

INEFFABILITY, EMPTINESS AND THE AESTHETICS OF LOGIC

ANDREAS KAPSNER

ABSTRACT: *In this essay, I explore the nature of the logical analysis of Buddhist thought that Graham Priest has offered in his book *The Fifth Corner of Four (5of4)*. The paper traces the development of a logical value introduced in 5of4, which Priest has called *e*. The paper points out that certain criticisms I have made earlier still stand, but focuses on a reconceptualization of 5of4 in which these arguments carry less weight. This new perspective on the book, inspired by a response to my arguments by Priest himself, sees the logical analysis of Buddhism as aiming more for an allegorical, suggestive and aesthetic endeavour, rather a purely analytical one. I illustrate this view by focusing on the Ox herding pictures, as interpreted by Priest and Ueda Shizuteru, and I compare it to ideas in the discussion around Critical Buddhism.*

Keywords: *aesthetics, Buddhist logic, Catuskoṭi, critical Buddhism, emptiness, Graham Priest, ineffability, many-valued logic, the Fifth Corner of Four, Ueda Shizuteru*

1. INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to explore the nature of Graham Priest's book *The Fifth Corner of Four*¹ (Priest 2018¹), in which he offered a logical analysis of Buddhist philosophy. As it happens, *5of4* has always seemed to me to be a prime example of constructive engagement as put forth as the mission statement of the journal *Comparative Philosophy* (see Mou 2010)². In a more recent piece, Bo Mou has summed up the constructive engagement strategy in five points, the first of which being:

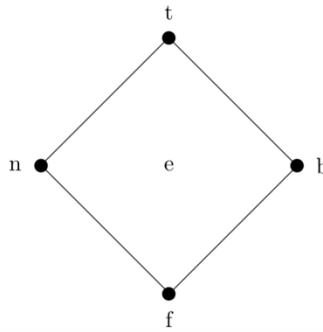
KAPSNER, ANDREAS: PhD, Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy, Germany. Email: Andreas.Kapsner@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

¹ I will adopt Priest's own convention of calling the book *5of4*.

² The same is true of the essays that have led up to and formed part of the material of the book. It is not a coincidence that one of the most important of these (Priest, 2010) was published in volume 1, issue 2 of *Comparative Philosophy*

(1) It emphasizes critical engagement (Mou 2016, 266)³

Until recently, I would not have hesitated to claim that *5of4* is, in its entirety, a clear exponent of (1). But I have come to wonder whether this is unreservedly true. The seed of this paper is in Priest's "Don't be so fast with the Knife" (Priest 2020), a response to my "Cutting Corners" (Kapsner 2020). The latter was an attempt at critical engagement itself, as it criticised the logical analysis presented in *5of4*. Our exchange has centered on a central part of the book, Priest's suggestion that a new logical value should be added to a faithful reconstruction of Buddhist thought. Priest calls the value *e* and interprets it as ineffability (though, also, sometimes as emptiness, see below). This value is placed in the center of a well known⁴ diagram of a logical lattice:⁵



My arguments in (Kapsner 2020) tried to suggest that we might do without such a value, and that we might be better off for it. I feel that most of my points still stand after his reply, but this is not what concerns me here.⁶ There is an intriguing suggestion at the end of his response that has, for me, cast *5of4* in a new light, as it offers a very different understanding of the book's aims. This is what I want to focus on in this piece.

³ The other four are these: "(2) it emphasizes the constructive contribution of each of the parties in critical engagement through learning from each other and a joint contribution to jointly- concerned issues, (3) it emphasizes philosophical interpretation of the addressed thinkers' texts instead of mere historical description (4) it emphasizes the philosophical-issue-engagement orientation aiming at contribution to the contemporary development of philosophy on a range of philosophical issues that can be jointly concerned and approached through philosophical interpretation; and (5) it, thus, has the character of comparative philosophy as understood in one fundamental engaging way of doing philosophy."

Though I think *5of4* surely meets criteria (2)-(5), I will not explicitly argue for that in this piece. Let me just state that using the tools of modern philosophical logic, as Priest does, is an especially daring and stimulating way of approaching these goals.

⁴ Well known to philosophers of logic, that is. The other four values are read, roughly, as *true*, *false*, *neither true nor false* and *both true and false*.

⁵ See *5of4* and Kapsner 2020 for more on the notion of a logical lattice. For this piece, a precise understanding is not essential. Indeed, in some sense the readily appreciable shape of the diagram is the most important fact about it for the purposes of this essay.

⁶ I provide point-for-point answers in a manuscript uploaded to <[https://www. researchgate.net/ publication/358148018_The_Fifth_Corner_Re-Examined_Reply_to_Priest](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358148018_The_Fifth_Corner_Re-Examined_Reply_to_Priest)>.

The new way to look at the book is prompted by the following quote, which, in part, starts with a quote from *5of4* itself.

Just to make matters clear: I am not suggesting the theory of validity [suggested in *5of4*] was endorsed by our Buddhist philosophers. Accounts of validity of this kind were just not on their agenda. The point is to show how the metaphysics of the *Catuskoti* makes perfectly good and precise sense from the perspective of contemporary logic. (*5of4*, 25)

...In other words, I am interested in the semantics as a way of explicating the appropriate metaphysical structure. (Priest 2020, 178)

I had not overlooked the part of the quote that is in the book; however, I had understood it to mean that the logics are not meant to track any explicit theorizing about logic on the part of the ancient Buddhist philosophers. I had not understood it to mean, as I now think it means, that questions of what follows from what, and of how someone holding the views of these philosophers should reason are not all too relevant for the purposes of the book. (But also not completely irrelevant, as Priest acknowledges that he discusses consequence relations and that my arguments have some cogency). If it does mean what I originally took it to mean, then I don't understand in what way it represents a retort to my arguments, and I can't think of a third reading that would make it one.⁷

So, what I take from his remark (whether he meant it or not) is that *5of4* might be read as a logical reconstruction that is relatively unconcerned with logical consequence. I found this an intriguing, as well as challenging, way to think about *5of4*, and one that I felt worth exploring. What follows are the thoughts I collected on that exploration. They are inspired by our exchange, but are sometimes at a very different level in terms of generality. In this sense, this is not really a response to Priest, but more of an essayistic meditation on the true nature of a remarkable book, or, alternatively, on the value of taking different perspectives on it.

To give a sense of what is to come: I will in the next section sum up the part of my earlier criticism that is necessary to understand the rest of the paper, which isn't that much. In (Kapsner 2020), I had concentrated my critical remarks on the first part of *5of4*, but an attempted appreciation of the book in a rather radically new way calls for taking the whole book into view. Though this piece will be only loosely connected to our exchange at times, value *e* will stay at the center of my investigation whenever I look at concrete issues rather than make very general observations. I will therefore start out Sec. 3 by surveying the parts of *5of4* I did not discuss in (Kapsner 2020), which brings us to new countries and Buddhist traditions, as well as a new interpretation of *e*. I will then focus quite closely at one particular episode in that part of the book, Priest's discussion of the Ox herding pictures (sec. 4). I will try to extend this discussion by taking inspiration from the

⁷ It is interesting to note that Priest moves from talking about "logic" in the part he quotes from *5of4*, but talks about "semantics" in the part that is new to his reply.

work of Ueda Shizuteru (sec. 5). The result is, I hope, interesting in itself, but it also sets up my later attempt of placing *5of4* in a recent important methodological debate in Buddhist studies, the debate about "Critical Buddhism" (sec. 7).⁸ I find this an interesting arena to consider the question of *5of4*'s nature in, and I will end by returning to my original arguments about *e*.

2. DESIGNATION

Though it would do no harm to read our earlier exchange, this piece is meant to stand on its own. Really, only one part of my criticism is especially important for what follows. It concerns the notion of designation, a technical notion in logic. Once we go beyond two truth values (namely just the usual True and False), as is the case in *5of4*, it becomes vitally important to discuss which values should be designated.

Designated values are those that have a desirable property *X* that one hopes is preserved in inferences. If all premises are *X*, then the conclusion is *X*. Priest's proposal has a semantic and an ontological version. In the former case, *X* is truth: If the premises are true, then the conclusion is true. In the ontological setting, where the logic deals with states of affairs, *X* is the property of obtaining: If all states of affairs the premises mention obtain, then the state of affairs of the conclusion obtains.

In a nutshell, my point was (and is) that *e*, read as ineffability, will attach to things that are true and things that are false, or, in the ontological version, to states that obtain and states that do not obtain. Thus, whether we opt to treat *e* as designated, or, as Priest does, as undesignated, we are bound to get some things wrong.

I will now show that this problem persists throughout the book, including in places suggestive of an alternative interpretation of *e* that I had not considered in (Kapsner 2020).

3. *e* AS EMPTINESS

As announced above, we will now go to the latter parts of the book, where Priest takes his story from India on to China and finally to Japan, and inspect the further developments of the value *e* in them.⁹

⁸ A word of warning up front: I will not have the space to ascertain that critical in "Critical Buddhism" means the same as in the characterization of constructive engagement I cited above, though I will mention the point again in slightly more detail.

⁹ I was hesitant to do so in my original piece for several reasons, one of which is still valid and the source of a little trepidation: If I can claim any knowledge of Asian philosophy beyond the level of an interested amateur (and it is debatable whether I can), then it is confined to the realm of Indian philosophy, that is, the part of the book I treated. Chinese and Japanese Buddhist traditions, the topics of the later sections of the book, are areas in which I have had no formal training at all. This flaw is somewhat mitigated by being able to draw on the advice of Steffen Döll, whose scholarship on these matters, especially on the ox herding pictures, I highly recommend to the interested reader. See for example (Döll 2020) and, in German, (Döll 2005).

As the book progresses, something interesting happens to value *e*. Historically speaking, *ineffable* is not the first interpretation that Priest gave to *e*. In the earlier papers that the book draws on, value *e* is read as *empty*. Consider, for example, the first essay in which I found mention of it:

A fifth value, *e* (emptiness), is added to the lattice. (Garfield and Priest 2009, 77)¹⁰

This older interpretation shines through more and more in later parts of the book, such as when Priest writes:

Why *e*? (a) true, (b) false, (c) both true and false, (d) neither true nor false, (e) none of the above. Conveniently, it will also transpire that it is the value of the ultimate reality of things: emptiness.¹¹ (*5of4*, 66)

In fact, an earlier draft of this paper suggested that *empty* was the intended interpretation of *e* in some parts of *5of4*, as this was how I understood those passages. In personal conversations, Priest has informed me that for the purposes of the book, the intended interpretation of *e* stays *ineffable* throughout. However, I think it is fair to say that at least reverberations of the alternative interpretation are, like those of a sympathetic string on a Sitar, activated by the discussion, especially for readers who have the older papers in mind. Thus, it seems to me that checking what happens to the kinds of criticisms I made under this alternative interpretation is a worthwhile endeavor.

Emptiness, of course, is one of the key ideas of Buddhist philosophy. I will not go into the general discussion of this idea, but here is Priest's own summary of it (the book has a whole introductory chapter on emptiness):

[E]verything is empty (*sunya*) of intrinsic nature: everything is what it is in virtue of its relation to other things. (*5of4*, 50)

Throughout *5of4*, especially in chapter 4, it is emphasized that the ideas of ineffability, emptiness and ultimate reality are tightly linked in Buddhist philosophy.

A way to homogenize the interpretation of *5of4* (*ineffable*) and the earlier papers (*empty*) would be to go beyond attesting a tight link and simply identify them with each other. But that seems to be going too far. Everything is empty, and maybe the complete truth that lies behind this statement is ineffable. But even accepting that, would this imply the following: Everything is empty, and thus everything is ineffable? If so, what are we doing here? Moreover, much of the discussion in *5of4* is predicated on a distinction between the effable and the ineffable (and the overlap between the two). If that distinction breaks down, what is left of the logical systems Priest introduced in these parts?

¹⁰ See also, e.g., Priest 2010.

¹¹ Note that, interestingly, ineffability is not even mentioned here. Nor is it silently implied: of course, “ineffable” falls under *none of the above*, but so does, e.g., “brightly colored”.

Maybe the trick is to think about this in terms of the two truths, i.e., conventional and ultimate reality: Conventionally, there are effable states of affairs,¹² but ultimately, all states of affairs are ineffable (subsection 5.7 of *5of4* already establishes that all states of affairs are empty, but the idea that all states of affairs might be ineffable isn't explicitly in the book). Maybe, this would make the logical fusion of ultimate truth, emptiness and ineffability plausible.

However, in this mode of thinking, the question of designating *e* becomes quite clearly decided, and in the opposite way in which things play out in *5of4*: In terms of getting the metaphysical picture right, *e* must surely be designated, as it stands for ultimate truth.

Now, a defender of undesignated *e* might say that logic is a tool useful for navigating conventional reality, and that conclusions about ultimate reality should be off-limits for logic. I don't think that Priest would be happy about logic taking such an enfeebled role in this discussion. Maybe we should look at matters this way: In thinking about ultimate truth, *e* should be designated, in the system that is the apt tool for conventional thinking, *e* should not be designated. If this is the correct way to think about this, then *5of4* is at least incomplete, in that the idea of designating *e*, even if it is just for some purposes and not others, never comes up.

More generally, I don't know that the critical points I brought to bear on *e* read as ineffability are any less problematic when we read the value as emptiness.¹³ One thing I am clear about is this: Thinking about these matters in the abstract is quite difficult. There are more concrete applications of the logics as the book moves on, and I would like to consider these developments to see whether we can thereby get a tighter grip on these matters.

4. VALUE *e* AND THE OX-HERDING PICTURES

So, let us see the new interpretation of *e* in action. In particular, I want to focus on Priest's discussion of the ox-herding pictures. This is a famous cycle of ten pictures (accompanied by commentary in prose and poetry) in which a herdsman is chasing after an escaped ox, which is usually interpreted as enlightenment, Buddha-nature or simply the self. It is a relatively straight-forward progression for the first part, as the first seven pictures show the herdsman looking for the ox, finding his tracks, capturing it, bringing it back etc. But once enlightenment hits, things become interpretationally difficult. The eighth picture is an empty circle, the ninth a depiction of a nature scene, and the tenth seems to bring us back to the beginning,

¹² And maybe ineffable ones as well if, e.g., you think the truths about ineffable ordinals mentioned in Priest 2020 are conventional.

¹³ One of my points was that making ineffability a logical value is quite an unusual move that would seem to require a more elaborate motivation than Priest gives. In the case of emptiness, there is an additional worry: By making emptiness a logical value, we might be seen to reify it, a move that is often warned against. E.g, Ueda writes: "This Buddhist nothingness that dissolves substance-thinking must not be adhered to as a nothingness however; it must not be taken as a kind of substance or "minus-substance" (a nihilum)." I will write more about Ueda's thought below, but I will more or less ignore this worry from now on.

but with a twist. We see an old monk, usually thought to be the herdsman himself, returning to the marketplace, usually interpreted to be the conventional world of everyday events. He is in conversation with a young man, for whom the search for his own ox will now begin.

Priest interprets this famous cycle as a story about attaining the right view about the two truths: In the beginning, the herdsman is caught up in conventional reality, but pursues and eventually reaches insight about ultimate reality. Priest illustrates this development by invoking the logic he had developed earlier in the book, plurivalent FDEe:

[W]e have a procedure with three moments: pre-enlightenment, enlightenment, post-enlightenment.

The whole process can, then, be modelled by a sequence of three [plurivalent FDEe] interpretations.... In the first, the interpretation, though a relation, relates every state of affairs to just one value: its conventional value. In the second, it likewise assigns only one value, but this is ineffability. In the third, it assigns two values: whatever the original value was, plus ineffability. Thus, the whole process can be modelled by a series of three interpretations of the kind we met in 6.4 \triangleright_1 , \triangleright_2 , \triangleright_3 . If the conventional value (t , f , b , or n) of the state of affairs A is c_A , then we have:

Stage 1: $A \triangleright_1 c_A$

Stage 2: $A \triangleright_2 e$

Stage 3: $A \triangleright_3 c_A$ and $A \triangleright_3 e$

Each of \triangleright_1 and \triangleright_2 has, as it were, a partial, one-sided, take on reality. \triangleright_3 overcomes this duality, encompassing both. (*5of4*, 131)

Now, \triangleright_1 , \triangleright_2 and \triangleright_3 are particular interpretations, namely those that reflect how things really are (at the different levels of reality). Epistemically speaking, few will have full access to these interpretations (and if enlightenment doesn't involve omniscience, then presumably no one will). Moreover, as these interpretations settle everything, logic has no interesting role to play here. Hence, there is little we can learn from this that would help us with our questions regarding logical matters.

Therefore, it might be more useful for our purposes to think about the whole classes of relations that \triangleright_1 , \triangleright_2 and \triangleright_3 are instances of. These result from restricting the plurivalent FDEe valuations in three ways. Moreover, one may see the restrictions on the valuation relations that result in valuations like \triangleright_1 , \triangleright_2 and \triangleright_3 as giving rise to distinct consequence relations, none of which coincide with the consequence relation of plurivalent FDEe. Seen from this angle, we are dealing with three distinct logics. Let me call these logics as follows (the numbers obviously make reference to the number of values at play):

Ox-4: The logic induced by restricting valuations to functions that assign one of t , f , b , or n .

Ox-1: The logic induced by restricting valuations to the function that assigns only e .

Ox-5: The logic induced by restricting valuations to relations that assign one of t, f, b , or n , and additionally assign e .

Let us examine these three logics in terms of their consequence relations before we go on to match them up with specific pictures in the next section.

Ox-4: First up, it is not difficult to see that Ox-4 is simply FDE (with the values replaced by their singletons, which makes no difference to the consequence relation).

Ox-1: Moving on we get to the logic in which everything is assigned the value e . Such a logic makes the job of the logician easy. First, the question what value a complex statement should receive is answered from the start. More importantly in the context of my exchange with Priest, my bickering about questions of designation is revealed to be moot at that elated level of reality.

This is because, surprisingly, the logic will be the same on either choice we have at this point. We arrive at this unanimous view of the matter: No matter whether we designate e or not, what we will end up with is the universal logic in which everything follows from everything else¹⁴ (and, fittingly enough, everything follows from nothing, aka the empty premise set). Maybe, this may chime well with intuitions about the enlightened experience, but one has to concede this: As a tool for analytical reasoning, this is among the least useful consequence relations one could think of.

Ox-5: In Ox-5, everything relates to one of t, f, b , or n , as well as to e . That is, we have four plurivalent values: $\{e, t\}$, $\{e, f\}$, $\{e, b\}$ and $\{e, n\}$. Note that this is not the whole range of plurivalent values of plurivalent FDEe, which also sports the five singleton values $\{t\}$, $\{f\}$, $\{b\}$, $\{n\}$ and $\{e\}$.

The logic that operates on the four plurivalent values will be different from the nine-plurivalued logic, no matter how we decide to treat e . If e is designated, then we are still stuck with the universal logic in which everything follows from everything, and which is patently useless for discerning logical thought. If it is not designated, then we are back to FDE in terms of logical consequence.

¹⁴ The reason for that lies in how logicians think of logical consequence: An inference is valid if and only if the following is true:

If all the premises receive a designated value, then the conclusion receives a designated value.

(In the context of classical logic, where true is the only designated value, this becomes: If all the premises are true, then the conclusion is true, as well. Priest goes over these matters on *Sof4*, 24)

Now, take e to be designated. Then the above statement is obviously true, as any possible conclusion must receive a designated value, namely e . On the other hand, take e to be undesignated. Then the above is considered as being true as well, though slightly less obviously and slightly more controversially so. The reasoning is that the antecedent, “All premises receive a designated value”, can not be true if there is no designated value around. Therefore, there can be no counterexample to “If all the premises receive a designated value, then the conclusion receives a designated value”, and thus it is considered correct.

5. AN ALTERNATIVE LINE-UP, or: GAZING AT THE OX WITH PRIEST AND UEDA

Now, just as Priest assigned his three valuations \triangleright_1 , \triangleright_2 and \triangleright_3 to pictures in the ox-herding series, I would like to line up the logics Ox-4, Ox-1 and Ox-5 and, in particular, their graphic representations, with specific pictures. Priest moves rather swiftly, and he does not single out specific Buddhist philosophers that have inspired his interpretation. In contrast, I would like to offer a reading that is inspired by a particular philosopher and follow the thought of Ueda Shizuteru (1926-2019). Ueda was the central figure in the third generation of the Kyoto school, and much of his philosophy finds itself articulated in an interpretation of the ox-herding pictures.

Ueda makes some remarks that suggest to me that it would not be unseemly to match his interpretations with logics and their diagrams as I am about to. He is not afraid of mathematical analogies, as can for example be seen by his comparing the role of emptiness in Buddhist thought with the role of the number zero in mathematics (Ueda 1982, 9). Moreover, the lattice diagrams clearly exhibit a feature that is, Ueda says, essential to Zen imagery: Simplicity.

He writes:

In contrast to the so-called mandala drawings, Zen pictures are typically as simple and unadorned as those we have just seen. For Zen Buddhism it is the simplest that is always the most original, the unconditioned. (Ueda 1983, 60)

Assuming, then, that it would at least not have been a preposterous thought for Ueda to have his reading of the ox-herding pictures matched with three logical systems and their graphic representations, let us consider which of the ten paintings should be correlated with the three lattices.

If I understand Priest correctly, then he sees \triangleright_1 as the valuation that describes the conventional reality of pictures 1-7. \triangleright_2 is the valuation of picture 8, the empty circle (it is because I read him this way that the emphasis in this section seems to me to be on the emptiness-interpretation of *e*, even though Priest talks about ineffability in his exposition). \triangleright_3 , lastly, correspond to the holistic view expressed in pictures 9-10. The three valuations track a development that spans all of the ten pictures.

Ueda, in contrast, holds that only the first seven pictures display a development. The last three pictures are not meant to be a continuation of the story, a point that he stresses again and again:¹⁵

¹⁵ Döll writes: "Ueda's exegesis is based on the assumption that pictures eight, nine and ten are no longer stages in a development process, but rather interrelated aspects of what Ueda calls the "dynamic trinity" of the true self." (Döll 2020, 495). See also there for further references to Ueda's work, which, however, is in large part not available in English.

[W]hile stages 1 to 7 are basically concerned with a step by step process of advancing along the way to the self, the last three stages no longer mark any progress as such, but rather portray a three- fold manifestation, in each aspect of which the same thing is totally present in a unique way even as it undergoes transformation....The 8th, 9th, and 10th stages, therefore, do not represent a step by step advance but rather three aspects of the true selfless self. (Ueda 1982, 22-23)

The three pictures in question form a unity depicting the fulfillment of the way to becoming a self. Together they give us a self-portrait of the self in triptych, displaying the disclosure of the truth of the self. (Ueda 1983, 58)

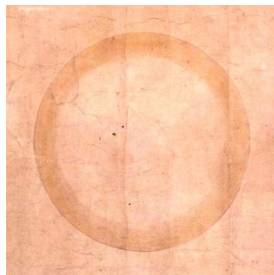
It seems to me that these last three pictures invite a direct and distinct assignment of one of the logics Ox-4, -1 and -5.¹⁶

5.1 PICTURE 8 and OX-1

So, where our sequence of three logical system begins is in picture 8, the empty circle that signifies nothingness and emptiness. Ueda writes about this picture:

The absolutely decisive element in the Zen way to the true self is the nothingness-event that breaks through the “I am I” definitively, including also the subtler forms it assumes in the realm of religion. In this absolute nothingness all form fades away, and this means likewise that the self, free of form, discloses itself initially as formlessness pure and simple, as formlessness itself. This takes place at the 8th stage, represented by an empty circle. (Ueda 1982, 23)

The corresponding logic is the trivial e-only logic Ox-1, and the diagram I use to represent it is something like the diapositive of the empty circle, in that it only shows the emptiness inside and not the frame around it:



e

¹⁶ In addition to giving us a nice one-to-one correlation, it avoids a potential problem: While I think that an argument can be made for Priest’s correlation of FDE and conventional reality, I am a bit skeptical about placing the four-valued logic with its truth value gaps and especially gluts at the pre-enlightenment part of the story. Usually, as far as I can tell, the introduction of contradictions into rational reconstructions of Buddhist thought comes only when the strictures of the unenlightened view of reality is transgressed. Maybe a two-valued logic of pre-enlightenment that sticks to only “true” and “false” would be closer to such interpretations (One might naturally call this Ox-2 and correlate it with the first pictures in the series, but I won’t pay much attention to it in what follows).

As I mentioned, the trivial logic that this results in is not a good tool for drawing analytical distinctions, but just that might be what befits this state of the self:

Hence the 8th stage leads to a once-and-for-all, decisive, resolute leap into absolute nothingness where there is neither herdsman who is seeking nor ox that is being sought, neither oneself nor Buddha, neither duality nor unity. (Ueda 1982, 13)

5.2 PICTURE 9 and OX-4

Next up, we get to the ninth picture, one that simply displays nature. In describing the move from the eighth to the ninth picture, Ueda again stresses that we are not dealing with a linear order any more and that there is not really a change in topic between the two:

In the movement from the 8th stage to the 9th it is no longer, as in the preceding stages, a matter of a gradual progression but of a correlatedness, or an oscillating back and forth. Nothingness in the 8th stage and simplicity in the 9th belong together, metaphorically speaking, like two sides of a single sheet of paper, a paper without thickness. The two sides are neither two nor one. It is rather a matter of a correlated double perspective each of which penetrates the other. In other words, the direction from the 8th stage to the 9th is “at one with” the opposite direction from the 9th stage to the 8th, permitting the whole to be described in reversible terms: “The blooming flowers are nothingness, nothingness is the blooming flowers.” (Ueda 1982, 19)

Ueda holds that the ninth picture, even though it is simply depicting a nature scene, is also dealing with the self.

But why then does “a tree in bloom alongside a river” appear in the 9th stage that follows and not a human being? It is a resurrection from nothingness to the selfless self; and the selflessness that constitutes the fundamental condition of the true self is first of all embodied, for the sake of that selflessness itself, in a reality where the human is not to the fore, for instance in a blooming tree. (Ueda 1982, 23)

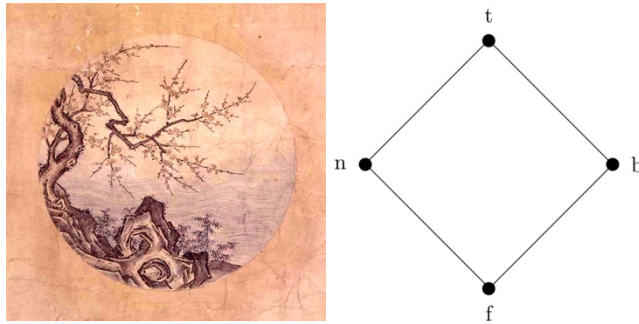
It is here that the background of the other pictures becomes the focus.¹⁷

Since the subject-object dichotomy in all its forms was restored at the 8th stage to a state of pre-dichotomy in nothingness, at this stage, in resurrection out of nothingness, a tree blooming by a river is simply the self, not in the sense of a substantial identity of nature and human being, but rather in the sense that a tree in bloom, just as it blooms, embodies in a non-objective way the selflessness of human being. Thus the blooming of the flowers and the flowing of the water here are, just as they happen, at the same time the play of the selfless freedom of the self. Nature, as the flowers blooming and the river

¹⁷ Cf. Döll 2020, 496.

flowing, is the first resurrection body of the selfless self out of nothingness. (Ueda 1982, 17)

If we direct our attention away from persons, bulls and even emptiness, nature emerges as the frame in which all of these are to be found. And, correspondingly, the four values that will ultimately frame the fifth come into view in the logical diagram.

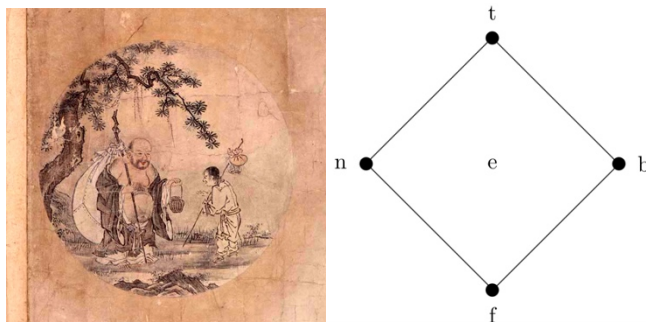


5.3 PICTURE 10 and OX-5

Last, we get to the grand synthesis of true awakening, in which all aspects can be seen at the same time. Instead of secluding himself and reveling in his own enlightenment, the ox-herd-turned-monk returns to civilization, but retains the ability to see it for what it is at all levels of reality.

To encounter others, the true self does not dwell off in “nirvana” but keeps to the well-travelled and frequented roads of the world, without forsaking absolute nothingness. (Ueda 1982, 21)

This picture, the richest of the three in terms of things going on in it, is accompanied by the richest of the logical spaces:



Ueda remarks that the meeting depicted in this painting will set off the young man's own ox-hunt, but that the topic of their conversation will not be about spiritual matters. It will be about the seemingly mundane, but the higher truth the monk has realized will shine through nonetheless. He couches this in a rather charming and extensive discussion about Japanese greeting rituals that is summed up in the following miniature:

Two Japanese meet on the road. They bow to one another in the depths of nothingness where there is neither I nor Thou (the 8th station of the Oxherding Pictures), and then straighten up, turn to one another (the 10th station), and exchange greetings. "Nice day, isn't it?" "Yes, it is" (the 9th station). Taken at bottom, the whole movement of the greeting is nothing other than the circular dynamic of the 8th, 9th, and 10th stations of the Oxherding Pictures, where the Buddhist concern of the non-differentiation of the religious and the everyday is given expression. This is how everyday life, in all its details, gets filled up with meaning. (Ueda 1982, 36)

This, then, might suggest an answer to whether *e* should be designated in Ox-5: It is the everyday world that the relevant conversations are about, so the consequence relation should be the one of Ox-4. That is, *e* should not be designated: Its presence in the plurivalent values is logically inert, but somehow projects out of them to point out what cannot be directly pointed at.

6. WHAT IS THE POINT OF PAIRING LOGICS AND PICTURES?

What might be the point of bringing logics and pictures together like I did just now? First, let me stress again that I was clearly deviating from and going beyond what Priest had done in *5of4*, and that he should not be held accountable for what happened above. Indeed, he might have deep reservations about the particulars of my account. However, I would be surprised if the general outlines of my experiment would be abhorrent to him. In this very minimal sense, I take it to be a faithful extension to what happens in *5of4*.

In judging my own effort, I think that the correlations between pictures and logics make intuitive sense, and I find the parallels that I tried to bring out real, at least in some sense. Also, drawing such parallels out, as Priest did and I tried to further pursue, feels like a worthwhile endeavor. For me personally, it brings together normally distinct areas of inquiry that interest me deeply, something that always sparks intellectual joy and motivation. I find contemplating these three juxtapositions of pictures and logical diagrams to be aesthetically pleasing and thought provoking, and I would hope that more people feel this way, so that such developments might lead to new insights about Buddhist philosophy and logic alike.

What we've seen doesn't tell us all we need to know about the logical value for emptiness. But it does tell us something, in particular about the rather thorny question of whether or not *e* should be designated: At the stage where only emptiness is in view (picture 8), it just doesn't matter whether the value is

designated; what we will get is the trivial logic. At the next stage (picture 9), the question does not even arise, as *e* is not among the logical values. Where it does have any weight at all is only at the very end (picture 10). Ueda's reading of the last scene has suggested that *e* might, indeed, best be seen as an undesignated value, just as it appears in *5of4*.

That said, I would not want to put too much weight on this last point. Though the development felt natural to me, I suppose that it might not be much harder (maybe by invoking other Buddhist philosophers and their interpretations) to find readings that point in a different direction regarding the designation of *e*,¹⁸ or even to completely different logical setups. And even if the story about not designating *e* should come out as the most plausible one, it would surely feel like pushing things much too far to further claim any normative authority about, say, how the logic of the conversation in the last picture should be governed.

In that sense, I've succeeded in bringing myself into that frame of mind in which the kinds of questions I originally raised cease to feel important. There does not seem to be too tight a link between the technicalities of the logics involved and the phenomena they are supposed to illustrate. The true nature of the enlightened self is not literally an ox, but still the picture cycle has helped generations of Buddhists to think about the issue. The true nature of reality might not literally be a space of logical values, but still, it might be a very fruitful way to think about the matter. To ask too detailed questions about the way the illustrating logics behave might be comparable to asking how far, exactly, the ox had run off before he was captured, or what breed, exactly, it was. Getting bogged up in such questions might mean to simply miss the point.¹⁹ There is an interesting parallel to a comparison Ueda makes between the last three pictures and the Christian notion of the Trinity, about which he then writes:

This of course should not be taken to mean that the Buddhist self is the equivalent of the Christian deity. There is no question of a real similarity between "self" and "God," but only of a similarity in the conceptual structure of the way each finds its way into human understanding. (Ueda 1982, 24)

It seems that choices appropriately made to bring out such similarities are, in a sense, much more guided by aesthetic, rather than technical concerns. Consider how a Picasso painting may succeed in vividly capturing the conceptual structure of how a scene finds its way into human understanding, where a more precise and naturalistic portrait might fail.

¹⁸ Here is a slightly different interpretation that leads to a pluralistic reading of the last diagram in which the designation of *e* is underdetermined: The enlightened monk can now freely shift from viewing reality in its conventional aspects (undesignated *e*) and its ultimate ones (designated *e*). Ironically, this seems to me to be in closer harmony with Priest's reading of the pictures, while it doesn't seem to be supporting his formal choice as well as my reading.

¹⁹ Just as it would be a bad idea to refuse someone to suck the arrow-poison out of your wound because all questions about the lineage of the marksman have not been settled yet.

But even if we stay clear of the danger of misapprehending the aesthetic nature of the project, there is a danger of seeing more than there is to see,²⁰ and Ueda warns us of this danger:

A Zen picture is, through its very character as a picture, a dynamic image for this movement of drawing and un-drawing, of depicting and un-depicting. In this way the Zen picture mediates the dynamic from the invisible to the the visible, and from the visible to the invisible. The importance of this dynamic character of the Zen picture is apparent when one considers the danger inherent in the power of an image because of its pictorial nature. The power of an image consists in its making seen what is unseen, which makes all the greater the danger that the image might imprison and constrict, as happens when we confuse the symbolized with the symbol. (Ueda 1983, 60)

It is surely good to be aware of this danger when we think about our lattices, as well. There are, however, voices out there that see more than a mere danger here: something much more pernicious, and indeed, something inherently anti-Buddhist. It is interesting to wonder how these voices would describe what has happened above, and I will do just that in the next sections.

7. A CRITICAL (BUDDHIST) LOOK AT LOGICAL OX-GAZING

If the kind of application above is indeed broadly in the spirit of Priest's project, then it puts it in a quite interesting place with regards to one of the major theoretical controversies in Buddhist studies of the last few decades, namely the dispute over "Critical Buddhism", which reached its high point around the turn of the millennium.²¹

Critical Buddhism is the project of two influential Buddhist scholars, Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro, who see the core of Buddhism in the art of rational criticism; "Criticism alone is Buddhism" is their (deliberately hyperbolic) motto. This core, they claim, has continually been disgraced by adoptions of anti-rational "indigenous" beliefs ever since Buddhism left India. They view the poetic, impressionistic elements that the Buddhist doctrines were, along the way from Ch'an in China to Zen in Japan, more and more couched in as nothing more than thinly disguised Taoistic and Shintoistic pollutants. The underlying philosophy, which they call "topical" in contrast to "critical", should be

²⁰ Quite literally, too:

"In addition to simplicity, Zen drawings have another important distinctive trait: they contain, as an essential element, the dissolution of the pictorial into an imagelessness that surpasses depicting." (Ueda 1983, 60)

²¹ As I noted above, I think it is an interesting question whether the usage of critical in the approach portrayed here is totally in harmony with the usage in point (1) of the characterization of constructive engagement I quoted in the introduction. I think that, a large common core notwithstanding, there are important differences, but a detailed investigation must for another occasion.

rejected, and its (rotten) religious fruits should not be considered Buddhist at all any more. Hubbard characterizes their notion of topical philosophy as

an aesthetic mysticism unconcerned with critical differentiation between truth and falsity and not in need of rational demonstration, a kind of thinking that [Hakamaya] feels actually dominates the Buddhist tradition. More properly, Hakamaya, Matsumoto, and others who agree with them feel that the denigration of language and rational thought implicit in much of the Buddhist doctrinal tradition leads to an erasure of the critical discrimination of truth that is at the heart of Buddhist realization (...). (Hubbard and Swanson 1997, vii)

To understand the impact of their ideas, it is important to note that Hakamaya and Matsumoto were, at the time of their attacks, not outsiders in any sense. They were both highly respected Buddhologists and, moreover, were employed at Komazawa University, an elite Zen institution associated with the Soto sect. This gave their critique an even more sensational quality than the fierce rhetoric²² they employed would already have guaranteed. (Hakamaya, more than a little self-deprecatingly, writes of "an outspokenness untempered by tact as my only virtue".²³)

Naturally, their criticism and other scholars' rebuttals were at first published in Japanese. However, with the publication of the excellent volume "Pruning the Bodhi Tree" (Hubbard and Swanson 1997), containing translations of important essays of the Critical Buddhists, dissenting reactions by other Buddhist scholars and rebuttals by Hakamaya and Matsumoto and their allies, the debate reached a worldwide audience.²⁴

The ambitions of the project of Critical Buddhism is nothing less than staggering. The methodological concerns that Hakamaya and Matsumoto voice lead them to reject vast tracts of Buddhist doctrine, such as the various teachings that are centered around the concepts of tathagata-garbha and hongaku shiso. Tathagata-garbha, roughly, is the idea that all sentient beings already carry the seeds of enlightenment in themselves. This is pushed further in the Japanese development of hongaku shiso ("original enlightenment"), where enlightenment is located, not only in sentient beings, but even in inanimate ones. Such ideas, the Critical Buddhists claim, presuppose stable selves that go against the fundamental original Buddhist teachings of selflessness (anatman) and emptiness. Moreover, they understand "hongaku shiso in a broad sense: a way of thinking that all things are embraced in a basic, singular, ineffable reality (a state of "original enlightenment") that functions as an authoritarian ideology and does not admit the validity of words, or concepts, or faith, or intellect."

Clearly, the aspects the Critical Buddhists attack are not accidental features of East Asian Buddhist traditions. Paul Swanson sums it up as follows:

²² Incidentally, a reliance on rhetoric is, for the Critical Buddhists, a clear mark of the style of thinking they attack; this irony has not been lost on commentators.

²³ [Hubbard and Swanson, 1997] p. 113.

²⁴ Well worth reading is also the extensive review article [Stone, 1999].

[W]e are in the midst of a very provocative “rethinking” of Japanese Buddhism by some prominent Buddhist scholars and thinkers who claim that Chan/Zen, the tathagata-garbha (“seed,” “matrix,” or “womb” of the Buddha) tradition, hongaku shiso (“original” or “inherent” enlightenment), and related ideas are “not Buddhism.” This is tantamount to saying that most, if not all, of Japanese Buddhism is not Buddhist.

One might pull out on the zoom of the last statement and include much of Chinese Buddhism, as well. One might, however, also zoom closer in and find that a particular focus of their scorn are the philosophers of the Kyoto school, i.e., the philosophical lineage of Ueda.

Moreover, the Critical Buddhists felt that their objections to topical philosophy lead, not only to the rejection of various doctrinal aspects of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, but also to severe criticism of the Japanese social structure that, to their minds, is founded on these misguided ideas. Again, the role of the Kyoto school in supporting these ideas is especially grating for the Critical Buddhists.

Though the scope of their criticism is of remarkable breadth, at the bottom of it are their methodological qualms with topical thinking, and their championing of the critical mindset. As methodologies, topical and critical thinking are not confined to Buddhism, of course. In fact, Hakamaya introduces the distinction with reference to two Western thinkers. The mark of the topical is the creative, impressionistic, poetic and relativistic mode of thinking that Hakamaya sees Giambattista Vico as championing. The critical, for him, is embodied by Descartes, and it confines itself simply to clear thinking that can, and must, be represented in language. (Jamie Hubbard, in “Topophobia”, convincingly argues that this reading of Descartes and Vico, as well as the use of the label “topical”, which references back to Aristotle, is rather problematic. Nonetheless, I use Hakamaya and Matsumoto’s terminology, as do most other critics of their arguments.)

The Critical Buddhists are highly disapproving of ineffable experiences (whether achieved by means of meditation or via more spontaneous means) as events that bear any theoretical weight. By their nature, these seem outside the realm of critical discussion. Zen is, of course, much concerned with such experiences, and sometimes it is indeed their aesthetic appreciation that seems to bear more weight than their logical analysis.

Accordingly, the Critical Buddhists are no friends of a strong role of aesthetics in religion, either. Matsumoto’s frustration with the topic becomes palpable when he writes: “The Japanese people are not perpetually in an ecstatic state induced by staring at flowers and trees. We are not vegetable-like human beings. What makes us distinctively human is the same thing that makes Westerners human: we can think.”

Not enough that an “aesthetic mysticism” has defiled Buddhist philosophy, it has become the stereotype of the Japanese way of life itself.

In sum, the Critical Buddhists’s attitude might be characterized as a rejection of religious claims not backed up by philosophical argumentation, but rather by reference

to the authority of ineffable experiences that can, if at all, be assessed on aesthetic grounds.

8. *5of4* AS TOPICAL PHILOSOPHY?

Of course, assessing the validity of the arguments the Critical Buddhists run is as fascinating as it is controversial. It is also much beyond anything I could be aiming for in this piece. Instead, what I am interested in here is the following question: What would the Critical Buddhists make of the association of logics and pictures I explored above? And what would they make of *5of4* in total?

5of4 is about Buddhist philosophy, and it is about logic. When Hakamaya contrasts topical and critical philosophy, logic falls clearly on the side of the critical. “Logic” often comes up in the writings of Critical Buddhists, thought most of the time in a quite general sense. More concretely, Hakamaya uses a quote in which logic is described as follows: “[L]ogic is the field of thinking and the study of its rules. Logic deals with objective thinking in generalizations and is therefore abstract thinking” (61).

Logic also comes up in Hakamaya’s recollection of the following incident:

The reason for [my distrust of East-West dialogue] was illustrated best in the reaction to a paper by my friend and colleague Paul Griffiths of the University of Chicago Divinity School, which advocated demonstration and logical proof as the proper mode of interreligious dialogue. The Japanese participants, advocating an “Oriental philosophy” that transcended logic, banded together with the majority of the Western participants who fancied themselves well-versed in Oriental thought and tried to persuade him that he needed a deeper understanding of the “Orient,” an Orient that is not bound by logic or fixed standpoints. As I will argue later, this is nothing other than the rhetoric of topical philosophy.... (Hubbard and Swanson 1997, 59)

I assume that Priest would not have joined that chorus of well-versed Orientalists (though he might have challenged the speaker about what the bounds of logic are, just as he would have challenged just about anyone about that in 1985). Instead, I would think he would have joined Hakamaya’s side in this debate.

On the other hand, what I have done in section 5 above would, clearly, be seen as an exercise in topical philosophy by the Critical Buddhists. If it captures the spirit of *5of4*, then that book would be anathema to them, as well. More, I suspect that it would feel like a betrayal to them, given that they might have been hoping for something quite different from a logical reconstruction of Buddhist thought.

So, should we view *5of4* as a work of topical philosophy? If the answer should turn out to be yes, then we will have a ready answer to my original question, namely how a reading of *5of4* was possible in which matters of logical consequence were not a central concern. Topical philosophy, as Hakamaya and Matsumoto understand it, is not much interested in logical consequences, and even less in the theoretical problem of defining

logical consequence. So, let us consider the question in more detail over the two next subsections.

8.1 AESTHETICS

One of the characteristics of the topical approach, as I pointed out above, is that it's thinking is guided, in important ways, by aesthetic concerns. Now, it is indisputable that Priest's whole book, not just the part about the ox-herding pictures, has clear aesthetic merit. A good illustration of this, even though one I will not talk about here, seems to be Priest's graph-theoretical representation of Indra's net in section 8.6 of the book. But also, the matters which we are concerned here share a certain beauty that would be lost in other presentations, or indeed, in other approaches such as the ones I have suggested in my earlier papers.

For example, consider the lattice diagrams (also known as Hasse diagrams) the logics are presented in. FDE could have been presented, just as well for logical purposes, in the form of truth tables. Or rather, as these tables would fix the behavior of negation, which is not determined by the diagram, it would be more useful to a logician, were it not for the fact that the diagram is so widely associated with FDE that its account of negation can be assumed to be silently implied if no other remarks are made. Further, once the new value *e* comes in, truth tables would be even *more* helpful for a logician, as the picture does not tell us how the value *e* behaves. This is because, as I remarked in the earlier paper, the diagram is not really a Hasse diagram at all.

But consider the alternative and its aesthetic costs. Imagine Priest had presented the new logic by showing the following truth tables:

| \neg | | \wedge | <i>t</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>e</i> | \vee | <i>t</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>e</i> |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <i>t</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>e</i> |
| <i>b</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>e</i> |
| <i>n</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>e</i> |
| <i>f</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>f</i> | <i>e</i> |
| <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> | <i>e</i> |

Not, exactly, an especially pretty or inspiring sight.

On the other hand, I find the bilattice diagram that characterizes FDE one of the most pleasing sights one can find in logical texts. That might just show how simple a man I am, aesthetically speaking; but to me there is something inherently suggestive about that most solid shape of a square, balanced precariously on one of its corners.

When it comes to matching a logic to the Catuskoti, which, remember, means "Four Corners", what other choice than FDE could we even consider, from an aesthetic point of view? The answer is so clearly "None other" that, as far as I can see, few discussions ever get off the ground that focus on the logical suitability of those features that are captured by the lines of the diagram. From a logical point of view, this might be surprising, as the main point of these lines is to illustrate how the values of conjunctions

and disjunctions are computed, and the solution the diagram supplies is not exactly unproblematic.²⁵

And when Priest goes on to add issues of ineffability/emptiness to the discussion, what could be a better picture to accompany the perfectly Koan-like title of the book than the one he chooses? Indeed, he gives his reasons for placing the fifth value in the middle of the other four in decidedly aesthetic and illustrative terms: “[P]lacing the *e* centrally maintains a pleasing symmetry, as well as suggesting that emptiness is at the heart of things.” (*5of4*, 66)

In sum: That Priest, when faced with the decision between table and diagram, went with the less precise, but much more evocative picture²⁶ seems a clear point in favor of the topical interpretation of Priest’s project, and one might even try to make an argument that the choice of the logics itself is underwritten, at least in part, by aesthetic concerns. Inasmuch as this is the mark of topical philosophy, there might be a claim to be made that *5of4* is topical in nature.

8.2 INEFFABILITY, EMPTINESS AND LANGUAGE

Let us now turn to the interpretations of the logical value *e* that kicked off my whole endeavor. Interestingly, the Critical Buddhists would react quite differently to *e*, depending on whether it is read as “ineffable” or “empty”.

For the Critical Buddhists, emptiness is among the tenets of original Buddhism that has been subverted by later developments. Consequently, they would see emptiness as an eminently worthy subject of study. (Whether they would approve of the exact approach Priest takes, of course, I can’t say.)

Ineffability, on the other hand, is a red flag for them, as I’ve discussed above. The great extent to which *5of4* is an analysis of ineffability, then, might be taken to be another reason to see it as a work of topical philosophy.

However, I think that this would not be the right view of the matter. There is nothing of the authority of the mystical and ineffable experience in *5of4* that Hakamaya and Matsumoto so vehemently criticize. As far as I can see, the ineffable nowhere plays the part of a shield to ward off unwanted criticism. Priest shows little interest (at least, for the purposes of his book) in ineffable experiences that meditative practices might induce. This is because these are, for him, part of Buddhism as a religious practice, but not of Buddhist philosophy.

In most Buddhisms, meditation—in some form or forms—is an important practice. Indeed, most Buddhists hold that it is only with this that one can come face to face with ultimate reality (whatever that is supposed to be in the form of Buddhism in question). Now, I do not want to deny that meditative

²⁵ I tried to supply a solution to the most salient problem in Kapsner 2019. Though this solution also sports a diagram, it is not quite as pretty.

²⁶ In so far as the six-valued logic I proposed in my earlier paper could not be displayed in a picture such as Priest’s and would have to employ truth tables instead, I concede clear aesthetic defeat.

experience may be an important part of Buddhist religion. Perhaps it might even be used as an argument for the existence of ultimate reality. However, what I would contest is that it is necessary to have such an experience to understand Buddhist philosophy (*5of4*, 147).

Priest is interested in the bounds of language and thought, in what we can say about what lies behind it, and in the contradictions that this entangles us in. (This is an old interest of his, going back at least to his seminal *Beyond the Limits of Thought*²⁷). But the point from which he views that boundary is on the side of language, not on the side of ineffable experience. Hakamaya and Matsumoto might take offense with the topic of ineffability per se, but at least the mode of approaching it does not fit the profile of the reasoning style they attack.

Also, *5of4* does not, in any sense I can perceive, exhibit the deprecating attitude towards language that the Critical Buddhists see as another, closely related, hallmark of topical philosophy. In his “Methodological Coda” to the book, Priest sums up his project as follows:

This book tells a story. It is the story about Buddhist metaphysics, the Catuskoti, and the interlaced evolution of the two. As for Dogen’s vines, these twine around each other. The point is not to advocate any particular view—though views are certainly interrogated along the way. It is to show the integrity of the process. The techniques of contemporary non-classical logic are employed to help do so. Philosophical ideas are slippery; mathematical ideas much less so. (*5of4*, 147-148)

This quote, of course, might be read as a critique of language, as the slipperiness of philosophical arguments might be blamed on its imprecision. I read it more as a plea to augment natural language by formal machinery, in particular the tools of mathematical logic.

In general, my feeling is that for *5of4* to be a pure work of topical philosophy, much too much attention is paid to getting the technicalities right. Regarding the aspects of the topical stance that are simply a rejection of the critical, *5of4* is not topical in nature.

9. CONCLUSION

In sum, it seems unfair to characterize *5of4* as either exclusively topical or critical. In a sense, the focus changes from one to the other as the book takes its course. But it is a matter of emphasis, as both aspects can be seen throughout. Indeed, I find that I often have a certain voluntary control over whether I perceive it as a topical or a critical work, much like one can learn to voluntarily see a Necker cube one way or the other.

Many critics of Critical Buddhism have pointed out that it draws lines few would be happy to live on only one side of. For example, Hakamaya associates the critical mode of thought with the left-side hemisphere of the brain, and the topical

²⁷ Priest 2002.

with the right side. It seems obvious but still worthwhile to point out²⁸ that the most successful thinkers tend to use their whole brain.

In extension, it seems like a good idea not to completely shut down either side of the brain while reading *5of4*. The two ways of thinking can enhance each other; a topical approach can suggest analogies that can then be followed up critically.²⁹ Thus, even though we saw the emphasis on the critical in Mou's characterization of constructive engagement in the introduction to this piece, I don't think the topical elements defeat my earlier assessment that *5of4* is a splendid example of this style of philosophical analysis.

Let me end by bringing it back to the questions my exchange with Priest started with: What should one make of my critical arguments about value *e* after the preceding pondering of the nature of *5of4*'s mission?

It is true that questions of the kind I raised are relatively uninteresting from a topical perspective. In the parts of *5of4* that are apt to put us into this mode of thinking, the sense of urgency of my arguments thus gets dialed down. In my own interpretation of the ox-herding pictures above, I have deliberately tried to amplify this aspect and push the analysis towards a point where my own critical arguments ceased to feel important, even to myself.

But in the sections of *5of4* that shift more towards the critical, I feel the weight of most of the questions I originally raised return. Some of them, in light of Priest's response, now feel somewhat less weighty to me.³⁰ However, they are in part replaced by new questions as well, which concern the joint logical treatment of ineffability and emptiness that I talked about in the beginning of this paper.

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²⁸ As Hubbard does, see Hubbard and Swanson 1997, 89.

²⁹ This is interestingly close to how Priest describes Chinese philosophy on Priest 2013, 172, the problem for Western audiences being that the critical step is often left to the reader.

³⁰ Again, please see <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358148018_The_Fifth_Corner_Re-Examined_Reply_to_Priest> for the details.

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