mahāyāna practices, which he proceeds to relate. But then, surprisingly, we are told that this is not necessary at all, for the Lotus Sutra practice is always already being practiced here in this world. Thereupon, billions of Bodhisattvas emerge from under the earth, saying they've always been here practicing the Lotus Sutra (Ch. 13). The question is then asked by the astonished onlookers: who are all these Bodhisattvas? We've never seen them before! Who started them on their Bodhisattva practice? Who gave them the initial teaching, showed them what a Buddha was and thereby inspired their own initial aspiration to become one? The Buddha says that he himself has done so: all these Bodhisattvas took their initial Bodhisattva vows and began their Bodhisattva careers under Shakyamuni Buddha as their teacher. But how is that possible, the crowd asks. We have been with you all this time and we've never seen them before. Besides, they are all advanced Bodhisattvas who have clearly been practicing for gazillions of years; but you have only been a Buddha for forty years or so, and according to the standard situation, a Bodhisattva can only get his initial teaching from a full Buddha. It's like a strapping young man pointing to a white-haired geezer and saying, "That's my son."

This is where the crypto-monotheism comes in. The big revelation of the Lotus Sutra comes in Chapter 16. The Buddha asks us to imagine a huge expanse of space and then a commensurately huge expanse of time, beyond the powers of human imagination to conceive. Then he declares:

"For an even longer time I have been constantly here in this world, preaching the Dharma and giving instructing, and also in gazillions of other worlds, guiding and benefiting living beings. During this time I have spoken of Dīpankara ['Lighter of Lanterns'] Buddha and others, and have also said that I would entire Nirvana, extinction. But all this was said merely as a skillful means."

Dīpankara Buddha is the Buddha who, according to the established hagiography, first shows Shakyamuni, in a previous lifetime, what it was to be a Buddha, and thereby inspired his initial aspiration toward Buddhahood, under whom he had taken his Bodhisattva vow. Dīpankara is the Buddha from whom, according to the traditional account, Shakyamuni himself received his initial instruction as a Buddha-to-be, a Bodhisattva; under whom he took his Bodhisattva vows; from whom he received his own assurance of Buddhahood. Dīpankara is Shakyamuni's teacher, the source of his own training, the one who embodied for him the idea of Buddhahood in the first place. Now he is saying that the whole story of Dīpankara was just something he made up, someone who emanates from him rather than the other way around.

The Buddha continues:

> When living beings come before me, I view them with the Buddha-eye, perceiving the condition of their faith and other capacities, and then speak of myself, according to what is necessary for their liberation, as having this or that name, this or that lifespan, and tell them that I will enter the extinction of Nirvana….Everything I've said in all the scriptures is for the sake of liberating living beings. Sometimes I describe my own person, sometimes the person of another; sometimes I manifest as myself, sometimes as another; sometimes I present my own deeds, sometimes those of another. And all of it is true, not false. How so, you ask? Buddhas see the attributes of the world not as the world views itself, but as it really is: without birth and without death, neither emerging nor retreating, free of both being-in-the-world and extinction-from-the-world, neither real nor illusory, neither thus nor otherwise. A Buddha sees all this clearly and

> without error, but in accordance with the various natures, desires, practices and conceptions of living beings, in order to generate good capacities in them he produces of all sorts of narratives, parables, phrases, ways of preaching. I never cease doing these Buddha-deeds even for an instant, and will continue doing so as my lifespan continues onward without measurable end, constantly dwelling here unextinguished.

In the verse at the end of the chapter, he says something else pertaining to how differently he sees the world from the way the world sees itself. When sentient beings see suffering and fire and destruction at the end of the eon, he sees this very world as a "Pure Land" that is forever undestroyed. It is not just an undifferentiated eternity: it is full of men and gods, flowers and music. He's always here, teaching—and in all other places as well. So being "neither like it appears nor any other way" apparently doesn't mean there are no beings or activities in it; it means rather that there always are, in some sense of other.

But since his being always there and everywhere as a Buddha is for the sole purpose of teaching others how to be a Buddha, he sometimes has to manifest not his presence but his absence. The rationale is that if sentient beings could always see him, they would take him for granted and would not listen to him. That would make his teaching ineffective. In the absence of a contrast between his presence and his absence, his presence would not be felt as presence. Omnipresence can only manifest by means of presence, which requires absence. So to make his teaching effective, he has to shock them with stories of his own disappearance and the preciousness of his own presence, even though it's the most common and cheapest and easily available thing in the world, like air. Since his presence is all about the teaching, his presence sometimes requires his absence, without which his teaching would be ineffective, thus making him effectively not present. He has to be absent to be really present. Chapter 16 gives another father-sons parable to illustrate why the Buddha sometimes tells sentient beings he is or will be dead and gone, even when he's not and never will be. A doctor goes on a trip. While he's away, his children get into his medicines, and recklessly ingest them at random. When the father returns, he finds his children violently ill, frothing at the mouth, inebriated, out of their minds.

He sees what medicines they took and immediately prepares the antidote. But the children are too far out of their minds to even heed his instruction to ingest the antidote; he cannot catch them and force it down, they keep spitting it up, running about wildly. So he devises a "skillful means." He departs, leaving the antidote and instructions to take it, telling them he's off on another business trip; then he sends back word to them, announcing to the children that their father has died on the road. The news of their father's death shocks the children back to their senses; all they have left of him is the antidote--which suddenly is not only noticed but seems precious, the last vestige of their dead father--and his instructions to take it. In their desperation and grief, they finally do so. Once they are restored to health, the father returns, telling them that he had never really died.

After that we are told of the immense merits that come from believing and understanding the Buddha's immense lifespan, even for a moment (Ch. 17), and even greater benefits for taking pleasure in the idea (Ch. 18). Then we are told, further, that communicating it to others causes immense expansions to the range of to one's own powers of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, speaking and thinking (Ch. 19). Then we're told a past life story about Sakyamuni, who was once a monk called Never Disparage, who would go around telling everyone he dared not disrespect them, because they were bodhisattvas, practicing the bodhisattva way, and they would all become Buddhas (Ch. 20). They get mad and attack him for this empty promise; he responds by saying, "I dare not disrespect you: you are all practicing the bodhisattva way, and will all become Buddhas." They then go to purgatory, suffering for a long long while, but then because of this karmic connection, they meet Never Disparage again—they are, we are told, the assembled listeners to the story right now, the ones who are again being told that they will all become Buddhas, and Never Disparage Bodhisattva is the being they now know as Sakyamuni Buddha. A few more illustrative stories follow about other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

There are at least four ways to interpret the claims of Chapter 16.

First, the straight Emptiness reading. The Buddha is just telling us that all the Buddhas are *upāyas*. There are no truths about the world: he's telling us these stories just to help us get to the point where we can see that. His own long duration is also just a story. There is no future or

past Buddhahood, there are no Buddhas throughout the universe, Buddhahood as such is something that cannot be said to exist or not exist; all Buddhism, like all time, is just a story, and paradoxically, knowing that is all there is to being a Buddha. As he says right there in the chapter, what the Buddha uniquely knows is that the truth is neither one way nor another, so all descriptions are equally true and equally false. The ones that count as true are the ones that act as *upāyas*, as rafts, to get us beyond the dichotomy of true and false.

Second, an expansion of this, in the Tiantai reading. Here the chapter is read as an illustration of what the Sutra had claimed back in Chapter 2: a Buddha appears in the world for one reason only: everything a Buddha does is a way of showing sentient beings what it's like to be a Buddha, and making them equal with him, and further, revealing that this vow to make all beings equal to himself has already been fulfilled, they already are Buddhas: he has just revealed the neglected dimension of every being which is its Buddhahood. What Sakyamuni says in Chapter 16 then applies not to him alone, but to each sentient being: it is a graphic expression of what it means to be a Buddha, which is what all Buddhism is showing all beings to be. When the Buddha predicted your future Buddhahood, this is what he was predicting: when you become a Buddha, you will realize that you have been a Buddha for measureless ages in the past—in other words, you will at that future time see your present self as already having always been a Buddha. The Buddha looks back at his past eons as a bodhisattva and declares that he now sees that he was a Buddha already during all that time. The future Buddha he has assured you you will become will look back and see you as an unwitting bodhisattva (assuming the form of this ridiculous "you" and your ignorance of your bodhisattvhood as one his infinite compassionate and educative upayic transformations), which is now seen to have always been a Buddha. Hence, in addition to an expanded version of the Emptiness reading above, such that the skillful means are no more or less real than their own Emptiness, such that the Emptiness and the infinite positings of all these stories and propositions as skillful means are identical, we add the that this understanding of his own experience is an illustration of what it's like to be a Buddha at any given moment, insofar as a Buddha is the one who has realized universal ambiguity, such that all determinations are temporary disambiguations. The epistemological and ontological framework for the claim is explicitly and emphatically anti-realist, even "trivialist": Emptiness means

literally that any interpretation is possible, and valid, and "works" in some way: it follows therefore that this interpretation, that these things are the Buddha's intentional arrangement, is also valid and also works. It does not eliminate the alternate possible interpretations; in fact it coexists with them, even encourages them as the principle of infinite *upāyas* that is promulgated in the same breath as that of the eternal Buddha; indeed, the only special character of the "it's done by the Buddhas" interpretation is that it also allows and even empowers the alternate interpretations, e.g., "it is all random chance" or "it is all my own karma," incorporates them not by unilateral subsumption and dissolution into itself but rather by allowing them as alternate expressions of itself—as ways in which the ineradicable intersubsumption of purpose and purposelessness, of multiple purposes, manifests: each transforms freely into all the others, with no beginning and no end, none more basic or final than the others. Each is a way of keeping all the others alive; the Buddha's intention is discoverable in every effect, and part of his intention is the embrace of all other intentions, and of all intentionlessness. It means that when you achieve Buddhahood, even the prior Buddhas who inspired and instructed you become aspects of your own present Buddhahood. All pasts and all futures become aspects of your present. You become the source of your own source. Like the "transformation bodies" of the present and the other Buddhas of the past, all the causes and conditions of one's own past are now recast in the light of this new present, become functions of it, recontextualized and transformed into parts and aspects of this present vision. It is a description of what it's like to see the world as a Buddha sees the world: one sees all beings and all actions as aspects of oneself, of one's present moment, one's present activity: since the present in question is the experience of Buddhahood, one sees only Buddhahood everywhere. All those specifications are manifestations of the Buddha's present experience of Buddhahood, his compassion and wisdom. To be a Buddha is to see all beings as Buddha. But as in the relation between sentient beings and Guanyin explored earlier, this also means it is impossible for the agency to land simply on the side of the Buddha: to be seen as a Buddha by a Buddha is something inherent to the nature of sentient beings. We produce the Buddha through our own ignorance, and the Buddha produces us through his wisdom and compassion. Everything said about the body and mind of the Buddha is also said about the body and mind of all sentient beings, for the difference between "will be a Buddha" and "is a Buddha"

here becomes meaningless. The Three Truths signify the inseparability and inter-identity of all these diverse states and phases of time. Strictly considered, moments are not just extremely short: they are nonexistent. If a moment has room for any content it all, it must arise and perish at different times; but then it is further subdivisible into smaller moments, and the same must apply to them. Since there are no separate moments, any determination at all requires a continuity across moments: the relation to otherness is intrinsic to any selfhood. That means the content of any so-called moment is just what is read into it by another moment, with a distance already stretched between them. But if one moment is nothing but the way it is read by another moment, that second moment can also be read by a third moment, and will turn out to be nothing but that way of being read. There is no non-arbitrary way to stop this process. So if there is anything at all, it must be a continuity across time, where the two end points are not really separate beings, but aspects of one and the same being. Since this applies equally in all cases, to admit you have a self at all is to admit that you have all selves. If the person you were half a second ago is still you, if the person you were two minutes ago is still you, if the baby you were is still you, then all the past is also you—in each case, if and only you choose to see it that way now. If the person you will be when you reach the end of reading any given word in this sentence is still the same person who read the beginning of the word, then all the future is you as well—in each case, if and only if you choose to see it that way right now. To be a Buddha, it turns out, is just to be in a moment when you are seeing things this way. All moments behold and intersubsume one another in this way, including our current state and our own future Buddhahood. The Buddha is always also a bodhisattva, and all other beings; and the same therefore applies to each of these beings. This provides a way of reading the text that allows an expansion of all the strange interfoldings of past and present, of here and there, of one and many. There is no end to bodhisattvahood, nor any beginning: Buddhahood is nothing but eternal bodhisattvahood that recognizes that there is never any end to its process of rebirth. A bodhisattva is a bodhisattva who falsely believes that bodhisattvahood is a mere means to the end of reaching Buddhahood, which he or she thus regards as a different state that will put an end to his or her present bodhisattvahood. A Buddha is a bodhisattva who knows, on the contrary, that there is no Buddhahood outside of eternal bodhisattvahood. Moreover, it is possible to be a

bodhisattva without knowing it. Indeed, to deny and reject bodhisattvahood—to reject life—is one more way in which one may sometimes be expressing bodhisattvahood—expressing life. Indeed, "not knowing it" might sometimes be essential to being able to do it. Indeed, it is impossible not to always be a bodhisattva, as well as a demon, an animal, a god, a human, a titan, a sravaka, a Buddha. For a Buddha is just an eternal bodhisattva, and a bodhisattva is just a constant process of rebirth in any and every form, in response to any and every condition, embodying the liberative neither-sameness-nor-difference between the conditions and the conditioned, their mutual pervasion and intersubsumption of one another, which is what constitutes the liberation of both from attachment to any single fixed identity or the lack of any particular identity. I have written about this interpretation in detail elsewhere.

Third, the realtime reading which keeps to traditional Mahāyāna mythology without worrying about its anti-realist implications of Emptiness theory, which is seen as de-emphasized in this sutra, perhaps even itself relegated to the realm of *upāya*. On this reading, Sakyamuni is revealing that he is the sole Buddha of this world-cycle, of the imaginable universe. The general picture of the Buddhist path remains as it always had. Just as we had always thought, he will eventually reach Nirvana, leaving the world of birth and death entirely. Just as we had always thought, he did originally begin as an ordinary being, becoming a Buddha through long and strenuous practice the Bodhisattva path. It's just that all this happened a much longer time ago than we knew, and will go on for much longer than we thought. In effect, he repeats the real process in playacting form innumerable times within the unimaginably long but still finite tenure of his Buddhahood, for upāyic purposes. This illustrates what it's like to be a Buddha, which is just what he has been predicted for us, and will occur at some specific time in the future for each of us. To be a Buddha is to be Father of a World, which one views as one's own responsibility, and which one experiences as, in some way, eternal and pure and blissful. We will all do that, in the unimaginably distant future. Each of us will have our own world, and will feel and behave as a father to that world, and constantly strive for unimaginably many eons to save the sentient beings in that world. Our method for doing this will involve presenting to our students a play-acted repeat of our real process of delusion and awakening and dying innumerable times, and the telling stories of other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, presenting ourselves under many guises, all

out of compassion. That is what we will all do. There may be other Buddhas in other world-cycles, but all the ones we know about are really just forms of Sakyamuni. The Buddha really did have a prior teacher of Buddhism; it's just that it was not Dīpankara, but some unknown Buddha of the much more distant past.

For convenience, we may call this the "crypo-Mormon" reading of the sutra. The meaning of "Father" is here radically opposed to the key monotheist element: for God's fathership in monotheism is predicated on the eternal difference in status between Creator and Creatures—an odd kind of Fatherhood, for the sons are never permitted to become fathers in their own right. They are to remain eternally sons only. In the Crypto-Mormon reading of the Lotus, in contrast, the Buddha is called a father only insofar as he contributes to the creation of further Buddhas, further equals, further fathers. A father fails as a father if his sons never grow up, never become adults, never become fathers in their own right. If he failed to produce other Buddhas, he would not be a proper Buddha. If he were the only Father of the world, he would not be Father of the world.

Interestingly, the successive realtime "crypto-Mormon" reading and the Tiantai "simultaneous intersubsumption" reading actually end up converging--precisely because of the specific nature of the concept of "Buddhahood." The "literalist" crypto Mormon reading is the real-time prediction of actual Buddhahood, first for some beings and then for all beings, and then, in Chapter 16, the revelation of what Buddhahood is: in effect, that what monotheists have been mistakenly calling God, Father of the World, etc.--the One Mind that is lovingly watching at all times, since the beginning of the universe until now, always finding ways to benefit all beings--is actually Sakyamuni Buddha. (One wonders if there is some Gnostic influence here: the real God is the God who cares for all souls, and appears as a savior figure, but is not the creator of nature. Here too the Buddha is purely benign, cares for all sentient beings spiritually, but does not create the natural world--which is said in Chapter 3 to be like a dilapidated and dangerous old house, which is read in the traditional Buddhist way: it is the collective creation of the karma of all sentient beings. The Buddha is proprietor of it only because of his compassion for the beings in it and his mastery of all there is to know about it.) In effect it completely accepts and subsumes the "one mind surveilling the world" model of monotheism--and I believe

should be taken as a deliberate coup of sorts, a way of fulfilling the need (perhaps the return of long-repressed infantile longing toward an powerful and benevolent father, as a Freudian would say, but prevalent in various forms everywhere) for monotheism: the desire for an all-powerful benevolent indestructible father who is looking after us. But the nature of this one mind is not as the monotheists think: the father of the world is not the creator and judge of the world, who sees all things as creations of his own sovereign will, and thereby determinates what roles they are to play as finite creatures. Rather, this mind has been revealed in the previous chapters to be a mind which began (in some other universe, at some incalculably distant time) as an ordinary being like us, but which is now constantly monitoring the world to find ways and means to advance all sentient beings to Buddhahood, but also a mind that sees all the past and future causality of beings sub species aeternitatis, all sentient beings as becoming Buddhas in the future. But this means to see them presently already as Buddhas-to-be, perceiving their past and future all at once. To become a Buddha means "to become someone who is the God-figure for a particular universe," but also, at the same time, "to see all beings presently as Buddhas." The Buddha sees all time at once. So seeing your present, he sees your future: he sees you as a sentient-being-to-Buddha. But the Buddha-part of you that he sees also sees all time at once! So the one mind that is always watching you is seeing you as the one mind that is always watching all beings. You are not the Buddha of this world, but you will be the Buddha of another world. But when you are that Buddha, you will see all beings of all worlds as Buddhas.

For this is how the specific conception of "a Buddha" seems to differ decisively from the conception of a "God," even the Mormon God which is no longer a single creator of the world, but still is modeled on the monotheist notion of what Godhood otherwise entails. I don't know if Mormon theology, in making its Gods subject to becoming, has retained the traditional disjunction between time and eternity inherited from monotheist traditions; if not, the events proceed linearly in realtime, which is considered an ultimate reality in the commonsensical manner, and this would apply also to the achievement of Godhood: it will look back at past moments of its own becoming as really past. This is not the case in Buddhism: rather, we have a combination of time and eternity in that we have a temporal process that leads to a vision of eternity, which sees even its own past process of reaching that state as eternal and forever

present. A Buddha sees a sentient being in the way a Tralfamadorian sees a person in Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five, which is probably modeled on some popular presentations of the "loaflike" nature of time in the Einstein-Minkowski interpretation: they see his past-present-and-future all at "once." "I am a Tralfamadorian, seeing all time as you might see a stretch of the Rocky Mountains. All time is all time. It does not change….When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in bad condition in the particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments."[62] When a Tralfamadorian looks at a human, what is seen is not just the present moment, the present adult. It is rather a long centipede, with baby legs at one end, growing legs along the way, and finally old man legs at the end. Extend that picture to a being with infinite past lifetimes as infinite creatures. When a Buddha sees a sentient being, he sees a long millipede with trillions of legs and bodies, culminating in a Buddha-body that sees the rest of its own body in exactly the same way, as an infinite millipede stretching out behind it, and infinite bodhisattva transformations stretching out into the future. All of that is what the Buddha is, not what he used to be or will become. And to be a Buddha is to see all sentient beings that way: for "seeing a sentient being" just means seeing the "sentient being legs portion" of that infinite millipede. Hence when he looks at any sentient being, he sees that he or she is, not will be, a Buddha, just as if I am looking at the hindmost legs of a millipede, I am looking at a millipede. Particularly if I can see the whole millipede. Further, I see the head of that millipede which sees the whole millipede, just as I do—so I can say that I see every sentient being as a Buddha who knows (not "will know") that he or she is a Buddha—and is seeing all other beings as Buddhas. The Buddha sees all beings as Buddhas, which means that he sees that head of yours way somewhere up ahead along the millipede that sees all beings as Buddhas—including himself, seeing you seeing him. Not for nothing is the climax of the sutra the moment in Chapter 11 when the two Buddhas of past and present come to be seated side by side in the opened tomb of the past, opened by the gathering in one place of all the present Buddha's transformations: as promised in Chapter 2, "Only a Buddha together with a Buddha can realize the ultimate reality of all things."

That means also that you will see your past self, as a creature living under the watchful

62

eye of Sakyamuni Buddha in Sakyamuni's world, as the Buddha. The Buddhas intersubsume, even if only one exists in each world system, and each is in that world like a God: in my world Sakyamuni is a sentient being watched (and cared for, and advanced toward Buddhahood) while in his world he watches and cares for me and advances me toward Buddhahod. The key is that a Buddha is defined not only as compassionate and wise, and as "father of the world" in the sense of creating value (i.e. producing all those bodhisattvas that emerge from the earth--a usurpation of fertility powers of monotheist Gods who create the natural world--a Buddha does not do that) and caring for it, but also being the one who persists through the whole course of this world system, and whose wisdom consists in seeing within each moment the entire temporal career of each being, and hence seeing all sentient beings as Buddhas. That is what is predicted for you when Buddhahood is predicted: that you will be the "God" of some world, and thus see all beings as Gods of some world....

So it really doesn't matter whether the Buddhahood is successive or simultaneous: to a Buddha, all time is present, so there is no succession, no emerging and disappearing, as he says in Ch. 16, or rather there is neither thus nor otherwise. Whether we say Buddhahood is just "figurative" and thus undermined by intersubsumptive motifs (someone is simultaneously a Buddha and a bodhisattva, or a sravaka and a bodhisattva, or as in Chapter 19, a regular eye that sees like the god's eye, etc.) or successive and literal, it amounts to the same thing, because Buddahood is precisely seeing all times at once, and thus seeing all sentient beings as the entire story of their karmic history, through their millions of years of practice up to their becoming a Buddha in the future, as if one a single string, thus seeing all sentient beings as Buddhas right now, seeing all sentient beings as seers who see all sentient beings as Buddhas! Hence in Ch. 5 we are told that the Buddha's surveillance and omniscience of the world is to know what sentient beings are really thinking and doing, of which they themselves are ignorant! The opposite of the monotheist God's surveillance, which is watching your thoughts and judges you to be much worse than you thought (i.e., the Sermon on the Mount, where "just looking on a woman in lust is already committing adultery"--in your own judgment it was not a sin, but God's judgment is much harsher), the Buddha sees you as much better than you think you are: you think you are merely a sentient being, acting from greed anger and delusion, but actually you are

at the same time a Buddha, who sees all beings as Buddhas. (Like the lost son in Chapter 4: he thought he was merely a shit-shoveler, but actually he was doing something much more exalted, and the whole place belonged to him (already did, in the view of him his father had!). Quite a coup: perhaps the Lotus Sutra should be called "the self-overcoming of monotheism," as Nishitani gave us "the self-overcoming of nihilism"!

The further Buddhist premises of course seal the deal on the coup: it turns out, as the story of the Doctor in Chapter 16 drives home, that being a monotheistesque God and being the absence of that God (i.e., all-powerful, undying father figure) are one and the same--and there we segue back to Spinoza, for whom "necessary existence" meant just that: something that is equally present as present or as absent. We can easily see how this blends seamlessly into the Tiantai interpretation of the effortless, non-dwelling, equally distributed Middle, neither being nor non-being and both being and non-being, as what is being referred to when we speak of the responses of the cosmic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Even them not being there and not doing anything is their compassionate presence and action.

And now the fourth conceivable reading of the sutra, our worst-case scenario, of which I know no historical examples, but which we take up for the sake of argument: it is just like the third reading, but it takes the predictions of other Buddhas in the earlier parts of the sutra and the descriptions of other Buddhas after Chapter 16 also as *upāyas*. On this reading, the only real Buddha in all the universes is Sakyamuni. His goal is therefore not to make Buddhas of us—all such talk was also just *upāya*. He is the one and only Buddha for all space and time. He has been here as long as the world has, and even when this universe seems to be destroyed, he'll still be here. He is the father and proprieter of the world. Let's call this the crypto-monotheist interpretation. Chapter 16 is the only literal truth: it is telling us that everything else, all other Buddhas, are merely partial embodiments of Sakyamuni, the only real Buddha for all time and space.

Now the crypo-monotheist interpretation would require not only neglect of all Buddhist thought, but also considerable violence to the text. For even in Chapter 16, Sakyamuni casually mentions that this long lifespan of his is the result of his long bodhisattva practice—if only that chapter reveals ultimate reality, then that part too is evidently not an *upāya*, but part of the real

story. That means Sakyamuni began as an ordinary deluded person. The Sanskrit version also refers to his eventual genuine nirvana. The Kumarajiva translation into Chinese mentions that this is how all the Buddhas teach, in the midst of the revelation of Chapter 16, and ends by saying this is all for the purpose of helping them quickly become Buddhas. So all that stuff would have to be included in what is really so, not dismissed as an *upāya*. All of this would support the crypto-Mormon reading over the crypto-monotheist reading.

But let's ignore that for now, and try to seriously entertain the crypto-monotheist reading, focusing on the sutra's traditional attribution of some kind of "omniscience" to the Buddha (which is generally interpreted radically away from any monotheist type of implications in the light of Emptiness anti-ontology: see for example Seng Zhao's "Prajna has no Knowledge") but also its claim that he is the "Father of all living beings in the world" to whom the world "belongs" in some sense, so much so that there is really only one Buddha, which is himself, of which all other alleged Buddhas are merely avatars. Let's ignore the clear statement, even in Chapter 16, that he began as a Bodhisattva, and assume that he's literally eternal. What I want to stress here is that even this near-impossible reading is still firmly within the atheist camp.

Why? Because even here, the Buddha is only described as watcher and carer for the world, tweaker of the world, responder to the world, never as a creator of the world, or as an omnipotent controller of the world, or as the judge of the world, or the executor of justice of the world. This has huge consequences for how this "omniscient father of the world" relates to the experience of sentient beings. He is said to be "father" only in the sense of having an indissoluble kinship with all suffering sentient beings, being responsible for the welfare and education of all sentient beings, and being their precursor in the path of cultivation and their teacher and potentially transforming them into a new mode of existence, not ever for literally creating their existence by fiat or will. They have created themselves with their own actions, their own karma. He reproduces them only "figuratively," with the understanding that in Buddhism all creation is only figurative, is always from a prior pre-existing state, insofar as there is infinite time in both directions, no beginning of the universe and no ex nihilo creation of any entity. A Buddha creates Buddhas, or if we really go crypto-monotheist here, merely Buddhists;

but he does not create the priorly existing sentient beings from which those Buddhas are developed. He is owner of the world as the one responsible for taking care of it, but not as its creator or unilateral ruler. Sentient beings see that world initially as a fine place, not realizing it's a burning house. That's due to their karma. The Buddha then uses sentient beings' own idiosyncratic desires to help them realize it's a burning house. He didn't make it a burning house either. Finally it turns out that even when they see it as burning, they are not seeing it correctly. The world is eternally so, neither thus or otherwise, filled with humans and gods, even and emphatically in Chapter 16: he didn't create that either.

All the Buddha does is teach, trying to inspire and transform the state of sentient beings by evoking certain states of desire, aspiration, reconsideration, accomplished through various types of storytelling, role-playing and hide-and-seek games. His sole activity, even on this crypto-monotheist reading, is to forever dwell in the world, lurk in all places, showing himself to whatever degree of explicitness will most help sentient beings attain benefits—in this case, not to become Buddhas like himself, since on this reading even his assurances that this will happen are being relegated to *upāya*, but some kind of benefit. The ones that are mentioned in the narrow range of this chapter itself are "liberating" them, which involves them acquiring "gentleness" and "flexibility of mind" and "joy" and "entering the Buddha-path." It is hard to consider these as not implying that these sentient beings will also become Buddhas, but that is the task we have set for ourselves in trying to imagine the crypto-monotheist reading. Perhaps this would revert to the old Buddhist goal, so vociferiously repudiated in the first half of the sutra: simply helping them get free of suffering. One thing is certain: it is not for the sake of the interpersonal relationship itself. Rather, the Buddha's engagement with us is for the sake of our own liberation. Non-personality remains ultimate. This is again a point which would count for many monotheist apologists and others as a defect rather than a merit: the relationship is wholly instrumental to the experiences of the participants. In versions two and three, the Tiantai and the crypto-Mormon versions rehearsed above, we would have a sense in which the relationship is in fact ultimate, taking the line from Chapter 2 as non-upāyic: "It is only between a Buddha and a Buddha that the ultimate reality of all things is fully realized….including their ultimate equality from beginning to end." This line argues strongly for the "millipede" interpretation, where the mutual regard of the

Buddha seeing all others as Buddhas is the ultimate goal, the only real Buddhahood, the ultimate revelation of what even all "appearances, natures, causes, effects" and so on really are. The Tiantai reading likewise would press this ultimacy of intersubjectivity, teasing out also the intersubsumption of the consciousnesses of all beings in all the Ten Realms. In both cases, the relationship itself is ultimate. But we should note well that this would still be quite different from the ultimacy of interpersonal relationship required in a monotheistic cosmos, where all virtue and all liberation is ultimately only for the sake producing the proper relationship with God: for there, that relationship is between one person who is a creature, and thus eternally subordinate and dependent on the non-personal or the other-personed (i.e., derived from the personhood of God), and one Creator, who is not dependent on a substratum of the impersonal at all. As we saw in part one of this book, this unequal relationship is a wild distortion of what makes real relationships between persons what they are, for all known persons are embedded in otherness in a way that the person of God is supposed not to be (except for the God of, say, mid-period Schelling): he is person, will, consciousness, purpose all the way down. Making the interpersonal ultimate in version two and three, on the contrary, is a way of ensuring that no single consciousness at all is based on itself all the way down, exacerbating the state of consciousness's embedment in otherness.

But here in version four, we are even farther away from a monotheism that makes any kind of relationship the ultimate purpose of existence. This eternal and sole Buddha is presented in Ch. 16 as existing and acting only to facilitate the welfare of sentient beings, their own quests, which are not defined in terms of that relationship of facilitation. What are the consequences of this picture of the world? First, we must consider the extent to which this allows for a certain kind of Panglossian interpretation of experience: whatever happens, there is some presence there of an element which is intended for our instruction, a purely benevolent intention with none of the sublime darkness of the monotheist God in his judgmental fury. There is a substrain of monotheist apologetics that consider this a kind of tragic depth; a purely benevolent deity like this Lotus Sutra Buddha would thus seem rather insipid and shallow. But insofar as this is not an omnipotent creator, the tragic depth does not need to be imported into a terrifying deity: the recalcitrance of the world, the darkness of the non-purposive, is there from the beginning, in the

prior deluded karma of sentient beings and the infinities of suffering that it entails, and it is this that he takes into his own possession, becomes father of, when taking on the role of father of the world: his Buddhahood depends on adopting all this darkness into himself as his own eternal task. The benevolent Buddha is a supplement to a pre-existing default atheist world where nothing was designed for our convenience or enjoyment, and our failure to see the liberative potentials of this world, to see it as a Buddha sees it, is not due to some disobedience or betrayal of our original design, of a misuse of the freedom he kindly bestowed on us to make us his willing fans, of the kindness shown by this Buddha in creating us, for he did not create us. All roads of causality do not lead back ultimately to the Buddha, even this maximally monotheistic Buddha. The darkness of the world is still the atheist darkness of an undesigned universe that was not made with us in mind. A natural disaster, like the Lisbon earthquake, would thus not present the kind of problem for this kind of crypto-monotheism that it does for full-on monotheism: it is not assumed that every event not accomplished by a specific human intentionality is therefore the work of the one God's intention. While it may be the case that it is an instance of the Buddha deliberately concealing his presence to affect living beings in a certain (allegedly benevolent) way, this would not be the first go-to explanation. From a Buddhist perspective, such an event is first and foremost the result of collective karma, and unfortunate in just the way all karma is unfortunate. And while the concept of karma does open itself to the criticism that it "blames the victim," i.e., that it refuses to see any misfortune as completely devoid of connection to some morally charged deeds and intentions of the past, and thus robs the universe, as Nietzsche would say, of its innocence (hence the importance for Nietzsche of replacing the "moral universe" with a universe of pure meaninglessness, as a redemptive move), it must be remembered that the whole point of the karma doctrine in Buddhism is to say how terrible it is that we have to live under this ridiculous regime of cause and effect. It is just what we're trying to escape from. It is not something of which we are asked to praise the glorious justice and rationality.

So the Panglossian element is extremely limited here, and rests on a tragic substratum: it is an optimism that, while not going to the extent of claiming this is designed as the best of all possible worlds does claim the existence of an omnipresent but non-omnipotent benevolent

consciousness operating with our welfare in mind in all events, even if only in the form of withdrawing its presence. Moreover, it does claim the world is pure in the eyes of the Buddha, not due to his planning and making it that way, but due to his insight into the nature of reality: it is an eternal pure land. In adopting the tragic world into his own oversight, he has made this tragedy a part of his own Buddhahood, precisely in his eternal task of having to address and overcome constantly recreated sufferings sentient beings create for themselves in all their endlessness—for that is what Chapter 16 tells us the Buddha is always doing, cheek and jowl with the assertion that this world in flames is always seen by him as a Pure Land. The presence of this deity's effects are seen entirely in terms of available presence rather than control. The ordinary run of events would still be interpreted here as occurring due to the complicated intertwining of karma. Unexpected twists and turns, seemingly miraculous turnarounds, ironic juxtapositions, anything that strikes one as out of the normal causal run, however, is to be viewed as possibly a deliberate sign or hint or instruction from the Big Buddha. If something especially favorable happens, it can be interpreted as the Buddha's "arrangement," and if a setback happens, this can also be taken as an arrangement in some way done intentionally by the Buddha as part of his upāyic education. Because even this One Buddha is never thought of as the intentional ex nihilo creator, the Buddha's providence is never, in no case, the only force operating to produce a given effect. We remain in the domain of the basic Buddhist doctrine of cooperative multiple causality here, rather than unilateral control. Each experience is produced from a superimposition of both our karma and the eternal Buddha's *upāya*; the source of every experience is not unilaterally due to our own karma or the Buddha's providential efforts to instruct us. It is a call and response, a literalist reading of "ganying" without the involuntary the-universe-is-doing-it-unintentionally reading we saw in the Tiantai treatment of bodhisattvas, discussed above. Even here, where everything that happens is fully the result of intentions, it is not one intention that can produce any experience or any thing. It is a cooperative interaction of our own deluded intentions (karma) and conceptions, and the intentions of the everpresent Eternal Buddha trying to find ways to tweak us to awaken. In this he is perhaps like the "persuasive" but sole God of the process theologies of Harsthorne or Whitehead—and perhaps similarly since he expresses himself in, rather than excludes, all alternate forms, he incorporates

what he can tweak from all beings into aspects or manifestations of himself, rather than excluding them as idolatry like the classical monotheist God. That means all the events that occur are joint products of this Buddha, constantly making growth opportunities available, but limited by the extent to which our own karmic delusions will allow us to receive them. He tailors them to our dispositions, which remain the primary determinant, and this means most of what happens will be less than ideal. It ensures only that somewhere within each composite event we can discern an intention meant to liberate us, which is available for our response. If we pass up this opportunity, no worries: he will be doing this forever, and we can catch the next train. There is no final judgment, and even whatever disappointment or judgment this may elicit from him are put forward exclusively for the same reason that the benevolent lure was put forth: to encourage our liberation. They are not expressions of the Buddha's judgment of us; if it were more beneficial to us to express a condemnation as praise, or praise as a condemnation, he would do so. We are not being tested to determine our fates: our fates our determined only by the Buddhas benevolence, he will never give up trying to liberate us. The only question is how long it will take, how much unnecessary suffering we will choose to endure by ignoring it. But no final failure is possible. Again, we see the importance of the infinite time in which we are to situate the human condition here.

This irreducibility to the control of any single intention applies also to the purity of the world and the eternal presence of the Buddha so seeing it. The Buddha is a deus absconditus, a hidden deity, and the point of Chapter 16 of the sutra is to present an interpretation of his absence as all part of his plan, just as it might be in a monotheist discourse. But here it is not a test designed ex nihilo as part of the chosen plan of a perhaps perverse omnipotent deity who had it in his power to save us in some other less cumbersome way, but a repurposing the consequences of a prior diffuse purposivity, our own karma. Our failure to see the purity of the world is in the ordinary course of things due to a combination of equally primordial causes: the purity of the world as seen by the Buddha and the views of things produced by our attachments and ignorance. Neither of these is more fundamental than the other, neither was created by the other. Eternity is present, purity is present, but we appropriate it in a way that causes us suffering, just as the children in the doctor story imbibe materials that, in the father's hands, are

medicines. Note that the father didn't create the medicines ex nihilo. Medicine is one way of taking the given, via a certain handling of it, a certain dosage and way of combining herbs that exist prior to anyone's intervention. The same herbs may be medicine or poison. The children's access to the same herbs that the father has concocted into medicines are for them poisons. The effect is a joint product of the father's benevolent intention (which is what made the dangerous drugs present and available in easily accessible form) and the children's ignorance (in how to take them). Our intentionality that misapprehends and causes ourselves suffering cannot be part of the design, because the intentionality of the Buddha is framed entirely as a response to it. This is where the use of this motif of herbs as either poison or medicine differs from the seemingly similar trope in intelligent design theories like those of, say, Plato or Augustine. The Buddha did not create us, and we are not "free" as part of a test he has designed. Our karmic limitations of vision remain the prior given. But this given ignorance is on certain occasions skillfully exacerbated by the Buddha's deliberate withdrawal of his visibility, the visibility of the one who always sees it as pure precisely in his adoption of it as his eternal task. The effects of our bad karma is an opportunity that the Buddha thus sometimes can tweak and radicalize into an *upāya* by which it can itself be overcome. Hence we are invited to see our own failure to see the eternal presence of the Buddha, and thus our failure to understand how the world looks when viewed rightly as pure qua eternal task, as he does, as both a call and a response, as an intersection of two sorts of intentionality, where the second is a kind of skillful extension of a riff we have first established, a continuation of it that also turns it around. We are suffering due to our ignorance, but the further complete hopelessness and lack of any element of value in the world is itself a result of the Buddha's intervention—i.e., his deliberate withdrawal. It is hard to see anything eternal in the world because of our ignorance, but it is so hard due to the Buddha's skillful withdrawal. As in the doctor's story, the Buddha's job is to turn mere cluelessness into genuine despair. The Buddha's omnipresence is not omnipotent control which has designed all things to serve his one purpose, but rather the omni-availability of a dimension of intentional hiding in any instance of complacent ignorance, and an intention all the more to be suspected the more severe the absence of any sign of bliss, purity or eternity is in any situation.

We can definitely imagine a holder of this Chapter 16-only crypto-monotheist reading of the *Lotus*, which dismisses all prior Buddhist thought and even the rest of the Sutra as now-obsolete *upāya*, sharing the sentiments of these monotheists who are constantly looking for the Lord's intention in all events, who see coincidences as signs of a plan, or who hand themselves over to the Lord's intention in the Compensatory Theist mode (like Samuel L. Jackson at the end of Pulp Fiction, or Neil Patrick Harris at the end of Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle, they are willing to go "wherever God takes me"). Indeed, there is talk in the sutra of being an "emissary" of the Buddha, working for the Buddha-company—by spreading the Lotus Sutra itself. We can perhaps also imagine Lotusoid athletes praying to the Eternal Buddha for victory over their rivals, and thanking him for it when it arrives. These are monotheist behaviors often understandably ridiculed by non-believers, including myself. But their meaning changes significantly with the removal of the key monotheist premises that are lacking here: omnipotence and the sole proprietorship that comes with creation ex nihilo. The athlete praying to the Buddha is praying for an intervention in the natural course of karma, which in the context of the sutra, means, "Please find a way to use my victory as an *upāya* that will somehow enlighten sentient beings, myself and others, if you can find a way." There's no guarantee the Buddha can find a way to do so in this instance, so there is no question of why my prayer wasn't accepted; this was just not an opportunity where the factors lined up in a way that would enable a skillful tweak in the requested direction. The monotheist might also say that it may be better for me to lose in this instance, and thus both the monotheist and the Lotus devotee can always read their unanswered prayer as not-ignored. But the Lotus devotee can never read his victory as a sign of his greater accordance with the plan of the universe, as a sign that he is more elect in the eyes of the deity than the loser, that he has won greater favor from the deity. For the expression of a desire for a particular outcome is itself proof that the praying man is still deluded and in need of waking up, and hence as much in need of instruction as the loser, perhaps more so.

In short, not everything that happens is done by the Buddha, or rather, nothing that is done is done by the Buddha unilaterally: there are no sole causes. Whatever happens is done as a cooperative venture of call and response, by Buddhas and sentient beings in tandem, and to the extent that it is attributable to any one, it is equally attributable to every other: it is fully

expressive of the world of the one as of the other. Nor are the Buddha's interventions rewards or punishments; they are always hints to goad awakening. The big point is that the goal of the two systems are radically different. The monotheist definition of the good is obedience to God, recognition of God, belonging to God. The athlete who prays to God expresses his devotion and submission to God, in the hopes that by proving his greater fealty to God than that possessed by his rival, he will be seen as more worthy of a reward than his rival. If both pray, God will look into the hearts of both and see who is genuinely more pious, sincere, submissive to God, and the outcome can be seen as the sign of a judgment. The removal of God removes what is most morally outrageous about this practice (although admittedly it perhaps remains superstitious and bizarre): the idea that the ruler of the universe would redirect the course of trivial events as a reward for those he favors, at the expense of others; that God cares about who wins this basketball game or this Grammy because it will serve as a reward for His loyal servants, while the loss expresses his disfavor. This is instructional only to the extent that they show human beings that they had better submit to God, for then things will work out better for them. This is because the sole definition of goodness here is submission to God. This cannot be so in the Buddhist crypto-monotheist case, because the interventions of this deity have nothing to do with his favor, and the goal is not submission to the Buddha, but awakening so as to end suffering. The Buddha-deities interventions are thus always subordinated to this goal, rather than being rewards for fealty. These interventions are not even the ending of suffering themselves, but rather clues to prompt all sentient beings, "whether they practice the way or not," as Chapter 16 says, to end their own ignorance and suffering. Monotheist systems of course do claim, in the Emulatory Theist tradition going back to Plato, that true blessedness lies only in knowing and submitting to God, and thus that this goal amounts to the same thing: God is showing us the way to our own end of suffering—the suffering of being separated from God, of not knowing God, of our self-will that denies God or is directed to the idol of a lesser good. The Chapter 16 Buddha too says that our only happiness lies in knowing and delighting in the eternity enjoyed by the Buddha, and freeing ourselves of our attachment to impermanent things. But the difference remains stark: in the Mahāyāna case, as in Spinoza's case or Nietzsche's case, it is the knowledge of eternity itself which brings liberation—*anything* sub species aeternitatis, *anything*

eternally recurring, *all things* eternal in Chapter 16 ("always full of gods and men and plants and lights, etc."). It is the form of eternity itself, infinity itself, that liberates: that is atheism. In the monotheist case, this infinity is usurped to an infinite purpose, an infinite personality. Recognizing God's goodness as expressed in his intention and design for us is the goal, having this relationship and loving him is the purpose for which we were created. It is not infinity itself, whether the infinity of this person, or of ourselves, that liberates us from our problem here: it is the infinity specifically of an intention, that is, the inescapability of an intention, of a plan that includes us—but which, precisely because it is a plan, an intention, is itself a means of exclusion, a bulwark *against* infinity. For that is what plans and intentions are.

This remains starkly opposed to the Buddhist case, even in its twisted impossible crypto-monotheist form, for even here, the goal is not decided by the Buddha, but by us, for it is entirely in terms of the desire to be free of suffering that the Buddha has compassion and works for us. In other words, in the absence of the aspect of judge, the good done by the Eternal Buddha is good for whom? By whose criterion? Not a universal criterion set up by the Buddhas as authorities, nor by the "eternal" Buddha as the ontological basis of beings, to which they are thus obligated to conform. Not His will, but mine. Good is still only definable as "what is good for the sentient being himself." My suffering, my desire to end my suffering—that is the sole standard, the sole justification. The Buddha might still do things "for my own good," against my own conscious will and judgment, seemingly in classic Compensatory Theist form, but that is not because he is imposing his own standard or goal on me. We may indeed view the Parable of the Burning House in Chapter Two of the Sutra as an attempt to make room, in a Buddhist cosmos, for the idea of the Buddha setting a goal for a sentient which is not the explicit goal of the sentient being—and perhaps we should see monotheist influence here as well, the idea that there is a plan for sentient beings decided by someone other than themselves. But here again we see how the non-monotheist premises thwart and indeed reverse all monotheist motifs—so much so that we may view this not as an incorporation of the monotheist motif but rather as its neutralization, its repurposing, its inoculation. For what remains unthinkable is the idea that any sentient being could be presented with a mission or destiny that he does not himself acknowledge as such, even if only after the fact. This Buddha is perhaps offensively paternalistic in telling a child who

wants a deer cart that an ox cart is better. What if the child, once outside the burning house, says, "That's great and all, but what I really want is a deer cart"? There is simply no available conceptual resource within a Buddhist cosmos, even if we were to add this impossibly crypto-monotheist but still non-creator version of the Eternal Buddha, by which to say, "Tough: that's what you are created for, that is your real purpose, to drive an ox-cart. What matters is not your desire, but the Buddha's desire—that's what he made you for, that's your mission." The ultimate goal can only be decided by the sentient being himself. In the absence of the ethos of command and obedience that go with monotheism, with the ultimacy of intention and purpose, with single teleology as the real ground of being, desirability is always the function of desire, and the unilateral desires of the Buddha would be, besides being a contradiction in terms, irrelevant to what is desirable for me. The telos is entirely mine, entirely particular, not universal. If I ask for guidance and ways are devised to show me that my grasp of the means toward the end that I myself desire has been deficient, if the Buddha deliberately thwarts my immediate plans to show that I'm barking up the wrong tree for what I want, that is still completely different from trying to impose his telos on me, to replace my Will with His will, or even the Will of the whole over the will of the part. Unless I myself come to agree that this previously undesired outcome is indeed something I find even more to my liking than the original goal, there are no available grounds by which to contradict me. I am under no obligation to share the Buddha's goals. The claim is rather that I will come to do so, in terms of desires I already have, and which are not caused by the Buddha. If I never want to be a Buddha, and if being told that I can do so never arouses joy in me, it will never be my obligation to do so. In this universe, even with a maximally crypto-monotheistic Buddha, there is no final point of adjudication, nor any need for one.

The *upāya* doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism may be viewed as way of incorporating and repurposing pre-existing religious motifs and beliefs, recontextualizing them in a Buddhist framework, and thereby sublating them and turning them away from their original anti-Buddhist implications: retaining them, but by reframing them into a larger Buddhist framework, ultimately undermining them and turning them towards Buddhist goals. We may see the bodhisattvas as a Buddhifying adoption and nullification of the polytheist gods and the role of prayer to them. And

we may view the Lotus Sutra, on any of its possible readings, even the most outrageously chowderheadedly monotheistic, as the most daring and thoroughgoing of the bunch: the Buddhifying adoption and thus nullification of monotheism itself.

Now let us turn to another such case: the Pure Lands as the Buddhifying adoption and thus nullification of the always popular get-in-good-with-deity-and-posthumously-be-born-in-paradise-when-you-die type of religion.

11. An Alternate Atheist Faith: Amida Buddha and the Pure Land

Consider the following: a being of inconceivably limitless power who pervades the universe with the light of his infinite wisdom and goodwill, enacting at all times and places his elaborate plan to save all, even the worst sinners, if only they will take refuge in what he wills for them, express their faith in him, give up their spiritual pride in themselves, relying only on his power and not on their own paltry good works—for in comparison to the real standard of goodness embodied by his being, all these so-called "good works," whether in the interpersonal ethical relations of the most upright citizen or in the religious practices of the highest saints, are through and through corrupt, merely thinly disguised forms of vanity, hatred, greed, selfishness, and ignorance. Constant devotion from the person of the believer to the person of this being, explicitly for the purpose of evading the hellish destiny one deserves after death through the grace of his free gift of acceptance, which will instead transport one after death to a land of bliss. Even our faith and devotion to that illimitable being are ultimately only attributable to that illimitable being himself, not to ourselves; it is him, not us, that is to be credited with our faith in him, by which we are saved. And in the current period of historical time at least, total reliance on his power is the only thing that can save us—there is no other way. None of this can be proved, of course, and in fact belief in such an unlikely scenario is highly unjustifiable through our reasoning or any evidence other than scriptural hearsay. But for that very reason, absolute faith is called for, and is itself a miraculous benediction.

All of the above obviously could describe certain well-known monotheist religions. But I am actually describing Jōdō Shinshū Buddhism, founded by the Japanese monk Shinran (1173-

1263). The being of inconceivably limitless power is Amida Buddha, the shortened Japanese form of Amitābha Buddha, which means "Awakened One of Illimitable Light," who is also known as Amitāyus Buddha, which means "Awakened One of Illimitable Life." What needs to be addressed here is just how big a difference it makes that, in spite of all the similarities to monotheist faiths of a certain stripe enumerated above—many of the things most offensive to modern secular sensibilities about religious faith in general—just how much of a big difference it makes that this is in fact not a monotheism, indeed is a deeply atheist type of religious consciousness. For it is to be noted that among the features of this being I did not list "Creator of the Universe." Nor did I describe this being as the creator or the judge of the beings he devotes himself to saving, nor punisher of anyone who was not saved, nor maker of the rules governing the fates of these beings. Nor, for that matter, did I even describe him as a lower-case "god." For according to this faith, Amida Buddha began as an ordinary human being like you and me, though in a land very far removed and very long ago in the vast Buddhist cosmos. Many many many trillions of years ago, this ordinary person heard a Buddha, a fully enlightened being, preach the Dharma, the Buddhist path, and was moved to leave the household life and become a monk, taking the name Dharmākara, meaning "Treasury of the Dharma." He made a vow to become a Buddha sometime in the future, thus becoming a bodhisattva—committed to unimaginably long periods of Buddhist practice, whereby he would attain all the necessary powers to save all sentient beings from suffering. One aspect of this vow was that he would create an environment that would by maximally conducive to sentient beings born there in their own practice of Buddhism, so that if they so chose they could more expeditiously become arhats (ending all suffering for themselves, and forever transcending the cycle of painful conditional rebirth) or else, like Dharmākara himself, become bodhisattvas striving to become Buddhas. He asked his teacher, the Buddha of that age, to show him what other Buddhas had done in creating their "Pure Lands," the places where, after becoming Buddhas, they continue to teach and transform sentient beings. After an extended vision and tour of all existing Pure Lands of all Buddhas, he chose what he considered the best features from each of them, and accordingly made a series of 48 Vows, all with the same form: "Unless such and such is the case when I become a Buddha, I will not become a Buddha." Dharmākara was still an ordinary unenlightened

being at this point in time. The only thing that distinguished him was this vow not to stop his practice until all this was accomplished—he had no idea how it was going to be accomplished. He would create a world according to his judgment of what would be best for the beings there. So though he was not the creator of the universe, he was the deliberate conscious creator of a particular world, setting the parameters through conscious choice—a finite miniature instance of total purposivity, and of *Noûs as Archê*—performing acts of supremely efficacious will within the larger context of a purposeless cosmos. One of the vows stipulated that inhabitants of his Pure Land would be able to instantly and unobstructedly visit all other lands, all the lands Amida himself did not create, and learn from them. Another stipulates that their vision always extend to all those other lands, and another that they can see the thoughts of all the beings in those lands who are unrelated to this Pure Land and its Buddha, Amida, whose vow this is. There were also vows stipulating that everyone there have the same skin color and level of physical beauty, have food and clothing instantly available without labor, read each others thoughts, remember all their own past lives and so on. And one of his vows included the stipulation that anyone who ten times called his name—not his current name Dharmākara, but the name he would adopt when he became a Buddha, Amida—would be born in that Pure Land after death. Then the scripture does a flash cut and we are told: Dharmākara did in fact become a Buddha, and is a Buddha now. So ipso facto, given his firm determination, we know that all those vows must have been fulfilled.

Will and conscious purpose, determined action to achieve an ambitious goal, are front and center here. But Shinran's Pure Land religion of faith stresses that we cannot now do likewise: we are sinful and deluded through and through, and can only depend on the "Other-Power" of Amida's vow—until we are reborn in the Pure Land, after which we can indeed become wise and strong enough to do as he did, and in the future become Buddhas who build Pure Lands for other sentient beings. Shinran says: I have no idea what's good or bad, I'm way too stupid and ignorant to know that. For the same reason, I have no idea of what's true, and thus I cannot possibly be sure that this tall tale about Dharmākara is true. But I believe it, because I have no other choice: being so stupid, helpless, unable to practice Buddhism, destined to long sojourns in purgatory if left to my own reasoning and virtue, when I heard my teacher Hõnen say that all that is needed is faith—not even the recitation of the name required in the scripture, but

just faith itself—I had no choice but to believe it. So now I believe it. Recitation of the name too is not due to any merit of my own, it is not even my own deed: it is Amida himself who bestows this mind of faith (shinjin). But it is not this faith that saves me: it is Amida's vow that saves me. My faith is gratitude for that fact, and its arising of in me now is the sign that this is the lifetime in which it is happening; rather than having to continue on through samsara for trillions of eons until I encounter news of Amida's vow, or find some other way out, I will go to Amida's Pure Land when I die this time. But since we have infinite time ahead of us, this will happen to everyone who needs it. It's true that Shinran insists that there is no other viable practice at our present time and place; given our present world conditions, there is no other Buddhist practice that can succeed. As in nearly all East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism, though, every sentient being everywhere will become a Buddha sooner or later. Strictly speaking, when in those vast and painful samsaric wanderings they find themselves in some in other world system, where the Dharma-ending age (mappo) has not yet been reached, they may make it to Buddhahood without having to go through the detour of the Pure Land of Amida, or may have available to them other viable Pure Lands, but all are eventually destined for Buddhahood no matter what, some sooner and some later. The arising of faith in me now is my gratitude that Amida has become known to me, that my karmic relation to him has ripened, and I will not have to undergo further eons of painful transmigration before moving into position for the achievement Buddhahood. But the faith is not what does the work: Amida's vow does. Such is Amida's infinite compassion. The recitation of the Nembutsu, the Name of the Buddha, is just an expression of gratitude, but even this gratitude is beyond my "self-power"—I'm way too ungrateful a wretch to be genuinely thankful for this gift, that would be way too much of a virtue for someone like me to aspire to. Nor do I feel much desire to go to this boring Pure Land of his—I'm way too stupid to see what would be so great about a place like that, so I can't drum up much enthusiasm for it—on my own. If I ever do feel a twinkling of a desire to go there, it's due to Amida's grace. So it is Amida bestowing my faith, my gratitude, even my aspiration to transcend my sin and ignorance.

Shinran tells us further that what we experience as shinjin, faith, is none other than Amida's Vow itself—as Dharmākara the ordinary deluded being aspired to become Amida, we ordinary deluded beings now aspire to be born in his Pure Land. Our faith is the experience of

the grace that comes to save us as it arises on the other side, the side of the Buddha: the recognition of our utter helplessness and need of a Buddha's help, which on the one hand manifests as Amida's vow to become that Buddha and on the other hand manifests as the recognition of our present helplessness and need. This of course has powerful resonances with Luther's view of faith as a gift of God, discussed in online appendix A, supplement 2, "Monotheist Innovations as Backfiring Detheologies." The difference, however, lies in the difference between the concept of "God" and the concept of "Buddha." No one starts as a Buddha: a Buddha is something that one must become, starting as a deluded sentient being, and this applies also to Amida. Shinran holds that the Vow that transformed him into a Buddha is the very thing that we feel as our faith in his Buddhahood. In this sense it is said that when the unenlightened Dharmākara proclaimed his Vow, his resolution toward Buddhahood, he was doing just what we unenlightened beings now are doing when we recite the name Amida and our total reliance upon him: the aspiration to become Buddha is included in the Nembutsu, in the "Namu" ("I take refuge") of the formula "Namu Amida Butsu"—I take refuge in Amida Buddha. "I take refuge" is what we say, relying entirely on Other-Power. But "I take refuge in (the Buddhahood I am now imaginatively aspiring to, namely) Amida Budda" is also what Dharmakara was saying when he made the Vow—the Vow that stipulated that by saying "I take refuge in Amida Buddha" all of us would be born in the Pure Land and from there be able to become Buddhas ourselves. His vowing to be a Buddha is also vowing to make all beings able to become Buddhas by saying this name, by turning their aspiration in this same direction as the Vow itself turned, toward his own future Buddhahood as Amida. Our shinjin is precisely his Vow to become a Buddha, his bodhicitta, and more particularly his 18th Vow, where he vowed that whoever so much as called upon him—or directed their minds toward him—would be born in his Pure Land. His Vow to save us through our calling to him is what is calling to him right now. His will is not merely a "compensation" for our willlessness: his will is precisely what we experience as our willlessness. Further, Shinran claims, this shinjin, this belief in our own powerlessness and worthlessness and the concomitant total reliance on Other Power, is Buddha-nature itself, is Buddhahood itself, is the Great Compassion directed back at us itself, is Great Nirvana itself. Living in this Other Power, surrendering completely to it, we are to become truly

wuwei, making no calculations of our own about what is so or what is good or what to do. But the purpose and will and personality that we are surrendering to here are purpose and will and personality that arose in a context of surrounding purposelessness, willlessness, and impersonality, a meaning posited by a sentient being as a response to and as a transformative taking up of a prior meaninglessness, aimed above all at becoming at home in this meaninglessness, in seeing this meaninglessness pervading its own meaning-making, at realizing the non-obstruction and coextensivity between infinite meanings and unchanging meaninglessness. The Great Assymmetry discussed in Chapter Two applies here: the ultimacy of meaninglessness rather than meaning allows for the mutual inclusion of meaning and meaninglessness, rather than their mutual exclusion. My willlessness and Amida's will are thus simply two alternate reads of this same fact, this will-willlessness, this meaningless-meaning. Hence, rather than the monotheist's bivalent "Not my will but Thine be done," assuming a mutually exclusive dichotomy between the two, as pertains to any two wills when will is considered ultimate rather than non-ultimate, Shinran says, "No duty [無義-also read to mean "no meaning, no calculating, no work toward a purpose"] is the true duty [the true meaning, the true work, the true calculation, the true purpose]."

Hence we see that what seemed at first to be a close analogue to Compensatory Theism—i.e., a structure where the human being is to renounce his own corrupt self-will to let the pure self-will of an exalted Other work through me and around me, to go fully *wuwei* myself but only in order to let the other, true, *youwei* work through me—here goes through an interesting reversal, which seems to be foreclosed in Compensatory Theism. Because this is an atheist system, because purpose is not the ultimate horizon, because it is *wuwei* infinity and not *youwei* decision or intention that is ultimate, and that is dispositive in this being whose name is taken to mean "awakening of infinite life (time) and light (space)," all its irrationalism and obfuscation does not land in the bifurcation and exclusion of an ultimate judgment: the inclusiveness of the impersonal wins out even in this relentlessly personalist orientation, in the form of a compassion that combines the ineluctable all-inclusiveness of unconditional necessity with the tenderness of motherly intersubjective care–-not as decision or contract but as relentless non-negotiable drive, love as a relentless and impersonal "force of nature." In spite of the

monomaniacal focus on the believer's relationship to a particular supremely powerful personal being as the sole means of salvation—indeed as the only thing of real value in the world--Amida eventually embraces all, even non-believers and slanderers: non-believers will be born according to their regular karma, again and again through infinite time until they encounter Amida and experience the gift of faith. (In even more radical Pure Land systems, like that of Ippen of the Ji ("Time") School, even faith is not necessary: just saying "Namu Amida Butsu" is sufficient for birth in the Pure Land, whether you believe in it or not—and this moment of speaking the name is regarded as coextensive with Dharmakara's utterance of his own Vow and the eons of strenuous practice by which he became Amida.) All will eventually become Buddhas, and make their own Pure Lands to save sentient beings. In a monotheist system, an attempted teaching of pure acceptance, grace, and faith will tend to end up being a means toward a dichotomy, as we saw in online appendix A, supplement 7, "Why So Hard on Love Incarnate": oneness is a means toward a final dualism, as dualism is entailed in the structure of purpose, and with it decision, judgment, exclusion. On the contrary, here we have just the opposite structure: the extreme dualism of helpless sinful human and all-benevolent perfect deity figure ends up being a dichotomous means to an end of the opposite type, the total overcoming of the dichotomy: where the consciousness of our own powerlessness is itself precisely the almighty power that is ostensibly its opposite, and indeed an experience of the being the almighty power in its becoming, for Buddhahood is something that must become itself again and again, each time retrospectively positing its own eternity, on the Tiantai model described above (Shinran had started his career as a Tendai monk). Thus through a very simple form of devotional faith, we are at once both fully aware of our own finite nothingness, powerlessness, and worthlessness, and also thereby identical to the power and goodness of the deity. This is just what the monotheist mystics aspired to again and again, thwarted in the final hour, though, by the ultimacy of the dichotomous structure built into the ultimacy of a conscious purposeful creator as the ultimate horizon of being, haunting even the attempts to think of a nothingness beyond being, a nothingness that then comes to share the exclusive structure of purpose, of oneness, of being itself under the auspices of the *Noûs as Arché* tradition. Such a non-dual devotionalism, a mystical convergence of infinite distance from the deity and remainderless identity with the

deity, of finite powerlessness and infinite power, can in fact be succesfully imagined--but only if, as here, there is no God.

12. Back to Ground Zero with the Nihilist Virtuouso: Chumming With and Dissolving the Creator in Zhuangzi's Perspectival Mirror

We have stressed the importance of ancient Daoism in framing our discussion here, and have already taken a look at the *Daodejing* in some detail to set up our basic categories in Part One of this book. The next classic text of this tradition, the *Zhuangzi*, was also a keynote to our formulations of Emulative Atheist Mysticism there. But close readers familiar with the *Zhuangzi* might understandably be surprised to find me trotting him out throughout this book as the ultimate atheist hero. After all, the core texts of the *Zhuangzi* are undeniably exceptionally obsessed with "Heaven" (*tian* 天—so much so that Xunzi criticizes Zhuangzi as someone who "is obsessed by Heaven and thus blinded with respect to Man"). Even more troublingly, the *Zhuangzi* also actually provides the locus classicus for what is really the closest term in all classical Chinese literature for something like an anthropomorphic creator deity: *zaowuzhe* 造物者, "the Creator of Things." This is not a term associated with ancient Chinese religion, and is unattested in any text prior to Chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*, where—some readers might object—it is most emphatically presented as anthropomorphized and intentional creator of all things, to whose intentions one would be wise to submit: a pitch perfect example of Compensatory Theism. To understand why exactly this seeming tilt toward theistic rhetoric conceals an even more radically atheist vision than perhaps any other of the writers and systems considered here, we must examine the distinctive contours and contexts of Zhuangzi's intervention in some detail.

We have encountered the Chinese word "Heaven (*tian* 天)" in our discussion of Confucianism above. The term had meant, first and foremost, the literal sky above, but it came to have many denotations with many divergent implications in early China. What is shared by all of these denotations is the sense of what is not done by human will, what is beyond human power, like the sky. In the political propaganda of the Zhou dynasty (1046-256), the term came to be used, possibly as an indirect metonym, to name the deity in charge of political fortunes, the

sponsor of the Zhou overthrow of the Shang dynasty (c. 1600-1046) in the 11th century BCE, ostensibly because of the moral outrages of the Shang's last emperors. Over the next millennium this deity Tian, Heaven, comes largely to replace the previously preferred official term for the morally-interested controller of imperial politics, Shang Di 上帝, "the Lord on High." The anthropomorphic character of this deity came to be gradually diluted among some intellectuals by the time of the Spring and Autumn period (771-476). We have already noted Confucius' (551-479) remark that he wishes to emulate Heaven in that it "does not speak" and yet is nevertheless instrumental in some way to the generation and growth of all natural things. The associations between the sky and the turning of the seasons, and thus with the birth and growth of plants and animals, are already coming to the fore in this demythologizing trend. At the same time, for Confucius, Heaven retains some vestigial sense of interested sponsorship of legitimate projects of political, social and ethical reform, such as his own. The Confucian tradition in general, as we saw, retained this ambiguity of the naturalistic and ethical associations of Heaven, linking these two senses by asserting that the spontaneous processes of growth seen in nature and the spontaneous sproutings of moral feelings in human beings are both due to the same power of Heaven, both emerging from something beyond deliberate human control but requiring human tending and nourishment to reach their fullest flourishing. Heaven may or may not control the external outcomes of events according to a moral arc (Mencius is ambiguous on this point), but it definitely makes moral interventions in the world via its activity as a very special part of that world, namely, the natural and spontaneous human constitution, and the actions that can, under the right conditions, be made to follow from that. In the eventually dominant Mencian line of Confucianism, the special solution to the problem of bridging the gap between the natural and the human, and the non-normative and the normative, is to locate the activity of this non-human agent right in the heart (literally) of human activity, as the spontaneity of generation and growth of certain (but not all) human sentiments, ultimately deriving from Heaven.

In this connection, Mencius himself offers an arresting definition: "When something is done though no one does it, that is [the work of] Heaven. " 莫之為而為者，天也.（Mencius 5A6）He probably does not mean this literally, denying even a divine agent, but instead means simply that no specific human agent has intentionally done these things; they are instead done by

something or someone *else* (which may well be an intentional agent), that is, by Heaven. This would be a typical trope of Compensatory Theism (not done by us=done by someone else), if not for the fact that even whatever vague agency can be attributed to Heaven itself here is, like all agency and all doing, conceived as ultimately rooted in its ultimate agentless spontaneity. But Zhuangzi, a near contemporary of Mencius, presents a starkly contrasted but closely related vision of the role of Heaven. In a way, his starting point is to take seriously and literally this definition of Heaven voiced by Mencius, which was perhaps already pervasive at the time. While Mencius probably meant that Heaven is the name of the non-human agent (albeit one itself rooted in agentlessness) of whatever happens without human intervention, Heaven is for the radical Zhuangzi just a name for what happens although done by no identifiable agent at all: it is a stand-in space-filling word for real agentless spontaneity. What happens is not done by man and not done by someone or something else called "Heaven" either—and this absence of agent, human or divine, is now all that is referred to when the word "Heaven" is used, a situation that leads to many of the self-referential paradoxes and rhetorical indirections that are distinctive to the *Zhuangzi*.

Moreover, since no one agent is identifiable as Heaven, no specific acts are identifiable as more Heavenly than others. Mencius' privileging of certain spontaneous events over others — i.e., the moral impulses belonging specifically to the organ of the human heart over the spontaneous functions of the other organs (a privileging which is itself perhaps merely rhetorical, or effectively performative: see Mencius 7B24)—falls away; it is their spontaneity as such, the lack of a discoverable agent, that is now the productive power of a "Heaven" that is no specific being—i.e., which has become a word for the absence of any specific being--and this is equally everywhere and nowhere.

Zhuangzi arrives at this conclusion through a philosophically intricate critique of the notion of identifiability as such, and with it agency as such, deploying the vocabulary of a nascent logical discourse that had begun to raise questions about the reliability of conventionally accepted judgments, distinctions, and attributions of meanings. In Zhuangzi these questions are turned toward an inquiry into the necessarily perspectival nature of determinate attributions of identity, and the way in which this necessarily leads to the self-undermining of any such

attribution. To posit an identity is to make a distinction between what is that thing and what is not. Such distinctions are actions done in accordance with a perspective. But upon inspection, we find that a perspective is *itself* something with an identity, something identifiable as this perspective as opposed to some other possible perspective. It exists only in contrast to other perspectives. Zhuangzi thus argues that to posit the existence of a perspective is by definition also to posit the existence of alternate perspectives. But alternate perspectives by definition make different distinctions, including the fundamental distinction between "this" (itself) and "that" (another perspective). The latter is distinguished from the originally posited perspective by in some respect differing from or contradicting it, along with the distinctions it makes concerning identities. So to posit any given perspective is simultaneously to posit a contradictory perspective; to make an attribution of identity to anything is in the same act to posit a contradictory attribution of identity for it.

The structure invoked here can be illustrated by considering certain common indexical words: to say "now" is to posit a contrast to "then"—but if "then" exists, it too must be a "now." From the point of view of that alternate "now," the necessary existence of which I have asserted just by asserting that this present moment is what is "now," that original "now" is necessarily viewed as a "then." Merely by positing "now," I posit its difference from something else, from "then"—which must view my "now" as its "then." My very attempt to distinguish it is what undermines the distinction; by contrasting it to what it is not, trying to identify it is only as "now" and not as "then," I have made it necessarily also "then." Similarly, to say "I" is to posit a contrast to "you," but the existence of this "you" makes it also an "I," for whom "I" am instead a "you." To say "here" is to posit "there," which is itself a "here," relative to which the original "here" becomes a "there." So when I say that something is to be called "now" I am also stipulating that it is to be called "then"—not (only) that something else is "then," but that this very moment I've called a "now" is itself necessarily a "then." If I say something is "here," I am also saying that it is "there." If I say I am an "I," I am also stipulating that I am a "you." For Zhuangzi, the same sort of problem applies to any entity, physical or metaphysical, logical or empirical, abstract or concrete, as long as it is determinate, a "this" as opposed to a "that." If I say something is "this," I am also saying that it is "that."

It is for this reason that what is not done by man is no longer seen, as most likely is the case for Mencius, as something done by something or someone else, i.e., some stably identifiable "agent" other than man. Any attempt to identify an agent necessarily posits alternate perspectives from which that agent is seen with equal plausibility to be not-that-agent. Hence our own actions, and the events of the natural world, cannot be attributed to any definite agent at all, nor even definitively to a lack of agency, which, as some particular state contrasted to what it is not, likewise falls prey to this critique of identifiability. For Zhuangzi, then, non-human agency (e.g., divine agency) falls away with the same stroke as human agency. (This is why we have invoked him as an exemplar of Emulative Atheism.)

Readers are asked to consult Chapter Two of the *Zhuangzi* to see how such considerations unfold into further implications. That chapter begins with the loss of the agent or "true ruler" that is sought behind natural events (i.e., Heaven) and also of the stably identifiable human self sought behind all the wildly varying human responses to events (that is, behind human emotions, actions and discourses). This "true controller" is in both cases sought and never found, for as soon as anything is identified to fit the bill, its identity, as the product of a perspective that necessarily posits alternate perspectives that undermine it, is revealed to entail its own undoing. But both the search for an identity behind shifting appearances and the failure of this search are necessary rather than contingent. The manifest content of our experiences transforms through wildly differing, even contradictory states—different moods, different thoughts, different perceptions. This is not only the transformation of the contents of our experience; also changing is the perspective that grounds our act of identifying each one as this or that. But we can identify this change of identity of our perspective over time only from within a further one of the perspectives that emerges in this very process. Both our perspective and the experiences it identifies are thus legitimately felt not to be fully self-grounding, not in control of themselves, incapable of self-initiating and self-sustaining. They seem to arise out of nowhere, and disappear or transform without warning, in a bewildering profusion of varying states that are constantly overturning each other. Zhuangzi compares it to the myriad different tones of a windstorm blown through trees and hollows. Which is "the" sound of the wind? Our transformations are not entirely in our own control, and we do not create ourselves. The same

can be said for any particular moment of experience considered separately: it is not in control of itself, and does not create itself. Their very appearing is what overturns them; by identifying themselves as "this," they posit in contrast a "that" which they are not, which already introduces into experience the perspective from which they are, on the contrary, identified as "that."

This constant instability and diversity, this constant juxtaposition among, and slippage into, other states easily suggests a general sense of something truly "other" to *all* of them lurking in all experiences, some seemingly unseen force that links them, transitions through them, and propels each state into the next, as if an unseen torque were distorting all apparent trajectories and morphing one into the next, or as if an unseen fabric or container pervaded or encompassed them. That would be the one constant within all this transformation--a single force that animates them, or a unity that encompasses them all, or underlies them all, or causes them all, or controls them all, or connects them all. Such would be the traditional role for Heaven (sky) among all seasons of the year and all the things that grow and live beneath it, and for the self among all moods and states and experiences: a unifier, or a totality, or an undergirding, or an encompasser, or a cause, or a connector, or a controller. In fact, we have here a development of the motif we already described as central to Daoist thinking back in our discussion of the *Daodejing*: the very distinctiveness and identifiability of any state comes with a contrast, appears only qua a distinguishing from what it is not. Every "this" already points to a background of "something-other-than-this." Their identity is their distinctness, their distinctness is their otherness from something--either another state (whether previous, subsequent or simultaneous) or something behind all the states, differing from them all. But even in the former case, the very ability to sustain a comparison, and thus experience the contrast between any two states, points to some third thing that subtends them, the medium in which or against which they are occurring. Only thus can the differences among them be apprehended at all. The very disunity of the transformations, the entirety of the array of distinct identities coming and going and swarming and separating, requires a background that is distinct from it. This is easily and understandably taken for a pointer to a transcendent other, an entity that is fully unified, something that could be stably identified as a constant throughout them all: Heaven for events in the world, or the Self for states of mind, ideas, preferences, feelings, actions. Zhuangzi says, 非彼無我，非我無所**取**

"Without them there is no me, but without me there is nothing from which they are picked out." Without the differing states of the self there is no experience of a self, but without a selfsame something sustained through them all, there is nothing from which anything can be singled out—there is no singling out of one against another, or of any against a background. Pure difference would not even register as difference; absolute impermanence of each event, wiping out all trace of past events, could not be experienced as contrasted to a past, since no apprehension of the past would be available there to contrast it with--and hence the present would not appear, contrastingly, as present. Pure difference would not register as any difference at all. To stick to Zhuangzi's metaphor, addressing only the dimension of sound: for the ear there is no wind apart from the varying sounds of the storm, each from its own hole; but even though there is no single sound of the wind simpliciter, without the sound of wind sustained through all sounds there would be no other sounds for each sound to be contrasted to, nothing to be distinguished from, nothing to arise from, nothing to be singled out from. The search for a single unified true agent behind everything that happens is to this extent inevitable.

But the failure of this search is equally inevitable. Zhuangzi continues: "There seems as if there were some true governor of them all, but any sign of one is uniquely unobtainable." The text points us to several problems. First, it considers our relation to our own bodies, which are made of various different organs, each with its own trajectories of activity and tendency, as an analogy both for the relation between our putative Self and its states of mind, each with its own tone and trajectory, and for the relation between Heaven and the world of various things, each with its own perspective, which it allegedly unifies and controls. Does one organ "rule" all the others, as the "true lord" of the body—as for example Mencius thinks our "heart" and its desires should rule over all our other organs and the desires each of them has, or, more to the point in the present context, as our personal *Noûs* is meant to rule and determinate all our activities, or (for post Anaxagoran monotheists) a cosmic *Noûs* is supposed to rule all things in the world? Does it not seem more accurate to say that they govern each other in turn, that the unity is not unilaterally imposed by any one of them at all times, nor by a static totality of the body as a whole, but rather that their dominance transforms just as our moods do, just as the sound of the wind does--that "the unified sound of the wind" is now yeeee! and now yuuuu!, and in each case

that is the total sound of the wind as a whole at that time? Our liver may be the ruling element at one moment, our heart the next, our foot the next, but in each case that is the unifier of the activity of the body as a whole; we may be sad one moment and happy the next, but in each case that is the state of our mind as a whole, and that mood, that sad thought or happy thought, is the total expression of the whole self at that time. Not, however a statically sad or happy total self: rather, a sad self that has within it the seeds of its own transformation into happiness, a happy self that has in it the seeds of its own transformation into sadness. Indeed, the only unity is just this inevitability and facility in transforming into a different totality: the health of the body, its only true unity, lies in its being able to respond to the world in such a way that at one time the foot is the master (e.g., when finding footing on tricky terrain), and at another time the hand (when reaching for a support), in each case able to draw all the other organs and their powers into that organ's momentary project as its temporary subordinates. My hand obeys my foot when it flies up to balance my shaky foothold; my foot obeys my hand when I go on tiptoe to reach that branch for support.

Approaching the problem from a different angle, the text goes on to suggest that if there were an identity responsible for producing the diversity of identities, it would ipso facto have no specific identity of its own, would not be identifiable; if it did, it would not be the producer or ground or source of all identities. Any definite identity would just be one more among the diverse items needing to be unified or contrasted; it cannot be what links all of them by grounding their contrast to one another. Any tone we attribute to the wind breathing out all the various tones would be among the manifold, not the unifier of the manifold. The particular tone—a particular identity--would be determined by the time and place and shape of the hole, not by the wind itself per se; if any particular tone were the proper constant tone of the wind, the other tones would not be the sound of the wind, would be excluded from the sound of the wind, would not belong to its unity. One would then have to look at that "real tone of the wind" and "all the other tones blown through the holes" and ask, what is it that blows forth and binds together this diversity? What can form a unity between the unity itself and the disunified diversity? Precisely in differing from them all, it would be one more item among them, one more

of the myriad tones in need of unification. As such, even if it must exist, it cannot have any one specific identity.

But is not clear how something without an identity is any different from not being anything at all, from being no one and nothing. By the same token, "no one and nothing" is indistinguishable from a something which is unidentifiable: the meaning of "nothing" is no different from "something we can't in any way identify." So both a definite presence and a definite absence of Heaven and Self are equally disallowed, by the same token. What we are left with is not merely the denial of Heaven and Self, but something even more deeply skeptical (or atheist): the idea that their existence would be no different from their non-existence, the undecidability between their existence and their nonexistence. The existence of a divine agent, Heaven would be no different from its non-existence: the same goes for a human agent, the Self. Everything would proceed just the same with or without it. It cannot be a something or a nothing, a definite presence or a definite absence. A definite absence, stably identifiable as such, would be an ultimate reference point and ground of all existence in just the way that a stable presence would be. It should be noted that this applies not only to the source of events, but also to their outcomes, and thus also to their meanings. There is neither any identifiable source and meaning of things, nor a definite lack of source and meaning. *And even if there were one, it would make no difference*. No hope of solving our problems by finding one is thus possible; the existence of God or Soul would not change anything about the non-existence of God and Soul.

Ultimate nihilism is presented here: ultimate meaning is not different from ultimate meaninglessness. Even if there were a true ruler, unity, meaning to things, it would not help—it would be exactly like meaninglessness. But in this ultimate nihilism Zhuangzi gives us also the ultimate overcoming of nihilism: the lack of God, Soul and Meaning is just as good as the existence of them! Indeed, that undecidability itself, the meaninglessness of meaning and the meaning of meaninglessness, is the best possible news.

For this built-in confusion pertaining to something identified as having no identity, a Mobius-strip of something that is nothing and nothing that is something, is then seen to pertain to the nature of identity as such, whether of a source (Heaven or Self: the sound of the wind per se) or of any of its putative products (natural events or personal experiences and actions: any

particular tone sounding forth from any particular hollow). To have an identity is never to definitely have that identity, for an identity relies on an attribution of a perspective, and a perspective is always also the positing of alternate perspectives. Every producing source, precisely in producing anything at all, thereby produces something that makes available another perspective that now serves just as well as its own defining source, and, because these products (specific experiences) are seen to have a different meaning and a different identity depending on their source and outcome, this undermines the definite identity even of the products of this source. We cannot distinguish what we call "Heaven" being a product of man from "man" being a product of Heaven, for positing either alternative at once equally establishes the other.

This model is expressed most elegantly in the famous butterfly dream story that ends Chapter Two: Zhuangzi dreams he is a butterfly, but then wakes up and wonders whether what he is experiencing now, his identity as Zhuangzi the erstwhile dreamer of the butterfly, is not just a dream the butterfly, whom he just dreamed about being, is now dreaming. There is no way to tell. As soon as he dreams he is a butterfly, it becomes equally likely that Zhuangzi, the source of the dreamt butterfly, is the dream of the butterfly, making the butterfly the source of the dreamt Zhuangzi. Here we have again the same structure we saw in the indexicals: "now" is necessarily distinguished from "then," but this positing of "then" makes the original "now" equally a "then." By being source distinguished from product, dreamer as opposed to dream, Zhuangzi becomes indistinguishable from product, from dream; by being product, the dreamt, the butterfly becomes indistinguishable from source, the dreamer. The identity of both is undermined in that each is identified only in contradistinction to the other, but in positing the other, the other's perspective is also posited, from which oneself is the dreamt illusion. This makes it necessarily impossible to know which one is the real self behind which. "There must be a distinction between them," as he says, and equally there must be a confusion about which is the source of which, which is also a confusion about which reduces to which, about which is the true identity expressed deceptively as the other. This is what Zhuangzi sees in the relation of all things to what they are distinguished from, and in all their transformations into one another.

What emerges from these considerations is a mystical agnosticism, a convergence of something similar to a reverent negative theology with what in isolation would be a nihilistic

skepticism. In the indistinguishability of these seemingly opposite positions we find the starting point of Zhuangzi's distinctive philosophy of religion. This typically takes the form of a three-step procedure. First, we show the necessity of distinctions for any attribution of identity. Then we raise questions about the validity of accepted distinctions, in light of their necessary self-undermining, and like some of the logicians, seeing all distinctions to be insupportable, we posit instead an undifferentiated oneness of all things. But then, in the final step, this oneness too falls prey to the same critique: the distinction between "oneness" and "non-oneness" does not survive this perspectival logic any better. In this way neither the original distinctions nor the second lack of distinctions can stand; but this inescapable paradox is not considered an objection or refutation suggesting a dead-end, but a positive result: the insupportability of the One, or indeed of any one, any particular identity, brings on the beatific state described in terms of forgetting 忘 and transformation 化, or, put another way, "doubt 疑 and drift 滑." Forgetting or doubt is the undermining of the distinctions that would establish certainty about any identity or lack of any identity. Transformation or drift is the affirmation of inevitable otherness pressing through any putative identity, as each posits an unlimited array of possible alternate identities from and to which it transforms. Forgetting or doubt is the apprehension of the possibility that the actual identity of whatever is presently identified as "this" is actually here and now already "that"—is already one of the alternate identities in contrast to which its identity as "this" is established: it could be an expression or aspect of any of them. As in the butterfly dream, each moment is a waking up to the question of whether this present identity is or is not the dreamer of all the pasts and future identities, which would make them all mere aspects of itself, or whether past dreamt identities are not the real identity behind this presently dreamt identity, which would make itself a mere aspect of them instead. Zhuang Zhou could be a name for a fleeting aspect of the underlying constant butterfly, or the butterfly could be a name for a fleeting aspect of the underlying constant Zhuang Zhou. The distinction between Zhou and the butterfly is thus preserved, inescapable, eternal, but in this very distinction is also overcome: we land in the typical Zhuangzian question: "Is there really any distinction between them? Or is there no distinction between them?" Neither answer is unilaterally correct, because the two alternatives are really equivalent: the distinction is internal to both sides of the eternal divide. This/that is

contrasted to this/that—is there a contrast there, or not? Thus we arrive at the unobstructed transformation among all perspectives, and thus the warranting of all possible distinctions, an infinite array of all possible distinctions as made from all possible mutually positing perspectives, constantly transforming into one another. The transformation is "unobstructed" because it is not simply a change from one certain state to another different but equally certain state; rather the different states might have been what the changed-from state actually was all along, the dreamer of its dream. This is the Zhuangzian three-step: from the setting up of conventional distinctions to the questioning of these distinctions and the positing of oneness, from oneness to forgetting and the resurrection of all distinctions in their open transformation into each other.

This fecund instability is now experienced as the very productive power formerly attributed to "Heaven," and still sometimes indicated in that way, although now always with a subsequent erasure or ironic backing-away. Zhuangzi sometimes replaces "Heaven" with "Fate" *ming* 命, traditionally the ungainsayable power that makes things go as they do, but now this is explicitly presented as a word used when no agent at all can be found, *including Heaven* (see the last sentences of Chapter Six). These events are not attributed to any single source, not given any single meaning, not done by any single agent, not reducible to any single principle. For this reason too, as we'll see below, a whole host of terms are offered as alternates for Heaven and for Fate, from the most anthropomorphic to the least—the Creator of Things 造物者, Creation-Transformation 造化, the Great Clump 大塊, Yin and Yang 陰陽—but most famously the term Dao 道. This term, as used in the *Zhuangzi* as in the *Daodejing*, is an ironic reversal of the prior meanings of this term that fits perfectly this discovery of the interchangeability of absolute skepticism and mystical insight, of absolute presence and absolute absence. Dao originally means "road," and had long been used in the slightly extended sense of a method or means, a course of cultivation or procedure for attaining a particular end--for example, the "way" of benevolence and righteousness, the "way" of sagely kingship, the "way" of archery, even the way of Heaven (e.g., its rotation and alternation of the seasons, producing agricultural growth). A dao is literally what makes things happen, what gets one to a pre-specified result, to whatever things one is looking for, to whatever things one is defining as important, to real things and real

goods in the relevant sense. Zhuangzi however speaks of "a dao that is not a dao" 不道之道 (Chapter Two)—i.e., a way of making things happen which is no particular way, done by no particular agent, embracing no particular vision of what things count as legitimate outcomes, done without anyone (whether oneself or anyone else, whether human or divine) knowing how or why. We may call this, paradoxically, a perfect atheism reaching a convergence with a thorough mystical vision of beatifically meaningless fecundity, exuberantly productive not only of objects but also of values, of viewpoints, of perspectives, of meanings, of frameworks for alternately defining how objects are to be divided and classed and identified and valued. Zhuangzi disallows the possibility of a definite identity for the source and outcome of things and actions and perspectives, either as Heaven as in religious thinking or a definite denial of the same, which would amount to a definite nothingness as source and outcome, as in run of the mill atheism, or of a straightforward pluralism where linear causality attributes in each case a single cause for a single effect, since neither an individual concrete cause nor a universal cause can have a definite identity that doesn't ipso facto make it also the bearer of equally likely contrary identities. This means that no single meaning or identity can be attributed to any event or set of events, that inexhaustible transformation of identities and values is imminent to existence. And yet that this does not lead to nihilistic despair but rather to a new opening up to the world, an opening up which exceeds that originally sought by connection with Heaven or definite "way" in its earlier sense; now it is "way" as such, interconnection and openness in all directions, between each position and every other position--for a "way" is precisely an openness between one position and another. That is what Zhuangzi means by Dao.

In a few places in the text, we find descriptions of what might be classed as apophatic spiritual practices. These do not involve any detailed descriptions of yogic postures or visualizations, but rather a progressive clearing away of the mind's preconceptions, its rigid adherence to any particular fixed perspective and the concomitant judgments about what is so and what is right. Here again we see the convergence of skepticism and mysticism. These states and practices are described with such terms as "me losing myself," 吾喪我 "the fasting of the heart and mind," 心齋 "dropping away the torso and limbs, chasing out acuity of hearing and vision, departing from the body and getting rid of the understanding, becoming the same as the

great (transforming) openness, [which is] called sitting and forgetting," 墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大(化)通，此謂坐忘 "forgetting morality, ritual, music," 忘仁義禮樂 "ousting past and present, ousting the world, ousting all things, ousting life itself" 外古今、外天下、外物 、外生. The resulting state is described as "an emptiness that awaits the presence of things," 虛而待物, "using the mind like a mirror, responding but not storing," 用心若鏡，應而不藏, "harmonizing with all rights and wrongs, with every 'this' and every 'that,' while resting in the center of the Potter's Wheel of Heaven," 和之以是非而休乎天鈞 "this and that no longer matching as opposites, [which is called] the axis of Dao, which when it finds the center of any circle responds without limit, with a limitless supply of rights and a limitless supply of wrongs," 彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也, "the numinous reservoir that can be poured into without ever filling and can be dipped out from without ever being exhausted," 此之謂天府。注焉而不滿，酌焉而不竭，而不知其所由來，"identity with Great (or 'Transforming') Openness,"同乎大（化）通, "the breakthrough of dawn," 朝徹 "seeing whatever appears as the one and only" 見獨, "fully embodying the infinite and wandering without identifiability," 體盡無窮，而遊無朕,"the tumultuous tranquility" 攖寧 and so on. All these terms point to the application of the above skeptical insights about identifiability of things and selves, maintaining a state which accepts no conclusions and attributes no particular single source and no particular single telos or meaning to any experience, reconnecting with the drift and doubt, the transforming and forgetting, the interconnecting upsurge of ever new events and ever new responses coming from no definite source and directed to no single long-term goal. For both explanations through efficient causes and explanations through final causes, both sources and meanings, require some term with a definite identity (i.e., the efficient or final cause itself), the possibility of which Zhuangzi has fatally destabilized.

As the mirror metaphor would suggest, the emptying of preconceptions is itself here seen as a way of enhancing the sensitivity and responsiveness of the mind, allowing it to adapt to the ever-shifting micro-demands of each emergent perspective in such a way that both protects one from

damage and also allows the various perspectives to transform freely into one another without obstruction. This is symbolized dramatically in the famous story that opens Chapter Three, which tells of a butcher whose knife passes through the open channels that form the grains of an ox's body. The edge of the knife (the Zhuangzian person) has "no thickness"—lacks any definite identifiability, has "lost itself"—and its placement into the ox allows for an altered experience of the ox: the ox is no longer experienced as a clump of solid identifiable obstructions to be slashed through, but rather at every point shows empty passageways--non-identities--through which the knife can pass. This both preserves the knife from wear and tear, and also forms channels that clear a way, a dao, a "path" through the ox of the world, transforming it and opening it out to the further transformation and interconnection with the world (e.g., becoming food for delectation, consumption, digestion, energy, other animals' action). The unexpectedly zigzagging and branching course through the ox is a dao, but a dao which is not a dao, i.e., which can not be surveyed in advance as a fixed set of roadways to guide the knife. For the "Dao that is not a dao" in Zhuangzi's new sense is an unobstructed openness that also implies unforeseeable transformation and connection, not only between things but also between perspectives on things. At the touch of the knife (the present perspective), each path transforms into other paths, each identity into other identities, unfolding unexpected twists and turns into new daos, for at each position of the knife (i.e., in each perspective) the relevant identities and network of connections transform. The knife has to get to each juncture to detect which way to go, and it is its presence there that opens up that new and unforeseen way to go. From the perspective of a moment ago, when the knife had not yet reached this new position and its perspective, this juncture may have looked entirely impassable and unobstructed, with no dao (opening, channel, path) available, and it may be again closed up from the perspective of a moment from now, when the knife has departed. The ox (the world) is transformed by the knife, the conclusionless all-responsive Zhuangzian person using his mind as a mirror, making unexpected channels through its stagnant, blocked preconceived form. This idea is extended to suggest that such an empty identityless person, although bringing no identifiably positive content to the table, offering no moral instructions or theoretical conclusions, somehow transforms others and even, perhaps, the socio-political environment (Chapters 4 and 5). Again, all this follows from the intrinsic instability of

identities, including the identities of identity-positing perspectives, the seeming paralyzing nihilistic skepticism of which is turned instead into a vivid and beatific attunement to the transformation of oneself and of all things constituted by both the embrace and the bracketing of all distinctions.

With these premises in view, we can now properly appreciate the meaning of Zhuangzi's surprising coinage mentioned above: "the Creator of Things." Here is the beautiful story where the term first pops up:

> Ziji, Ziyu, Zili and Zilai were talking. One of them said, "Who can see nothingness as his own head, life as his own spine, and death as his own ass? Who knows the single body formed by life and death, existence and non-existence? I will be his friend!" The four looked at one another and laughed, feeling complete concord, and became friends. Suddenly, Ziyu took ill. Ziji went to see him. Ziyu said, "How great is the Creator of Things (*zaowuzhe* 造物者), making me all tangled up like this!" For his chin was tucked into his navel, his shoulders towered over the crown of his head, his ponytail pointed toward the sky, his five internal organs at the top of him, his thigh bones taking the place of his ribs, and his Yin and Yang energies in chaos. But his mind was relaxed and unbothered. He hobbled over to the well to get a look at his reflection. "Wow!" he said, "The Creator of Things has really gone and tangled me up!"
>
> Ziji said, "Do you dislike it?"
>
> Ziyu said, "Not at all. What is there to dislike? Perhaps he will transform my left arm into a rooster; thereby I'll be announcing the dawn. Perhaps he will transform my right arm into a crossbow pellet; thereby I'll be seeking an owl to roast. Perhaps he will transform my ass into wheels and my spirit into a horse; thereby I'll be riding along —will I need any other vehicle? Anyway, getting it is a matter of the time coming and losing it is just something else to follow along

with. Content in the time and finding one's place in the process of following along, joy and sorrow are unable to seep in. This is what the ancients called 'the Dangle and Release.' We cannot release ourselves--being beings, we are always tied up by something. But it has long been the case that mere beings cannot overpower Heaven. What is there for me to dislike about it?"

Suddenly Zilai fell ill. Gasping and wheezing, on the verge of keeling over, he was surrounded by his weeping wife and children. Zili, coming to visit him, said to them, "Ach! Away with you! Do not bring disturb his transformation!" Leaning across the windowsill, he said to the invalid, "How great is the Process of Creation-Transformation! (*zaohua* 造化) What will it make you become, where will it send you? Will it make you into a mouse's liver? Or perhaps an insect's arm?"

Zilai said, "A child obeys its parents wherever they may send him--north, south, east, or west. Now Yin and Yang are much more to a man than his parents. If they send me to my death and I disobey them, that would make me a traitor—what fault would it be of theirs? For the Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age and rests me with death. Hence it is precisely because I regard my life as good that I regard my death as good. Now suppose a great master smith were casting metal. If the metal jumped up and said, 'I insist on being nothing but an Excaliber!' the smith would surely consider it to be an inauspicious chunk of metal. Now if I, having happened to stumble into a human form, should insist, 'Only a human! Only a human!' Creation-Transformation would certainly consider me an inauspicious chunk of person.

So now I look upon all Heaven and Earth as a great furnace, and Creation-Transformation as a great blacksmith—where could I go that would not be all right? All at once I fall asleep. With a start I awaken."

The story starts with a shared affirmation of what sounds like a classic atheist trope, picking up a motif from the *Daodejing*: for any given thing, it is first not there, then it's there for awhile, then it's not there again. Things begin as nothing, become something for some length of time, and then return to being nothing when they die. Those three phases are inseparable, so we are invited to look at them as one body. Our consciousness and all its purposes, our love of life and preference for it over death, are operative only in the middle section: "life." Chapter Two of the Zhuangzi had suggested that the preference common to living beings for life over death is just an example of how each thing affirms whatever its own position is: they are biased in life's favor because they are presently living, just as one roots for one's hometown team just because it's one's hometown. It doesn't mean life is actually of greater value than death: it just looks that way to the living, the way a size 10 shirt looks more desirable than other sized shirts to someone who wears a size 10 shirt. The universe does not prefer life to death. This consorts well with the view that the universe does not produce life on purpose, that the universe has no purposes.

But then we find one of the characters becoming ill, and instantly he translates this idea into strongly anthropomorphic language: the Creator of Things (*zaowuzhe* 造物者) is doing this to me. The final *zhe* 者 in the phrase even stresses the idea of a nominalized agent: whatever is happening to me is happening because someone is doing it. This is a strong example of the idea of God the Creator as an intentional doer of whatever happens. There is a controller of things, and the contravening of our willing and doing, our purposes, is the result not of the breakdown of purpose itself, as perhaps the initial "nothing-life-death" body would suggest, but precisely due to the doing and willing, the purpose, of someone else: the Creator. There it is, from Zhuangzi's own brush, the very kernel of the dreaded *Noûs as Arché* idea that we've been railing against so tirelessly in these pages! Even if the Creator is not exactly claimed to be especially intelligent or good here, it amounts to the same thing, as we can see in the comparison that follows: just as a child should obey his parents and go wherever they send him, we should obey the Creator and willingly become whatever he makes us.

But in the course of making the latter point, a subtle shift has occurred in the narrative. Ziyu speaks of the Creator of Things. But when Zilai get sick, Zili picks up Ziyu's metaphor and

uses it to comfort him. But in so doing, he makes one big change: he no longer uses the term *zaowuzhe*, the Creator of Things, but substitutes instead *zaohua* 造化, Creation-Transformation, without the final nominalizing *zhe* (which turns a verb pharse into a noun phrase, meaning "the one who" does that verb). The term suggests not an agent who creates, but the process of creation and transformation itself, leaving out the doer and the doer's alleged intentions. Might we read this as a deliberate modification, suggesting an increasing accuracy and refinement of the basic trope, moving it further away from anthropomorphism? Several factors urge a strongly affirmative answer.

First, we see this morphing of the term for the creative process continuing two more times in the same story, in the version of the same idea then elaborated by the next speaker, the dying Zilai himself. For there, when making the point about obeying transformation as a child obeys his parents, he actually refers to neither the Creator of Things nor Creation-Transformation, but simply to "Yin and Yang"—an even more depersonalized non-agent, not even a single entity (in Zhuangzi's time the terms did not yet have their technical meaning, and really just refer generically to "light and dark," i.e., the diurnal and yearly cycle, or, in a medical context, the disparate and precariously balanced energies making up the physical body, i.e., natural processes). Then, a few lines later, even this term is replaced by a term with connotations as far away from Personhood as imaginable: The Great Clump *dakuai* 大塊, which in the windstorm story at the opening to Chapter Two, alluded to at length above, was used to mean something like "the whole earth," as that from which the wind comes. In spite of all these name changes, and this clear progression from anthropomorphic to non-anthropomorphic, the lesson remains: whatever it is that makes us sick and die, and also makes us be born and live, is regarded as a smith forging metal implements: we presently have our rigid human form like a sword (the "life" or spine part of the one body), but this will again be melted down to make other things. The Creator is the smith who makes us and melts us back down to nothingness, and then into something else.

But the anthropomorphism is really not much diminished in Zilai's version, for his final trope is of not wanting to displease the master smith with his impudent insistence on the form of a human. Thus, if that were the end of the matter, we would have to consider Zhuangzi an

admittedly peculiar and slippery but nonetheless undeniable member of the Compensatory Theist club, albeit one who insists with unusual thoroughness on the unknowability and unnameability of this Creator—so much so that we can apply any name we like to it, from the most to the least anthropomorphic, organized, or even unified. A maximally agnostic theist, perhaps. Or, a little more charitably and profoundly, we could read this story, if it existed in isolation, as suggesting that it makes no difference whether we think of the one agent as God or as the Universe or as a Great Clump or as a combination of forces, minded or unminded—we can't know that anyway, one way or the other. But from our point of view, that non-knowing is enough: we have no choice but to do what it/he/she/them/ has us do, to "obey" it—so, we may say, whether God exists or not, it's all God to me. Whatever-It-Is gives, and Whatever-It-Is taketh away. I was only ever alive because Whatever had made me alive, and being alive is what made me think being alive is good. Hence, when Whatever makes me dead, transforming me into whatever comes next, that is also just as good.

Taken in isolation, then, this story can be interpreted either as the Emulative Theistic "I should desire it because the Creator desires it, and it is therefore good" or as the deeply Atheist structure of "I consider whatever made me alive to be good, because I consider being alive good—and I consider being alive good only because I am alive." This latter reading has a corollary: "it will be good to be dead for the same reason it is now good to be alive--because what I consider good in each case is a function of what I am at that time." The latter reading is indeed more consistent with Zhuangzi's Chapter Two, so if we consider these texts to be products of the same author, we should probably already favor the latter, atheist meaning. Nonetheless, it hardly makes Zhuangzi an outspoken atheist hero. But that is far from the end of the matter. In fact, as traditional commentary has pointed out, this story is part of a sequence of three stories about death, and the progression we have seen already beginning within this tale continues into high gear in the following two stories. The first of them begins with a modified version of the trope that began the previous story:

Zisanghu, Mengzifan and Ziqinzhang came together in friendship, saying, “Who are able to be together in their very not being together, to do things for one another by not doing things for one another? Who can climb up upon the Heavens, roaming on the mists, twisting and turning round and round without limit, living their lives in mutual forgetfulness, never coming to an end?” The three of them looked at each other and burst out laughing, feeling complete concord, and thus did they become friends.

After a short silence, without warning, Zisang fell down dead. Before his burial Confucius got the news and sent Zigong to pay his respects. There he found them, one of them composing music, the other plucking the zither, and finally both of them singing together in harmony:

> “Hey Sanghu, hey Sanghu!
> Come on back, why don’t you?
> Hey Sanghu, hey Sanghu!
> Come on back, why don’t you?
> You’ve returned to what we are really,
> While we’re still humans—wow, yippee!”

Zigong rushed forward and said, “May I venture to ask, is it ritually proper to sing at a corpse like that?”

The two of them looked at each other and laughed, saying, “What does this fellow understand about the real point of ritual?”

Zigong returned and reported this to Confucius, asking, “What kind of people are these? They do not cultivate their characters in the least, and they treat their bodies as external to themselves, singing at a corpse without the least change of expression. I don’t know what to call them. What sort of people are they?”

Confucius said, “These are men who roam outside the lines. I, on the other hand, do my roaming inside the lines. The twain can never meet. It was vulgar of me to send you to mourn for such a person. For the previous while he had been chumming around as a human with the Creator of Things, and now he roams in the single vital energy of Heaven and Earth.

“Men such as these look upon life as a dangling wart or swollen pimple, and on death as its dropping off, its bursting and draining. Being such, what would they understand about which is life and which is death, what comes before and what comes after? Depending on all their diverse borrowings, they yet lodge securely in the one and only self-same body. They forget all about their livers and gall bladders, cast away their eyes and ears, reversing and returning, ending and beginning, knowing no start or finish. Oblivious, they drift uncommitted beyond the dust and grime, far-flung and unfettered in the great work of doing nothing in particular. Why would they do something as stupid as practicing conventional rituals to impress the eyes and ears of the common crowd?”

Zigong said, “Since you know this, Master, of which zone do you consider yourself a citizen?”

Confucius said, “As for myself, I am a casualty of Heaven. But that is something you and I may share.”

Zigong said, “Please tell me more.”

Confucius said, “Fish come together in water, and human beings come together in Dao. Those who meet each other in the water do so by darting through the ponds, thus finding their nourishment and support. Those who meet each other in Dao do so by not being bothered to serve any one particular goal, thereby allowing the flow of their lives to settle into stability. Thus it is said, fish forget one another in the rivers and lakes, and human beings forget one another in the arts of Dao.”

Zigong said, “But please explain to me about these freakish people.”

> Confucius said, “They are freakish to man but normal to Heaven. So it is said, He who to Heaven is a petty man is to the people an exemplary man, while he who to Heaven is an exemplary man is to the people a petty man.”

We notice that, in the new formulation of the shared view that brings the friends together, all reference to the personal Creator has dropped out. Indeed, even the personal in themselves, in the sense of interpersonal social relations and intentional purposive activity, is now reduced to an epiphenomenon of the nonpersonal, the asocial, the unintentional, the purposeless. Instead of any talk about a creator or a source of any kind, we begin with a second-order reflection on the setting of the story: here they are coming together, but only through not coming together; here they are acting for a purpose, but only by not acting for a purpose. What is being undermined here is precisely the ultimacy of the personal and the ultimacy of purpose—the two key underminings that we have repeatedly described as characterizing atheist mysticism. In the previous story, we had the impersonal (nonbeing/death) and the personal (life) as parts of a whole, with the impersonal (nonbeing and death) still at the basis and the conclusion, but with the various parts distributed and distinguishable as the head, spine and tail of a single body. Now, in contrast, the two are simultaneous and inseparable at all times: even while alive and interpersonal and purposive, these persons are grounded in the impersonal (“without associating with each other”) and the purposeless (“without being for each other”). Where this leads is not to the intention of the Creator to be obeyed, but to *infinity*, another of our key atheist markers: transformation without end, without telos. When death comes, we are not told how a man who is still alive but soon to die looks at it, but how his friends, who share his outlook, see the matter now that he is dead. We may read this as the view of the matter from the side of death. Just as the living are more at home in life, the dead are more at home in death. Feeling complete accord, the friends sing of the feelings of the dead man: he has comfortably returned to what we all really were, the purposeless and noninterpersonal, but also make ironic reference to their own aliveness: again, the two are now simultaneous for them.

In the conversation that follows, Confucius very clearly reveals the relation of the two stories, and their relation to the anthropormorphized Creator. First, he reiterates the trope about

the fish in water quoted in Part One of this book.[63] The interpersonal and the purposive are like fish spitting on each other when stranded on the shore—using a bit of the water, to be sure, and derived from it, but full immersion in precisely those qualities will at the same time eliminate the interpersonal and purposive: like fish forgetting each other in the water. But this gives a place to both the life side and the death side, the personal side and the nonpersonal side: "For the previous while he had been chumming around as a human with the Creator of Things, and now he roams in the single vital energy of Heaven and Earth." The previous story related the way living humans related to the Whatever which is the source of all things. That is, as a human. The human see things in human terms, they relate to it humanly, as a human. So while alive, the dying men felt an intimate chumminess with the Whatever from which they had come: they related to it as human., spitting on the Whatever and feeling the waters of the Whatever only as the Whatever's spit on them, that is, his personal regard, intention, purposes. Being still intentional beings, they took the Whatever as a companion in having intentions. Again, for Zhuangzi, it is the perspective that determines the values. So a living personal being relates to the Whatever as a living personal being, values in terms of living and life and intention. Here, however, we see also how it as after one ceases to be a human, "roaming in the single vital energy (*qi*) of Heaven and Earth." The image is starkly anti-personal: no separate being, no solid thing, no consciousness, no goal, just *qi*, constantly transforming energy conceived as a fluid formless flowing medium which sometimes congeals into concrete entities, like ice congealing from water. My ultimate life-and-death on one string mean a parallel life-and-death-on-one-string for the Creator: it too is only human and purposive as long as I am, and to the extent that I am, and in the specific temporary ironic modality that I am. Both the personal and the impersonal sides of the equation are now in view, connected by Zhuangzi's central perspectivism, which is precisely his deep atheism.

That is, in this and the previous story, we see a certain willingness to talk theistically when talking to people who are talking theistically. It is even used as a wedge to move past

[63] Which comes from earlier in this same chapter of Zhuangzi: "When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, blowing on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes. Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we'd be better off forgetting them both and transforming along our own courses." We'll talk a bit more about this image below.

itself: Heaven or the Creator can be used to undermine accepted distinctions, overturn them, reverse them, to unsettle things and dissolve them into the process of transformation. And then the same is done to the concept of Heaven or Creator itself. Each thing is affirmed, but this affirmation is also the way in which it moves beyond itself. This is an example of "responding with unlimited rights and wrongs" explored in depth in Chapter Two: going by the rightness of the present This (*yinshi* 因是) —here This speaker, with his invocation of the Creator. Zhuangzi is being consistent here, and thoroughgoingly atheist: so atheist that he can even lightheartedly use Creator-talk, and then flip it over. (Zhuangzi is more tolerant than myself in this respect, obviously! And I would claim, in this sense, he is more thoroughgoingly and consistently atheist than myself!)

But that is not yet the end of the sequence. Following this tale we have another one about mourning for a dead loved one:

> Yan Hui went to question Confucius. "When his mother died, Mengsun Cai wailed but shed no tears, unsaddened in the depths of his heart, observing the mourning but without real sorrow. Lacking tears, inner sadness and real grief, he nonetheless gained a reputation throughout Lu as an exemplary mourner. Is it really possible to have a reputation that is utterly at odds with reality? I have always found it very strange."
>
> Confucius said, "Mengsun Cai has gone to the very end of this matter, beyond merely understanding it. For when you try to simplify things for yourself but find it impossible to do so, things have already been simplified for you.
>
> This Mr. Mengsun understands nothing about why he lives or why he dies. His ignorance applies equally to what went before and what is yet to come. Having already transformed into some particular being, he takes it as no more than a waiting for the next transformation into the unknown, nothing more. And if he's in the process of transforming, what could he know about not transforming? If he's no longer transforming, what could he know about whatever transformations he's already been through? You and I, conversely, are dreamers

who have not yet begun to awaken. As for him, his physical form may meet with shocks but this does not harm his mind. His life is to him but a morning's lodging, so he does no real dying. This Mr. Mengsun alone has awakened. Others cry, so he cries too. And that is the only reason he does so.

"We temporarily get involved in something or other and proceed to call it 'myself'—but how can we know if what we call 'self' has any 'self" to it?

You dream you are a bird and find yourself soaring in the heavens, you dream you are a fish and find yourself submerged in the depths. I cannot even know if what I'm saying now is a dream or not. An upsurge of pleasure does not reach the smile it inspires; a burst of laughter does not reach the jest that evoked it.[64] But when you rest securely in your place in the sequence, however things are arranged, and yet separate each passing transformation from the rest, then you enter into the clear oneness of Heaven."

Here we have the real culmination of the matter. Now there is neither the Creator nor *qi*. There is only forgetting and transformation. Non-knowing trumps everything, as it does in the more theoretical parts of Zhuangzi's writing in Chapter Two, where he develops his skeptical relativist perspectivism. The ultimacy of non-knowing is of course the atheist trope par excellence. For here the non-knowing is so thoroughgoing that it is not mere agnosticism, i.e., the human subjects lack of knowledge, which eliminates all reference to a creator, a doer, a substrate, a prior state, a later state. It recognizes that we cannot even know, as negative theologians claim to know, that there is something out there that we don't know: we can't even say there is something called Heaven or the Creator or *qi* which we don't understand. At the source of everything is not even a something or a nothing: it is just the unknown, so unknown that the idea of source as such now drops out entirely. The ultimate source is not here claimed to

[64] Reading pai 俳 for pai 排, the latter being perhaps mistakenly transposed from the following line. Leaving the character unsubstituted would yield, "When you stumble into a pleasant situation there is no time even to smile, and when a smile bursts forth there is no time to arrange it in some particular way," adopting Chen Shouchang's reading. Others take take the buji 不及 in the sense of "not as good as," which yields something like, "Just going wherever you please is not as good as laughing, and offering a laugh is not as good as just taking your place in the sequence of things."

be *Noûs*, that much is obvious; but more than that, even to call it "the source," as if we knew that, is already much too *Noûs*-ey, much too much of a concession to intelligibility. There is only taking each transformation, being whatever you are for awhile, and then dropping it and becoming something else. The claim to knowledge that there is some unknown Creator, or that we are all made of a formless *qi*, would get in the way of this forgetting and this transformation. We no longer even need "the one body" that connects and enfolds nothingness, life and death. There's just being this and then letting go of being this. Even in being this, non-knowledge is the ultimate: it's not just that I am alive and human now but ecstatically accept that I don't know what I was before or what I will become or where any of these changes come from or what they mean: I don't even know if I'm alive now, if I'm a human now, if I'm myself. The knowing and the non-knowing are not arranged as parts of a whole, strung together: they are simultaneous at all times. Even when I know, I don't know. Not-knowing, the impersonal, the non-purposive, trumps everything, thoroughly saturates even knowing, purpose, person. That is the real apex of atheist mysticism.

Hence we see that for Zhuangzi, death too is approached in terms of this thorough agnosticism and its attendant transforming openness, in the treatment of which we see again the Zhuangzian three-step. By the first step, the friends dissolve the distinctions between nothingness, life and death into a oneness. In the second step, we have three friends who no longer speak of oneness at all. Now we are told instead that the friends forget the oneness: they participate with each other "without participating with each other (i.e., without awareness of it, not positing any "one body" of which their divergent identities are all parts)," taking action for each other "without taking action for each other" (i.e., without positing a single shared purpose). We are no longer referred either to one agent or to one body or to one meaning of all things and all stages. There is no longer any universal overview, even of the whole, or even the whole as seen from the present perspective. All that is left is endlessness of transformation and mutual forgetting, not only of each other but also of our oneness with each other in some larger identity or project. Finally, in the third step, we treat death simply as transformation and forgetting, without any knowledge about what makes one live or die (so no more talk of a Creator or a process or smelter or even a Great Clump of oneness), without any oneness, without any

assertion of some uncognized or nondeliberate mutual participation, without any speculation of what comes before or after, but now also without any certain knowledge of who or what one is even at present: just in the course of any transformation, one simply drops away all that came before and after, but with it vanishes also one's certainty of his present identity. He now makes no judgments even about what he is presently, whether he is alive or death, spine or head or backside. Of his state we are told, "We temporarily get involved in something or other and proceed to call it 'myself'—but how can we know if what we call 'self' has any 'self" to it? You dream you are a bird and find yourself soaring in the heavens, you dream you are a fish and find yourself submerged in the depths. I cannot even know if the person speaking right now is dreaming or awake." He cannot jump out of his skin to a before or after, or to a foundation or cause, or to an outcome or meaning, and that means that he can't really even know what he is right now, whether later events will show him to have been something else entirely, someone else's dream. The oneness with contrary states now undermines even the definitive identity of the putative parts, and with it the possibility of subsuming the identity of any part into any definite "oneness" or even of a definitive "infinity of transformation and mutual participation in non-participation." This pure agnosticism is then what the oneness and fecundity of Heaven have amounted to. Hence we are told, in the same chapter, that for such people "the oneness is one, but the non-oneness is also one."

The dream imagery used in this passage hearkens again back to Zhuangzi's famous "butterfly dream," already mentioned, which makes the same point. Zhuangzi cannot know whether he is now being dreamed by the butterfly he just dreamed he was, or vice versa. If Zhuangzi is the butterfly's dream, then even this moment of being Zhuangzi is really one more aspect of butterfly, one more part of the experience of being a butterfly; Zhuangzi is an aspect of the identity of the butterfly. If the butterfly is Zhuangzi's dream, then even when it is fluttering around it is really a part of Zhuangzi's experience, a part of what it is to be Zhuangzi. The mere positing of the alternate contrasting perspectives makes it impossible also to be simply one identity or the other in any definitively knowable way, even for a moment. And yet they do not collapse into a oneness: there must be a distinction between them, even to have this unknowing of what they are, of which they are, for without the distinction there can be no question of

"which"? All identities are both preserved and abolished in the unobstructed mutual transformation of their unidentifiability, what the text calls "the radiance of drift and doubt" 滑疑之耀.

All of these death stories come from the middle of Chapter 6 of the Zhuangzi. Right afterwards there are three more short dialogues, which bring the chapter to an end. These three final dialogues may be seen as roughly recapitulating the steps of this progressively structured perspectival atheism in another form. In the first Yierzi asks Xu You for instruction about Dao, but is rebuked as incapable of receiving it because his mind has already been ruined by moral ideas and prejudices, by ideas of "right and wrong." Yierzi says, Ok, but maybe you can tell me a little about it, "just the outskirts"? Xu You says no, you're already mutilated, crippled, blinded by your prior instruction. Then Yierzi invokes the Creator of Things as the source of all sorts of unpredictable change: "How do you know the Creator of Things will not wipe away my tattoo and restore my nose, making me intact to follow you?" Xuyou responds, "Ah! It is indeed unknowable. I will speak for you of the broad outlines then. My teacher! My teacher! He destroys all things, but he is not administering responsible justice. His bounty reaches all things, but he is not being humanely kind. He is an elder to the remotest antiquity, but without being old. He covers and supports Heaven and Earth and carves out all forms, but without being skillful. It is all the play of his wandering, nothing more."

So here, as in the first of the three death and mourning stories, the theistic-sounding term Creator of Things is invoked, in this case by someone already identified as brainwashed and ruined by prior moral instruction. The Creator is invoked even by this speaker, however, only as a support for non-knowledge: how can you or anyone know that I can't be restored to mental health in spite of my prior moral instruction, or for that matter that someone might magically grow back his nose after it has been cut off? Anything can happen, who knows! As with Confucius' remark that what is normal to Man is freakish to Heaven and vice versa, only the sense in which the Creator overturns and subverts any positive knowledge is invoked. In this sense, the idea of Heaven serves temporarily as a first way of aiding and abetting the sense of transformation and forgetting. Xuyou agrees with the "I don't know" thrust, and thus yields and consents to give him "the broad outlines"—and here he speaks in Creator-of-Things argot, the

conceptual system of his interlocutor, but inserting key modifications to eliminate the moral prejudices implied in the idea of a conscious Creator. Chumming around with the Creator while one is oneself a human, he deploys the anthropomorphism only to assert that the Creator is his teacher—that is, his role model. In what way? Precisely in his lack of intention, his lack of justice, his lack of humaneness, his lack of oldness, his lack of skill—which yet destroys and creates and carves out all forms and encompasses Heaven and Earth. Xuyou wants to emulate "his" play (note that there is no personalized pronoun, let alone a gendered one, in Chinese—the all-purpose pronoun *qi* 其 could just as well mean "it" or "he" or "she" or "they"; the gendered personal pronoun is added in English only to accord with the anthorpormphizing trope of "teacher"), his wandering, his non-intentionality, his *wuwei* as the real source of all emergent values, even consciously sought values. Here again we have Zhuangzi showing how what I've called the "wild card" works, going by the rightness of the present This as a way to allow it to transform endlessly, speaking in terms of Compensatory Theism and tweaking it directly into Emulative Atheism.

In the next dialogue of Chapter Six, as in the second death and mourning story, forgetting and non-knowing are again moved to center stage. Yan Hui says he is progressing in that he has forgotten precisely those ideas of right and wrong that distorted the mind of Yierzi: Humaneness, Righteousness, Ritual, Music. Then he says he reaches a state of "sitting and forgetting": "It's a dropping away of my limbs and torso, a chasing off of my sensory acuity, which disperses my physical form and ousts my understanding until I am the same as the Transforming Openness.[65] This is what I call just sitting and forgetting." Confucius then says, "The same as it? But then you are free of all preference! Transforming? But then you are free of all constancy! You truly are a worthy man! I beg to be accepted as your disciple." Preference would imply intention; constancy would imply a single substrate, an agent, a doer behind changing actions and events. We have here precisely the denial of purpose and oneness. Free of preference, free of constancy, endless transformation and openness: the opposite of the intentional anthropomorphic Creator of Things, who has been forgotten along with the rest:

[65] Reading huatong 化通 for datong 大通("Great Openness"), as in the parallel passage in Huananzi 淮南子, "Daoyingxun." 道應訓。

precisely freeing oneself of these preconceptions, of the idea of the Creator as intentional and agental, are what make him one with the "Transforming Openness," the real marker of the how things come and go, the opposite of God.

In the final story, ending the chapter, Ziyu finds his friend Zisang in undeserved and unbearable distress, asking who did this to him—a search for the cause of unrelenting suffering, rather in the manner of the "Book of Job." But unlike in Job, the claim to know where this all comes from, which is the one thing never questioned in the "Book of Job," is exactly what needs to be dispelled. Here it is again non-knowing that is the final word. Zisang asks who did it? Father? Mother? Heaven? Man? "I have been thinking about what could have caused me to reach this extreme state, and I could find no answer. My mother and father would surely never wish to impoverish me like this. Heaven covers all equally, Earth supports all equally, so how could Heaven and Earth be so partial as to single me out for impoverishment? *I search for some doer of it all but cannot find anything*--and yet here I am in this extreme state all the same. This must be what is called Fate, eh?" (Italics added.) Note well: not Heaven. It is now not Heaven, not the Creator of Things, that does it. Acceptance of Fate is not accepting the will of Heaven. On the contrary, it is reached only when one has dispelled progressively, as in the preceding steps, the very idea of Heaven as some particular entity. No doer is found anywhere, for anything that happens. That's about all the word "Fate" can mean: "I don't know." This is the heart of Zhuangzian perspectival atheist mysticism.

The same chapter that ends this way, Chapter Six, begins with a discussion making this very point, starts with the traditional clearcut division between Heaven and Man, which it then savagely deconstructs in favor of non-knowledge, exemplified by what it calls the Genuine Humans of antiquity, in a typical Zhuangzian three-step we have already seen in this sequence of stories: first, a perspectivist-skeptical overcoming of apparent distinctions through a provisional oneness of agent (the Creator), and then moving on to 2) totality (the One Body of life and death), and then 3) rejecting both through the continued application of the perspectival skepticism, in favor of transformation and forgetting, the ultimacy of purposelessness and non-knowing, unobstructed even in purpose and knowing:

> "To know what Heaven is doing and also what is to be done by Man, that is the utmost."
>
> "To know what Heaven is doing": Heaven, as Heaven, is the production of whatever happens.
>
> "To know what is to be done by the Human": that would be to use what your knowing knows to nurture what your knowing does not know. You could then live out all your natural years without being cut down halfway. And that would indeed be the richest sort of knowing.
>
> However, there is a problem here. For our knowing can be in the right only by virtue of a relation of dependence on something, and what it depends on is always peculiarly unfixed. So how could I know whether what I call the Heavenly is not really the Human? How could I know whether what I call the Human is not really the Heavenly? Let us say instead, then, that there can be "Genuine Knowing" only when there is such a thing as "a Genuine Human."

Heaven: the term is used by Zhuangzi to indicate the unknown, the unknowable. Earlier in his text, back in Chapter Two again, he had asked where our moods come from, where our thoughts come from, where our values come from, where our perspectives come from, where events come from. He noticed that he did not know. He noticed that he could not identify any particular source or doer of what happens. He noticed also that there seemed to be no way for him ever to know, since all his knowing occurred within one of these happenings, one of these perspectives. By definition, no act of knowing can survive into the time after its occurrence from the time before it occurred. In other words, no act of knowing can directly witness the event of its own emergence, which would have to include an apprehension both of what it is and of what preceded it, in contrasts to which it is said to emerge. Since knowledge is confined to the postemergence state, it can only speculate about the state prior to its existence and about the transition from that state to its present state of existing.

But speculations and inferences also occur only as existing states of consciousness, and they seem to proceed very differently according to the mood, commitments, and canons of reasoning implicitly embraced at different times and places and by different agents — that is, in different knowledge-events. The particular act of knowing thus seems to affect and color all that is within its purview, and its extrapolations about an origin for itself, an otherness from which it emerged to be what it is now, cannot be trusted to be applicable to the mood, commitments, and canons of other acts of knowing. Any state's act of determining where it came from is also deeply and hopelessly internal to its own present state. Its "before" is a "before as seen from now"; its "cause" is "cause as what remains of the impact of the cause already internalized into the effect."

Zhuangzi uses the traditional word for cause, which is Heaven, the more usual term standing in the position of Creator-of-Things, but again, purely in a negative sense. We spoke above of the Confucian thinker Mencius, Zhuangzi's contemporary, and his shorthand functional definition of heaven: "What happens although no one makes it happen; what is done although no one does it" (5A7). We suggested that Mencius probably meant this in a less than radical sense: "Heaven is the doer of whatever happens for which we can find no other cause." Heaven means whatever is beyond human control — a way, traditionally, of passing the ball. What is beyond human control must be in the control of someone or something else: an anthropomorphic deity, or the ancestors, or a loose collection of spiritual forces, or simply an impersonal set of natural processes. But on this view, some definite something is still viewed as the real cause that, if known, would give a full account of what happens and why. Even, however, in Mencius's scaled-down definition of heaven we find a hint of Zhuangzi's more radical understanding of the term, which takes the Mencian definition quite literally: Heaven is not merely what is beyond human control; it is that to which the notions of definitive "control" and "cause" and "determiner" do not apply at all. As we have seen for Zisang, what we are really talking about is just fate, which doesn't even mean Heaven: it just means the bare fact of looking for a source and never finding one.

Zhuangzi's passage thus begins by offering us a commonplace regarding the proper division of labor for human knowledge: know Heaven — that is, know the natural world and

whatever moral or religious dimensions it may have, know what is beyond your control and also know what is within your control, for that would be true knowledge, true wisdom. But then Zhuangzi twists this platitude, as is his wont: if heaven, or the heavenish aspect of things, is the unknowable, then this division of labor could only mean, at best, that we should take the knowing part of ourselves and use it to nourish, rather than to know, the unknowable part of ourselves and of the world. The relation of "nourishing" is in itself the highest possible knowledge, of a kind that folds nonknowing into itself and sustains a definite relation between knowing and nonknowing: This Daoist position is perhaps close to the earlier one sketched in some parts of the *Daodejing*: the unknown/unknowable is the unhewn, the true source of life and growth and being, and we can devote our knowing minds not to getting information about it, which is impossible, but to making sure that it continues to flourish into the known by maintaining the intimate connection between the unseen "root and soil" — the unhewn — and the valued blossom.

But how can we nourish something we do not know or understand? We must have some knowledge about its care and feeding! The nutriments we offer may prove poisonous to it, or to ourselves when they return to us (in the waste products, as it were, of the unknowable). Changing the terms of the relation does not solve the problem of nonknowledge, which trumps all the rest. More radically still, Zhuangzi extends the quality of nonknowledge even to the question of knowledge and nonknowledge: "So how could I know whether what I call the Heavenly is not really the Human? How could I know whether what I call the Human is not really the Heavenly?" These questions echo the still more pointed formulation found earlier (Chapter Two again) in Zhuangzi's work: "How could I know whether what I call knowing is not really not-knowing? How could I know whether what I call not-knowing is not really knowing?" This progression might seem a reductio ad absurdum of a radically agnostic position — and, indeed, similar arguments in Western philosophy since Plato's time have been taken in that way: if knowledge is impossible, we cannot know that knowledge is impossible, and thus the claim that knowledge is impossible cannot fail to contradict itself, and *therefore it must be abandoned*.

Zhuangzi, however, does not accept the italicized upshot of this argument.

Instead, he sees the radicalization of the problem of nonknowing as bringing with it its own kind of solution. The conclusion he reaches after asking his series of "How could I know" questions is a complete change of tack: "Let us say instead, then, that there can be 'Genuine Knowing' only when there is such a thing as a 'Genuine Human' " — an odd and easily misleading way of saying that the term "Genuine Knowing" shall henceforth, in his writings, be employed only as an honorific title for a kind of mental state and existential attitude. He then goes on to describe that attitude:

> And what do we mean by a Genuine Human? The Genuine Humans of old did not revolt against their inadequacies, did not aspire to completeness, did not plan their affairs in advance. In this way, they could be wrong or they could be right, but without regret and without self-satisfaction. And thus they could ascend the heights without fear, submerge into the depths without getting drenched, enter the flames without feeling hot. Such was the way their understanding was able, in its very demise, to ascend through the remotest vistas of the Course. . . .
>
> The Genuine Humans of old understood nothing about delighting in being alive or hating death. They emerged without delight, sank back in without resistance. Swooping in they came and swooping out they went, that and no more. They neither forgot where they came from nor inquired into where they would go. Receiving it, they delighted in it. Forgetting all about it, they gave it back.
>
> This is what it means not to use the mind to push away the Course, not to use the Human to try to help out the Heavenly. Such is what I'd call being a Genuine Human.
>
> Such a huamn — his mind is intent, his face is tranquil, his forehead is broad and plain. He is cool like the autumn, warm like the spring; his joy and his anger intermingle with the four seasons. He finds something fitting in his encounter with each thing; none can tell exactly what his ultimate end might be. Hence, if the sage uses force, he may destroy nations without losing the hearts of

the people. His kindness and bounty may extend to ten thousand generations, but not because he harbors any love for mankind.

So he may take joy in clearing the way for things, but he is not being a "sage." He may have a certain intimacy with others, but he is not being "Humane." His timeliness is of Heaven, but he is not being a "worthy man." Benefit and harm do not get through to him, but he is not being an "exemplary man." He may do what his designated role requires, ignoring his personal interests, but he is not being a "steadfast knight." He may lose his life without losing what is most genuine to him, but he is not being "a man devoted to service.". . . The Genuine Humans of old seemed to do whatever was called for, but were not partisan to any one course. They appeared to be in need, but accepted no assistance. Taking part in all things, they were solitary but never rigid.

Spreading out everywhere, they were empty but never insubstantial. Cheerful, they seemed to be enjoying themselves. Impelled along, they did what they could not help doing. They let everything gather within them, but still it manifested outwardly to the world as their own countenance. They gave it all away, but still it rested securely within them as their own Virtuosity. Leprous with symptoms, they seemed just like everyone else. Haughty, nothing could control them. Unbreached, they seemed to prefer to close themselves off. Oblivious, they would forget what they were saying.

They took knowing as a temporary expedient arising only when the situation made it unavoidable. . . .

Thus what they liked was the oneness of things, but what they disliked was also the oneness of things. Their oneness was the oneness, but their non-oneness was also the oneness. In their oneness, they were followers of the Heavenly. In their non-oneness, they were followers of the Human.

> This is what it is for neither the Heavenly nor the Human to win out over the other. And that is what I call being the Genuine and yet being a Human, a Genuine-Human.

This passage is presented not as prescriptive but as purely descriptive — a description of the state of activity and attitude that Zhuangzi will honor with the term "genuine knowledge."

But what is genuine knowledge like? It is precisely a thoroughgoing embrace of non-knowing: not taking apparent want as real want and therefore not needing to rebel against it; not taking apparent success as real success and thus not rejoicing in it. Since people really do not know whether life is better than death, but it appears to be so from the perspective of the presently living, they *do not know how* to delight in life and abhor death. The by-product of simply not knowing is a state of flowing along, swooping in and out of each situation, forgetting it and moving on, without trying to know or take an attitude toward what precedes or succeeds it. The climax of the passage is reached in the last lines I quoted: "In their oneness, they were followers of the Heavenly. In their non-oneness, they were followers of the Human. This is what it is for neither the Heavenly nor the Human to win out over the other." Nonknowing, then, is a kind of union of knowing and not-knowing, of the "human" and the "heavenly" — or, more strictly, not a union, which might suggest an achieved synthesis, but rather an openness to the free flow of knowing and nonknowing, so that "neither wins out" once and for all, neither is the definitive answer to the questions, "What is this? Is it knowing or is it nonknowing?" Since every perspective knows only itself, all knowing is also nonknowing, yet nonknowing is always presented as a form of knowing, so we can never know which is which.

It is here that we encounter Zhuangzi's way of resolving the self-contradiction of radical agnosticism that, in other traditions, has excluded it from serious philosophical consideration. For Zhuangzi, to accept the human means to take one's position of the moment as one's position of the moment, rather than try to attain a pristine state of skeptical hygiene that rejects all positions all of the time. To embrace the heavenly means to not-know whether one's position of the moment is or is not true knowledge. The convergence of knowing and not-knowing in the constant transformation of knowings might be understood as a bracketed but definite and

consistent kind of knowing, perhaps along the lines that Kant envisioned for scientific knowledge, restricted to the realm of phenomena: the idea that we may know phenomena exactly and consistently, even mathematically, but at the same time this knowledge is not knowing the thing-in-itself. In the Kantian approach, one accepts what one knows within the limits of its being conditioned by one's own cognitive situation. But Kant's approach depends on several assumptions that are not at all a part of Zhuangzi's presentation. Above all, there is Kant's supposing that the faculties of Reason (*Vernunft*) and Understanding (*Verstand*) function identically in all of us. The rejection of our ability to know about any such univocity is the key leitmotif of Zhuangzi's entire text. Zhuangzi rejects such univocity, along with the concomitant shared canons of validity, even of "myself" at one moment and "myself" at another moment — as in Zhuangzi's the dream of being a butterfly, or was it a butterfly's dream of being Zhuangzi? Because I do not see things, or reason, in the same way at all times, there are deep discontinuities in the modalities of my experiencing that cannot be embraced within a single overarching system of adjudicating knowledge (any such system would itself belong, and be limited, to one of the modalities). Remembering these transformations makes me just as incapable of definite conclusions as forgetting them. For without the assumption of univocity, nothing can ensure that the bracketed phenomenal knowledge must be consistent over time, and thus it becomes meaningless to call it even definite, even in the midst of a perceived experience that is anything but unfocused, that is as unblurred and precise as a blade's edge paused expectantly on the cusp of an as yet unopened channel in an ox, awaiting the tremble of the next transformation but having no idea which way it will go. The reproducibility and verifiability necessary to such consistency, for "definite" to have any meaning, require that the same findings can be arrived at a second time, indeed an infinite number of times, by various witnesses, whereas Zhuangzi denies the possibility of revisiting anything. Rather, Zhuangzi evokes for us what it is like to live in this clarity of the indefinite, this indefinite clarity, this tumultuous tranquility, this tranquil turmoil: what it is like to not know who one is or what one is doing even when one is doing it, whether zigzagging directionlessly like a butterfly that knows nothing about Zhuang Zhou and just as little about itself, or awaking in one's bed the undeniably palpable Zhuang Zhou right here and now, clearly remembering also that forgetful fluttering, yet for all that no more sure of

who one is or what one is doing than the butterfly was. Obscure impulses animate "Genuine Humans": they forget what they are doing while they are doing it, they follow no one consistent course, they do not know why they do what they do ("now a dragon, now a snake, changing with the times, unwilling to keep to any one exclusive course of action" as we find it put in Chapter 15). Recall the *Daodejing*'s invocation of an infant who "doesn't yet know the union of the male and female, and yet his penis is erect — the ultimate virility!" He does not yet have a knowledge of the "good" toward which his impulse is aiming him, he has no "mental picture" of his goal, but he has an imageless, knowledgeless impulsion; which is to say, he knows no definite purpose, he has no definite purpose. This is *wuwei*, action without any prior conscious knowledge of what one is trying to do, and unsusceptible to any such knowledge by anyone, divine or human.

In another chapter, Chapter Seven, Zhuangzi tells the story of a fortune-telling shaman who knows the future of whomever he meets simply by looking at them. He can predict the future exactly and with certainty — this is Zhuangzi's satirical figure for any claimant to definite knowledge, especially predictive knowledge. The shaman is foiled by a certain Huzi, who presents a sequence of inconsistent visages that leave the former scratching his head, annoyed, confused, and insisting that Huzi straighten himself out so that his fortune can be told properly. Finally, Huzi shows something of himself that has the shaman running off in terror. Asked what it had been, Huzi replies:

> Just now I showed him the never-yet-beginning-to-emerge-from-our-source — where both he and I are a vacuity that is yet serpentine in its twistings, admitting of no understanding of who is who or what is what. So he saw it as something endlessly collapsing and scattering, something flowing away with every wave. This is why he fled.

What Huzi describes is how a "Genuine Human" looks and feels — empty, with no understanding of who or what—butterfly or Zhuang Zhou?--serpentine in its twistings, endlessly collapsing and scattering, flowing away with every wave, no longer paired as an emergence to a

source, a tumultuous tranquility, a radiance of drift and doubt, without constancy and without preferences, doing for each other without doing for each other, being together without being together, the great transforming openness. Zhuangzi's summary reflects how to take "knowing as a temporary expedient" — in other words, how to do without any definite knowing of who or what one is, or what one is doing or why:

> Not doing, not being a corpse presiding over your good name;
> Not doing, not being a repository of plans and schemes;
> Not doing, not being the one in charge of what happens;
> Not doing, not being ruled by your own understanding. . . .

Knowledge, *Noûs*, cannot be a guide for action; it emerges secondarily as a by-product of action. Knowledge cannot be the master that determines what is or is not, what should or should not be, what one should or should not do. The kind of knowledge embedded in such action can only be the knowing that only *sort of* knows what is going on, the type we find in tangling with the untamed vastnesses of the real world, following the channels that open before the contentless edge of our blade, or in composing a work of art. One plunges into a groping set of vague experiments, not knowing how it will turn out or what one is really trying to get or do. Daoist action is, in this sense, artistic action, open to the muchness of whatever may emerge.

Directly following on this passage, Zhuangzi introduces his metaphor of mind-as-mirror, destined to have a long career in subsequent Chinese thought:

> In this way, wholeheartedly embody the endlessness, and roam where there is no sign, fully realizing whatever is received from Heaven, but without thinking anything has been gained. It is just being empty, nothing more.
>
> The Utmost Man uses his mind like a mirror, rejecting nothing, welcoming nothing: responding but not storing. Thus he can overcome all things without harm.

It is crucial not to misunderstand "his mind like a mirror" as calling for the mind objectively to reflect "the way things really are." The salient features of the mirror adduced are not its accuracy or reflection without distortion, but its responsiveness and its incapacity for "storing" images. Thus, knowledge is not to be accumulated from moment to moment; it is not to be made definite or consistent, not forced to cohere and form an increasingly large body or system of information. Knowledge is a chaos that cannot be compelled to assume definitive shape — hence the striking final parable of Zhuangzi's work, a veritable anti-Genesis, which follows directly on the passage quoted about the Utmost Man:

> The emperor of the southern sea was called Swoosh. The emperor of the northern sea was called Oblivion. The emperor of the middle was called Chaos. Swoosh and Oblivion would sometimes meet in the territory of Chaos, who always attended to them quite well. They decided to repay Chaos for his virtue. "All men have seven holes in them, by means of which they see, hear, eat and breathe," they said. "But this one alone has none. Let's drill him some."
>
> So every day they drilled another hole.
>
> Seven days later, Chaos was dead.

Primal chaos, the unhewn, cannot be made an object, or even a subject, of knowledge.

The mirror, like chaos, is empty but never a blank. Its emptiness — of fixed identity, consistent knowledge, univocal values, known agenda — is what allows it to respond to whatever comes before it. But this responding is not merely mimesis, or accurate representation; in a certain very distinctive sense, the mirror too has its own activity, its own trajectory, derived from the emergent value of the situation and from the mirror's placement. It is a replication of what is before it but also differs from what it replicates. The difference lies in its simultaneous presentation of that content *and its distancing from it*: responding but not storing. Its very duplication of the content, confronting it with itself, displacing it from itself, decentering it into a position of alterity from itself, being an alternate perspective on it right in its very presence to itself, is how it changes that content, and presents it back to whatever it mirrors in a way that

unblocks the transformations there as well. We see this illustrated in strikingly dramatic detail in Zhuangzi's stories of how "empty" figures, confronted with difficult situations and people, transform them purely by mirroring them, as the thickless edge of the knife transforms to ox by never touching it anywhere, its mere presence revealing the correlative emptinesses already present in the ox itself. Its own lack of identity, its bracketing of every content within it as simultaneously presented and undermined, the alternate perspective opened by every taking of a perspective, the "thatness" in every "thisness," its inescapable drift into otherness, reveals to the other just by drifting into that other that the other too also lacking in identity and constantly drifting into othernesses, thereby overcoming its previous deadlock in a specific identity (an ox, a tyrant, a moralist, a shaman). For in this sense the mirror has its own position, its own perspective, enabling it to overcome, in the very act of reflecting, whatever stands before it, and to do so without harming either itself or what it responds to. Zhuangzi's famous story of the monkeys and the monkey trainer can help suggest what he means by mirroring:

> But to labor your spirit trying to make all things one, without realizing that it is all the same [whether you do so or not], is called "Three in the Morning."
>
> What is this Three in the Morning? Once a monkey trainer was distributing chestnuts. He said, "I'll give you three in the morning and four in the evening." The monkeys were furious. "Well then," he said, "I'll give you four in the morning and three in the evening." The monkeys were delighted. This change of description and arrangement caused no loss, but in one case it brought anger and in another delight. He just went by the rightness of their present "this." Thus the Sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others, and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel. This is called Walking Two Roads.

The trainer's going "by the rightness" of the monkeys' "present 'this' " is parallel to the mirror's "responding but not storing." The monkey trainer took up the values of the present situation, without concern for rightness or wrongness. Rightness and wrongness are not

objective; their ultimate grounding can never be known or justified. But someone's idea of what is good, some desire, some version of rightness is always being presented. It is the "present 'this' " that the mirror reflects or, rather, responds to. "Not storing" is "remaining at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel"—the still equilibrium point between the two opposite visions of what is right, empty like the hub of a wheel because devoid of the content of both, but also like the hub of the wheel connected to both, and enabling their spin into one another. By being empty in this way, the mirror responds to every (yet stores no) monkey image or bias or project. The mirror furthers and enhances any and every project, but doing so can also be said to be in the mirror's own obscure interest. The mirror's own project is no more disinterested than the monkey trainer's; it is unconfinement, getting to and through every point, unobstructedness, connection (all of which translate the word *tong* 通, a crucial term through Zhuangzi's second chapter)—the interconnecting radiance and flow of drift and doubt. The mirror enables both itself and what it reflects to flow on without obstruction, without harm—the monkeys are delighted. For although in this example only the protection from harm of the monkey keeper is illustrated, perhaps suggesting a complacent consolidation of the monkey's current prejudices, it is this very structure that will enable the monkey too to flow on without obstruction, without harm, so to speak—this is what is shown in the application of this model to knife mirroring the hollows of the ox (Ch. 3), to the mind-faster mirroring the tyrant (Ch. 4), to the useless freak mirroring the agitated seekers (Ch. 5), to the forgetting transformers mirroring the death worriers (Ch 6), to the unknowability-of-who-or-what mirroring the seeker of certainty and control (Chapter 7)—in every case presented as a way to catalyze transformation of identity and prejudice in the mirrored as well when all else fails. Zhuangzi's point is not a utopian guarantee that this will *always* and in every situation foment such transformation (for how could we know that?); it simply presents situations where every other approach to changing others backfires, and how the alternative, the empty mirror, can accomplish that task all the better, more expansively and more profoundly, for not trying to.

Nor is he insisting that this is a task that is incumbent upon all of us, or indeed any of us. He assumes and imposes no universal values. Values, including this one of maximizing openness to change, are expressions of desires, and desires are expressions of perspectives, which are

constantly changing in unpredictable ways and emerge for unsearchable reasons. Instead, each illustration is presented *in media res,* with someone presented as *already* having a certain set of desires, a certain project, in which they are already struggling to succeed: to feed monkeys, to get skillful at carving oxen and avoid damage to our blade (or to our life), to reform a tyrant, to rule a country well, to face the death of oneself or a loved one, and so on. All of these desires are equally groundless and inexplicable, finding and requiring no justification beyond their unaccountable existence. The text only shows us that, *if* this is what is wanted and valued, here's what happens if it is encountered with the *wuwei* empty mirror mind. The results can be evaluated, positively, in terms of those various groundless perspectival values, to which they doubtless appear successful, each in its own terms. But there is no claim, and no need to claim, that they *must* be so evaluated. For no values can be found at the root of the world, and none can be applied at all times and places; the world is not rooted in a *youwei* mind, and no universal values can be discovered.

We can perhaps now begin to see how Zhuangzi's Chapter Six, in the process of giving the most comprehensive view of a pure untrammeled atheist mysticism, does so precisely when it most seems to flirt with theistic ideas, taking them up, actually inventing them, then scrambling them around, and tossing them into the miscellaneous bin with everything else, ready to make use of them as needed. The Chapter disturbs Zhuangzi enthusiasts of a certain stripe, i.e., those who are impressed and enlivened by the rigorous skeptical perspectivism of Chapter Two but disgusted by other parts of the Zhuangzi text that seem to be little more than mystical ramblings about a metaphysical Dao at the beginning of all things that seem to come out of nowhere, ignoring the rigorous skeptical underminings of any such possible knowledge that have been so powerfully established back in Chapter Two. The skepticism seems to these readers to be incompatible with the mystical effusions. For this reason some good Zhuangzi scholars are eager to dismiss Chapter Six as something that could not possibly be written by the same person as Chapter Two, or at least not when he was being responsible or serious. Though I think the linguistic similarities strongly suggest a single author for these two chapters, or at least the key passages of these two chapters,[66] I share the concerns of these scholars—it is what I would call

[66] Above all, the extremely distinctive locutions 庸詎知吾所謂知之非不知邪？庸詎知吾所謂不知之非知邪

an admirably atheist concern. I hope I have shown here that the worries they have about a compromised crypto-theist Zhuangzi in Chapter Six are unwarranted, even with all this "Creator of Things" talk. But perhaps the passage that worries readers of this kind the most is a passage that seems to say there is some metaphysical absolute called "The Dao." With the previous discussion under our belt, we are in a position to understand this notorious passage—seeing it now not as a betrayal of Zhuangzi's atheist mysticism, but as its most incisive and complete statement. It can be read in (at least) two different ways. The first is close to the traditional reading, which takes the Zhuangzi as presupposing some prior conception of Dao, drawn from some tradition like that we find in the *Daodejing* and a few other Pre-Qin texts, although the text doesn't often mention this Dao explicitly, and certainly makes no arguments to justify his claims about it. That conception of Dao would still fit very well with our picture of atheism mysticism, much like the straight-up reading of Spinoza's conception of the physical universe as the attribute of extension, spatiality indivisible, infinite, active, self-causing, timeless, of which all particular beings are modes. The passage in question, if read in this way, could be translated like this:

> Dying, being born—that's "Fate." The predictable constancy of them, like morning following night—that's "Heaven." These are what humans can do nothing about, just brute facts about the way things are. Now some people look on Heaven as a father and therefore love it. But why not love even more that which exceeds it? Some people look on their ruler as going beyond themselves and therefore gladly accept death on his account. Why not gladly accept death on account of what genuinely [goes beyond self]?

(Chapter Two) and 庸詎知吾所謂天之非人乎？所謂人之非天乎 (Chapter Six), and 其所言者特未定也。(Chapter Two) and 其所待者特未定也 (Chapter Six). It is to be noted that the two linguistic markers shared in these case are extremely distinctive fingerprints: 庸詎 appears, in all of Pre-Qin and Han literature, only in these two places, once more in Chapter Four of the Zhuangzi, once in the Huainanzi within a clear quotation of the Zhuangzi, and once in the Chuci, while 特未定 appears only in these two places, Chapter Two and Chapter Six of the Zhuangzi.

When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, blowing on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes. Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we'd be better off forgetting them both and transforming along our own courses.

The Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, rests me with death. So precisely what makes my life good is what makes my death good.

For you may hide a boat in a ravine or a net in a swamp, thinking it is secure there. But in the middle of the night a mighty one comes along and carries it away on his back, unbeknownst to you in your slumber.When the smaller is hidden within the larger, there remains someplace into which it can escape. But if you hide the world in the world, so there is nowhere for anything to escape to, this is an arrangement, the vastest arrangement, which can sustain all things.

This human form is merely a circumstance that has been met with, just something stumbled into, but those who have become humans take delight in it nonetheless. Now the human form in its time undergoes ten thousand transformations, never stopping for an instant—so the joys it brings must be beyond calculation!

Hence the sage uses it to roam in that from which nothing ever escapes, where all things are maintained. Early death, old age, the beginning, the end—he considers all of them good. People may try to model themselves on him. But why not emulate all the more what ties all things together, on which depends even their slightest transformation, on which depends the total mass of transformation that they are! (萬物之所係，一化之所待).

As for this, the Dao, it has reality and truth, but without deliberate action or physical form. It can be transmitted but not received, can be attained but not shown. It is its own root, its own foundation. It has firmly existed since ancient times, indeed since even before there existed Heaven and Earth. It is what gives

> ghosts their spiritual power, indeed it is what gives God-on-High his spiritual power. It gave birth to Heaven and Earth. It is above the highest summit and yet it is not high. It is beneath the six extremities and yet it is not deep. It preceded the production of Heaven and Earth but is not long-lasting. It is elder to the highest antiquity and yet it is not old.

The text then gives a long list of various polytheist deities who "attained" it and thereby achieved their positions of superhuman power and longevity, their roles in the functioning of the cosmos.

Skeptically-minded readers tend to be wary of this passage, especially the bit with the crazy superstitions about deities, and would very much like to find out that it is an interpolation into the text. But as I've been stressing throughout this book, a polytheist picture is entirely compatible with an atheist mystical position, with the deities emerging from a prior, non-personal metaphysical absolute of some kind. What matters is that the non-personal and non-purposive is what is ultimate, and does not create them; rather, it is they who "attain" it. The purpose is entirely on the side of the derivative gods and other beings, not on the part of the Dao, which is here apparently identified by its preferred, most minimally anthropomorphized name, "the Great Clump." The whole passage begins explicitly with the project of going beyond Heaven, and Ruler, and Heaven as Ruler or Father—the anthropomorphic God figures. What goes beyond them, what really surpasses all selves, is the Dao which is like the water that goes beyond the spittle of the fish, the personal communication and the praise and values, the social and the purposive and the evaluative, all the entailments made ultimate in monotheism, as we've discussed at such length above. To see all things as parts of the Great Clump, as coming from the Great Clump, is to hide the world in the world, to see the unhewn, formless, fluid Dao as the real substratum from which particular things are carved out, like waves in water. You cannot fall out of the universe. Death and life come from the same source, and as the *Daodejing* claims, it is their connection with this source that makes them any good to begin with. Whatever good there is in things comes their similairity to and containment of the effusions of Dao, their rootedness in their source, from which flows their nourishment, vitality, power, their De or Virtuosity. So if

you think one thing that comes from it is good, you should think all the things that come from it are good. It ties all things together. All things and all their transformations depend on it. It has always existed: like Spinoza's Substance, it cannot not exist. But it has no particular form, and no deliberate activity. All things were born from it, even Heaven and Earth. Spiritual beings come from it, and get their spiritual power from it, even the God-on-High, the henotheistic deity mentioned in ancient texts (subsequently effectively replaced by the less explicitly personal "Heaven"). It exceeds all limits. But only limited things are "beings" with specific characteristics, since "determination is negation" (Spinoza again). It is Being but is not a being. Hence though it is higher than the highest being, it is not a high being, and so on. But equally important here is the implication of the negated wei 為-phrase in each of these sentences: for in Chinese simply to say *bugao* 不高 would already mean "is not tall." Why is it instead *buweigao* 不為高, and so on? The point is that, as in the passage already cited that echoes this formulation, Xuyou's description of "the outlines" which frame it as his "teacher," i.e., his role model for emulation, it does all this undeliberately, in an *wuwei* manner, in a non-deeming manner, without choice and without preference and without values and without effort. It is the opposite of a person. But it is precisely because it has no justice that it destroys all things, precisely because it is not kind that its bounty reaches all things, precisely because it is without any skill or control that it covers and supports Heaven and Earth and carves out all forms, precisely because it is not a continuous self that endeavors to persist and become old that it persists and endures. It is all the play of its wandering, nothing more.

All that would be fine from where I sit; the work of combining that with the rigorous skepticism and relativism of Chapter Two and elsewhere is tricky but not impossible, as I've tried to show elsewhere. But there is another way to read this passage, which is even more radical and pushes quite a long way toward some of the more daring formulations of our atheist mystics. On this reading, the translation would go like this:

> Dying, being born—that's "Fate." The predictable constancy of them, like morning following night—that's "Heaven." These are what humans can do nothing about, just brute facts about the way things are. Now some people look on

Heaven as a father and therefore love it. But why not love even more that which exceeds it? Some people look on their ruler as going beyond themselves and therefore gladly accept death on his account. Why not gladly accept death on account of genuinely [going beyond self]?

When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, blowing on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes. Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we'd be better off forgetting them both and transforming along our own courses.

The Great Clump burdens me with a physical form, labors me with life, eases me with old age, rests me with death. So it is precisely because I consider my life good that I consider my death good. For you may hide a boat in a ravine or a net in a swamp, thinking it is secure there. But in the middle of the night a mighty one comes along and carries it away on his back, unbeknownst to you in your slumber.When the smaller is hidden within the larger, there remains someplace into which it can escape. But if you hide the world in the world, so there is nowhere for anything to escape to, this is an arrangement, the vastest arrangement, which can sustain all things.

This human form is merely a circumstance that has been met with, just something stumbled into, but those who have become humans take delight in it nonetheless. Now the human form in its time undergoes ten thousand transformations, never stopping for an instant—so the joys it brings must be beyond calculation!

Hence the sage uses it to roam in that from which nothing ever escapes, where all things are maintained. Early death, old age, the beginning, the end—this allows him to see each of them as good. People may try to model themselves on him. But all the more worthy of emulation are those who bind themselves equally to each and all of the ten thousand things, making themselves dependent only on

the single totality of all transformation!" (*wanwuzhisuoxi, yihuazhisuodai* 萬物之所係，一化之所待).

That Way—attaching to all things equally, preferring none and shunning none, depending only on the totality of all transformation--is real and reliable, but free of any deliberate activity and of any one definite form. It can be transmitted but not received by others, or attained but not shown to others, for it allows one to root and ground oneself spontaneously in whatever state of affairs may be prevailing wherever one is, without dependence on any specific state of affairs. One who does this exists firmly even if Heaven and Earth are not yet there [for he is not dependent on Heaven and Earth is one specific arrangement of things only, but such a person can root himself in anything]. On the contrary, this ability to root oneself in anything, to take it up as right for oneself, is what makes the spirits and the Lord-on-High divine, what makes Heaven and Earth become what they are. When one is above the summit it is without trying or considering oneself to be high (*buweigao* 不為高); when beneath the nadir it is without trying or considering oneself to be deep. By the same token, what precedes Heaven and Earth does not do so by trying to be long-lasting (*buweijiu*). What has lasted since prior to the earliest antiquity does not do so by trying to achieve old age.

Read in this way, the whole passage is a gloss on the phrase that introduced the Zhuangzian project back in Chapter One of the *Zhuangzi*: "But suppose you were to chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth, riding atop the back-and-forth of the six atmospheric breaths, so that your wandering could nowhere be brought to a halt. You would then be depending on--what? Thus I say, the Utmost Man has no fixed self, the Spirit Man has no particular merit, the Sage has no one name." 若夫乘天地之正，而御六氣之辯，以遊無窮者，彼且惡乎待哉！故曰：至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。 This entire passage in Chapter Six, read in this way, is not about a metaphysical absolute that produces all beings, but about

what it's like to be "charioting" upon all possible conditions, "Going by the Rightness of the Present This," thereby "depending on" all of them, which is the same as depending on none of them in particular. This is restated here in the phrase that differs perhaps the most in the two translations: "to bind themselves equally to each and all of the ten thousand things, making themselves dependent only on the single totality of all transformation!" (*wanwuzhisuoxi, yihuazhisuodai* 萬物之所係，一化之所待). And this is "the Dao" in question: this *way of relating to the world*. It is just a restatement of *yinshi* 因是, "going by the rightness of the present This," as contrasted to *weishi* 為是, "deeming as right," in Chapter Two. It means, when high, one goes by highness without deeming it as definitively high, without deeming high to be a value, or a definite state, or a goal, or a purpose: we might say, 因高而不為高。 This is why the text, on this reading, says to practice this Way is to be higher than the highest without being high, and so on: not because of worries about giving finite predicates to the infinite, but from considerations about *wuwei*, the centrality of the anti-purpose polemic. And this is seen in the Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* as the means by which real Virtuosity is attained, whether by animate being, inanimate beings, or divine beings—that Virtuosity of which all existence and all function is an example.

On either reading, though, we have here a fine instance of Emulative Atheism. The more one emulates the universe in its non-purposivity, its modus operandi of going-by the present This rather than deeming anything to be right, having no values or goals, responding but not storing, transforming but not doing, the more virtuosic one becomes at whatever one does—and this is also true for whatever ghosts and gods there might be. They are gods only to the extent that they tap into the non-purposive: the non-personal, the non-conscious, the non-unified, the all-inclusive, the formless, the transforming—that is, to the extent that they tap into the very opposite of gods, spirits, the opposite of definite mutually exclusive selves whose essence is to make choices among alternatives. They are only godly to the extent that godliness is not ultimate and not one. They are only gods insofar as they tap into the Godlessness of the universe—otherwise known as "Dao." We are back where we started, with the line from Zarathustra that stood as one of the epigraphs to this book, which we have revisited several times already: "Just this is divinity, that there are gods but no God."