

God Is Dead: What Next?

A Buddhist Response to Nietzsche

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INTRODUCTION

IN BRITAIN, during these past ten years or so, interest in the writings of the 19th century German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, has dramatically increased. Nietzsche is now popular. To meet the new interest in Nietzsche, in 1990 the British Nietzsche Society was founded, which publishes its own biannual journal. And there has been a sudden flood of books on and about Nietzsche dealing with his theory of language, his notions of truth, reason, literature, nature, morality, his relation to Socrates, Kant, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Blake, Darwin, Post-Modern Criticism, his attitude to Christianity, Buddhism, etc., etc. Why there is this sudden increase of interest in Nietzsche I do not know, but the interests are very diverse: Nietzsche had something to say, mostly polemical, on all and everything, even on the effects of eating rice on the minds of the early Indian philosophers.¹

However, he was not always so popular, especially in this country. For example, Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy*, quotes a line from King Lear as being ‘Nietzsche’s philosophy in a nutshell’:

I will do such things –
What they are yet I know not – but they shall be
The terror of the earth.²

Russell sees Nietzsche as advocating a kind of universal war that will clear the earth of all the rubbish-like beings and leave only Nietzsche’s ‘noble man’, ‘a being wholly devoid of sympathy, ruthless, cunning, cruel, concerned only with his own power’.³ However, I’m glad to say that such an [52] ill-informed and distorted judgement of Nietzsche’s philosophy is no longer espoused today.

It seems, however, to be the opposite case with God: unlike Nietzsche, he certainly was popular, but of late he (or she) does not appear to be so popular. Indeed, God’s popularity, at least in Western Europe, seems to be fading rather fast. Today, we even have clergy who, despite the fact that they officiate as priests and ministers at Christian services, do not, themselves, actually believe that God exists. In an article in the *Independent* newspaper, Michael De-la-Noy, who used to be the press officer to the Archbishop of Canterbury, tells us that:

In the good old days (about ten years ago) it was enough to run off with a choirboy or the organist’s wife to be unfrocked. But, having dismantled the liturgy of Cranmer, the [Anglican] Church is now so lazy about language that it allows blatant confusion between doubt (which any reasonable person experiences) and disbelief. So any friendly atheist who is above moral suspicion is welcome to stay on board and receive a salary and accommodation to the value of £20,000 a year.⁴

I am not sure of the state of affairs with the other Churches, but at least in the Anglican Church it seems you do not even have to believe in the existence of God in order to become a vicar or even a bishop! It is rather surprising, therefore, that the sex of an applicant should matter at all!

1. THE DEATH OF GOD

BUT ALL THIS is just by the way to bring us to the first part of this essay: just what did Nietzsche actually mean when, in Book Three of *The Gay Science*, he declares that ‘God is Dead’?⁵ Not only that, but: ‘All of us are his murderers’.⁶

Nietzsche’s assertion that ‘God is Dead’ is not simply a theological statement. Nietzsche hasn’t come up with the definitive argument to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that God could not possibly exist – except in the minds of men. This statement, although it certainly does have its theological aspect, is essentially a statement proclaiming the plight of modern Western [53] culture. Succinctly stated, the ‘Death of God’ refers to the complete loss of belief in the accepted religious and metaphysical world-view along with the system of values it upholds, in particular its moral values. The ‘Death of God’ announces the advent of the age of nihilism, an age of cultural barrenness arising from this loss of belief, and which may well end in catastrophe as far as any truly human existence is concerned.

Yet, to Nietzsche, this demise of ‘God’, this loss of belief in all that we esteemed as the highest and most valuable, is simply the natural and logical outcome, within the history of Western culture, of the accepted religious and metaphysical world-view. It all begins with the original premise of the framework of Platonism, which, according to Nietzsche, became the ground of all subsequent metaphysical, religious, moral, historical and political views on man and his place in the universe. Broadly, that original Platonic or Socratic premise claimed that existence is bifurcated into two separate asymmetrical realms, one transitory, mundane and of the nature of an ‘appearance’, the other the eternally divine and ‘True Reality’. It was the latter, this ‘True Reality’, that gave life its meaning and value and man his orientation within it, as well as the capacity, through the ‘intellect [*nous*] which is the pilot of the soul’,⁷ to discern it. The former, the natural world, was, by contrast, valueless and without any inherent meaning except, perhaps, as a means of weakly reflecting that ‘True Reality’ and reminding the philosopher of its presence. Within this two-world view, the only truly human life was one lived in pursuit of that eternal reality, was one whose goal was to gain knowledge of, to commune with and even enter, at death, that ‘True Reality’. Our ‘true home’ was in that other divine realm. Within this two-world framework, the highest human values, whether religious, moral, aesthetic or otherwise, those which give life meaning and value, had their source not in this natural world but in that other realm or being that transcends this natural world. In comparison with that eternal, transcendent realm or being, the source of all that is called ‘good’, this transitory and mundane world is valueless and meaningless, even ‘evil’. As a consequence of this two-world view, all passions, aspirations and goals whose objects and ends are in this natural world are also, by definition, valueless and meaningless – even ‘evil’. As such, they are to be resisted and conquered by the [54] ‘good’ man. In the West, this Platonic world-view provided the theological framework for Christianity. As Augustine tells us, ‘Christianity is Platonism for the people’.⁸ Plato’s ‘True World’ becomes Christianised as the ‘Kingdom of God’, which is now accessible to more than philosophers as one can enter it by faith alone. However, the object of faith can only be verified at death – what is called ‘eschatological verification’.

Socrates, speaking through Plato, is therefore seen by Nietzsche as ‘the one turning point and vortex of so-called world history’, because, in spite of the fact that Christianity claims that one can now enter the ‘Kingdom of God’ through faith alone, it is this pursuit of knowledge that ‘became the real task for every person of higher gifts’⁹ down through the ages. As a result, it is this pursuit of knowledge that became the formative force in determining the way Western culture has

evolved down to the present day. Yet, ironically, it is this very pursuit of knowledge and truth that is undermining this whole Platonic world-view, that is 'killing off' belief in God, and giving rise to the age of nihilism: the pursuit of 'Truth' has led to the truth that there is no 'Truth'; the pursuit of 'Knowledge' has finally led to the knowledge that there is no 'True Reality' in the Platonic sense, no 'Kingdom of God' or even a God without a Kingdom. The 'Death of God' means the death of a whole world-view, of a whole interpretation of existence and a whole set of values, moral and otherwise, that were inherent in that world-view. How could this happen?

The full story, being a rather long story, cannot be told here. It would involve the whole history of Western philosophy and theology, and in particular, the growth of modern science-using 'science' in the sense of the German *Wissenschaft*, which includes not only the 'hard' sciences like physics, but any scholarly and critical discipline such as philology, the discipline Nietzsche himself was trained in. As a philologist, Nietzsche had first hand experience of the destructive effect the sciences were having: 'the philologists ... are the destroyers of every faith that rests on books'.¹⁰ But let us very briefly look at what Nietzsche sees as one very important juncture in this history of Western culture.

Beginning with the 18th century Italian thinker, Vico, various philosophers sought in the bowels of history for intelligible signs so as to make sense of [55] their own times in terms of the past and, like augurs of old, discern how the future might unfold. All, however, despite their differing views, because they were looking at history through some version of this Platonic framework, whether consciously or unconsciously, concluded that the course of human history, at least in the West, revealed an intelligible purpose: human history was characterised by a gradual progress towards some end, and this end was, in some manner, the fulfilment of human striving and potential. Man and his actions were cosmologically central within a universe that was purposeful and inherently structured to fulfil that end. But to Nietzsche, because of what one scientist in particular – Charles Darwin – had revealed, such a philosophy of history was now beginning to be seen as no more than gross human conceit and wish fulfilment. With the appearance of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the scientific data available tended to premise an opposite conclusion: man was now seen as the centre of nothing other than his own existence; there was no evidence of any extra-terrestrial providential force or being looking after his destiny; nor was the natural world structured for his welfare any more than for any other animal. There was simply no evidence to premise such an optimistic conclusion. With Darwin, man becomes just another animal without any necessary laws to guarantee his future progress. As Nietzsche puts it in *Daybreak*:

Formerly one sought the feeling of the grandeur of man by pointing to his divine origin: this has now become a forbidden way, for at the portal stands the ape, together with other gruesome beasts, grinning knowingly as if to say: no further in this direction!¹¹

One of the main avenues by which we came to see ourselves as essentially separate from the rest of Nature, see ourselves as created by some divine fiat or possessed of a soul that had its natural home in that other, transcendental realm, was now, for many thoughtful people, barred. But perhaps, Nietzsche asks, our feeling of grandeur might be still be derived from the opposite direction:

One therefore now tries in the opposite direction: the way mankind is going shall serve as proof of his grandeur and kinship with God. Alas this, too, is vain! At the end of this way stands the funeral urn of the [56] last man and gravedigger (with the inscription *nihil humani a me alienum puto* [I hold nothing human alien from me]). However high mankind may have evolved... it cannot pass over into a higher order, as little as the ant or earwig can at the end of its 'earthly course' rise up to kinship with God and eternal life... why should an exception

to this eternal spectacle be made on behalf of some little star or for any little species upon it! Away with such sentimentalities.¹²

Yet it would be wrong to think that Nietzsche was pleased with all this and rejoiced in the fact that God was dead. He did not welcome the advent of nihilism because, putting on his prophet's hat, he foresaw that as a consequence of the 'Death of God' what we regard as human civilisation and culture, all that we hold as most worthy and valuable and the source of our self-esteem, is now likely to be overtaken and destroyed by a more brutal and animal-like age. In one of his *Untimely Meditations*, he reveals his fears:

'[If]... the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal – doctrines which I consider true but deadly – are thrust upon the people for another generation... no one should be surprised if the people perishes of petty egoism, ossification and greed, falls apart and ceases to be a people; in its place systems of individualist egoism, brotherhoods for rapacious exploitation of non-brothers ... may perhaps appear in the arena of the future.'¹³

The 'Death of God' and the advent of nihilism, although they arise from a more honest and critical look at ourselves and the institutions we have created, rather than leading us on to something more worthy of our humanity, are more likely, instead, to create a cultural vacuum into which will pour the hordes of the more obnoxious aspects of human nature. The demise of God may unleash forces whose consequences, as far as the future potential of human civilisation is concerned, will be disastrous. The only consequence of God's demise may be the destruction of all that we have regarded as truly human, as we have, as yet, nothing of any real value to replace 'God' with. We may be left with what Nietzsche calls 'the terrifying Either/Or: "Either abolish your reverences or yourselves!"'¹⁴ [57]

All this comes about, because, realising that the values we saw in the world were put there by ourselves – were our own creation – when we pull those values out again then 'the world looks valueless'.¹⁵ 'One interpretation has collapsed, but because it was considered *the* interpretation it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain'.¹⁶ We are left feeling 'as if one had deceived oneself all too long'¹⁷ and, as a consequence, feel a certain despair and hopelessness concerning the future. The world now looks valueless and meaningless. However, as it only looks valueless and meaningless because of this sense of loss, its true status is still as yet unknown to us. Consequently, for all we know, 'the world might be far more valuable than we used to think'.¹⁸ Nietzsche thought it was and saw as his next task the creation a new world-view and set of values to replace the old ones, values that would take us through the on-coming stage of nihilism and out the other end. The 'Death of God' simply puts the question as to the value of life and man's place in it back in our laps, which is where it belongs. The question as to the value and meaning of life is once again an open one. As Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science*:

At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea'.¹⁹

Individual human beings have an unknown potential, and that potential may yet reveal to us that our lives can become far more valuable, meaningful and satisfying than we ever imagined. Just because one false avenue has been shown to be a kind of evolutionary cul-de-sac, this doesn't mean that there are no more avenues, even though that is what it may feel like. Nietzsche, of course, did venture out onto that 'open sea' but, unfortunately, he did not travel very far. His proposed answer

to nihilism, his projected ‘revaluation of all values’, was cut short by his death. Nevertheless, he did leave us with a few hints as to its general outline. However, at this point, before moving on to have a look at Nietzsche’s general outline, I must say something about one fear Nietzsche had, and this was that many of his [58] contemporaries, in their despair at having lost all that they had held in esteem, might actually turn to Buddhism as a means of seeking solace in the now nihilistic world.

2. BUDDHISM AS DANGER

NIETZSCHE SAW an historical parallel between his own age and that of the Buddha.²⁰ The Buddha, according to Nietzsche, saw in his own age, just like Nietzsche, that ‘God is Dead’. But, rather than create a new avenue by which human potential could unfold, thereby passing beyond nihilism, the Buddha failed by creating a new religion that simply helped man adjust to nihilism. The Buddha’s response to the possible ‘awe inspiring catastrophe’²¹ of his own time was to found a religion which, rather than help people overcome the newly felt meaninglessness of existence and create a new more meaningful vision of existence, simply helped them adjust to nihilism with a certain degree of cheerful acceptance. According to Nietzsche’s view of Buddhism, the Buddha taught his contemporaries how to face up to the stark, cold, meaninglessness of existence, face up to the fact that in this universe human existence has no special place, and remain aloof, untroubled and cheerful. To attain this state, and Nietzsche considers that it was actually achieved,²² is to attain the Buddhist goal of *nirvāṇa*. Although the Buddha avoided what Nietzsche considered the greatest danger resulting from the ‘Death of God’ – destructive anarchy, a ‘war of all against all’ in the Hobbesian sense – he nevertheless failed to understand nihilism for what it actually is – a world-view expressive of a psychological reaction of despair that comes from seeing through the illusion we were living under, seeing that ‘the world does not have the value we thought it had’,²³ and concluding that the world, therefore, must be worthless and meaningless. The Buddha, by failing to understand how nihilism arises, accepts nihilism as the ultimate statement upon existence. Consequently, if human existence has to be given an aim, it must reflect this ultimate judgement and present a goal appropriate to it. The Buddha gives us *nirvāṇa*, the ultimate panacea, a state of cheerfulness and desirelessness wherein all terrestrial troubles and existential *Angste* are extinguished, and death will be met with nothing more than a [59] cheerful sigh of ultimate relief. Nietzsche therefore sees Buddhism as ‘a religion for the end and fatigue of civilisation’.²⁴ Yet, although the Buddha ultimately failed to transcend nihilism, Nietzsche does regard the Buddha as being a real physician of the psyche who offers a real cure. Unlike other religions, Buddhism does not offer man fictitious goals, but only real ones: the Buddhist path does lead ‘to an actual and not merely promised happiness on earth’.²⁵ But the Buddha’s ‘cure’ fails to go beyond nihilism, and, instead, only strengthens the spirit in the face of a cold, meaningless universe. And as Nietzsche sees that many of his cultured contemporaries, having lost their Christian faith, were beginning to be attracted to Buddhism, he is rather worried that Buddhism will gain ground in Europe. After all, it offers a real cure for the ‘diseased nerves’ of these ‘late human beings... grown kindly, gentle, over intellectual, who feel pain too easily’²⁶ and allows them to sit at ease with nihilism. But the ‘cure’ does not go far enough.

3. NIETZSCHE'S ANSWER TO NIHILISM

NIETZSCHE'S ANSWER to nihilism begins with the question: if the source of 'Truth', the 'Real World', has been negated by truth, what now is the status of that world previously seen as 'mundane', seen as a mere 'appearance'? Nietzsche replies:

We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent world perhaps?... But no! With the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!²⁷

What we are therefore left with is simply 'the world' or, more correctly, the world and life as encountered and interpreted by its own latest prodigy, man. And when the man, Nietzsche, contemplates life and the world, he eventually concludes that 'the world described and defined according to its 'intelligible character' – it would be "will to power" and nothing else'.²⁸ This notion of the 'will to power' becomes Nietzsche's replacement for 'God', and it is a notion derived from contemplating this world. It is through this notion of 'will to power' that the world and life become, once again, intelligible, and a new, more truly meaningful vision of existence can be created, taking us beyond nihilism. So how did Nietzsche arrive at this view? [60]

Throughout the whole history of Western culture there has only ever been a single people who, in terms of Nietzsche's view of culture, achieved a perfect form of it: the ancient Greeks. For Nietzsche, they have been 'the only people of genius in world history'²⁹ because they created so many great individual human beings³⁰ who, he says, 'shine in the radiance of a higher humanity'.³¹ For a glimpse of what humanity can become, it therefore is to the ancient Greeks that Nietzsche turns. And when Nietzsche looks for the reason why Greek culture threw up so many great individuals, he finds it in its attitude towards and creative response to our natural desires and passions. Briefly stated, the Greeks Nietzsche so admired, whilst acknowledging the blind destructiveness that human nature is capable of, did not, like Plato and Christianity, alienate man from nature: they did not seek to explain what is best and most worthy in man by appealing to some fictitious, higher non-natural source but, instead, saw what is most worthy and best in man as a continuation of nature, as having its roots solely in this natural world:

... the 'natural' qualities and the properly called 'human' ones have grown up inseparably together. Man in his highest and noblest capacities is Nature and bears in himself her awful twofold character. His abilities generally considered dreadful and inhuman are perhaps indeed the fertile soil, out of which alone can grow forth all humanity in emotions, actions and works.³²

The Greeks accepted that human nature contains some 'dreadful and inhuman' traits, but their genius, according to Nietzsche, was in their methods of dealing with them. The paradigmatic model is found in the *Works and Days* of the 8th century poet, Hesiod. For Hesiod, the most common characteristic of life is 'Strife' or *Eris*. But Hesiod, in his poem, personifies two forms of 'Strife' upon the earth in the form of two *Eris*-goddesses, a cruel one who 'makes battles thrive, and war'; and the other, 'first-born child of blackest Night' who 'is good for mortal men', because, through envy, she makes 'even lazy men to work'. Thus 'potter hates potter, carpenters compete,/ And beggar strives with beggar, bard with bard'.³³ Nietzsche comments that 'this is one of the most noteworthy Hellenic thoughts and worthy to be impressed on the newcomer immediately at the entrance-gate of Greek [61] ethics'.³⁴ More importantly, it shows that the natural passions can incite 'men to activity but not the action of war to the knife but to the action of contest... [making of *Eris*] ... a beneficent deity'.³⁵ The Greeks did not judge human passions and desires as being either moral

or immoral in themselves: they were simply natural. But they could be used by men, as in Hesiod's example, either destructively thereby becoming 'dreadful and inhuman' – the 'bad' Eris, or creatively – the 'good' Eris, which, through the notion of 'contest' or *agon*, can become a pursuit of 'excellence' or *aretē*. Even the great tragedies of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides, works that are still held in esteem today, were created out of this spirit of *agon*. As Nietzsche comments: 'the Greek knows the artist only as engaged in a personal fight'.³⁶

It is through the example of following Hesiod's 'good' Eris, through this Greek model of *agon* based on the pursuit of 'excellence', that Nietzsche finds his answer to nihilism. Hesiod's 'Strife' becomes, in Nietzsche, the 'will to power'; and just as Hesiod's 'Strife' has the potential for both 'good' and 'bad', so too with Nietzsche's 'will to power'. However, in Nietzsche's model, for the creative aspect to flourish fully, the 'contest' must move on from being between individuals to one between the vying drives and passions within the individual, what Nietzsche calls 'self-overcoming' (*Selbstüberwindung*). It is this path of 'self-overcoming' that constitutes Nietzsche's answer to nihilism proper. It is this path of 'self-overcoming', the 'will to power' become individualised, that is his proposed replacement for the old, displaced spiritual or religious quest. The goal is now not in some other world, but is the re-creation of one's own being in this world into something more exalted, what he calls an *Übermensch*. This goal of the creation of *Übermenschen* now becomes 'the meaning of the earth'.³⁷

However, although it was the Greeks who provided Nietzsche with his paradigm, on its own, in the modern world, it would not be enough. For any new view of man and his place in the world to be taken seriously, it would also have to be underpinned by science, whose confidence and prestige at that time was extensive. Yet although Nietzsche admired science, especially its hard-headed search for the truth, he judged that modern science was itself a danger. It too was leading mankind to a thoroughly nihilistic end by way [62] of its mechanistic interpretation of the world, which is still with us today. As he says about this mechanistic interpretation of the world:

A 'scientific' interpretation of the world... might... be one of the most stupid of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning. This thought is intended for the ears and consciences of our mechanists who nowadays like to pass as philosophers and insist that mechanics is the doctrine of the first and last laws on which all existence must be based as on a ground floor. But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially meaningless world. Assuming that one estimated the value of a piece of music according to how much of it can be counted, calculated, and expressed in formulas: how absurd would such a 'scientific' estimation of music be! Nothing, really nothing of what is 'music' in it!³⁸

Just as a scientific analysis of a Mozart symphony cannot evaluate it as a work of art or determine what the human being Mozart might have been trying to express, mechanistic materialism, as a philosophy of life, is quite useless in any evaluation of life, in any attempt to understand what a human being is, or what human goals are worthy of being pursued. Nietzsche feared that this mechanistic philosophy was well on its way to becoming the victorious world-view. But to Nietzsche, science, by itself, cannot create values, but actually requires 'a value-creating power, in the service of which it could believe in itself'.³⁹ To oppose it he required a non-mechanistic theory of nature which, whilst being scientific, could also be adapted to his notion of human nature derived from the Greeks. When reading Friedrich Lange's *History of Materialism*, what Nietzsche called his 'treasurehouse',⁴⁰ he found the means by which to undermine dogmatic, mechanistic materialism: the dynamic theory of nature put forward by the 18th century Jesuit

scientist and mathematician, Roger Boscovitch.⁴¹ Here, Nietzsche found his ‘servant’. In Boscovitch’s theory of matter, the atomic lumps of rigid, inert matter are replaced by *puncta*: indivisible, dimensionless, point-like centres of force, what Nietzsche, after Lange and others, variously calls *Kraftcentren* or ‘force-centres’, *Machtquanta* or ‘power-quanta’ and *Kraftquanta* or ‘force-quanta’. What we think of as solid matter is, in fact, better described as a [63] ‘constellation of forces’.⁴² What we conceive of as ‘impenetrability’ and ‘solidity’ are no more than the experience of ‘repulsive force’.

All natural phenomena, in this model, from the simple atom through to that of a human being, are viewed as various dynamic configurations of forces. Yet, according to Nietzsche, whatever we understand, even in the realm of science, we can do so only in our own image, only on the analogy of our own experience.⁴³ This being the case, given that we are the evolutes of nature and that our most intimate and direct experience of nature is the forces that vie within us – our drives, instincts, emotions and passions – on the analogy of this experience Nietzsche asks: ‘is it not now permitted to make the experiment and ask the question whether this which is given [in our experience] does not suffice for an understanding even of the so-called mechanical (or “material”) world’, thereby making life and nature ‘intelligible’?⁴⁴ If so, then Boscovitch’s dynamic theory of nature still needs to be completed: an ‘inner-will’ analogous to that of the forces within us must be ascribed to it – even the atom must be characterised as possessing a *Wille zur Macht* or ‘will to power’. Thus, by adding a primitive *nisus* to Boscovitch’s *puncta*, turning them into *Willens-Punktationen* or ‘will-points’,⁴⁵ Nietzsche is attempting to give his theory of human nature derived from the Greeks a scientific basis. Our drives, instincts and passions – our affects – can be seen as the latest ‘fruits’ in a dynamic continuum whose roots are the forces studied by physics. Consequently, there is no ‘matter’, there is no mechanistic materialism, but only something more analogous to ‘will’ struggling with ‘will’.⁴⁶ Nietzsche therefore proposes that the ‘world seen from within, the world defined according to its “intelligible character”, would be “will to power” and nothing else’.⁴⁷ Given this paradigm, it follows that if it is these very natural forces vying with each other that have not only created rocks but also us, then if mankind is to have any kind of future spiritual quest to replace the old one, it is only by consciously working on and with the forces within us – our drives, emotions and passions – through a process of ‘self-overcoming’ (*Selbstüberwindung*), that we can achieve this. We are free to re-create ourselves and release the potential that we each have. It is only by following such a path that we can once again find more meaningful [64] and deeply satisfying lives. We will come to experience ourselves as living life as it should and can be lived. However this is all very well in theory, but when we turn to Nietzsche to find out just how we are to achieve this, we are given little help.

Practically the whole of Nietzsche’s reflections and advice on how one can work on and with our affects and so ‘recreate’ ourselves is found in a few extended dicta in *Daybreak*, *The Wanderer and his Shadow* and one in *The Twilight of the Idols*. Firstly, he considers that we have so far been blind to the possibility of self-development:

What we are at liberty to do. – One can dispose of one’s drives like a gardener and, though few know it, cultivate the shoots of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as productively and profitably as a beautiful fruit tree on a trellis; one can do it with the good or bad taste of a gardener... one can also let nature rule and only attend to a little embellishment and tidying-up here and there; one can, finally, without paying any attention to them at all, let the plants grow up and fight their fight out among themselves... All this we are at liberty to do; but how many know we are at liberty to do it?⁴⁸

‘Disposing of one’s drives like a gardener’ requires ‘weeding’, ‘pruning’ and cultivation through ‘nourishment’. With respect to ‘weeding’ and ‘pruning’, he gives us a few hints as to his gardening methods.

First, one can avoid opportunities for gratification of the drive, and through long and ever longer periods of non-gratification weaken it and make it wither away. [Secondly] one can impose upon oneself strict regularity in its gratification: by thus imposing a rule upon the drive itself and enclosing its ebb and flood within firm time-boundaries, one has then gained intervals during which one is no longer troubled by it – and from there one can perhaps go over to the first method. Thirdly, one can deliberately give oneself over to the wild and unrestrained gratification of a drive in order to generate disgust with it and with disgust to acquire a power over the drive: always supposing one does not do like the rider who rode his horse to death [65] and broke his own neck in the process – which, unfortunately, is the rule when this method is attempted. Fourthly, there is the intellectual method of associating its gratification in general so firmly with some very painful thought that, after a little practice, the thought of its gratification is itself at once felt as very painful... Finally... he who can endure it and finds it reasonable to weaken and depress his entire bodily and physical organisation will naturally thereby also attain the goal of weakening an individual drive: as he does, for example, who, like the ascetic, starves his sensuality and thereby also starves and ruins his vigour and not seldom his reason as well.⁴⁹

And, elsewhere he comments:

Overcoming of the passions. – The man who has overcome his passions has entered into possession of the most fertile ground; like the colonist who has mastered the forests and swamps. To sow the seeds of good spiritual works in the soil of the subdued passions is then the immediate urgent task.⁵⁰

Nietzsche gives us a few gardening analogies, but as to what it is we are to ‘plant’, what it is we are to ‘weed’, what it is we are to ‘cultivate’, what is and what is not ‘nutritious’, we are left only with a few hints. And as to how we are to proceed, he is even less forthcoming. However, if one scours his writings, one can get his general trend. For example, he tells us that ‘the first preliminary schooling in spirituality’ for the spiritual aspirant is ‘not to react immediately to a stimulus, but to have the restraining, stock-taking instincts in one’s control’.⁵¹ One firstly has to ‘become master over his wrath, his choler and revengefulness, and his lusts’ as any attempt to ‘become master in anything else, is as stupid as a farmer who stakes out his field besides a torrential stream without protecting himself against it’.⁵² But, apart from these hints, that is about it. It is time to turn to Buddhism.

4. THE ‘WILL TO POWER’ AND ‘THIRST’

TO ME, all this leads to a certain irony. Here we have Nietzsche seeking for an answer to the oncoming nihilism, searching for some new spiritual quest to replace the old theistic one and, but did he realise it, it is only in Buddhism that he could have found fully worked out methods to achieve the kind of ends he was searching for. Buddhism, rather than being the nihilistic religion he thought it to be, is in fact something more akin to kind of the spiritual path he sought as an answer to nihilism. This is not to say that Nietzsche would have accepted Buddhism unconditionally, but as a method of spiritual development he would certainly have found much that would have helped him in his task.

As Buddhism is essentially a spiritual path addressed to the individual, its primary concern, as the *sūtras* make clear, is to aid the individual in his or her spiritual quest. As such, it has nothing to say about the constitution of the natural world, except that it is, like everything else, governed by the law of *pratītya-samutpāda* or ‘conditioned co-production’. In other words, whatever comes to be does so in dependence upon other conditions and is, therefore, characterised by impermanence and lack of any substantial, autonomous or unchanging essence or soul. The very same law applies to all phenomena, whether spiritual, psychological, biological or inorganic. As Buddhism has nothing to say about the scientific constitution of the natural world, except that it is also governed by the law of *pratītya-samutpāda*, there is no point in trying to find any affinity between Nietzsche’s notion of the natural world characterised as ‘will to power’ and some Buddhist notion of the world. However, when we turn to man, one can see such an affinity. Nietzsche’s general conception of man as ‘will to power’ has an affinity with Buddhism’s dynamic conception of man.

In Buddhism, the most basic trait in any unenlightened being is *trṣṇā* or ‘thirst’, a term found mainly in poetic literature. Although not clearly stated in the Buddhist texts, this ‘thirst’ can be understood as the affective ground out of which all unenlightened action springs, the ground out of which all our instincts, drives, passions, emotions, aspirations, etc. – what I will call, after Nietzsche, our ‘affects’ – evolve. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* the Buddha is reported as saying that the ‘first beginning’ of *trṣṇā* ‘cannot be known’ [*na paññāyati*],⁵³ implying that ‘thirst’ is no ordinary affect, but is rather, in the language Nietzsche uses to describe the ‘will to power’, the most ‘primitive form of affect’ from which ‘all other affects are only developments’.⁵⁴ Understanding *trṣṇā* in this way, we can see an affinity between [67] this Buddhist notion of ‘thirst’ and Nietzsche’s notion of man as ‘will to power’: both are characterised by a primitive and innate striving, a striving from what is perceived to be a less satisfactory to a more satisfactory state, from a less powerful to a more powerful state. The ‘will to power’ in its crude and basic human form is concerned with conquering others, cruelty, tyranny, enmity, revenge, sex, crude selfishness, etc. However, it can be transformed into expressions of love, justice, gratitude, forgiveness, generosity, independence of spirit, etc.,⁵⁵ all of which Nietzsche considers as manifesting a greater quantum of power than the cruder aspects. Therefore, in Nietzsche’s terms, and this is an important point for what follows even though it needs to be qualified, ‘love’, relative to ‘hate’, manifests more power; self-restraint rather than *laissez-aller* manifests more power. Traditionally, in Buddhism, ‘thirst’ is practically always negative as it is seen as the subjective ground for the arising of mental states coloured by greedy self-centredness, aversion and animosity, and mental confusion with regard to what life can become. As such it is detrimental to one’s spiritual development. However, one can look at it in a more neutral light through the lens of *pratītya-samutpāda*. Putting what is a very detailed argument into a short formula, we can say that without *trṣṇā* there would be no beings; without beings there would be no Buddhas. If we view *trṣṇā* in an evolutionary context, see it as the basic drive that gives rise to the desire to find security, happiness and fulfilment, we could say that what is wrong is not so much *trṣṇā* itself, but, as in Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’, its crudeness and spiritual blindness: it seeks happiness and fulfilment in ways that are inextricably linked to pain and frustration, which, in turn, create such secondary affects as cruelty and violence, despair, etc. In this way one thereby ends up in an eventual self-frustrating loop, what in Buddhism is called *samsāra*, or the ‘continual round’ of unsatisfactory and unenlightened existence. What *trṣṇā* has to do, using Nietzsche’s terminology, is to ‘overcome’ (*überwinden*) itself, overcome its atavistic and primitive characteristics that had their role to play in early human evolution. *Trṣṇā*, when it does this, when it becomes cognizant of the spiritual path, is transformed into *dharma-chanda*, the desire or aspiration (chanda) to enter the spiritual path that culminates in Buddhahood or Enlightenment, which is seen

as the goal and fulfilment of [68] all human striving. But for *tr̥ṣṇā* to become *dharma-chanda*, for this ‘sublimation’ (*Sublimierung*) of our deep seated desires to come about, there has to be a kind of ‘epistemic shift’ wherein we come to see and understand the world and our lives in a new way, a way which opens up possibilities we had not seen before. These possibilities offer the promise of a new and more fulfilling way of life. This is the Buddhist view. However, there is no such epistemic shift mentioned in Nietzsche’s account, but given his account of Hesiod’s two *Eris* goddesses, we must assume one.

We have moved from a glance at Nietzsche’s notion of man as ‘will to power’ as compared with the Buddhist notion of man governed by the most basic characteristic of ‘thirst’, from Nietzsche’s notion of the sublimation of ‘will to power’ as ‘self-overcoming’ (*Selbstüberwindung*) to the Buddhist notion of the sublimation or overcoming of *tr̥ṣṇā*, which is *dharma-chanda*. What I will do now is to try and show that it is something like the Buddhist notion of *dharma-chanda* that fills out and completes Nietzsche’s replacement for the old spiritual quest, his notion of ‘self-overcoming’.

5. BUDDHISM AS THE PATH OF ‘SELF-OVERCOMING’

AS WE SAW earlier, Nietzsche viewed the person as a constellation of various fluctuating forces whose individual and collective *nisus* was expressed in terms of a striving to overcome all resistance and accumulate more power, i.e., the will to power. Man is ‘the totality of his drives’⁵⁶ or, as Nietzsche puts it elsewhere, is ‘subject as multiplicity’.⁵⁷ For Buddhism, also, man is ‘subject as multiplicity’, he is also ‘the totality of his drives’. Buddhism sees man as a complex, psycho-physical continuum of vying drives and passions. What we call our ‘self’ is no more than a label for whatever particular configuration of these various psycho-physical energies happen to be manifesting at any particular moment. As Sangharakshita tells us, Buddhism regards man...

as one manifestation of a current of psycho-physical energy manifesting now as a god, now as an animal, revenant, tortured spirit or titan, and now as a man, according to whether its constituent volitions are healthy, unhealthy or mixed. Thus Buddhism does not think of [69] sentient beings in terms of separate forms of life, one absolutely discrete from another, so much as in terms of separate currents of psychic energy each of which can associate itself with any form. Energy is primary, form secondary. It is not that man wills, but rather will ‘mans’.⁵⁸

What we are at present, our present ‘form’, comes to be as a consequence of our past affective-action, our past willing; our present action, our present willing, in turn, determines what we will become in the future. Therefore, if we wish to become something other than we are at present, or have been in the past, then it is our present affective-action, our present willing, that will be the primary and determining factor. In other words, using Nietzsche’s language, what we will become is a matter of our present ‘willing’, our present striving, which, as we see, is also the language of Buddhism.

In Buddhism, the ‘psycho-physical continuum’ that we are is analysed, for pragmatic purposes, into what are called the five *skandhas* or five ‘collections’. What we call a ‘person’ can be divided into five types of process. Firstly, there is *rūpa* or ‘form’, which is all that is other than our subjectivity, i.e., our bodily form. Then there are the other four ‘groups’ which constitute our subjectivity: firstly, *vedanā* or ‘sensation’ or ‘overall feeling tone’, which is either pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent; secondly, *saṃjñā* or ‘apperception’, in the sense of the process by which

our present experience is assimilated and formed on the basis of our past experience; thirdly, the *saṃskāras* or ‘affective and volitional dispositions’ both determined and determining; and, lastly, *viññāna* or ‘consciousness’, which in this set-up simply ‘lights up’ the rest, or makes the rest its object. But, as in Buddhism it is our past *saṃskāra-skandha*, our past ‘affective and determining dispositions’, our past willings, that have determined what we now are, and it is our present action, our present willing, that will determine what our future being will be, it follows that the methodologically cardinal *skandha* is our present *saṃskāra-skandha*, in other words our present volitions, our present willing, our present actions. It is here, therefore, that we will find Hesiod’s good and bad *Eris*-goddesses, it is here that we will stumble upon Nietzsche’s ‘garden’ and find the various weeds and flowers and dormant [70] seeds; find what is to be nourished and cultivated and planted; find what is to be weeded out and thrown on the psychic rubbish-heap. The good Buddhist, is, in Nietzsche’s analogy, the good gardener. But this Buddhist gardener has a much better idea of what it is he or she is trying to achieve: they have the advice of previous gardeners who have gone before and who, according to the Buddhist tradition, have created the most beautiful gardens the world has ever seen by re-creating themselves in the light of a vision of what is it possible for a human being to become.

The first thing that the Buddhist has to do is to look at their various drives, passions and emotions—one could even say, ‘look at their souls’, using that term in a strictly poetic sense – and learn to discriminate between the weeds and the flowers, learn to tell the difference between what are traditionally called the *kuśala-karmans* or ‘skilful-volitions’ – we could say, ‘skilful-willings’ – and *akuśala-karmans* or ‘unskilful-volitions’. ‘Skilful-volitions’ are those which express those aspects of our nature that are worth cultivating and developing; ‘unskilful-volitions’ are those which spring from aspects of our nature that, being a hindrance to our efforts to spiritually develop, are to be overcome and even rooted out. So how do we tell one from the other? The general guideline that Buddhism gives us is that any activity, whether of body, speech or mind, that is, to some degree, motivated by unconditional generosity, unconditional friendliness and mental clarity, is to be cultivated and developed as that is where one’s spiritual future lies. And any action, whether of body, speech or mind, that is motivated by acquisitive greed, animosity and ill-will, or mental muddle and confusion, is deemed detrimental to one’s development as a human being. As such, it is regarded as a *kleśa*, a ‘defilement’ or ‘affliction’ or, we could say, a ‘weed’. The former are ‘skilful-volitions’ because they express an intelligent and open-minded awareness of what it is that leads to a more fulfilling human life. ‘Unskilful-volitions’ express the opposite. Some Buddhist texts give extended lists of these volitions. For example, listed as ‘skilful-volitions’ are ‘friendly concern’ (*maitrī*), ‘compassion’ (*karuṇā*), ‘sympathetic joy’ (*muditā*), ‘generosity’ (*dāna*), ‘confidence’ (*śraddhā*), ‘mindfulness’ (*smṛti*), ‘concentration’ (*samādhi*), ‘moral shame’ (*hrī*), ‘moral propriety’ (*apatrāpya*), ‘greedlessness’ (*alobha*), ‘hatelessness’ (*adveṣa*), ‘non-[71]viciousness’ (*ahiṃsā*), ‘vigour’ (*vīrya*), ‘diligence’ (*apramāda*), ‘equanimity’ (*upekṣā*), ‘contentment’ (*santuṣṭi*), ‘non-delusion’ (*amoha*), ‘alertness’ (*praśrabdhi*) and certain qualities of the mind in general such as the ‘agility’ (*lahutā*), ‘elasticity’ (*mudutā*), ‘adaptability’ (*kammaññatā*), ‘proficiency’ (*pāguññatā*), and ‘uprightness’ (*ujukatā*) with regard to these ‘skilful-volitions’.

As for a list of ‘unskilful-volitions’, we have ‘hatred’ (*dveṣa*), ‘envy’ (*īrṣyā*), ‘selfishness’ (*mātsarya*), ‘worry’ (*kaukr̥tya*), ‘attachment’ (*lobha*), ‘sensual desire’ (*kāmarāga*) ‘opinionatedness’ (*dṛṣṭi*), ‘conceit’ (*māna*), ‘mental obduracy’ (*styāna*), ‘sloth’, (*middha*), ‘unreasonable scepticism’ (*vicikitsā*), ‘vindictiveness’ (*krodha*), ‘resentment’ (*upanāha*), ‘hypocrisy’ (*mrakṣa*), ‘spite’ (*pradāsa*), ‘deceit’ (*māyā*), ‘dishonesty’ (*śāṭhya*), ‘mental inflation’ (*mada*), ‘malice’ (*vihiṃsā*), ‘lack of moral shame’ (*ahrīkyā*), ‘lack of moral propriety’ (*anapatrāpya*), ‘mental restlessness’

(*auddhatya*), ‘lack of confidence’ (*aśraddhya*), ‘lust’ (*sneha*), ‘laziness’ (*kausīdya*) ‘carelessness’ (*pramāda*), ‘forgetfulness’ (*muṣitasmr̥titā*), ‘inattentiveness’ (*asamprajanya*), ‘sexual infatuation’ (*preman*), and ‘desultoriness’ (*vikṣepa*), etc., etc. When we come upon these lists, we can see how important self-awareness and the practice of mindfulness and meditation are in Buddhism. Also, it shows that the context in which our emotions express themselves makes no difference as to their being ‘skilful’ or ‘unskilful’. Therefore, if one reacts to criticism of one’s religion, its founder, one’s teacher, one’s bishop, rabbi or imam, or any of its beliefs, practices or doctrines with hatred, arrogance, resentment, self-righteousness, defensiveness, etc., such reactions are, from a Buddhist perspective, simply irreligious and ‘unskilful’. As such they have no place at all in the truly religious life. But, back to the ‘garden’.

The Buddhist tradition gives us many different methods and doctrinal reflections to help the individual overcome the more unskilful aspects of their nature and develop the more skilful. But all fall into one of four categories, traditionally called the ‘Four Right Efforts’ or the four ways to skilfully strive. Firstly, one can strive to prevent potential unskilful volitions not yet arisen, from arising. For example, one can at least stay away from situations that stimulate those potential unskilful volitions. Secondly, one can strive to overcome those unskilful volitions that have arisen. Here one can, for exam- [73] ple, contemplate the likely consequences for oneself and others of those unskilful volitions, or one can try and develop a counteractive skilful volition. Thirdly, one has to try and create and develop skilful volitions not yet arisen. And, fourthly, one strives to maintain and develop further those skilful volitions that have arisen. The first two ‘Right Efforts’ are, to go back to our gardening analogy, concerned with ‘weeding’; the second two ‘Right Efforts’ with ‘cultivation’ and ‘planting’. To give an example of Buddhist ‘self-overcoming’, a Buddhist example of ‘cultivation’, there is the meditation practice known as the *maitrī-bhāvanā* or the ‘cultivation of loving-kindness’ – *bhāvanā* quite literally means ‘cultivation’ or ‘development’.

Here we find a clear example of Nietzsche’s ‘sublimation’ proper, i.e., the transference of an affect from one object to another, so as to sublimate it into a ‘higher’ or, in Nietzsche’s language, more ‘powerful’ state. The first step of this practice is to ‘cultivate’ (*bhāvanā*) *maitrī* or ‘loving-kindness’ towards one’s own self, in other words, to develop a healthy attitude towards oneself. To this end one can recollect happy and contented moments in one’s life and desire that one’s life will become more satisfying and fulfilling, thereby giving one’s mind room for appropriate affects to arise. Then, from that state of healthy self-regard one calls to mind a friend and, on the basis of being in that state of healthy ‘self-regard’, a feeling of friendliness towards the friend can arise naturally.

Now, in a sense, this feeling one has both for oneself and the friend is not *maitrī* proper, simply because both these affects can be said to be quite natural to all. In other words, they are not affects most people would have to make an effort to develop. And there is no inconsistency between having a feeling of friendliness towards one person whilst hating another. Also, such affects can involve a good deal of attachment and give rise to petty jealousies, etc., affects that Buddhism categorises as ‘unskilful’. Consequently, although we call them stages of *maitrī*, they are more like the necessary conditions out of which true *maitrī* can arise. Yet these more everyday emotions are the only conditions out of which *maitrī* can spring. So, in a sense, the real task starts at stage three. Here we are trying to extend ourselves, overcome our natural inclinations by thinking about someone whom we have little or no feeling towards, someone we feel quite indifferent to, what is [73] usually termed ‘a neutral person’. The underlying context here is that if one’s mind is imbued with the feeling of friendliness which has extended beyond one’s own self to a good friend, that is the ideal condition, the ideal ‘soil’, within which to contemplate some ‘neutral person’, someone we

normally feel indifferent to. If we heard that they has just been run over, we might exclaim ‘Oh, dear!’, but it wouldn’t really bother us. In making them the object of one’s concentrated mind, one then tries to empathise with them, tries to see them as people just like oneself, with desires, worries, hopes, fears, etc., and begins to cultivate kind and caring thoughts about them. In this way, feelings of kindness may arise towards them as one is already in a friendly state of mind because of thinking about the good friend. Then, in the fourth stage, one tries to do the same with someone one normally feels hostile towards, someone one might hate, an ‘enemy’. If one can come to develop kind and friendly thoughts towards a person one normally hates the sight of, then that is what *maitrī* really is as distinct from more ordinary feelings of friendliness. One has then overcome the limitations of the ‘self’ that started the practice, which was incapable of such affects towards an enemy. Then, having developed this more developed feeling of *maitrī* towards someone whom one’s earlier ‘self’ regarded with hostility, one can then extend the feeling to encompass the whole of existence, extend it towards all sentient beings throughout the cosmos.

What we have here is a kind of self-engendered dialectic. As Nietzsche says, our affects need nourishment in the form of objects, but the processes by which they come to be nourished are arbitrary. What is nourished is, therefore, usually a matter of chance. This being the case, what one becomes in the future is also a matter of chance. But, here, by consciously selecting appropriate objects to present to the mind, one begins to have some say on the kind of affects that will be stimulated, and, therefore, the kind of person one will become. We start from the most natural feeling people have for themselves which has an objective counterpart as a perspective on the world. It is a world that more or less revolves around ‘me and mine’. Its perspective is therefore rather narrow and overtly self-referential and, being such, excludes other possibilities and perspectives. Stage two opens the self up and includes another, who having their own interests and being someone you [74] like, extends the field of interest outside of one’s own direct interests. That ‘having to consider’ engenders a different, even though slight, change in perspective: others are now part of one’s world. But it is, as I have said, the third stage that represents a real shift from the norm. The dialectic comes about when one finds oneself in stage two, open to considering others. By focusing one’s mind, which is now imbued with a degree of friendliness, onto the ‘neutral person’, there is the chance of seeing them in a different way than before, and that seeing is accompanied by a ‘new’ affect: that of feeling kindness towards someone one previously felt completely indifferent to. It is a different affect, although it has, in Wittgensteinian terms, a ‘family resemblance’ to the former. In this way, the mind becomes more concentrated and more malleable, becomes a focus of *maitrī*-like energy. Therefore, when calling to mind an enemy there is now an opportunity of seeing them differently, of seeing them less subjectively, i.e., not just from the narrow perspective of what wrongs they have committed against ‘me’, or based on some narrow-minded prejudice, etc. This new seeing affords the possibility of actually feeling differently towards them, i.e. with some degree of friendliness and kindness, which in this case is no everyday affect, but *maitrī*, a new kind of volition that does not come about without trying to cultivate it. This is possible because of the condition one is in, because of the kind of ‘self’ one now is or, better, has become. This new volition, *maitrī*, whatever its strength, represents a transformation of one’s attitude towards the world, a transformation of the way we see and understand the world. This example also gives another dimension to the often popular but misunderstood Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* or ‘no-self’: what we have here is an unfolding series of ‘selves’, none of which can be said to be the ‘real’ self, and this series can unfold as it does because there is no ‘real self’ over and above the changes, which, in itself, remains unchanged. In Nietzsche’s terms, what we end with here is a new constellation of forces, a new ‘self’, whose overall constitution exudes ‘love’, which,

as we saw earlier, in his terms represents a greater quantum of ‘power’ than hate. And this has come about through what he would call a process of ‘self-overcoming’, which was his replacement for the old spiritual quest. However, unlike Nietzsche who only has the general idea, Buddhism gives us well tried methods as well as theories. [75]

In this example of Buddhist ‘self-overcoming’ I have used the *maitrī-bhāvanā* practice, but the same can be done with other affects such as ‘sympathetic joy’ (*muditā*), ‘compassion’ (*karuṇā*) and ‘tranquillity’ (*upekṣā*), and this principle can be methodologically applied to all the affects and states of being that Buddhism wishes to develop and nourish. This is why the Buddha referred to his teachings, his Dharma, as like a raft – it is a means by which we can get from this shore, *saṃsāra*, to the other shore, *nirvāṇa*. Therefore, being strictly a means, it follows that anything that helps us achieve this is also the Buddha’s teaching, can form part of the Dharma, whether he actually said it himself or not. And it is because Buddhism is such a methodology that it avoids the dogmatic intolerance that infests so much of what goes under the name of religion.

CONCLUSION

TO CONCLUDE, then, we can say that the Buddhist path can be regarded, in Nietzsche’s terms, as a path of ‘self-overcoming’. It is a path on which one attempts to overcome one’s relatively limited and restricted ways of being with their corresponding limited perspectives on life and the world, limited perspectives on the possibilities of human development. Generally speaking, we are restricted and limited by being all too often governed by mental states expressive of either greedy acquisitiveness, ill-will and aversion, or simply lack of mental clarity. This being the case, Buddhism wholeheartedly agrees with Nietzsche when he says that ‘the first primary schooling in spirituality’ for the spiritual aspirant is to ‘become master over his wrath, his choler and revengefulness, and his lusts’. But, unlike Nietzsche, Buddhism does give us various well-tried methods to help free us from these restricting and debilitating ways of being, methods such as the *maitrī-bhāvanā* practice, which help us break down these barriers and release deeper levels of our humanity. It does seem slightly paradoxical that it is through developing such ‘other regarding’ affects such as *maitrī*, ‘compassion’ and ‘delight in the well-being of others’ that we find our own lives more deeply satisfying and meaningful. However, on the other hand, Buddhism does have practices that are more ‘self-regarding’ such as the ‘mindfulness of breathing’ *meditation* practice and various visualisation practices that help us break down emotional and mental barriers by going deeper into one’s own mind, thereby releasing energy from deep within the psyche, energy that we did not know we had. At each stage on this Buddhist path, there is a corresponding perspective on the world – one begins to see differently – the cognitive and affective aspects of our being are inextricably interlinked. According to Buddhism, this process of enhanced seeing and willing can carry on, in a dialectical fashion, until there is such a radical shift in one’s state of being, with a corresponding transformation in the way one sees, such that we can never be the same again – we can never again become what we were, we are completely free from any possibility of falling back into our old ways and habits, our old ways of being. But not only are we ‘free from’, we are also ‘free to’: we are now free to enter what one Buddhist scholar (H.V. Guenther) has termed ‘the open dimension of Being’,⁵⁹ within which the possibilities for ways of being are endless: the possibilities for what ‘we’ can become are infinite.

Nietzsche’s claim that ‘God is Dead’ does seem rather prophetic – we can see the consequences around us today. However, for the Buddhist, the ‘Death of God’ does not mean very much at all as ‘God’ has never had any part to play in the Buddhist spiritual quest. In Buddhism, he

has never died simply because he was never considered to have existed in the first place – at least not as he has been conceived of in the West. In the early Buddhist texts, there is the god Brahmā who thinks he has created the world with its various beings, and is its lord and master. However, when questioned by a Buddhist monk he is made to eventually admit his spiritual ignorance, but asks the monk not to tell the other gods!⁶⁰ So Brahmā, in Buddhism, is a bit of a joke! The ‘Death of God’, therefore, in Buddhism, has no meaning. This being the case, for those for whom such notions have now become unbelievable and meaningless Buddhism offers an alternative spiritual path – a path which, rather than simply help them adjust to the apparent purposelessness of human life – adjust to the apparent nihilistic reality of the universe as Nietzsche thought it did – actually now offers them a real answer to nihilism. Nihilism means that life has no real meaning and purpose apart from the immediate satisfaction of our animal-like drives and passions, but Buddhism says that life does have a much greater meaning and purpose than we ever thought it had – from its perspective, we in the West have simply failed to discover it. So, when Nietzsche says: ‘One can dispose of one’s drives like a gardener... but how many know we are at liberty to do it?’, Buddhism replies: ‘We have known this for the past 2,500 years: it is you, Friedrich Nietzsche, who are only just beginning to catch on’.

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Notes

¹ *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann, NY, 1974, section 134. [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, subtitled *la gaya scienza*. *Fröhlich* means ‘merry, cheerful, joyful’; therefore given the connotations that the word ‘gay’ has in the modern West, to translate *fröhlich* as ‘gay’ is rather inappropriate.].

² Russell, B. *History of Western Philosophy*, London, 1946, p.795.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *The Independent*, Wednesday, 16 September 1993.

⁵ *Gay Science*, p.108.

⁶ *ibid.* p.125.

⁷ *Phaedrus*, trans. W. Hamilton, Harmondsworth, 1973, 247c.

⁸ Chadwick, H. *Augustine*, Oxford, 1986, p.25 but without source.

⁹ *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, NY, 1968, section 15.

¹⁰ *The Gay Science*, p.358.

¹¹ *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, 1986, section 49.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, 1983, II, section 9.

¹⁴ *Gay Science*, p.346.

¹⁵ *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, NY, 1968, section 12.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p.55.

¹⁷ *ibid.* p.12.

¹⁸ *ibid.* p.32.

¹⁹ *Gay Science*, p.343.

- ²⁰ *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, NY, 1968, III, section 27.
- ²¹ *Birth of Tragedy*, p.18.
- ²² *The Antichrist*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, 1968, section 21.
- ²³ *Will to Power*, p.32.
- ²⁴ *The Antichrist*, p.22.
- ²⁵ *ibid.* p.42.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p.22. As many people today are, indeed, attracted to Buddhist meditation as a means of relieving neurotic anxiety, stress, etc., Nietzsche's prognosis is quite apt. However, as a Buddhist, I would argue that the real danger here is to Buddhism itself: Buddhism's spiritual message being undermined and appropriated by the purveyors of the latest fashionable 'psycho-babble', especially in America. This is not to deny that Buddhist meditation can help relieve stress and other unwanted psychological symptoms – it can; but that is not the spiritual aim of Buddhist meditation.
- ²⁷ *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, 1968. IV.
- ²⁸ *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, 1968, section 36.
- ²⁹ 'We Classicists', trans. W. Arrowsmith in *Unmodern Observations*, New Haven, 1990, p.360.
- ³⁰ *ibid.* p.348.
- ³¹ *ibid.* p.344.
- ³² *Homer's Contest*, trans. M.A. Mügge, Vol. II of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Edinburgh, 1911, p.51.
- ³³ *ibid.* pp.54–55 but translation taken from *Hesiod and Theognis*, trans. by D. Wender, Harmondsworth, 1973, p.59.
- ³⁴ *ibid.* p.54.
- ³⁵ *ibid.* p.55.
- ³⁶ *ibid.* Translation from Kaufmann's *The Portable Nietzsche*, NY, 1954, p.37.
- ³⁷ *Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, 1961, Prologue, p.3.
- ³⁸ *Gay Science*, p.373.
- ³⁹ *Genealogy of Morals*, III, p.25.
- ⁴⁰ Nietzsche refers to Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus* as: 'a real treasure-house to be looked into and read repeatedly'. Quoted in George C. Stack, *Lange and Nietzsche*, Berlin, 1983, p.13, from a letter to von Gersdorff.
- ⁴¹ For an account of the influence of Lange, Boscovitch and others on Nietzsche's thinking, see Stack's *Lange and Nietzsche*.
- ⁴² As Nietzsche puts it in *The Gay Science*, 'matter is as much an error as the God of the Eleatics' [p.190].
- ⁴³ *Will to Power*, p.619 and *Beyond Good and Evil*, p.36.
- ⁴⁴ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p.36.
- ⁴⁵ *Will to Power*, p.715.
- ⁴⁶ *Beyond Good and Evil*, p.36.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Daybreak*, p.560.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.* p.109.
- ⁵⁰ *Human All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, 1986, *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, section 53.
- ⁵¹ *The Twilight of the Idols VIII*, p.6.
- ⁵² *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, p.65.

⁵³ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* v.116.

⁵⁴ *Will to Power*, p.688.

⁵⁵ These latter are all terms taken from Nietzsche's various writings. When contrasted with the former terms, one can see just what Nietzsche means by 'a greater quantum of power'. It also gives us an idea of the kind of affects that are to be cultivated, and what some of the 'weeds' actually are.

⁵⁶ *Daybreak*, p.119.

⁵⁷ *Will to Power*, p.490.

⁵⁸ Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, Glasgow, 1991, p.98.

⁵⁹ Guenther, Herbert V., *Kindly Bent to Ease Us*, Emeryville, 1975, p.169.

⁶⁰ See the Kevaddha Sutta in the *Dīgha Nikāya*.