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## Ethics as a Declaration of Interdependence

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The quality of life on Earth seems to be slipping away from us, and future forecasts indicate that our children will experience considerably greater environmental decline. As a comparativist, I find myself instinctively turning to other cultural traditions, encountering insights and ideals which might enhance and cleanse those of my own. It is not that I think that other cultures do not pollute and exploit, while my own does. No culture lives up to its ideals, and increasingly few seem concerned by that fact. Yet it remains within the hopeful depictions of the ideal that any real guidance is to be found. We desperately need to listen to the wisdom of other peoples, as well as to our own if we are to find common ways of salvaging this sick young planet.

Indeed, it is somewhat in this spirit that Arthur Danto, in a book of quality entitled *Mysticism and Morality: Oriental Thought and Moral Philosophy*. 1., concludes, at the beginning rather than at the end, that

There are times when the moral fabric of our lives appears so rent that one must look with sympathy upon anyone who in desperation turns to other civilizations for guidance. The East has always held the promise of a deeply alternative existence, satisfying and pacific and exalting. ...It is nevertheless an aim of this book to discourage the hope that a way through our moral perplexities may be found in the Orient..2.

One should take seriously a warning of such unconditional clarity from as eminent a scholar as Danto. But making the journey from one of the world's distinctive cultural traditions to another is, at best daunting, and at worst impossible. And the reasons have much to do with the inability, and sometimes unwillingness to put one's own cultural assumptions "at risk." Not that Danto and others would not be willing to do so, but that, as Gadamer, and his teacher and colleague Heidegger observe, it is never clear and distinct that one's "translation" of an idea from another culture into the ideational language of one's own culture, has not ripped that idea or conceptual cluster out of its own bed of assumptions, and rendered it safe and unthreatening by making it "one of our own." Indeed, Danto warns of this very possibility, except that he *only* speaks the language of *assimilation*, and never once of risk-taking. To assimilate a tradition to one's own always already presupposes that one's own "house" of language and being is the ruling one, and that whatever is learned must be fitted into this house, or left outside to rust harmlessly on the lawn. There is no thought of *foundational renovation*. Danto writes,

...we cannot take over the moral beliefs of the East without accepting a

certain number of factual beliefs — beliefs about the world — that such a system of moral beliefs presupposes. But the relevant factual beliefs cannot easily be assimilated to the system of beliefs that define the world for us. The fantastic architectures of Oriental thought...are open to our study and certainly our admiration, but they are not for us to inhabit..3 .

But why not? Without minimizing the difficulties, evident even in the fact that there are few in the world who can straddle two cultural traditions intellectually, with half a brain and half a heart in each, and who have facility in both languages, or language groups, it is also evident that some do break through the barriers of inscrutability and mystery, and successfully begin the arduous and demanding business of the fusing of horizons. Of course, a fusion of horizons leaves neither horizon of understanding intact. The one alters the other, else there would be no fusion but only harmless juxtaposition. Not only does fusion demand the placing of key and fundamental assumptions at risk, but it puts at risk one's way of life as well. And whenever ethics enters into the picture, our defences go up and we become doubly protective for fear of losing the slight hold on civilization we have. The yawning gap of relativism and scepticism is usually enough to keep us at home.

## On the Nature of the Will

In so far as we are willing to risk it all, ethically speaking, we will push on, inquiring of Danto what it is that forces him to reject the entire Orient as a source of moral renewal and critical reassessment. His answer is crisp and to the point: in the East, "the will is not anything like the important moral concept...that it is in the West. Equally, there is none of the agony over freedom of the will, which is, after all, the paradigmatic philosophical concern in the Western tradition."<sup>4</sup> The issue is one of the place of the *will*, and as I will suggest one of the *nature* of the will in different cultural traditions, and Danto is quite right in observing that in the Western traditions, the world that we live in demands that we *struggle* along the path of righteousness, and that we enlist in the noble *battle* against evil along the way. Comparing the Japanese *haiku* poet Basho, to Dante, Danto writes,

He [Basho] is no Dante, puffing up an arduous path through a hierarchical universe to a permanent lodging in Paradise. The Way has no vector. One cannot get lost. The way is everywhere. ...So the wanderer does not follow an itinerary, like a pilgrim thirsting for the final beatitudes. Happiness is the way one goes, not something luminous at the end. Of course there is no rest there: we are always moving...but we can move without effort, and that is what following the Way is..<sup>5</sup>

By now there may already be inklings about how one might reinterpret the sense and place of the will in the East, in order to find a way through this rather sharp dividing of the moral West from the amoral East. It is not that the Taoists, the Buddhists, and the Zen Buddhists are *amoral*, but that their vision of morality is always already an implicit critique of precisely the sort of morality and conception of will, which we in the West have taken to be the only genuine and true willful morality. Indeed, the Zen Buddhist philosopher, Abe Masao makes this abundantly clear when he formulates a Buddhist perspective on the human will as it is understood in the West:

...in Buddhism, human free will is grasped as an endlessly self-determining, self-attaching, and self-binding power — which is the ultimate source of human suffering and which inevitably leads us to the final dilemma — that is, death in the absolute sense. However, when this endlessly self-binding blind power (karma) is realized as it is, through the practice of *dhyana*, meditation, one can be emancipated from it and awaken to boundless openness, Sunyata [emptiness, nothingness].... In this awakening to Sunyata, human free will is realized entirely anew in its pure

form by eradicating its self-attaching and self-binding character. Instead of producing a chain of causation and transmigration, free will, which is now based on the awakening to Sunyata, freely works in this phenomenal world without attachment, delusion, or bondage..6.

No wonder the temptation is *not* to invite the culturally "different" into our houses: because to allow them to enter will result in things at least being altered, and possibly in tatters. Good and evil, we often hear in Eastern thought, are distinctions made in the state of delusion and ignorance. They are relative, not absolute distinctions, and what they are relative to is the way of thinking that we habitually take to be the absolutely correct and reasonable way(s) of thinking. What is typical, by contrast, in the Far East in particular, is to focus on the ideal state of mind/heart, in which one is transformed to such an extent that one spontaneously does "the right thing." One no longer follows the moral imperative, like a novice learning to paint by number, for now one's capacity to empathetically identify with others is an effortless and unthinking compassion. The ideal, enlightened state of mind is a prereflective "without-thinking,".7. a state of awareness prior to all distinctions and conscious differentiation. And it is a rather constant opinion in the Far East that this prereflective state, in particular because it is also preego, is a compassionate state of awareness which seeks to preserve or maintain what is, that it is even-handed in its compassionate identification with whatever is, and that it is intuitively active, rather than calculative. Prereflective change is real and continual, but it is spontaneously and effortlessly active, slipping between the paths of greatest resistance and opposition. Thus, it is not that the will is ignored or depreciated in value, but that it is no longer tied to calculative reasoning. As D.T. Suzuki argues, the will in the Zen tradition is prior to the self as discursive deliberator, or as motivator of an ego separate from its objects of awareness:

The will in its primary sense...is more basic than the intellect because it is the principle that lies at the root of all existences and unites them all in the oneness of being. The rocks are where they are — this is their will. The rivers flow — this is their will. The plants grow — this is their will. The birds fly — this is their will. Human beings talk — this is their will. The seasons change, heaven sends down rain or snow, the earth occasionally shakes, the waves roll, the stars shine — each of them follows its own will. To be is to will and so is to become. There is absolutely nothing in this world that has not its will. The one great will from which all these wills, infinitely varied, flow is what I call the 'Cosmic (or ontological) Unconscious,' which is the zero-reservoir of infinite possibilities. The 'Mu!' thus is linked to the unconscious by working on the conative plane of consciousness. The koan that looks intellectual or dialectical, too, finally leads one psychologically to the conative center of consciousness and then to the Source itself..8.

Danto's criticism of Eastern "morality" — and he takes Taoism as "the more typically Oriental attitude,".9. — is that it "aims at the stunning of the will,".10. and this stunning of the will appears necessary because "the will is considered the enemy of ultimate happiness throughout the East."..11. The picture that he gives of the Taoist as the typical Oriental is that of effortless, undisturbed, strictly *un* willful flowing — a "monotonous flowing away" — of being at one with the stream of life such that morality as we understand it becomes literally impossible. One no longer possesses the ability to act against the stream of things, or to set out to change the world in some small way, for happiness demands that one flow in *conformity* with the world. "Exactly that space that Taoism intends to collapse is what makes morality possible at all."..12.

Where Danto goes wrong — and I do want to suggest that he goes wrong — is in assuming that the *will* is turned off, allowed to atrophy, and abandoned. Rather, the will is understood in a different light, is nurtured differently in the cultural gardens of the East,

and yields both quite different methods of application, and distinctively different results. To begin, let me focus the discussion by quoting from Danto once more, this time on the concept of *wu wei* (or *wei wu wei*) in Taoist thought. I will analyze the meaning of the term shortly. For now, let me dwell on Danto's rendering of the meaning of this Chinese phrase, for he explicitly defines *wu wei* as "to do nothing," emphasizing that "*wu wei*, non-doing, celebrates the power of immobility." .13. In fact, it means nothing of the sort! Rather than implying inaction, it is that which makes all doing, of whatever kind, possible, including moral doing. Chapter 48 of the *Tao Te Ching* tells us that we must stop acting altogether, and that once we do so, then there will be nothing that we do not do. "The Tao never acts, yet there is nothing it does not do" (Chapter 37). The Tao is "universal spontaneity." .14. When all is well, one digests one's food without willing it done, checking it step by step through its process. An even better example is pregnancy, for the less aggressive and less dominating female is the heroine of Taoist thought, and not because she can bear children, but because the effortless and spontaneous *doing* over nine months, is more frequently evident in the way women live their lives generally. Women are more likely to have come to terms with nurturing, and with the importance of gentle interaction and persuasion. One does not force a pregnancy, normally, deciding at seven months that one has had enough. Nor does one force physical and mental development of the fetus. The more aggressive male, in China and here, is more likely to *force* things, to advocate a *war* on drugs, a *war* on poverty, to discipline quite severely because of a breach of good conduct, to become impatient quickly, and to see to it that injustice does not go unanswered, as in the retaliation of war and combat.

By contrast, the Taoist sage *intervenes* minimally, with others and with the natural world, letting each thing develop in accordance with its own nature. Deliberate intervention, particularly *forced* intervention, sooner or later results in failure, or in strikingly bad consequences. As Holmes Welch puts it, "in human relations force defeats itself. Every action produces a reaction, every challenge a response." .15. The combination of humility and compassion "work like gravity between man and man," accomplishing effortlessly, and by attraction rather than by force, what might otherwise not be accomplished, or if forced, accomplished with severe penalties flowing from it in the future..16. Rather than fighting evil, the Taoist realizes that "good creates evil...never [try]...to do good, because this requires having a concept of good, which leads to having a concept of evil, which leads to combatting evil, which only makes evil stronger." .17. Welch summarizes his account of *wu wei*:

*Wu wei* does not mean to avoid all action, but rather all hostile, aggressive action. Many kinds of action are innocent. Eating and drinking, making love, ploughing a wheat-field, running a lathe — these *may* be aggressive acts, but generally they are not. Conversely, acts which are generally aggressive, like the use of military force, may be committed with such an attitude that they perfectly exemplify *wu wei*. The Taoist understands the Law of Aggression and the indirect ways that it can operate. He knows that virtuousness or non-conformity can be as aggressive as insults or silence. He knows that even to be non-aggressive can be aggression, if by one's non-aggressiveness one makes others feel inferior. It is to make another person feel inferior that is the essence of aggression..18.

Rather than "do nothing," then, *wu wei* means not doing anything that is not done naturally, i.e. spontaneously, and from the heart as well as from the mind. One's doing must be an expression of one's whole character, and must in some way embody an empathetic awareness of the situation of the other. One may stop someone from doing harm, and in so doing one may harm that person. But one's intent is not to do harm, but to avoid as much of it as one can. The Chinese character for mind, *hsin*, is also the character for heart. Similarly, the Japanese term *kokoro*, means both mind and heart, or mind/heart, and underscores that a "heartfelt" gesture is also a "mindful" *and* a *spontaneous* act. It arises naturally and spontaneously from the depths of one's self, deeper than one's surface will, not mere *acting* but an authentic expression of one's whole person as knower,

"feeler", and "willer". Such acts are not acts of calculation, not because they are mindless, for indeed they are allegedly mind-full, but because calculation implies being at an objective *remove* from the situation. Acts of calculation are more like running down the list of debits and credits on a cluttered sheet in order to decipher what would be best in this case. Calculation can result in the ignoring or setting aside of one's feelings and one's sense of how to act in this circumstance here and now, and then applying an abstract principle or law to an instance which is rarely ever exactly like what the law envisioned or is set out in the manual as its test case. T.P. Kasulis articulates the case and the place for the "Eastern" outlook and contribution to moral thought, when he concludes that

Even if Western philosophers continue to maintain that consciousness should always remain primarily rational and conceptually oriented, the *capacity* to respond prereflectively should still be nourished. Otherwise, we will lose, along with that capacity, the possibility of being truly compassionate, selfless, and spontaneously moral..19.

But deeper still is the observation that ordinary morality arises only from the surface of egos already in social conflict. Morality is a web of prohibitions and prescriptions to deal with people who might otherwise do each other great harm. By contrast, if we saw each other as brothers and sisters, we would identify with each other's gains and losses, pleasures and pains, aspirations and fears. This is not to say that morality requires nothing more — at least it need not mean this — but that whatever rules of morality do arise, arise out of this foundation of human-hearted capacity for empathetic identification. David Loy makes this point in some detail:

The nondualist traditions make the same point [that the problem of morality is not evil, but delusion] as part of their critique of dualistic categories. The tendency to evaluate all acts as good or bad, pure or impure is a classic example of the delusive *vikalpa* [discrimination or the bifurcation of experience] that needs to be eliminated. To eliminate all delusion therefore means to eliminate all moral codes as well. But this does not excuse selfishness, for a true elimination of delusion will also eliminate all those self-centered ways of thinking that motivate selfish behavior. Deeper than the imperfectly flexible strictures of any moral code (which may still have value as "rules of thumb") is the concern for others that springs up spontaneously within those who have realized their true nature. This is the heart of the Taoist critique of Confucianism, which sees Confucian emphasis on such doctrines as righteousness and propriety as an attempt to close the barn door after the horse of natural feeling has already run away..20.

The *will*, in the *dualistic* state of awareness, attempts to manipulate the numerous separate and emotionally unattached entities of the world, in order to reconstruct some sense of interconnection, by means of laws, regulations, prohibitions, and intellectual prescriptions and requirements. But, "nondual action does not imply wanton, merely spontaneous activity like that of a spoiled child. The point is more subtle...acculturation introduces ethical factors (e.g., a superego) that condition our instinctive selfishness, but nonduality, in denying an ego-self, eliminated the basis of selfishness."21. Action which emanates from a willful ego simply serves to increasingly dualize us, i.e. separates us from others, and from the natural environment. Action which emanates from a peaceful, meditative, empathetically embracing state of awareness, is already selflessly acting so as to preserve and to protect all that this embracing state embraces. It is not that such action is necessarily done without thinking, but that the thinking is a heartfelt and spontaneous thinking from the depths of one's integrated being, and that this state is a state of compassion and love. This point is emphasized again and again in Far Eastern philosophy: "When the cursed barrier of egoism is broken down, there remains nothing that can prevent us from loving others as ourselves."22. Or, "It is apparent that the ethical

application of the doctrine of Nirvana is naught else than the Golden Rule, so called. The Golden Rule, however, does not give any reason why we should so act, it is a mere command whose authority is ascribed to a certain superhuman being." .23. The reason which Suzuki gives in support of acting in accordance with the Golden Rule, on behalf of Buddhism, is the finding of "the oneness of things...from which flows the eternal stream of love and sympathy." .24. The emphasis on the "enlightenment state," is an emphasis on the "the spiritual expansion of the ego, or, negatively, the ideal annihilation of the ego," which then produces a "never-drying stream of sympathy and love." .25. David Loy states the case this way:

Insofar as I realize my true nature, perhaps love becomes, not something that I have, but something that I participate in. Such love would necessarily be non-discriminatory. In moving from the sense of myself as an alienated consciousness to an awareness that all phenomena are a manifestation of the same nondual ground, love and compassion would spontaneously arise for all beings. Understanding myself as a facet of the Whole, I would naturally identify with all other facets of the Whole..26.

## Evil

There is much more to say about non-aggressive action, or creative quietude, or active inaction, or not-forcing, but I want to say something as well about how *evil* arises in this Taoistic-

Buddhist scheme of things, in the first place. If the Confucian Mencius distilled the focus of the Chinese assumption that human beings are by nature *good*, then Lao Tzu was able to throw out the bath water while saving the baby by maintaining that our *natural* state is prior to the distinction between good and evil. As babies, we come into the world as "uncarved blocks" (*p'u*), free from hostility and aggressiveness, but also free of a vast array of distinctions which divide the world up into the useful and the useless, the good and the bad, the progressive and the regressive. It is the mark of *civilization* that distinctions arise, and when there is recognition of goodness, there is, necessarily and axiomatically, the recognition of evil, for otherwise "goodness" would be unable to identify what it is that it is not. Benjamin Schwartz beautifully describes the *fall* from the Taoist "garden of Eden:"

But why does civilization arise? Here our focus shifts to the mysterious emergence within the human *hsin* (mind) of an unprecedented new kind of consciousness that seems to exist nowhere else in nature. Somehow within the Eden of the *tao*, there arises the deliberative, analytic mind which has the fatal capacity to isolate the various forms, constituents, and forces of nature from their places in the whole in which they abide, to become fixated on them, and to make them the objects of newly invented desires and aspiration. The human mind itself becomes, through this new consciousness, isolated from the flow of the *tao* and finds its meaning in asserting its separate existence against the whole..27.

The Taoists were fully aware of the evils that were perpetrated in the name of the good, of the goods of yesterday which have since been "seen" to have been evil, and of the evils of yesterday which are now considered to be socially acceptable, or encouraged. But perhaps the point of Taoism can be best understood by us, as an ancient form of *ecological* living. As with the Far East generally, in overwhelming proportion, human nature is seen to be an extension of the nature of the universe itself. To follow Nature is to be in accordance with one's own nature, and to follow one's own nature is to be in accordance with the rhythms of Nature, the world, and the cosmos as a whole. As Schwartz observed, it is the analytic mind which isolates by distinguishing, and then sets about to encourage what it values positively, and to eliminate what it values negatively.

And while some of this is inevitable, even for the Taoist, it is the excessiveness with which we *reform* Nature, with which we *carve* out a place for civilization, by which we *harness* and exercise our *dominion* over nature, with which we so quickly attack the evil and then aggressively mine the good-for-our-purposes, that leads to our personal, social, and ecological downfall of the present day. We have lost the sense of flowing, and we no longer are content with *dwelling* in a world which is our neighbourhood. But what we have lost that is most precious, is our sense of the *whole of things*, our sense of the supportiveness of this great evolutionary flow of adventure that human and non-human existence is. It is not that we have simply lost our sense of wonder, but that we have lost our sense of the whole. And while the curse is evident, both East and West, it might be argued that it is worse in the West because we are the home of the analytic mind, where the word "mind" does not mean "heart," nor does it mean "spontaneous arising," nor does it synthesize nearly as well as it takes apart. In a way, for us there is no loss, just the inexorable working out of what we have already put in motion as our manner of being-in-the-world.

To focus on the "letter of the law," on rules and regulations, can take us away from what is the centre of ethical thinking, for Confucians, Taoists and Buddhists: that central ethical ideal is *human heartedness (jen)*. One can do the right thing, without either wanting to, or without a feeling of caring, or with no human heartedness. One can go through the motions, one can act correctly, but for the Oriental mind, the great characters in their tradition all act as they do out of the spontaneous arising of human-heartedness which they give expression to whatever instance is at hand. This is an *agent-oriented* criterion of ethical action, rather than an act-oriented criterion. Whereas Kant would have us act in accordance with maxims and principles, and would praise us for acting against the grain of our actual inclinations, the Far East stresses doing what we do not out of duty alone, but out of a sense of respect, or reverence, or righteousness or caring. It must arise spontaneously, effortlessly, uncalculatedly, for no ulterior *reasons*, from deep within us. It arises from our deeper will, rather than from the more surface will of obligation and calculation. Ideally, as Confucius remarks, when one matures one's inclinations and one's moral duty will always and spontaneously coincide. To quote David Loy once more,

The only way to transcend the dualism between the self and the other is to act without intention — that is, without attachment to some projected goal to be obtained from the action — in which case the agent can simply *be* the act." .28.

The dualistic state of consciousness emphasizes separation from the world, and it is this sense of separation which is itself the root-cause of both evil and suffering. The nondualistic state leads one to recognize that the entire course of history has led to the existence of things existing here and now, just as they are. And while we necessarily interfere and intervene, in order to live, and to eat and to act, we are likely to interfere and to intervene less, and certainly less aggressively, when we both see and feel the world in this way. We will act non-actively, we will live from a sense of peaceful co-existence, and we will take joy from the manifoldness of the flux which is the world, and of which we are not only a part, but which, at our depths, we actually are.

## **Spontaneity**

In the Far East, spontaneity comes at the end of training and discipline, and not early on. As with ballet, one has to practice for years before one can "break loose," and interpret in an individualistic way, perhaps breaking new ground. Ethically, too, one is brought up within a civilizing tradition, and even the Taoists broke away from Confucian training and did not grow up in a cultural vacuum. Ordinary people continue to march more or less in step with the rules and regulations of their culture (*li*), but the enlightened, wise, and sage-like few go beyond the rules and regulations to that state before moral distinctions were carved out of the heretofore undifferentiated whole of existence.

Chuang Tzu in particular refers to this undifferentiated state, as *chaos*, presumably because *cosmos* already implies order and classification, whereas chaos is to be taken as referring to everything there is as an undifferentiated flow. He engages us in a process which one writer has termed "chaotification,"<sup>29</sup> which means that all boundaries and distinctions will appear and disappear, move, shuffle from one place to another, and re-appear in a different place, *as in a dream*. So, whether Chuang Tzu dreamt that he was a butterfly, or the other way around, the fluidity which this image presents is that of "the transmutation of things." Reality is something quite different from what it appears to be to *reason*. Thus, what we are given is two quite different points of reference: that of ordinary consciousness, where things are civilized, distinct, and good and evil are in their place however much they shift from age to age, and that of the chaotic vision which apprehends things as they might be seen by one who had not yet distinguished them, classified them, and made judgments about them morally and valuationally. Everything is a manifestation of one and the same reality, and while there is b and c, phenomenally, b and c are both *a*, at this deeper level of metaphysical understanding.

Similar images apply to many of the other Far Eastern traditions, as well. In Buddhist thought, the *Jewel Net of Indra* is a powerful image which reappears again and again. Francis H. Cook has recently observed that in the West, the science of *ecology* has only recently begun to show that the environment is an interrelated and interdependent web of existence. He observes as well that "the traditional methods of analysis, classification, and isolation [have] tended to erect boundaries around things, setting them apart in groups...."<sup>30</sup> What Hua-yen Buddhism has pictured from earliest times is not just a world, but a Cosmos, a universe which is so interrelated that any one thing reflects everything else, and everything else is reflected in any one thing. Let me quote his paraphrase of this image:

Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" [or section] of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected *all* the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring.<sup>31</sup>

The result is that there is a *mutual identity* to be grasped such that what happens to any one jewel happens to all of the others as well. To destroy a single jewel will not cause the net to fall, or even to flutter noticeably, but the loss will be recorded infinitely, in each of the other jewels, and in the reflections of each of the jewels in each of the other jewels.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the doctrine of "dependent origination," or of "interdependent origination" as it is sometimes termed, the interrelatedness of all phenomena, is again emphasized. Causally, everything causes everything else, and rather than there being a first cause, everything simultaneously arises, or simultaneously is. Everything is *empty* in that everything is interdependent, or dependent, and nothing whatsoever is self sufficient. At the same time, each individual thing is, if properly understood, a mirror of the entire universe, since its coming to exist is inseparable from the causal net of the whole Cosmos. Nakamura Hajime draws the appropriate moral conclusion when he writes that ordinary consciousness pays

too much attention to the aspect of difference and to the confrontation between individual human beings. We are not separate beings who are

absolutely irrelevant to each other, and have nothing to do with each other..32.

Thus, the all-encompassing ultimate reality is one, or chaos, or nothingness, or emptiness, and it is in this that each person, and every atom moves, and understands.

The state of enlightenment is a nondual state. At one's deepest level of understanding, one is identified with others, and with everything, as clearly as one is identified with one's own body and mind. If one is the whole world, then one cares about it all as though it were one's self — because it is oneself. One is indistinguishable from it. Evil is *delusion*, therefore. It is the taking of the surface of things as their depth, a confusing of figure and ground, a confusion of one perspective with another. The great delusion is that of selfishness, of self-centred action. But in avoiding selfish behaviour one must eliminate all distinctions which divide one person or one group from another, and this includes moral distinctions. Only selfless thinking, "willing" and feeling can take us beyond the vagaries of moral codes, and the ultimate in selfless thinking is thinking which eliminates the self altogether, which empties it, and grasps it as a mirror of, or a manifestation of the whole of things. And delusion is failing to see that one is a manifestation of the *whole*, and as such, actually re-presents the macrocosm in the microcosm. Rather than speaking of *evil*, the Buddhist speaks of *suffering*. Suffering is the result of ignorance, and ignorance is the result of delusion, namely, the sense of separation, individualization without a sense of the whole of things resulting in one's alienation from the world and from the Cosmos, and eventually from other people as well, and finally from oneself. Evil is separation, willful aggression, selfish separation, painful isolation.

Someone who manipulates the world merely for his own advantage increasingly dualizes himself from it. Those who live in this way cannot help expecting the same from others, leading to a life based on fear and the need to control situations."..33.

So, if the entire causal history of the world exists just to bring me into the world, it also exists to bring you into the world, and to bring the single flower to bloom.

For the nondualist, life is nothing but a series of such timeless sunya experiences: a sip of coffee, a few words with a friend, a walk down a path. Someone who cannot trust his world enough to 'forget himself' and *become* these situations is condemned — or condemns himself — to watch his life ooze away..34.

In my own work on Nishida Kitaro, I wrote that one may live, act, and understand in such a way as to move away from interdependence, and towards independence. Estrangement from the whole, or centrifugal movement, is the cause of evil, and identification with the whole, or centripetal movement, is good..35. But if one has had the nondual experience of interconnectedness, then one spontaneously and effortlessly *flows* with the whole of things of which he or she is now fixedly conscious. It is not that one cannot pick out the good and evil paths or ways when one applies the analytic mind to the subject matter, but that one can simply live and act in accordance with things such that one respects them as being of the same worth and of the same stuff as one's own self, and one's own beloved, and one's own family, and it might never arise, therefore, that you would wish to harm or destroy another. It is no longer a matter of refraining from harming others, for there is no reason not to be inclined to maintain the whole. No law is needed to protect others, for one is others, and to become willful about it by trying to get clear about when and when not to do something will only destroy this original spontaneity and lead to a contrived series of regulations which will never be detailed enough to handle all possible circumstances and situations in a constantly changing world such as ours. Compassion is the natural way, and for one who glimpses the interconnectedness of things it is inevitable. To act compassionately is to act in accordance with the "suchness" of the

Cosmos. To Buddhists, the Cosmos is "radiant" with infinite compassion. Great compassion, and a great pitying heart is termed "Buddha-nature," and is seen to be natural to us. What we call "good" actions spring naturally as expressions of who one really is, without calculation, for no reason, for no gain, as expressions of our suchness. Freedom is to do spontaneously what it is one's nature to do. The necessity of freedom is an internal necessity, and expresses a truly good nature. It is true that this inherently good nature must be "cultivated," and can be warped and diseased by an unhealthy environment. Yet if you and I are still "lost" in discrimination, rather than in the emptiness of things, then we must be taught the traditional Buddhist virtues. But if, as Nakamura writes, "we allow the virtue of compassion to grow in us, it will not occur to us to harm anyone else, any more than we would willingly harm ourselves."<sup>36</sup> And we can access this outlook, this way of being in the world, through *meditation*. Now meditation is not a firm aspect of Western cultural traditions, but it is ubiquitous in the East. The effects of meditation are, writes Nakamura,

...to abolish our deep-rooted egoism in our own existence: it aims at cherishing compassion and love towards others. By dissolving our human existence into component parts, we can get rid of the notion of ego, and through that meditation we are led to a limitless expansion of the self in a practical sense, because one identifies oneself with more and more living beings..<sup>37</sup>.

## Conclusion

Have we enough here for a full-blown theory of ethics? I think not, although I am willing to listen to one who thinks we might. Everyone is not enlightened, and so walking within a world which is dualistically perceived, it remains necessary to carve out a system of distinctions, rules and regulations, political and social conventions, etc. in order for us to co-exist reasonably well. Yet it is possible to view these as *empty*, necessary conveniences and delusions which allow us to co-exist with less harm done than might otherwise be the case, the Taoists notwithstanding. Moral rules are empty because we now know that they are but rules of thumb, rough and ready approximations at best, which miss the mark far more often than we would like to admit, and when they do hit the mark, they often do so for the wrong calculated reasons, and can do so without compassion. But for those who do not know that they are empty, they are useful guidelines, and may lead to eventual recognition of their inherent inadequacy. Yet, while I am unwilling to abandon rules and regulations in a cultural tradition which does not even recognize the possibility of nondualistic enlightenment, and which is unaccustomed to meditative peace and quiet integration, I find it incredible that Arthur Danto would maintain that we have nothing to learn from the East about ethics. Far Eastern thought, and feminist thought as well, do much to transform our hyper-aggressive and hyper-active meddling ways into life-

patterns which are considerably more interrelational and adaptive. Nel Noddings, in her provocative book, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, defends an understanding of human nature as characterized by the fact of *relatedness* rather than separation, or isolation in the world..<sup>38</sup> She describes the "ethical ideal" as arising from two sentiments: "the natural sympathy human beings feel for each other, and the longing to maintain, recapture, or enhance our most caring and tender moments."<sup>39</sup> What is distinctive about the Far Eastern perspective on ethics, and is echoed, although no doubt for quite different reasons, in the feminist West of today, is the fundamental assumption that we are from the beginning *in relation*, and only secondarily and dependently, individuals. We are individuals, and yet we are individuals only insofar as we are individuals-as-foregrounded expressions of the background whole, which is the family, the social group, society at large, humankind, or the entire cosmos. It makes no sense to speak of an individual except as the individual stands-out from the whole of which s/he is a part. Of course, to speak of the whole is to be an individual who stands out from it and

reflects back on it, as well. We are individuals only as we recognize that we are individuals related to the social whole, and there is the social whole only as there are individuals who both constitute it and stand apart from it, in reflection, in order to assess its worth, and to direct it. What results is a relational unity of opposites, for we conclude that we are not only part of the social whole, and not just individually distinct, but we are also related to the other person because we are *one in communal existence*. The group is more than the sum of the individuals who make it up. We are always already related, as well as individual, and this double structure, or double aperture, or stereoscopic vision is needed in order for us to be able to account both for human individuality and for human relatedness.

Speaking as a comparativist, I think it can now be stated that Danto sees with one lens only. He understands relatedness as an atomistic activity among individuals who must set about to control their wills, lest selfishness prevail. But relatedness can also be glimpsed at the beginning, as the sense of interconnection from the family to the cosmic expanse, which sidesteps the willful need to establish and maintain morality and civilization by instead knowing, feeling and spontaneously willing that the magnificent whole with which we identify, even to the point of selflessness, be left more or less at it is to wander on in its own seemingly spontaneous and timeless way. The dualistic calculating mind has not brought us a healthy environment, an altogether healthy soul, or nearly as much agreement in the world as one might have thought after several thousands of years. I am far too Western to want to abandon the good it has wrought, but too Eastern to ignore the bad. I think it would do us a world of good to breathe feeling back into our moral lives, and to rekindle the sense of relatedness both to each other, and to the natural environment. The East does not give us *the answer*, but I think it does provide us with a part of it. Danto condemns Taoism for recommending that the individual not allow himself to be disturbed by the state of happiness, or its lack, in others. He adds, "no man could be counted moral who did not have that minimal concern for others that permits his own felicitude to vary as theirs does."<sup>40</sup> Here he is right, but it is Taoism, and Zen Buddhism, and Buddhism which teach us that we are intrinsically interrelated, and that the ground of ethics, and the foundation of ethical sentiment is the selfless recognition that we are each other's hopes and aspirations, sufferings and disappointments. The Taoist, and the other stances from the Far East can answer why we do and ought to be care about the universe, but can Danto answer why we ought to be moral? I think he can do so only by expanding the circle of caring concern (and not just bare intellectual seeing) from smaller group to large, and then to larger still. But that is exactly where the Far Eastern vision of being-in-the-world *begins*.

## Notes

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7. Thomas P. Kasulis, *Zen Action/Zen Person* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii,

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32. Hajime Nakamura, "Interrelational Existence," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 17, nos. 1-4 (1967), p. 112.

33. Loy, *Nondualism*, p. 298.

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37. *Ibid.*

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