Buddhisms and Deconstructions:
A Preliminary Discussion

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1. Philosophy and its Limits

In the *La□kāvatāra Sūtra*, one of the Mahāyāna Buddhist texts, the Buddha repeatedly criticizes philosophers. "Philosophers," which is D. T. Suzuki's rendering in his English translation of this Sanskrit text, refers to Brahmins, the Buddha's philosophical opponents at the time. The major charge that the Buddha brings against the philosophy of the Brahmins is its substantialism. The Buddha contends that philosophers, or Brahmins, begin their practice of philosophy based on egoistic attachments, which results in the dualism of the self and others, and of the qualifying and the qualified.[1] The Buddha also criticizes philosophers for claiming that "there is a first cause from which continuation takes place."[2] Opposing this view of Brahmins, the Buddha contends that continuation takes place with no first cause of that continuation to be identified. That is so from the Buddha's perspective because the continuation is not an evolution of a certain independent and substantial essence but arises from the interaction of different elements involved in that action. Marking the limits of Brahmins' substantialist philosophy, the Buddha identifies his philosophy through the concepts of "dependent co-arising" and the "middle path" which understand the identity of an entity as a differential notion.

Derridean deconstruction joins Buddhism in understanding an entity as a differential notion instead of based on the identity principle. Derrida points out that once language, the medium of philosophy, is accepted as functioning on a differential base, no discourse can enjoy the privilege of coherence or the purity of unity. By marking the gap and fissure in a discourse through a close

examination of how signification takes place, a deconstructive reading dismantles, destabilizes, and delimits the scope of a text and further inscribes the limits of metaphysical thinking.

Derrida contends that metaphysical thinking in particular and Western philosophy in general has maintained itself as discourse on Truth, the presence of which is located in the presence of the enduring entity. Derrida identifies the history of Western philosophy as the history of the metaphysics of presence. Philosophy is a guarantor of the existence and presence of Truth in the enduring being which protects the subject from the contingency of existence. Philosophy, in this context, has contributed to appropriate the mutability of being, and that was made possible through a positing of the atemporal *Being* as presence of *Truth*. Derrida argues that this transcendental metaphysics is a result of human "determination." Marking the limits of metaphysical thinking, Derrida proposes *différance* and trace as basic environments in which signification takes place and in which the presencing of Truth cannot survive.

Both Buddhism and deconstruction anchor themselves in the differential notion of an entity and challenging dominant forms of substantialist philosophy. This changing direction of philosophy in Buddhism and deconstruction opens a new way for philosophizing in various aspects of philosophical discourse. In this paper I will first outline the basic paradigms of Buddhism and deconstruction, examine its challenge to the conventional logic, and briefly consider the ethical paradigm offered by these two philosophies.

2. The Middle Path, the Middle Voice, and the Question of Identity

The nature of the Buddha's philosophy, demonstrated through his criticism of the Brahmins' philosophical orientation of substantialism and its metaphysical and dualistic tendency, is well inscribed in early Buddhist texts. For example, the Chinese Āgama collection, which contains dialogues of various lengths between the Buddha and his disciples, followers, and his contemporary inquirers, offers us the Buddha's philosophy as the "middle path." The Buddha considers the metaphysical substantialist philosophical orientation as either annihilationism or eternalism, and defines the middle path as a path which leaves these two extremes. The middle path is frequently summarized by a passage, "because this happens,

that happens; because that ceases, this ceases." Since the middle path defies the identity principle, the Buddha's discourse often resorts to paradoxical expressions. In his conversation with Kaccāyana as recorded in one of the early Buddhist texts, the Buddha's follower, Kaccāyana comes to ask the Buddha about the meaning of the "Right View," one of the eight steps in the Eightfold Path. In replying, the Buddha points out that the basic structure of people's construction of meaning is based on dualism: "This world, Kaccāyana, usually based [its view] on two things: on existence and on non-existence."[3] Such a dualism, the Buddha contends, arises with one's desire to grasp things as permanent entities. The Buddha points out that this is demonstrated in our "dogmatic bias" which causes a "mental standpoint." The Buddha tells Kaccāyana that when our thought stands still, it inevitably distorts reality, because the reality exists in the flux of constant changes. The Buddha advises that when one sees the inner changes of things that constitute being beyond the optical illusion of the seeming constancy of an entity, one has much chance to see through the reality. The Buddha thus states: "He, who with right insight sees the uprising of the world as it really is, does not hold with the non-existence of the world. And he, who with the right insight sees the passing away of the world as it really is, does not hold with the existence of the world."[4] The Buddha here affirms both arising and ceasing, being and non-being. His affirmation, however, is characterized with a double affirmation: The Buddha is not affirming exclusively arising or exclusively ceasing. Arising is accepted together with cessation; by the same token, being is affirmed alongside non-being. The Buddha sums up: "Everything exists:—this is one extreme. Nothing exists:—this is the other extreme. Not approaching either extreme the Tathāgata teaches you a doctrine by *the middle* [path]"(emphasis mine).[5]

The "middle" here does not point to the median center of two ends. The difficulty of identifying the "middle" the Buddha refers to in his conversation with Kaccāyana arises among other reasons from the fact that the Buddha applied the idea to the concept of "existence." To the Buddha, the position of viewing things from the perspective of "being" ("everything exists") and that of "non-being" ("everything does not exist") are both extremes. What does exist between existence and non-existence? How do we find a middle path between being and non-being? The answer to these questions can be found in the basic Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising in terms of temporality indicates the causation of things

happening. In this case, the temporality is not a linear movement subscribing to the idea that cause "A" produces cause "A-1" as its effect. Dependent co-arising proffers the multilevel causation for each and every moment to each and every existence. A being exists at the crossroads of a complicated web of causes that are both causes for future happenings as much as they are effects of previous happenings. The "next-previous" connection exists only in the linguistic convention, since no moment—however brief it may be—can stand still to be identified as past, present, or future. In this sense, the past has never existed; the present and future will not ever exist; but all the same the past, present, and future influence and are influenced by others. The "dependent co-arising" then demands a maximum level of awareness of the mutability of a being.

The concept of dependent co-arising has been frequently confused with an atomistic dependency of entities. Consider the model of beings—A, B, C, D, *ad infinitum* —that exist in dependence upon others. A's existence is dependent upon B, B's upon C, C's upon D, *ad infinitum*. Even though the paradigm supports the idea of a being's dependency on others, it falls short of explaining Buddhism's dependent co-arising because, the paradigm constantly hypostatizes the identity of each entity in the process of dependency. The Buddhist concept of dependent co-arising is characterized by two aspects: activity and non-substantiality.

Things exist in connection with others. It is important in this context to imagine this connection *without* constructing a substantial entity—either as a subject or an object—that acts as an agent of this connection. Mutual-connections and inter-dependency in the web of dependent co-arising are movements without agent. To understand dependent co-arising as an activity means to recognize that dependent co-arising cannot have a name and thus is unnameable and, at the same time, self-deconstructing.

The idea of movements without the subject, which confirms both being and non-being and at the same time negates both cannot but appeal to paradoxical use of language. In addition to paradox, another salient mode through which the Buddha demonstrates his position of the middle path is known as the "undeclared thesis" (Pāli: *avyākata*; Sk. *avyāk□ta*) or the Buddha's silence. The Buddha refused to answer *certain* questions asked by his followers, and this silence of the Buddha has been subject to various interpretations. One of the most supported interpretations takes the Buddha's silence as his way of rejecting philosophical discourse. In this interpretation, Buddhism duly belongs to religious tradition which rejects any

abstract discourse as irrelevant to Buddhist practice. I propose here the opposite of such an interpretation and suggest that the Buddha's silence is his way of acting out his own philosophy by marking the limits of the metaphysical and substantialist philosophy.

Silence is not merely an absence of language; silence, as much as speech, is charged language. When one keeps silent, this is one's way to react to the external stimuli. By the same token, the Buddha's silence, and refusal to answer certain questions, is his way to challenge the limits of existing mode of thinking and linguistic convention. Steven Collins in this sense identifies those questions to which the Buddha keeps silence as linguistically ill formed questions.[6] The questions the Buddha refuses to answer are unanswerable because the questions themselves are flawed and based on untenable presuppositions. This is an incident of logical and linguistic impasse that occurs when interlocutors do not share basic assumptions of their dialogue. The questions are formulated in such a way that they deprive the interlocutor of any option to respond to the questions. A popular example of such a question asks: "Have you stopped beating your wife?" Unless the dialoguer has been in fact beating his wife, he has no choice but to keep silent. In this context, the Buddha's silence and his frequent use of paradox remind us of the relevance of "how" in our philosophizing.

In a philosophical investigation, "how" an issue is articulated is as important as "what" is enunciated. A shift of concern from "what" to "how" in a philosophical articulation also demonstrates a change in philosophical paradigm. When the "what-ness" of an entity occupies the main concern of a philosophical discourse, that philosophical system takes the form of substantialism, and the system's discouse develops according to the principle of identity. When a discourse underscores the limits of "what-ness" based logic and addresses the issue of "how," as the Buddha does in his undeclared thesis, that philosophy takes the position of non-substantialism. The "how" in this case does not indicate an applicative dimension of "what": "how" itself constitutes the non-whatness of the what, or the non-identity of identity. When the discourse of "how" encounters the logic of "what" that dominates the linguistic convention of the time, the former has to reconfigure the logic and language it employs. The Buddha's silence functions as a provisional logic and language that demonstrates the gap between the Brahmins' philosophical paradigms of substantialism and his own non-substantialist position.

Derrida makes his own move in this context by creating neologism "différance" in his challenge to what he identifies as the metaphysics of presence. According to Derrida, the notion of "difference" characterizes the philosophy of his epoch. Philosophers of "difference" view a being as a differential notion in which identity is constructed by its relation to non-identity, and, thus announces the dethronement of the metaphysical concept of the subject.

The idea of "difference" is well articulated in de Saussure's semiological difference and Heidegger's ontico-ontological difference. In the field of linguistics, de Saussure's semiology challenges the metaphysical understanding of the sign. By setting forth the arbitrariness of signs and their differential character as principles of general semiology, de Saussure subverts the traditional concept that a sign is identical with a word. In the semiological difference, each sign obtains its identity by its difference from the other signs in a linguistic system. Signification arises not by an act of consciousness or an act of the subject, but by signs participating in a signifying chain. Thus, "in language there are only differences ... without positive terms."[7] By denying the possibility of any positive values which are not produced from the system of the difference, the semiological difference undermines the function of the signifying subject in traditional linguistics.

Heideggerian ontico-ontological difference plays a similar role in the history of metaphysics. To Heidegger, the history of metaphysics is the history of the oblivion of the relation of Being to beings. Heidegger contends that to reinstate the question of Being from its oblivion and thus from the reduction of being into an essentialized transcendental entity is to think about the relationship between Being and beings. In Heidegger's ontology, one's existence is this relationship, the difference between being and Being, the nature of which Heidegger identifies not with the relationship of ownership but of "the event of appropriation."[8] Existence, thus, is not identity but difference, or the happening of ontico-ontological difference.

To Derrida, however, de Saussure's semiological difference and the Heideggerian ontico-ontological difference present their own limit. They still remain in the realm of the metaphysics of identity and presence in the form of structure (in the case of de Saussure) and onto-theology (in the case

of Heidegger). Marking the limits of his predecessors in the philosophy of "difference," Derrida presents his own version of "difference," which he names *différance*. *Différance* differs/defers. In this neologism, Derrida combines the difference in kind ("to differ") and that in temporality ("to defer") symbolically re-presenting the inexhaustible "movements" of "difference" which are constantly and always already charged with traces. "*Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other," Derrida observes in his interview with Julia Kristeva.[9]

In explaining the construction of *différance*, Derrida writes:

> Here in the usage of our language we must consider that the ending *–ance* is undecided between active and passive. And we shall see why what is designated by "*différance*" is neither simply active nor simply passive, that it announces or rather recalls something like the *middle voice*, that it speaks of an operation which is not an operation, which cannot be thought of either as a passion or as an action of a subject upon an object, as starting from an agent or from a patient, or on the basis of, or in view of, any of these terms.[10] (emphasis mine)

The "middle" in Derrida's "middle voice," like the "middle" in the Buddhist "middle path," cannot be the median of two end points. The Derridean "middle" also designates the impossibility of drawing a clear-cut demarcation between conditions that the history of philosophy has defined as binary opposites and that our linguistic convention has separated into two opposite realms. In the above passage, Derrida brings up a centuries-old issue of philosophy—namely, the relationship between subject and object.

For Derrida, each different story of philosophy has been the philosophy that essentializes, inflates, and privileges one side of binary opposites, which suppresses not only the unfavored side in a pair but also the middle voice (*la voix moyenne*) which is neither present nor absent. Derrida states: "Philosophy has

perhaps commenced by distributing the middle voice, expressing a certain intransitiveness, into the active and the passive voice, and has itself been constituted in this repression."[11]

Here we are reminded of the way the Buddha articulated the middle path. The philosophy of presence, and thus of being, is one extreme, just as that of absence and non-being is another. While problematizing Western philosophy for its privileging presence, Derrida is cautious so as not to place deconstruction at the opposite end of onto-theological metaphysics. A philosophy created to locate itself at the other end of the metaphysics of presence will be yet another metaphysics. As the Buddha expounds in his explanation of the middle path, the articulation of absence, as much as that of presence, anchors itself in substantialized being. Annihilationism and eternalism are just two sides of the same one theory. The role of Derridean deconstruction, then, is to mark the indecidability between presence and absence and thus to demonstrate the impossibility of drawing a clear and permanent line between the two. The "middle" in the middle voice, thus, witnesses the dissolution of the subject and object, and further announces their inter-dependence.

Why is presence and the philosophical assumption of the existence of non-changing entity so problematic for Derrida? There are at least two ways to address the issue. First, in our thinking process, philosophy is done through language and language itself functions through differences and trace. Once the differential notion of language is accepted, the idea of presence in onto-theological discourse is possible only when we seize the movements of *différance* and trace that have been always already at work.

Secondly, to Derrida, the problem of presence (and the present) is the problem of the future as well. If presence exists in the present, then presence should provide a predictable future. Presence is not merely a predictability of future, but the future itself, because presence is timeless. However, the future is a "monster" as Derrida attests at the end of his "exergue" in *Of Grammatology*. The future is utter unpredictability, clear evidence of which appears in one's death. In *Of Grammatology*, the "monstrosity" of death is articulated through the movement of *différance*.[12] In "Signature Event Context," death reveals itself through the "iterability" of writing. The text outlives its author, and to survive its author's absence and the death of the author is the very capacity of the text. To remember the face of death—its presence and absence in our

being—is to refresh the existential condition of the human being all over again. Here we realize a theme that runs through both Buddhism and deconstruction in a manner that is not too obvious but still visible: the mortality of one's existence.

Though implicit and sometimes even disguised, Derridean deconstruction has waged a war against the philosopher's futile dream to reify human existence and thus create immortality out of one's finite and mortal life. The names Derrida has assigned to the tradition of Western metaphysics—such as ethnocentrism, logocentrism, metaphysics of presence, phallocentrism and so on—are all marked by the extension of the power of the dominant party in the field into eternity and thus into *the* Truth. That the immortality of their power is inevitably based on the identity principle, which is constructed through the suppression of their respective others, make both Buddhism and Derridean deconstruction emphasize the middle path/middle voice, in which identity cannot be understood except as non-identity. Identity is constantly in the process of being created without giving us a chance to name it *as* "identity," for dependent co-arising or *différance* is always already at work, before we name it.

3. Language, Logic, and the Ethical

The differential notion of identity advocated by Buddhism and deconstruction raises questions of the fundamental assumptions of certain traditional philosophical categories, especially of logic and ethics. The Buddha's passage in his dialogue with Kaccāyana unequivocally violates the Aristotelian logic of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle. Not only does the passage violate the rule of logic by identifying "A" with "~A," it doubles the violation by articulating that (A · ~A) and ~(A · ~A) are non-conflicting. One of the well-known logical constructions that explain the Buddha's logic of non-substantialism is known as the four-cornered logic (*tetralemma*). Put in a simple way, the four-cornered logic of Mādhyamika Buddhism postulates the identity of an entity in four stages: "S" is: P; ~P; both P and ~P; neither P and ~P. This Buddhist logic, or illogic, has been one of the grounds for the Western intellectuals' characterization of Buddhism as a theory of annihilation or the "cult of nothingness."[13] Derridean deconstruction has faced a similar problem, which is especially visible in the claim that *différance*, which is neither word nor concept,

neither present nor absent, cannot but be a negative theology.[14] The double negation of the "tetralemma" has been frequently discussed together with Derrida's double negation,[15] further demonstrating the similar position that Derridean deconstruction and some of Buddhist schools share with regard to the issue of logic.

Buddhism's and deconstruction's problem with the logic of philosophy demonstrates another incidence of the Buddha's silence, in which the interlocutor deprives the other side of the possibility to participate in the dialogue. The substantialist assumption embedded in the logical frame of the philosopher cannot but be challenged, when the structure of the world and being is understood based on differential notion. The problem of the traditional logic is well articulated by Heidegger in his discussion of the nothing in "What is metaphysics?" Pointing out the limits of the philosopher's logic in the investigation of the nothing, Heidegger claims that logic is "only *one* exposition of the nature of thinking" (emphasis original).[16] Heidegger further contends: to follow the rules of logic might be the most "exact" thinking; however, the most exact thinking does not guarantee "the strictest thinking." Moreover, the discussion of the nothing makes one "face up to the decision concerning the legitimacy of the rule of 'logic' in metaphysics,"[17] and eventually, "the idea of 'logic' itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning,"[18] which, for Heidegger, is the question of the meaning of the nothing. For the Buddha and Derrida, the question which challenges the logic of philosophers is not limited to the investigation of the nothing. The challenge encompasses our philosophizing itself.

The use of the contradictory logic in Buddhist discourse is especially visible in East Asian Zen Buddhist tradition. One example can be found in the *Diamond Sūtra*, one of the major texts in Zen Buddhism. The narrative in the *Diamond Sūtra* is characterized by its use of paradox as demonstrated in the following examples:

(1) What is called Buddhist *dharma* refers to what is not Buddhist *dharma*.[19]

(2) I will lead all the sentient beings to *nirvā□a*; though I said "I will lead all the sentient beings to *nirvā□a*," there actually are no sentient beings.[20]

(3) Tathāgata means that all *dharmas* are as such. Some people might say that the Tathāgata has obtained unsurpassed, right, and equal enlightenment; however, Subhūti, there is no such *dharma* as unsurpassed, right, and equal enlightenment. In the unsurpassed, right, and equal enlightenment that the Tathāgata obtained, there is nothing real nor unreal, and that is why the Tathāgata says that all the *dharmas* are Buddhist *dharmas*, and again, Subhūti, what is called all the *dharmas* are not "all the *dharmas*"; their names are "all the *dharmas*."[21]

(4) Do not assume that there is *dharma* to be explained by the Tathāgata. Do not think like that... To talk about *dharma* (*dharma*-talk) means that there is nothing to talk about, that is why it is called *dharma*-talk.[22]

These quotations provide evidence of how the simultaneous usage of affirmation and negation, which I would consider as a characteristic feature of the Zen use of language, develop into Zen logic in a text like the *Diamond Sūtra*. The *Sūtra* in the first passage identifies *dharma* with no-*dharma*. In the second passage, the existence of sentient beings is affirmed and immediately negated. The third passage begins by negating the belief that the Tathāgata has attained enlightenment. This negation is immediately revoked by the admission that he did attain enlightenment. The final passage again identifies *dharma* with no-*dharma*.

The discourse obviously violates the logic of language, not to speak of the logic of logic. If "a" is identified with "not-a," language cannot function; or language might still function in such a state but it loses its meaning; or language will function only if the user of the language learns it in a way that is different from linguistic convention. If we remember the Buddha's claim of the middle path, Zen use of language and logic can very well be understood as another way of articulating the middle path. Huining, the Sixth Patriarch of the Zen Buddhist school explains in his *Platform Sūtra* one's relation to language by employing thirty-six parallels. Huineng writes:

> [Things] arise and cease, and thus leave two extremes. When explaining any *dharma*, do not stay away from the nature and characteristics [of things]. If someone asks you about *dharma*, use language so that the two extremes are completely explored [and exhausted]. All explanation should be given using parallels to show that things originate from each other, and eventually the two extremes [dualism] will be exhausted [explored to their end], and find no place to set themselves up.[23]

The thirty-six sets of parallels Huineng postulates are examples of individual entities which convention views as opposites. To name things is to give them an individual identity through opposition and contrast, and this process constitutes a major function of language. By claiming the independence of each being and giving it a separate identity, language functions against the idea of dependent co-arising. This world of provisional appearances, however, eventually reveals itself as only half of the truth, for when a name is used, it brings with it the other side of itself, that is, invisible aspects within the visible reality, which is the rupture of the other within the self. As Huineng states, "Darkness is not darkness by itself; because there is light there is darkness. Darkness is not darkness by itself; with light darkness changes, and with darkness light is revealed. Each mutually causes the other."[24]

The name, darkness, is understood by virtue of its relation to its other, i.e., light. A problem arises when one represses the invisible other within the name, and the name, darkness, claims an independent identity, refusing to admit its relation to light. Zen both confirms and rejects the linguistic function of naming by employing language to reveal the interrelatedness of each pair of oppositions. Huineng thus warns:

> When you speak, outwardly, while remaining within form, free yourself from form; and inwardly, while remaining within emptiness, free yourself from emptiness. If you cling to emptiness, you will only be increasing your ignorance. If you cling to form, you will slander *dharma* with your false views. Without hesitation, you will say that one

should not use written words. Once you say one should not use written words, then people should not speak, because speech itself is written words.[25]

With this citation, it is not difficult to see the echo of the Buddha's claim for the middle path as demonstrated in his undeclared thesis. Linguistic expression, as Huineng states, must contain within itself the other side which articulation cannot bring forth because language functions based on its capacity to make distinctions. If light and darkness are understood as identical, language cannot function; not only that, if they are identical, why does one need two different linguistic expressions? On the other hand, the concept of light cannot stand by itself but exists dependently with darkness. This identity of difference and difference of identity becomes a core synergic relationship in Zen understanding of language. Despite the seemingly paradoxical nature of this definition of language in Zen, this is only another way of saying that language is an arbitrary sign system. Buddhist terminology for this arbitrariness would be emptiness. Language itself is a good example of emptiness. Being an arbitrary sign system, no signifier in a linguistic system can claim anything about the nature of the signified. Language functions on a tentative agreement between the signifier and the signified. That this agreement is tentative, however, is frequently forgotten: in the naming process, the signifier is identified with the essence of the signified, and this essence is further reified, paving the way to create a fixed Truth, which in turn assumes a central role in one's understanding of the world and of being.

Buddhism's and deconstruction's challenge to the traditional logic has become the source of their potential problems with ethics. If light and darkness are understood through the logic of the identity of difference as Huineng states, how does one make a distinction between right and wrong and good and bad? Where does Buddhism and deconstruction situate itself with regard to the ethical discourse?

4. Violence, the Secret, and the Context

In his later works, Derrida employs differential notion to address the issues of ethics and politics. The ethical and political dimensions of Derrida's deconstruction, which is explicitly discussed with the

themes of hospitality, forgiveness, or laws in his later works, can be already found in *Of Grammatology*. By understanding the identity of an entity fundamentally heterogeneous and differential, in his interpretation of the metaphysical tradition, Derrida reveals the violence that is done in the process of institutionalization. Institution in this case is not limited to established organizations such as government, school, or church as it is commonly understood. Institution for Derrida includes, among others, language, moral and ethical system in a society, and laws. Institution by nature is the source of violence because it is created through the suppression of heterogeneity existing in an entity. In this context, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida identifies three types of violence. Violence begins with articulation, when one makes distinctions through a linguistic system. The first layer of violence in the form of naming opens a door for the second layer of violence arising from the evaluation and creation of an institutional system such as moral regulations and laws. Out of this second layer of violence, there emerges more empirical and physical violence, or "what is commonly called evil, war, indiscretion, rape."[26] To be noted in understanding Derrida's discussion of violence is that the original violence described here is not an optional element in life. The fact that violence begins with our use of language, by making distinctions and naming, does not offer us the option not to use language.

The problem of institutionalization Derrida focuses in his discussion of ethics and politics has been well addressed in Buddhist tradition as well. The silence of the Buddha through which the Buddha challenges the substantial mode of philosophizing offers one such instance, in which institutionalized values and mode of thinking are challenged from the position that does not share the value commonly held in a community. Zen Buddhism's use of paradoxical language, especially in the form known as encounter dialogues, or *gong'ans*, is another instance which reveals this original violence in any institution. The *gong'ans* are Zen Buddhism's way of acting out the Buddha's silence by problematizing institutions including linguistic convention and habitualized mode of thinking as well as social system.

From Derrida's and Zen Buddhist perspective, the structure of conditioned causality (or dependent co-arising) is such that it is not possible to have the complete structure of the each event in the phenomenal world. Derrida explains this excessiveness in the structure of the world through the concept of the

inexhaustibility of the context. The context in which an event takes place is always open, since there is always something "to-come." Derrida states:

> there is a context but one cannot analyse it exhaustively; the context is open because 'it comes' [*ça vient*], because there is something to come [*il y a de l'avenir*]. We have to accept the concept of a non-saturable context, and take into account both the context itself and its open structure, its non-closure, if we are to make decisions and engage in a wager—or give as a pledge—without knowing, without being sure that it will pay off, that it will be a winner, etc.[27]

The inexhaustible context is what Derrida also calls the "secret." The secret for Derrida denotes the totality of contextuality of one's existence, whose boundaries can never be reached because of their indeterminacy. Likewise, Huayan Buddhist tradition, which is sometimes understood as a philosophical foundation of Zen Buddhism, pays close attention to the inexhaustible context. Fazang, the Third Patriarch of Huayan Buddhist school, especially addresses the "inexhaustibility" (C. *chongchong wujin*) of the realm of reality.[28] Phenomenal level is always already an appropriation, in which diverse separate entities exist. Their noumenal reality, which Huayan Buddhism identifies with the Buddhist concept of emptiness, cannot be completely exhausted. Like Derrida's "to-come," the world seen from the perspective of dependent co-arising is indeterminate, always defying an attempt to reify it. Derrida calls the totality of that which is to-come, or the totality of the other, "justice." Challenging the common sense understanding that the law is equal to exercising justice, Derrida argues that the law always falls short of practicing justice, because justice is totality of the other, whereas the law is the appropriation of justice. The relationship between justice and the law in this case can also be applied to that of the ethical and ethical categories.

Ethical categories for Derrida are by nature appropriations of the inexhaustible context of each incident, and thus violence as they are, as much as an attempt to actualize ethics. With this understanding, ethics do not arise by merely offering ethical codes through categorization of good and evil or right and

wrong. Instead, for Derrida, ethics becomes possible with an awareness of the "non-closure" or the "openness" of the context in conjunction with ethical codes in a given society. In this context, non-substantial philosophy of Buddhism and deconstruction demands a radical re-conceptualization of ethics.

Notes

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[1] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, trans., *The La□kāvatāra Sūtra: A Mahāyāna Text* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003), p. 11.

[2] Suzuki, *The La□kāvatāra Sūtra*, p. 35.

[3] "The Kaccāyana," in *Samyutta-nikāya* vol. 2, 12, §15. English translation, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, trans. Rhys Davids (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2000), vol. 2, 12.

[4] *Samyutta-nikāya,* vol. 2, 12-13.

[5] *Samyutta-nikāya*, vol. 2, 12-13. This passage is repeated several times in the text with several variations. For example, the chapter on "Jānussoni" (*Samyutta-nikāya*, XII, §47 (7)) has almost the same expression as in "The Kaccāyana." The section 48 (8) "The Brahmin wise in world-lore" shows a variation on the theme:

'What [say you] here, Master Gotama: — everything is?'

'"Everything is"— that, brahmin, is the chief world-wisdom.'

'Well then, Master Gotama:—nothing is?'

'"Nothing is":— that, brahmin, is the second world-wisdom.'

'"Everything is a unity":— that, brahmin, is the third world-wisdom.'

'Well then, Master Gotama: — everything is a plurality?'

'"Everything is a plurality": — that, brahmin, is the fourth world-wisdom.

The Tathāgata, not approaching any of these extremes, teaches you a Doctrine by a middle [way]."

[6] Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 132.

[7] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), trans. Wade Baskin (New York: MacGraw-Hill, 1959), p.120.

[8] Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 36.

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (1972), trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981/1982), p. 27.

[10] Jacques Derrida, "Differance," in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs,* trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 137.

[11] Derrida, "Differance," p. 137.

[12] Derrida thus writes: "Differance does not *resist* appropriation, it does not impose exterior limit upon it. Differance began by broaching alienation and it ends by leaving reappropriation *breached*. Until death. Death is the movement of differance to the extent that that movement is necessarily finite" (*Of Grammatology*, p. 143, emphasis original; *De la grammatologie*, p. 206).

[13] A good example of interpreting Buddhism as a theory of annihilation in Continental philosophy is Hegel's reading of Buddhism in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. See my discussion on the issue in Chapter Two of *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Buddhist-Postmodern Ethics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008, forthcoming).

[14] When Derrida first introduced "*différance*" before the French Society of Philosophy he was fully aware that *différance* could be confused with negative theology. He was also well aware of the importance of distinguishing between the two, as he states: ". . . the detours, phrases, and syntax that I shall often have to resort to will resemble—will sometimes be practically indiscernible from those of negative theology. Already we had to note that differance is not, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present (on). And we will have to point out everything that it is not, and consequently, that it has neither existence nor essence. It belongs to no category of being, present or absent. And yet what is thus

denoted as differance is not theological, not even in the most negative order of negative theology. The latter, as we know, is always occupied with letting a supraessential reality go beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastens to remind us that, if we deny the predicate of existence of God, it is in order to recognize him as a superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being." (Derrida, "Differance," p. 134). Also see "The Original Discussion of 'Différance' (1968)," trans. David Wood, Sarah Richmond, and Malcom Bernard, in *Derrida and Differance*, eds. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 83-95; and *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

[15] For discussions on the issue, see Zong-qi Cai, "Derridean and Mādhyamika Buddhist Theory of Deconstruction," in Jin Y. Park, ed. *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* (Lamham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), 47-62.

[16] Martin Heidegger, "Postscript," in "The Quest for Being," in Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: New American Library, 1975), 257-264, "Postcript," p. 259.

[17] Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" (1929) in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 89-110, p. 106.

[18] Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," p. 105.

[19] *The Diamond Sūtra* (Jingang banruo buloumi jing), *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*. (Hereafter *T*) 8.235.749b

[20] *T* 8.235.751a.

[21] *T* 8.235.751 a-b.

[22] *T* 8.235.751 c.

[23] Huineng, *Nanzong dunjiao zuishang dasheng mahe panruo bolou mijing: Liuzu Huineng dashi yu Shaozhou Dafansi shifa tanjing* (The Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra of the Best Mahāyāna Buddhism of the Sudden Teaching of the Southern School: the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch

Huineng of Dafan Temple in Shaozhou), *T* 48.2007.337a-345b, p. 343b.

[24] Huineng, *T* 48.2007.343c.

[25] Huineng, *T* 48.2007.343c.

[26] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 112.

[27] Jacques Derrida, "I Have a Taste for the Secret," in Jacques Derrida & Maurizio Ferris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. by Giacomo Donis, ed. by Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 13.

[28] For the discussion of Fazang's concept of inexhaustibility, see Chapter Ten of Fazang's *Wujiao zhang* (*Treatise on Five Teachings*).