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"The Turning Word"

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"The Turning Word": Relational Hermeneutics and Aspects of Buddhist Thought.

1. Introduction.

Relational hermeneutics is to be commended for avoiding two difficulties facing attempts by Western Philosophy to engage with the Chinese and Japanese Buddhists tradition of thought. These concern (1) individual reductionism and (2) cultural subjectivism. Regarding (1), whereas there has been excellent documentation on how key Japanese thinkers such as Kitaro Nishida and Keiji Nishitani have responded to the works of Nietzsche and Heidegger,[1] there has, however, been little consideration of the way Buddhist thought has impacted on contemporary European philosophy.[2] Too often it is assumed that a direct connection can only be demonstrated by biographical evidence rather than by the exposure of logical and ontological structures.[3] Relational hermeneutics is not concerned with meaning reduced to mentalism but with patterns of linguistic and conceptual agency that effectively operate independent of individual intention. Concerning (2) Western Thought has become increasingly aware of the danger's implicit in the reduction of foreign intellectual tradition to the norms of a more prevalent one. The work of Hans Peter Duerr and Edward Said caution against the imperialistic tendencies with such assimilations.[4] The difficulty here is that hermeneutic exchange is understood in terms of one dominant cultural subjectivity assimilating another. Relational her-

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[1] See Graham Parkes's excellent study of Nietzsche's reception in Japan - *Nietzsche and Asian Thought,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991,and Hans Waldenfells landmark study of Keiji Nishitani's reception of the Christian Philosophical tradition in *Absolute Nothingness*, *Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue,* New York. Paulist Press, 1980.

[2] Although it contains one chapter on Confucius, the recent and commendable *Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. J.Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander, London, Routledge, 2015, makes no effort to engage with the Buddhist tradition of Hermeneutics. Gianni Vattimo introduced a text on *Japanese Hermeneutics*, ed. Michael F. Marra, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, p. 9 -16, but only approaches the Oriental modes of thought as a necessary means for any *Geisteswissenschaften* to constantly hold its pre-suppositions under review. One of the best essays in such a vein as Eberhart Schieffle's "Questioning One's Own from the Perspective of the Foreign," in Parkes's, *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, 1991, see note 1.

[3] Contemporary hermeneutics might well profit from the musicological studies of composer-theorists such as Hans Zender who has produced excellent studies of note-clusters that are not only passed unthinkingly from composer to composer but are transformed in the passage. His re-working of Schubert's *Winterreise* is exemplary, See Hans Zender, *Winterreise,* Klangforum Wien, Kairos, 2000.

[4] See Hans Peter Duerr, *Dreamtime,* Oxford, Blackwell, 1987., and Edward Said, *Orientalism,* London, Penguin, 2003. It is noteworthy that in a second introduction to the 2003 edition of his book (the original being published in 1978, Said takes a slightly less sceptical tone with regard to Occidental interpretations of East Thought. Indeed, it is precisely to the humanist philological tradition of critical reading that he appeals. He cites Erich Auerbach's "Philologie der Weltliteratur" (1951) as an example of reading foreign texts philologically, concretely, sensitively and intuitively, using erudition and an excellent commander of several languages to support" (p.xix) readings of different traditions "that resist the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history." (pp.xxii).

meneutics resists such monadic subjectivism: it conceives of subjectivity in terms of the location and situation of participant subjects (agencies) not acting apart from the sum of relations that constitutes its environment. Subjectivity is interactive, a consequence of interaction and not the singular ground of action. A clear advantage of relational hermeneutics is that it recognise that all agency is grounded in networks of meaning that transcends each and every agent, that the linguistic horizons of each agency *already* contains alignments of meaning which can render that agency foreign to itself.

Relational hermeneutics is concerned with identifying such common linguistic structures and practices the advantage being that it allows comparison between intellectual traditions which avoids the pitfalls of both reductive individualism and the dangers of subjectivist assimilation. It is accordingly with two aspects of a shared language ontology - the formal operation of the "speculative word" in philosophical hermeneutics and the powers of the "turning word" in Chinese Buddhism - that this essay is concerned. It is the fact that both traditions of thought are already placed within the participatory frameworks of language and the transformations it affords that permit both intellectual orientations to learn from each other's account of of how immersion in language facilitates the achievement of "understanding" and "enlightenment".

This overtly "theoretical" appeal to linguistic ontology and the participatory epistemology of interaction that it enables might seem an inappropriately formal approach to modes of thought which assert the primacy of experience over theory. However, this is not an essay concerned with the reduction of experience to a theoretical model. A participatory epistemology at the heart of any relational hermeneutics recognises that experience is always multi-registered and never be encapsulable within a single conceptual schema.[5] It is, as Gadamer argues, experience itself which summonses word and concept in order to better understand its illusive complexity.

2. An Eloquent Fragment

There it was, lying in a glass display case, part of a collection of Buddhist culture in the *Preussicher Kultur Besitz,* Dahlem*,* Berlin, all the more powerful for being unexpected.The perfection of a fragment: a torn scrap of parchment, dry, brittle, etched with the fading ink of a Middle Eastern script, a remnant of a document from the 11th.C. Syrian Church retrieved from Buddhist desert caves in Eastern China. Somehow, it had survived its passage along the Silk Roads, endured the aridity of its desert stowage and, on its return to Europe, withstood the attentions of Allied bombers razing Berlin. Just as astonishing was the speculative charge

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[5] See below, section 5.

of this fragment: though hardly the size of a child's palm, it spoke of worlds beyond itself. It gave eloquent evidence for the the interconnectedness of the worlds of Ancient Christian and Buddhist learning. Furthermore, its very contemporaneousness brought those different worlds a living immanence.This miraculous survival vividly embodied both the performative and speculative structure of hermeneutic truth. It brought unseen relations to light and in so doing sharpened an immediate present of the relations between its worlds and ours. [6]

3. A Family Resemblance

The inter-connections disclosed by this fragment showed what many scholars have sensed:the conceptual relations between the Occidental and Oriental traditions of thought. Nietzsche confessed his admiration of the work of his Orientalist colleague Erwin Rohde, In *Beyond Good and Evil* he anticipates Gadamer's discussion of the inter-connectedness of philological structures in language.

> That individual philosophical concepts are not anything capricious or autonomously evolving, but grow up in connection and relationship with each other; that, however suddenly and arbitrarily they seem to appear in the history of thought, they nevertheless belong just as much to a system as all the members of the fauna of a continent - is betrayed in the end also by the fact that the most diverse philosophers keep filling in a definite fundamental scheme of possible philosophies ….
>
> The strange family resemblance of all Indian, Greek, and German philosophising is explained easily enough. Where there is an affinity of language, it cannot fail, owing to the common philosophy of grammar - I mean, owing to the unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions - that everything is prepared at the outset for a similar development and sequence of philosophical developments.[7]

The cave fragment displayed in Berlin evidenced not just that one intellectual community had taken an interest in another, but that the intellectual orientation of one ancient community was *disposed* it to select and store the written meditations of another. The circumstances of the fragment's placement and conservation in one life-world disclosed something of the dispositions of the other life-world into which it had been received.

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[6] This chapter is in part the result of a long standing personal interest in Buddhist Philosophy. It draws on parallels which I have long reflected on. I offer these reflections from the perspective of a hermeneutic philosopher and not as East Asian specialist. It has been a pleasure to return to some of my published comments on the philosophy of Keiji Nishitani. See my short essays " Kitaro Nishida" and "Keiji Nishitani", in the *Biographical Dictionary of Twentieth Philosopher*, 1996, ed. Stuart Brown, Diane Collinson and Robert Wilkinson, London, Routledge,, p. 573-576

[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil,* New York, Vintage Original, 1966, Sec 20. This passage can be rightly compared with Gadamer's argument that concepts articulate and develop notions that are already held in language. The common destiny that Nietzsche alludes to is the development of philosophical nihilism,. One of the strongest links between philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist thought is the fact that in terms of metaphysics both are nihilist in that they deny changeless truths, essences and extra-mental realities.

The speculative charge of the Syrian fragment disclosed a greater hermeneutic whole binding aspects of Early Christian and Buddhist thought. The fragment was no mere historical curiosity: it was an invitation to be drawn into the world of those relations and to consider the hermeneutic possibilities within the life-worlds that the fragment held in proximity. The brittle parchment displayed a key tenet of both philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist thought: the aesthetic capacity of the particular and singular case to invoke an infinity of meaning. Like Blake's grain of sand, it served as a conduit for bringing forth that infinity and, by so doing, wisely demarcated the limitations of our understanding.[8]

4. A Common Concern : The Address of Experience

This is not an essay about hermeneutical and Buddhist thought *per se* but more a meditation on what the relationality of the two modes of thought reveal of each other. In his admirable book, *Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue,* Hans Waldenfells notes that while there is no uniformly accepted translation of the Buddhist doctrine known as *pratityasamutpada*, one sticks out as viable. The notion can be translated as "pure-relationality, pure existing from and in relation to."[9] This affords a direct conceptual link to twentieth century hermeneutic philosophy.

The theme of the part whole relationship is of course central to Dilthey's hermeneutics: "The connectedness of life is only adequately understood *in the relation* which the meaning of events has to the understanding and significance of the whole."[10] Whereas Dilthey's discussion of relationality is for the most part epistemological, Martin Heidegger treats of the relational ontologically. The relational underpins his concept of (human) *Dasein.* The term evokes not so much a particular mode of being but a mode of being that is always a being-with or a being-in-relation to and is not separable from nor discernible apart from the nexus of relations which it sustains and which sustain it.This paper will argue that such relationality is

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[8] "To see A World in a Grain of Sand,
    And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
    Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
    And Eternity in an hour."
    William Blake, *Augeries of Innocence*, 1.
[9] Hans Waldenfells, *Absolute Nothingness*, Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue, New York. Paulist Press, 1980.
[10] Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Construction of the Historical World, " *Selected Writings*, ed. P. Rickman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 238. (emphasis added).

central to philosophical hermeneutics and that finds its ontological equivalent in key as-
pects of Buddhist conceptions of philosophy. C.Y. Kim Standish comments eloquently on the
centrality of relational thinking within the Kyoto School of Philosophy,

> Each self or body exists not as an independent closed substance but as a mutually re-
> lational being involving a body, its cells and other selves. In addition, all these parts
> or elements are related to a flow which from prior beings and what flows from the
> newly emerging beings as body, cell and self. Thus, the self like other beings does not
> exist as a self-sufficient being but as a relational, open, social and communal being.[11]

D.S. Wright in his land-mark study of the Chinese Huang Po texts emphasises that the central
Buddhistt concept of emptiness (*k'ung*) presents *be-ing* not as that which either lies behind or
grounds all things but as that relational complex which is all things.[12]

> All sentient beings and all beings of any kind, "co-arise"; each originates conditioned
> by the others and in turns conditions their very possibility … every relation to things
> in the world is simulataneously a relation to the ground of all things which has no
> "existence" independent of the "worldly things " through which it is manifest. [13]

Nevertheless, though relational thought figures substantially in this essay, it is not an essay
which seeks to relate two incidental aspects of what might seem quite separate and independ-
ent forms of philosophical thought. To the contrary, relational hermeneutics enables the fol-
lowing suggestion; because of a common language ontology, both traditions of philosophical

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[11] C.Y.Kim, "William James, Kitaro Nishida and Religion", in Paul Standish and Naoko Saito (eds.),
Education and the Kyoto School of Philosophy, in Contemporary Philosophies and Theories in Educa-
tion, Dordrecht, Springer, 2012, Vol 1, p.103. David Cooper in his book *The Measure of Things   Hu-
manism, Humility and Mystery*, Oxford and Clarendon Press, 2002, one of the best attempts to moder-
ate systematic problems in Western Philosophy by reading them against analogous arguments in the
Indian and Chinese traditions writes, "there are no atoms or constituents of reality with intrinsic iden-
tity or own being for everything is interdependent in the process of dependent origination". "As Nagar-
juna re-iterates, the doctrine of emptiness just is the doctrine of dependent origination… (It) has none
of the dramatic implications drawn by the transcendentalists and nihilists. Their problem is fixation on
the idea that truth and reality require independence from dependent origination, from merely conven-
tional designation. The sensible person will strive to rid himself of that fixation, in the manner of the
Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist, Ching Yuan, who, recalls, how he at first reacted to the atrophy of his naively
realistic belief in mountains by denying their existence, but goes on to explain how after further medi-
tation, he became able to see mountains again as mountains." (Cooper, (2002) p. 300. Here one may
draw a parallel with Gadamer's re-working of Husserl'ss doctrine of the *Sache selbst.* A subject-matter
is nothing essential in itself but is effectively the continuity of its temporal appearances. A subject-
matter becomes more what it is by extending the manner of its appearances. The argument is close to
that of dependent origination since the subject-matter is no more or less than the chain of appearances
it has always been been and will yet become.
[12] On Nishida's understanding of emptiness and nothingness see, J.J.Wargo, *The Logic of Nothingness,*
A Study of Nishida Kitarō,, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2005.
[13] D.S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*, London, Cambridge University Press,
1998. p. 188-189

hermeneutics *already* stand in a fundamental relationship to one another. Through a joint commitment to language ontology, both share a common speculative grounding in experience, the wisdom of which is to reveal the infinite interconnectedness of its grounding relations as against the finitude of its cognitive grasp. Both modes of thought are defined by what they defer to. Both reflect and refract in comparatively suggestive manners different aspects of what transcends them.

 Because of a common foundation in speculative ontology, these traditions can bring to light different aspects of each other's different orientation to understanding, its linguistic nature, finite character and its capacity to achieve transformative re-orientations to the question of existence. On this basis as we shall argue, it becomes possible to meaningfully compare Gadamer's account of "hermeneutic" or "speculative" experience with Huang Po's account of the "turning word". A common foundation in language ontology reflects the fact that both forms of philosophy proclaim the primacy of experience and practice over purely theoretical concerns.

    N. A. Nike argues that "in Indian Thought philosophy is not primarily "thinking" about reality but rather an experience of reality, and as such a verified and verifiable experience of that reality."[14] Precisely because it reflects on the experience of the meaningful, regards that experience as an event and, indeed, an expression of the real, the same can be said of philosophical hermeneutics. The common pre-occupation with experience immediately poses a challenge to propositional, statemental, or analytic modes of understanding. The difficulty for modes of thinking dominated by ideologies of quantification is that experiential processes do not easily lend themselves to assessment. It is, however, precisely to on-going experiences of the meaningful that both philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist thought direct themselves.

 Thinkers like Gadamer recognise that mental life is one of incessant movement. To achieve a re-orientation of how one understands a subject-matter (*Sache*) is to effect a further movement in one's understanding, to reposition one's relation to both what has been understood and to what may now be understood in the light of that repositioning. What is at issue is not just the achievement of a new or novel insight but rather what the pursuit of that achievement can itself bring about. This can be variously understood as a shift in the hermeneutical subject's own sense of narrative, an emergent awareness of that subject's finitude of understanding and an acceptance of the fragility of previous judgements. The other side of such "negativity" is an increasing confidence in the practices of a hermeneutic subject, a sense of having

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[14] Waldenfells (1980), p. 122.

won through to new insights, the pleasure of having a hermeneutic insight confirmed. Not only does this re-enforce the notion that understanding is a type of movement, a movement which not only progresses the understanding of a subject-matter but also (thereby) the hermeneutic subject's own narrative of self understanding. This confirms the argument that transformation of insight can only be achieved by participation within a practice, by being already embedded in a nexus of hermeneutical relations that can sustain infinite development and variation. The achievement of new insight is never *ex nihilo* but always within the context of a specific practice and its historical location. This argument is consistent with Heidegger's insistence that interpretation fills out or brings to realisation the possibles already held in understanding (*Dasein*) ontologically conceived.[15] In short the transformation of insight that hermeneutical philosophy aims at is rendered explicable by a participatory or relational epistemology which grounds its transformative interactions. The Buddhist notion of the 'turning word" becomes explicable in this context and throws light on the dynamics of hermeneutical transformation itself. If hermeneutical insight depends upon a play of relations that ground but transcend all speaking, how are these relations to be conceived?

5. Frameworks of Encounter: Towards a Relational Hermeneutics

What enables this reflection on philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist thought to be something other than an encounter with the exotic, is the recognition that both forms of thought are grounded in a common language-ontology. In Gadamer's mind such an ontology is to be articulated dynamically. Understanding, as facilitated by linguisticality is eventual. Understanding is not the cognitive achievement of a knowing subject but is revealed to that subject. A key attribute of the hermeneutic event is its relationality.[16] When we undergo a meaningful experience we are taken up into a form of movement which unifies the threads of an enabling tradition that condition our experience with the dawning of the future implications of that experience. What has been understood, what is now understood and what will be understood are all played out in the undergoing of hermeneutical experience. That undergoing is, essentially, participatory. Here we touch one of the limits of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, a limit which, as we shall see, is in certain respects brought to light by an aspect Buddhist ethics thought.

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[15] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, London, Wiley-Blackwell, 1978. Sections 31-33.

[16] see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Problem of Self Understanding," *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008, p. 50.). Gadamer writes, "Just as the relation between the speaker and what is spoken (about) points to a dynamic process that does not have a firm basis in either member of the relation, so the relation between the understanding and what is understood has a priority over its relational terms."

Following Heidegger, Gadamer loyally accepts the fundamental critique of philosophical subjectivism initiated in *Being and Time.* [17] This entails a repudiation of the Kantian insistence that all knowledge and understanding has its transcendental ground in the structure of the knowing subject's consciousness. Asserting the ontological priority of understanding over the subject shifts understanding away from a subjective attitude to a dynamic eventual process in which knowing subject participates. In short, Gadamer displaces subject-based epistemology with a language based ontology. Such a move exposes a limit to philosophical hermeneutics but at the same time offers, albeit undeliberately, a way of escaping it. The limit is this.

Gadamer's understandable wish to avoid a subject-based epistemology prioritises the agency of language over any hermeneutical subject. The disclosure of meaning is not a subjective act but the autonomous act of the language world which breaks open subjective consciousness contrary to the willing and doing of such a subject. The problem with this as Hans Herbert Koegler has pointed out is that language is elevated to the status of a super-subject before which the hermeneutic subject is prostrate.[18] Dialogue and negotiation is rendered problematic. The assertion of the ontological autonomy of language overcompensates for the excesses of philosophical subjectivism by refusing to acknowledge the necessary contribution the hermeneutic subject makes to the event of meaning, its receiving, its application and its transformation. Gadamer fails to see that if it is to serve as the inter-active basis for the transformation of understanding, his commitment to a language ontology requires for its development a participatory (relational) epistemology.

Relational hermeneutics needs to be based on a participatory epistemology. This entails *replacing the traditional notion of the cognitive subject with participatory dialogical centres,* that is, hermeneutics subjects or agencies ontologically formed in and through linguistic, cultural, or social practices. Practices conceived as participatory activities (inter-actions) form the narrative-self or hermeneutic identity which can both moderate and be moderated by other such subjects. As an elaboration of Heidegger's *Dasein* and Gadamer's language ontology, participatory epistemology can be outlined as follows.

1. The participant-subject is always 'positioned', always a part situated in a larger nexus or whole.

[17] Gadamer, (2008) p.48.

[18] Hans Herbert Koegler, *The Power of Dialogue*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.

2. The experience of embodied and hence situated subject is multi-registered, and not to be reduced to any singular mode of interpretation. Though it may reflect a point of view, it cannot be reduced to a single perspective.

3. The participant-subject is an embodied subject, not standing apart from the sum of relations that constitutes its environment but simultaneously acting on and being acted on by it.

4. Such a subject is always located within a situation that is both historical and linguistic but as Gadamer would argue, to throw light on a situation is a task that can never entirely be completed.

5. The situation of a participant agency is not subject to final description: If each and every cultural positioning is linguistic, its character can never be fully articulated. In language there is no final description of any position albeit that language will always seek the finality that is constantly inferred from it.[19]

6. Because embodied experience is an experience of the temporal, it is also perspectival i.e. characteristic of a specific temporal, spatial and cultural location. A given perspective is rarely self-transparent though its characteristics are often clearer when discerned from another perspective. There is always more to a positional centre than a singular perspective can imagine. That participatory epistemology should (indeed, ought to) be invoked in favour of inter-disciplinary research is no surprise.

7. The situated subject is a dialogical, negotiable being. The other can see things about my perspective I cannot see: I need the other to present me with perspectives enabling me to think differently about the possibilities within my own. Each (dialogical) position is unfinished and unfinishable, "constantly under pressure" to open itself to what is other than itself .[20]

8. To be is to do: participatory-subjects are in effect clusters of activities, not beings that act but actions that have a being insofar as they are effective agencies: their essence is a consequential construct, an effect of and not a pre-requisite for action.

9. Subject-participants are, to use Nietzsche's phrase, multiplicities that act as subjects but are not actual subjects. They are processes of assemblage or com-posure that gather

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[19] Gadamer contends in this context: "Hermeneutic philosophy, as I envision it, does not understand itself on an "absolute position but as a path of experiencing. Its modesty consists in the fact that there is no higher principle than this: "holding oneself open to the conversation:. *Autobiographical Reflections", *The Gadamer Reader*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2007, p. 34.

[20] See Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words*, London, Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 122

received events and possible courses of action into one constantly revising story, identity, or practice.[21]

10. The situated-subject is grounded in what transcends it. If a position's character and possibilities depend upon the nexus of historical, linguistic and cultural horizons it is placed within, each "position" is dependent the sum of inter-actions it is part of. It is practices regionally or understanding generally conceived that up-hold inter-active relationality. Practices artistic, religious or scientific presuppose ontological positioning in the sense outlined. Positioning within culture and language implies part-icipation. Participation is interactive: the part can change the character of the whole. Practices are, then, vehicles of transformation, forming and yet being formed by their participants.

In the light of this formal outline of a relational hermeneutics and its implied participatory epistemology, we can turn to Gadamer's account of speculative understanding and then to the Buddhist conception of the turning word.

6. Speculative Language.

For Gadamer verbal experience of the world is prior to everything recognised and addressed as existing. What is called "world" and the statements made about it are both already within a wider world horizon of language and are, indeed, consequent to it. The natural language world is prior to the speech-created worlds of discourse. Following Heidegger, he differentiates between what he declares as the primary aletheic (disclosive, presentational, or eventual) aspects of language and the secondary or derivative aphophantic use of statements and assertions.[22] Gadamer's key contribution to the philosophy of language concerns his corrective to the analytic approach, namely, that language functions speculatively.

> Words that bring something into language are themselves a speculative event. Their truth lies in what is said in them and not in an intention locked in the impotence of subjective particularity."[23]

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[21] Friedrich Nietzsche; ""The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary: perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general? … My hypothesis: The subject as multiplicity … The continual transitoriness and fleetingness of the subject". Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, section 493.

[22] See Heidegger's *Being and Time,* London, Wiley, Blackwell, 1978, sections 31-32 for his articulation of this key differentiation in language use and expression.

[23] Gadamer, (1989), p. 489.

> The word speculative … refers to the mirror relation. Being reflected involves a constant substitution of one thing for another. [24]

Underpinning these remarks is the conviction that the richness and profundity of the spoken word lies literally not in what is directly said but in its ability to summons those unspoken horizons of meaning upon which all meaningful utterance depends. "To say what one means … to make oneself understood … means to hold what is said together with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning". [25]

> Every word breaks forth as if from a centre and is related to a whole, through which alone it is a word. Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole of the worldview that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning" .[26]

The speculative capacity of words denotes their power to insinuate an infinite horizon of possible meaning. When operating speculatively, the word discloses (though never fully) our existence in the primordial relational horizons of linguisticality, The eventual nature of language demonstrates that its capacity to generate meaning cannot be controlled. Meanings may be conventionalised by dictionary and grammatical lexicons but a living language will not be so constrained. We are often subject to meaning. Meanings are encountered in words independent of volition. It is, indeed, the speculative openness of linguistic meaning that enables such spontaneous productivity, a productivity which Gadamer specifically associates with poetry. Although a way of life may assume a certain stability of meaning for its defining terms, that stability is always open to challenge from other related or contiguous determinations of meaning. The speculative openness of language is such that new meanings are bound to arise. So long as a discourse exists within the primordial language horizon of human existence, it is susceptible to the serendipitous emergence of new meanings. An unusual expression, a novel metaphor, an unexpected phrase, a "straunge" usage or spelling can undermine a received understanding of a word, point to other ways of understanding it, and awaken a sense of the infinite extent of the language horizon sustaining human existence. Hermeneutics it is not about understanding words in isolation but concerns setting received and contemporary meanings into play with one another so as to initiate the emergence of new ways of thinking about those meanings and thereby to effect change in the movement of any self-understanding they facilitate. Gadamer's belief in the transformative educational value of hermeneutics is premised on his belief that

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[24] Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, Sheed and Ward, 1989, p. 465.
[25] Gadamer, (1989), p. 469.
[26] Gadamer, (1989), p. 458.

speculative understanding *takes* place: *it* makes itself evident as the event of disclosure understanding.

An extraordinary omission in Gadamer's position is that he never asks *how* it is that speculative understanding take places? What is it about the structure of our linguistic horizons that enables them to effect such transformations of understanding? This is not asking for the impossible, not asking for why it is at a certain moment that this rather than that idea comes to the poet's mind, or why this specific phrase and not another strikes a composer's imagination. Insisting that speculative language is an event of language alone overcompensates Gadamer's anxieties about epistemological subjectivity. The result is that the contribution of subjectivity to linguistic reception is underplayed. Though the occasion of meaning's emergence of meaning may be a spontaneous occurrence, the context and content of the event rarely is. The relationality of meaning indicates that the emergence of the meaningful depends on the anterior existence of networks of meaning which the "event" varies or transforms. Heidegger indicated this when he proposed that interpretation brings to light possibilities that are already inherent within understanding.[27] Yet, neither Heidegger or Gadamer explore what it is in language that allows the disclosive "event" of meaning to occur. It is here that the Buddhist conception of the turning word is insightful.

7. The Doctrine of the Turning Word

In his remarkable study of the medieval Chinese Buddhist roots of Zen Philosophy, D.S. Wright discusses Huang Po's notion of the "turning word" (*ch'uan-yu*). Echoing Heidegger's distinction between apophantic and aletheic language, Master Lin-chi differentiates between "*ssu-chu*" (dead words) and "*huo-chu*" (live words). [28] Whether "dead" or "alive", words alone are "empty" of inherent significance.[29] Explanatory, analytical words are regarded as "dead" in that they lead not to insight but to the need for further explanation and qualification. Live words, however, " point less to a meaning than an opening or fissure in a network of meanings" such that they open that framework in a new and revealing way.[30] "Turning words" have no power or significance of their own but rather "fit into a context in such a way that they open that context to view in a some revealing way." [31] Turning words release the mind from the hold that

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[27] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1969, Sections 31- 33.

[28] Dale S Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 84-86.

[29] On "live" and "dead" words, also see Robert F. Boswell, "Ch'an Hermeneutics," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics,* ed. D.S. Lopez, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1998, p. 231-254.

[30] Wright, (1998,) p.103

[31] ibid.

everyday language has upon "allowing it to see things in unusual ways and, at the same time, say "unusual things". Wright cites the recording of one such turning.

> Shen-Tsan (on) returning to the monastery of his former teacher (…) is immediately seen by his old teacher to not be the same Shen-tsan who left to go out on pilgrimage, so he says" 'Who did you visit while out on pilgrimage? I notice you've been speaking in unusual ways." Shen-Tsan replies: "I was awakened by the Zen master Pai-chang. The teacher can see that Shen-tsan has undergone a significant transformation, and the evidence is to be found precisely in what he says and how he says it … Rhetorical strangeness was thought to be both a natural consequence of awakening … and an enabling power for others in that it functioned to open the minds of hearers or readers in breaking the hold that ordinary discourse has on them.[32]

Consistent with a Wittgensteinian approach to linguistic understanding, no appeal to an "inner" event to explain this transition in understanding is made. The change is facilitated by the transformative capacity of a turning word. Wright comments,

> The task of interlocutors is not so much to produce the turning word intentionally as it is to prepare for its appearance in the midst of dialogue. "Preparation" here is only a renunciation of subjective intention and an opening out of the self such that, when "a turning word" does appear, it will be able to do its work of awakening.[33]

From the perspective of relational hermeneutics and participatory epistemology, several points of congruence show themselves. The young monk can be turned only because he is already 'positioned' in a larger linguistic nexus. Though his situation within that participatory framework is not subject to final description, it is capable of being freshly articulated from a range of unexpected perspectives. Because his situation is unfinished and unfinishable, it is "constantly under pressure" to open itself to what is other than itself. As a situated subject, the monk like any other hermeneutical agent is grounded in what transcends him or her and it is precisely such grounding that opens the young monk to the possibility of transformative understanding. The parallel between the linguistic basis of Buddhist enlightenment and the speculative understanding that derives from hermeneutical practices become clearer. What enables the turning word to function (an anterior positioning across and between different linguistic frameworks), also allows speculative understanding in hermeneutics to operate. This becomes evident if we briefly compare Wolfgang Iser's account of "place-holder" concepts with Lin-chi's notion of the turning word.[34]

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[32] Wright (1998) p. 86
[33] Wright (1998) p.102.
[34] See Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation,* New York, Columbia University Press, 2000.

Though key conceptual subject-matter's may have indeterminate meanings, within different discourses their meanings remain relatively stable though always vulnerable to being de-stabilised by alternative meanings. Subject-matters such as love, truth, justice, nation or courage differently inhabit (participate) various discourses so that truth in a religious discourse (an appeal to an ultimate ground) will have different meanings to those associated with the concept when used in a legal context (reasonable evidence), science (ranges of pragmatic probability), or art (the authentic address of a work). In the context of Gadamer's appeal to the notion of linguisticality,, the concept truth serves not as the ground of a definitive meaning but as a placeholder term aligning different combinations of meaning in a range of discourses. Across discourses it combines similar but significantly different bodies of meaning. On another level, alignments of meaning may not have a common placeholder term. As in the case of metaphor, a placeholder term attached to one body of meaning can be transferred to another analogous alignment of meanings though it may not be (prior to the transference of metaphor) a bearer of that placeholder. The plurality of alignments attached to a placeholder term is not itself important. What is key is that such pre-existent possibilities establish the ontological precondition of the event of understanding. They establish the parameters within between which hermeneutic movement (understanding) can occur.

Though Gadamer follows Husserl in the invocation of horizons of historical and cultural meaning, he underplays the number of horizons we live amongst simultaneously (family, professional, religious, and national). To any of these, a hermeneutic agent may feel intense loyalty: on them depend a sense of identity and cultural expectation can depend. The "event" of understanding clearly comes about when horizons of meaning not only "fuse" (in Gadamer's terms) but also enter into transformative fission (as Iser would have it). Precisely because of the permeable nature of the horizons we live within, a poetic discourse on love can be displaced (sometimes alarmingly so) by a discourse on power. One body of meaning can be read "as if" it were another. An archaeological discourse concerning the varied migrant demography of Roman cities in Britain such as York can and have effected a critical re-reading of the limited pre-suppositions of political questions of "national integrity" and migration.[35] The content of emergent understanding is presently not as important as what that emergence itself evidences: it is witness to the fact that movement within and between horizons has taken place. In Buddhist terms, a "turning word" effects a shift from, displaces, substitutes or transforms one horizon of meaning into another. In the language of philosophical hermeneutics it is the "speculative" capacity of a poetic image, of a strange meaning, or of a painted image to light up the hidden horizons of meaning it participates in or to transform them in unanticipated ways that achieves

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[35] See Charlotte Higgins, *Under Another Sky,* London, Vintage, 2014, Chapter 9.

movement in understanding. Neither the "turning word" nor the "speculative world" operate apart from the anterior participatory frameworks of meaning that ground them. This takes us to another point of comparison between philosophical tradition and the Buddhist tradition.

8. On-going Enlightenment

There is no doubting the power of speculative turns in both hermeneutic and Buddhist thought. The experience of language's speculative power is multi-registered, held within, as we shall see, a dialectics of openness and dependency. On one level, speculative experience illuminates the extent of our blindness to the enabling *Hintergrund* of assumptions that contribute to the pre-reflective horizons of our understanding. An unusual phrase, an image seen askance, or a particularly articulate musical phrase can suddenly illuminate the tacit frameworks of our understanding and allow us to see them as if for the first time. A turning word is also able to suddenly light up and resolve nagging doubts about a certain philosophical argument. That exhilarating experience can make us wonder at the short-sightedness of our initial perspective or at the folly of believing that what we had understood was all that there was to be understood. The speculative or turning word has multiple effects. It can change what we think about our tradition and its defining problems, alter our own self-understanding, and reveal the frailty of our powers of judgement. No matter how transforming such speculative turns may be, they remain a re-alignment (albeit an intense realignment) of the multiple horizons that fuse within the moment that "meaningfulness" is experienced. This brings us to another significant parallel between philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist philosophy: there is no final insight, no end state of enlightenment.

Though a speculative insight or turning word can have profound and far reaching transformational effects, they remain but re-alignments of ways of thinking, speaking, and hermeneutic orientation. The finitude of understanding means that for philosophical hermeneutics, no understanding can be complete. Though hermeneutic understanding can, as in the case of *Bildung,* accumulate, thicken and intensify, it does not progress towards to an end-state, to a condition of final understanding.[36] Understanding and enlightenment are not static: both involve transformational and on-going movement.

In this context, D. S Wright makes it clear that for Chinese Buddhist thought, a commitment to tradition is a commitment to transcendence.

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[36] See Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 37 -106.

> Taking its point of departure from past experience, any new experience of transcendence might go beyond its predecessor insofar as circumstances, thinking, practices, and human selves have changed. Understood along these lines, tradition is a living medium, every dimension of which grows, changes, and recedes in relation to other dimensions and surrounding historical circumstances. It is the tradition's "nature" always to be "different," to "go beyond" itself by considering each new realization – each "going beyond" – as one historical potentiality contained within tradition itself. [37]

The author notes after the fashion of Heidegger that some degree of transcendence, or "going beyond," will occur to us whether we want it or not: "history … hurls us beyond, not so much against our will as by shaping our wills." [38] He suggests that as far as Huang Po is concerned, "simply to agree with (…) tradition, to obey its current form, is to fail to receive the "transmission." It is to be "ungrateful" for it constitutes a refusal of the true gift of any vibrant tradition i.e. the invitation to go beyond its current limits of understanding. [39]

Christian mystics also recognise the transient quality of "enlightenment". McIntosh emphasises that "the shifting patterns of self-understanding are themselves always the result of an *on-going awakening*, troubling, by the call of the other. [40] Christian spirituality he suggests is never about a silent absorption in a putative inner self but is the (continuous) activity of being drawn into an encounter with the other.[41] Each moment of newly won understanding may function as "a new theological *gestalt*, a hermeneutical field within which everything is seen in a new light and is charged with a new resonance" [42] but such an opening is but one in an endless chain of openings.

 Hermeneutical philosophy entails a way of life that aims at nothing outside itself . It struggles continuously towards its own self-transformation, towards a deeper and intenser form of negotiation with the subject matters which form the terrain of its concerns. Gadamer's argument that "the truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience" is telling:[43] "the dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself".[44] The argument is

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[37] Wright (1998), p. 152

[38] Wright (1998) p. 154

[39] Wright (1998) p. 156

[40] Mark A. McIntosh, *Mystical Theology*, London, Blackwell, 2006. p. 140.

[41] McIntosh, (2006), p. 152

[42] McIntosh, (2006) p. 153

[43] Gadamer , (1989) p. 355

[44] Gadamer , ibid

mirrored in McIntosh's reasoning. What makes spiritual experience important is not that it offers another order of experience but that it is a call to further and new frameworks of experience. Gadamer's and McIntosh's accounts of the essential openness of hermeneutical and spiritual experience are in effect notes towards "*practices for the transformation of experience" itself.* Acquiring such openness is to practice seeking dis-possession of oneself. As a mode of being, the disciplines of spirituality and aesthetic response are open to formative encounters with the other and otherness. Gadamer describes this encounter as dialogical and McIntosh moves in the same direction. What I think of, he argues, as my own reality and what I am, is drawn out of myself to encounter honestly the reality of the other.[45] The parallel with Chinese Buddhism is striking.

  Gadamer says of his own position that there is no high principle than "holding oneself open" to experience and its surprise emergence.[46] One may train oneself to be more attentive to experience though one can never control what arises within speculative experience. Similarly, we may note that for Wright, enlightenment is described by Huang Po as openness; "the mind openly awaits the disclosure of truth: silent composure, no grasping". [47] Openness is a practical virtue because impermanence is the truth even of enlightenment: all things change; closure unwisely resists the change that is always under way. [48] Wright observes that although the self must strive to open itself …it cannot on its own accomplish the event of "awakening." But it can be opened. Like hermeneutic practice, meditational and spiritual practices entail the adoption of certain mental stratagems but all three stand stand in the service of living life as a temporal process, as a movement of multidimensional occurrences that are not fully of our own doing. They are means to the speculative event of being opened to the realignment of our understanding the condition of which is active participation in the relational practices into which our being is woven.

We should note that Zen conversation is has a spontaneity not unlike that of hermeneutic conversation. The purpose of both forms of dialogue is to set the occasion for bringing something about - the emergence of insight. As Wright argues,

> neither the conversation nor its resultant disclosure are the subjective accomplishment of either interlocutor. Nor is it, in another sense, their joint construction. Opening themselves to the unexpected, both await disclosure, the moment in the

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[45] McIntosh, (2006) p.29
[46] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Autobiographical Thinking", in *The Gadamer Reader*, ed. R. Palmer, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2007, p. 34.
[47] Wright, (1998), p 202
[48] Wright, (1998) p. 204.

> conversation when open minds find themselves in an event of insight that is not their own product.[49]

Hermeneutic practice and and Zen dialogue both invoke what Waldenfells describes as "open questions".[50] Better put, they are questions that seek openings into how a subject-matter might be newly or differently understood, questions that create mental spaces in which new insight might arise. Gadamer's argument that the fulfilment of hermeneutic dialogue is not the possession of knowledge but the winning of a new openness to further experience, is analogous to Nishitani's rendition of the "emptiness of open hands" argument; Buddhist meditational practice concerns the emptying out of every-day concerns and commitments not to achieve "nothingness" *per se* but rather to attain an openness to new alignments of meaning which allow us to transcend what we presently understand. It is clear that both traditions of thought allow for progress and improvement in the expedition of their respective practices. However, though traditions accept that insight and understanding are both formative and accumulative, it makes no sense to talk of them as "progressive." The horizons of possible understanding and enlightenment are of infinite extent. Whereas it is logically possible to talk of the deepening, intensification and transformation of understanding, one cannot talk of its progress: both traditions grant that we neither know the origin nor the end of understanding. Talk of its progress is metaphysically redundant. The task of understanding and insight is on-going. This insight is itself a form of "enlightenment." It releases us, first, from the illusion that understanding is fixed, permanent and possessable and, second, from the suffering that inevitably attends the pursuit of the unachievable. In this context, philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist thinkers such as Nishitani share a sceptical strand. Each line of thought entertains a version of "The Great Doubt", a letting go of any belief in grand systems of thought as offering insight into changeless truths and fixed meanings. This is entirely consistent with the "relational frameworks" and participatory epistemology implicit within both traditions of philosophy. Both accept that understanding is partial and fragmentary. All insight is rooted within, shaped by, and takes place within complex linguistic, cultural and historical networks of meaning that transcend the individual locations through which they (partially) manifest themselves. From a spiritual and educational perspective, the point of engaging in hermeneutical and Buddhist practices is precisely to become open to what emerges from the infinite horizons of meaning capable of triggering unrealised possibilities within everyday understanding. A clear condition of such emergence is active participation in the networks of meaning in which one's relational being is grounded. A further and concluding parallel between philo-

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[49] Wright (1998) p. 200.
[50] Waldenfells, (1980), p. 115

sophical hermeneutics and Buddhist thought concerns the eventualist notion that aesthetic experience is an occasion of phenomenological disclosure. Both traditions concur in the claim that both understanding and enlightenment are achieved through the particular instance.

9. Aesthetic Eventing

The visual worlds and logics in which philosophical hermeneutics and Chinese Buddhism are located are extraordinarily different. The manner of flat as opposed to perspectival composition gives an entirely different feel to the Chinese tradition of watercolour landscape painting. Yet, and perhaps not unsurprisingly, both the participatory and relational nature of both modes of philosophical discourse and their emphasis on the emergent, the disclosure, the opening, and the turn, point to a parallel way of thinking about aesthetic experience. This becomes clear when Gadamer forcibly distances himself from those analyses of an artwork which only discuss formal aesthetic properties (texture, line, composition, fore-grounding etc) and not with what is addressing us in and through that work. It is what emerges speculatively from within the work that interests Gadamer, how it discloses (brings into appearance) unexpected perspectives of its subject-matter. As an aesthetic event, the artwork is for Gadamer a particular visualisation of what is grounded in the work and yet transcends it, namely, the whole nexus of meanings and concerns that constitute a subject-matter. Through the occasion of the work, that which is transcendent (the nexus of meaning-relations sustaining a particular image) opens itself to the spectator.

Gadamer's account of aesthetic experience, it suffices to say offers, an appropriate way of thinking of hermeneutical experience itself. Such experience is always multi-registered and therefore requires different perspectives to occasion the emergence of other aspects of the experience. Like aesthetic experience, hermeneutic experience cannot be subject to theoretical capture. With the help of time and memory, one may come understand it better or more profoundly but only by altering one's relation to it in the nexus of relations in which the subject and object of that experience are placed. Hermeneutical understanding like its Buddhist counter-part is always incomplete, aspectual and partial but, nevertheless, always extendable and transformable. In this context it can be wagered that Gadamer's mode of philosophical argumentation resembles modes of *haiku* assembly. Gadamer does not write in a systematic manner. His style is more conversational in that it establishes one theme and passes to another so that in the movement different alignments of meaning are built up, each offering a different perspective on the unstated totality of meaning speculatively anticipated by the pursuit of any subject-matter. Each philosophic *Leitmotifen* criss-crosses its counter-part not only affording a different view of one's initial perspective but also enabling a speculative glimpse of the

transcendent reach of the whole. *Haiku* poems are not to be read as singular poetic statements but rather as constituting a dynamic collective so that by moving back and forth between each poem their unifying subject matter is occasioned and one's sense of the (unstated) whole is altered.[51] What makes a comparison between philosophical hermeneutics and *haiku* possible has nothing to do with philology or etymology but rather with a similar temporal device in reading structures. Both suggest patterns of reading and an unstated whole. Immersion in the initial poems or philosophical statements allows them to establish in the reader a horizon of expectation against which subsequent poems and statements are read. It is participation in the movement of the fragmentary and perspectival that allows changing and potentially transformative glimpses of the whole to appear. This brings us to another telling parallel between philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist aesthetics, namely, the way Gadamer's account of speculative experience reflects the Japanese gardening practise of *shakkei* (the art of borrowed landscape).

 J. Nollman writes of the practise of *shakkei*, "Every single tree, herbaceous plant, and man made addition to the garden is placed, not so much to hold one's attention through its own individual beauty but rather to lead the eye to the view beyond. Pruning the trees to frame the vista has been transformed into a higher art."[52] In short, the art of *shakkei* is to garden in such a way as to let that which is beyond the garden and yet sustains it (giving its place and position) to come into the garden and be seen. "Borrowing" in this context has the dynamic connotation of bringing juxtaposed elements into a new relation. The art of creating gaps and openings in hedges to bring the landscape outside the garden into the garden is brilliantly used as an analogy for the awakening of memory in Tan Twan Eng's novel, *The Garden of Evening Mists*.[53] Returning to Gadamer, the analogy is clearly with the ability of the writer or teacher to create gaps and openings within a discourse so as to allow that infinity of meaning which lies beyond it and yet sustains it to be speculatively disclosed within its compass. Heidegger's arboreal notion of a "clearing" has an obvious place in this discussion. Nishitani uses the imagery of borrowing in a different but related way. He deliberately plants foreign terminology into his philosophical discourse in order to bring to light something within it that would not otherwise be seen. Nishitani writes in the idiom of contemporary European Thought but as Waldenfells observes,

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[51] See *Haiku*, ed. Peter Washington, London, Everyman's Pocket Library, 2003.
[52] Jim Nollman, *Why We Garden, Cultivating a Sense of Place,* Boulder, First Sentient Publications, 2005, p. 129.
[53] Tan Twan Eng, *The Garden of Evening Mists*, Newcastle, Myrmidon books, 2012.

While he deliberately uses the primary language of Buddhism, these terms are not to be taken as pertaining to a definite religion or to the teaching of a definite school. They are rather "borrowed" says Nishitani, so that he can say in the context of modern philosophy what he is able to say and would like to say from the standpoint of his own tradition. [54]

The dynamics of such philosophical borrowings, well instanced by philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhist thought, provide a much needed framework for articulating not only what happens when a discourse facilitates a speculative turn within itself but also what happens when it opens out on to other discourses. Like all true education, this has to be experienced.

10. Conclusion

Hans-Peter Duerr is well aware of the problems posed for any dialogue between philosophical hermeneutics and Buddhism if understanding is articulated as the transposition of "mental" worlds. Should understanding a foreign thought system require the renunciation of a home view for the sake of grasping the "interiority" of a different world view, I lose the basis of why I wanted to understand the other world-view in the first place. Relationality is lost. Locating hermeneutics within a relational participatory framework of understanding avoids the mentalistic connotations surrounding the terms understanding and enlightenment. Both are indicative of significant shifts in the horizons of meaning that constituted a given participatory centre or subject. Understanding and enlightenment emerge not as a change of mental state but as a change of orientation or positioning within the linguistic and cultural frameworks that each participatory subject traverses. Relational hermeneutics emphasises that understanding and enlightenment are both effects of the participatory character of language. The speculative and the turning words neither turn us away from language nor beyond it. Rather, they lead to other and unexpected re-orientations of meaning within its horizons. Heidegger and Gadamer never doubt *that* language produces disclosive "events" of meaning. Gadamer's invocation of the speculative dimensions of language goes someway towards showing *what* occurs in such events, that is, the passage of one horizon of meaning to another. However, what both philosophers fail to offer is an account of *how* such a transition takes place. In this context the Buddhist notion of the turning word has much to commend it. When understood as a placeholder term, a turning word operates as a linguistic catalyst, linking and transforming different horizons of meaning. A turning word can only turn because it is placed within and works across different relational networks of linguistic and cultural meaning. The turn of the turning word is the event of understanding itself, the very occasion of its coming into be-

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[54] Waldenfells, (1980), p. 62

ing. Philosophical hermeneutics never questions the phenomenological fact that understanding "happens". The doctrine of the turning word offers philosophical hermeneutics an insight into *how* it happens. In so doing, the doctrine turns philosophical hermeneutics away from theory towards a more regional, local, relational hermeneutics. As the parchment fragment in Berlin indicated, it is, after all, the embodying power of the particular that opens the "silken" roads to enlightenment and understanding.

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