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Our Soul Is Bowed Down to the Dust

Jampa Dorje
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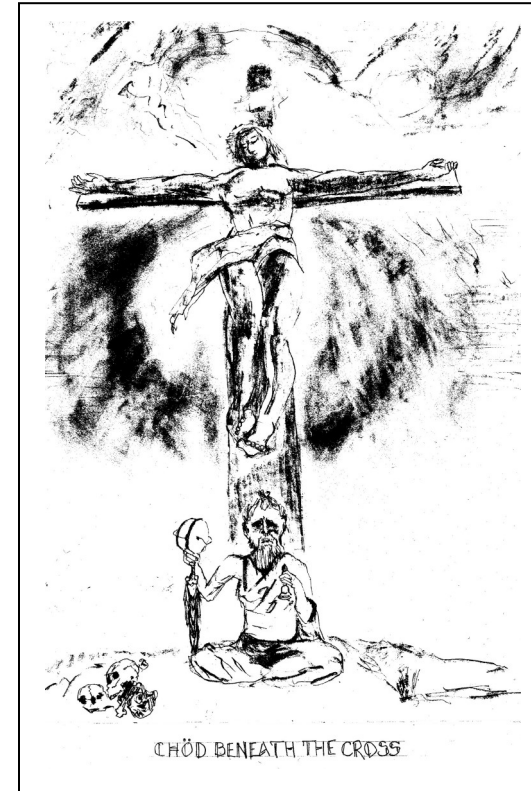
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OUR SOUL
IS BOWED
DOWN TO
THE DUST

WRITINGS ON
RELIGION BY
JAMPA DORJE





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DOWN TO THE DUST
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Back cover photo: untitled fabricated metal sculpture by Darwin Davis in front of the Language and Literature Building on Central Washington University campus.

Title taken from *Deadwood*: the last words of Reverend H.W. Smith in Season 1, Episode 10, “Sold Under Sin”.

Photos and drawings by the author.



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NOTES

“God” originally appeared in *Jampa Dorje’s Worldly Dharmas* Volume 2 by Bouvard Pécuchet, Kapala Press, Santa Fe, 2014 and appeared as a chapbook under the same logo in Ellensburg, 2016.

“Art As Meditation, Meditation As Art” was originally written for Dr. Matthew Altman’s Philosophy of Art Class, Central Washington University, and appeared as a chapbook under the Kapala Press logo, Ellensburg, 2016.

“Initiations” originally appeared in *Jampa’s Worldly Dharmas*, Volume 2 by Bouvard Pécuchet, Kapala Press, Santa Fe, 2014 and appeared as a chapbook under the same logo in Ellensburg, 2016.

“A Devil Sits Under the Ass of the Goddess Sophia” appeared in *A Devil Sits Under the Ass of the Goddess Sophia and Other Stories* by Bouvard Pécuchet, Kapala Press, Ellensburg, 2016.

“Reveries of a Eudaemonist” is Part 2 of *A History of a Novel Idea* by Jampa Dorje, Kapala Press, Ellensburg, 2015.

“An Emptiness Set” appeared as a chapbook with that title and was submitted to Dr. Cynthia Coe’s Philosophy of Religion class, Central Washington University, Ellensburg,, published as a chapbook by Kapala PreSpring, 2019.

“Make It New: a Response to Aronofsky’s *Noah*” was written for Dr. Lily Vuong’s Religious Studies class, Legacy Of the Hebrew Bible class taught at Central Washington University, Winter, 2018.

“Book of Acesius” is an essay written for Dr. Lily Vuong’s Religious Studies Class on Christianity at Central Washington University and appeared as a chapbook, Kapala Press logo in Ellensburg, 2018.

“The Annotated Earthday Ode” was created for Dr. Lily Vuong’s Religious Studies Class on Christianity at Central Washington University and appeared as a chapbook under the Kapala Press logo in Ellensburg, 2018. The poem appears in earlier versions as “Too Many Horses, Not Enough Saddles.”

CONTENTS

God

1

Art As Meditation, Meditation As Art

9

Initiations

21

A Devil Sits Under the Ass of Sophia

29

Reveries of a Eudaemonist

33

An Emptiness Set

53

Make It New: a Response to Aronofsky’s *Noah*

63

Book of Acesius

69

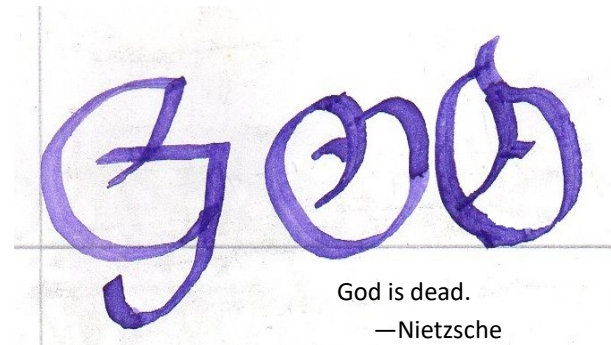
The Annotated Earthday Ode

81

Mandala's organizational values, as espoused by Lama Tsultrim Allione in the Tara Mandala 2018 newsletter, *Vast View—Open Heart*, consist of recognizing the sacredness of all life, supporting a just and equitable world, promoting balance in environmental and political activities, and honoring the re-emergence of the Divine Feminine. The concluding lines, with their equivalence of elements, have the feel of a mystical experience. There are 108 lines in the poem and 108 prayer beads in a Buddhist mala.

Here is where we are from
awake to the scent of rabbit ear sage
ears hear fire, eyes see light
all one taste

Garden of fire,
garden of stars,
garden of air



God is dead.

—Nietzsche

Nietzsche is dead.

—God



I thank God for all His blessings and for the many, many instructive lessons that I've received. I am grateful for this life, even if, as St. Augustine put it, we are born amid piss and shit. I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, the better to feed on the offal.

I've had kind, steadfast parents, loyal friends, intelligent and beautiful wives, genius children, and enlightened teachers. I have felt Christ within me in my darkest hours, restoring my soul (*Psalm 21*). Goodness and mercy have always followed me (*Psalm 25*). I believe the sins of my youth have been forgiven. The name "Jampa" means lovingkindness, and this quality, by the grace of the Lord, I have come ever closer to embody. Praise be! And this from the mouth of a Buddhist.

How do I reconcile my Judeo-Christian faith with that of Buddhism? I claim that it is easier to be a Buddhist and a Christian than it is to be a Christian and a Buddhist. The First Commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," is not a problem for a Buddhist, since we do not believe in a creator god. Gotama and other buddhas are women and men who are given respect because they have attained a state, called enlightenment, that is an understanding of the nature of mind, revealed as luminous, cognitive emptiness.

Buddha-mind is said to be, by those who have attained this realization, to be beyond description, but the path to enlightenment can be communicated. The Buddhist approach to the meaning of Life is understood within a psychological context, and the metaphysical approach of Christians, with the emphasis on proving God's existence independent of humans, is abandoned. The ontological solution is: nothing really exists in and of itself. Even Heidegger's inquiry into "Being" should be considered an etymological tempest in a teapot.

Raised in the Christian faith, I attended, first, a Methodist church and, then, Presbyterian churches. I was uncomfortable in church. The light coming through the stained glass windows was beautiful, but the wooden pews in the Methodist church were as hard to sit on as the sermon was hard to listen to. The pews in the Presbyterian churches were padded. This was a comfort, but the liturgy still seemed interminable. "That man, nailed to a cross, hanging on the wall, he must be in agony," I thought. "Is this what it's all about—torture? I would prefer to sleep in on Sunday morning." Eventually, I got my way.

Attending church for my parents was, for the most part, a social obligation, something they felt the family was expected to do. Their true belief system was Freemasonry: The Order of Free and Accepted Masons, for men, and The Order of Eastern Star, for women. For young men, there is The Order of DeMolay, and for young women, Job's Daughters. My sister, Lynda, and I were initiated, but I found it too stuffy. And formal attire was required, and I didn't find the girls I was asked to escort to dances attractive. (Dance couples were paired by a drawing of names sent from one lodge to another.)

After a surprise baptism in the basement of the High Street Presbyterian Church, in Oakland, I began to seriously question the whole religious rigmarole. It is true that Freemasons do not consider their brotherhood to be a religion, more a system of morality taught through signs and symbols, but they do recognize a Supreme Being, who is the "Great Architect of the Universe." Upon acquiring a copy of Bertrand Russell's *Why I'm Not a Christian* in a Sausalito bookstore, I decided on being skeptic.

The doctrine of skepticism, that certain knowledge cannot be proved absolutely, served me well once I entered the University of California, in Berkeley, and began a serious study of literature and

shift in narrative structure is done in oral traditions to segue into a different story for a different occasion. Here, the poet confesses to memory loss as a means to bring forward the story from primeval times to the present. The evolution of types of firearms, those first used by Spaniards and then by U.S. Army troops, symbolize the historical eras from the time of the first people to now. This sixth day can be considered the antistrophe of a classical Greek ode, where the chorus moves from west to east behind the altar, before the members sing in unison. The *vajra* (line 95) is a Tantric ritual implement, symbolizing skillful means. It may also be a nod to Namkai Norbu's "Song of the Vajra," an esoteric sound and movement practice that embodies the essence of the Vajrayana Ati Yoga teachings. These teachings relate to our potential to realize our true nature.

SEVENTH DAY (lines 80-108): A 20th century voice emerges with the mention of television, and this indicates where Richard Running Deer transmitted the story to Richard Sitting in Bookstore. These lines highlight local color and celebrate complicated social interactions. Coyote is still present, but Mother Nature is now related to the Great Bodhisattva, Tara, who can manifest in twenty-one forms and is the central tutelary deity at Tara Mandala Retreat Center. At the Continental Divide, there is not only a geographical divide, there is a cultural divide; coming from the East, you are now in the Old West. The seven hundred acres of Tara Mandala lie wedged between the Ute Indian Reservation, the San Juan National Forest and a large cattle ranch. Tara

The Conquistadors come
with their firesticks
the Bluecoats with their rifles
and now, we're in the time 80
of the third language,—Internet
Mother Nature looks over
the breast-shaped mountain
at Bobcat bounding
from an altar at Tara Mandala

A new moon
yip yap of Coyote
screech of Hawk
and drumming sounds
from a yurt at the base 90
of the Continental Divide

East meets west
we're back to basics
wood and water, water and wood
the energy of Vajra
song and dance

Our love of the land
is our comfort and strength
this the Ute people know
this the Buddha people know 100
the Sangha is a circle

Mormon country, so there are biblical names mixed with the indigenous people's names. People have special needs. Note bene, after placing the various animals including the humans, to the side, she tells the humans to shut up and focus on what she is doing (lines 43-47). Like the Israelites following Moses, they are grumbling (*Exodus* 16.8). Like the Israelites, these people want to be sure of their place in the scheme of things. In making a transition, ME does some fine tuning before giving each animal a place.

FOURTH DAY (lines 48-59): ME places various animals in their natural environments, but she does not allocate a place for the humans. Instead, similar to what Noah does in the biblical flood story (*Gen.* 8.7-10), she sends birds out to do reconnaissance.

FIFTH DAY (lines 60-71): Mother Earth invites the leaders of the peoples to a con-fab, where the people make promises (ref. God's covenant and the peoples' oaths of allegiance in *Exodus*). Mention of The Great Spirit (line 71), known as Wakan Tanka among the Sioux, is an abstract conception of a universal spiritual force (see *Sundance*, Jampa Dorje, D Press, Sebastopol, 2005) and is more in line with the omnipotent God of *Gen.* 1, predating ME and FS in this telling; or it is an import from another source.

SIXTH DAY (lines 72-79): At this juncture, the style of the narrative changes from an exposition about a related group of events to a highly compressed timeframe. This accordion-like

and the four-legged people
to the mountain and the plain

The two legged people
beg her to have their place
but first she tells

the winged people

to fly over the land

and report back to her

She invites the leaders

60

of the peoples to a circle

the Bear tells the humans

"I will give you wisdom

but you can't hunt me"

The Elk offers bones

for tools and hides for clothes

and meat for food

the Fish promises

to keep the river water clean

and the Eagle to carry

70

messages to the Great Spirit

And the story goes on

for a long time

and I may have forgotten

a part, like Coyote

promising to be a teacher

the sciences. Kept my mind open. And when I began to delve into philosophy, I could suspend judgment and accept the views of diverse thinkers. In both chemistry and physics, the empirical method is the Holy Grail of research, combining as it does the use of reason and experiential data. In literature, all the old gods appear and are carried forward into the present through literary allusions. It seems to me that just as science proceeds to dispel the realm of mystery, poetry and fiction renew the fountainhead.

I was unable to maintain a pure skepticism. I mingled the philosophies of the ancients with the moderns and combined mythologies into an egotistical form of Hedonism highly spiced with mushy mysticism. Poetry became my path and a pitfall. The classes I took from Walter Benesch at the University of Alaska in Eastern and Western Philosophy and from Bob Allen in English and Canadian Literature helped me firm the mysticism into a metaphysical foundation for my poems that synthesize visionary consciousness with a social conscience.

STRIVING WITH SYSTEMS

TO FREE OURSELVES f/SYSTEMS

As Blake saw

I find a place where rent is low

Gardens grow, pace is slow

Mushrooms blow

Whitehole/blackhole continuum

Rivers evaporate on Mars

40000 BCE at 8 'til eulenspiegael

While a child discovers its feet

A legislature extends its session

Into a series of telemetric sequences

Another unconscious police action

Uniting conditionally imagined
Noun phrase verb phrase strings
La Illa Ha Il Allah Hu
Either/or & both

GURU KHAN HUM PHAT
X-RAY CRISTALGRAPH
KRAZIGNATZKAT

Bohem's exegesis of Genesis
Buddhist Logic of Exists
Differential equations

Alpha-particular articulation that
I = an elliptical metaphor 4
Misononeismystic Presbyterianism

This anarchistic shotgun blast of imagery is from "intergallactic69pornoputer," a selection from my book, *Islam Bomb* (D Press, 1998). It dates to 1972, when I lived in Preston, Washington, and was decompressing from two intensive years of studying a vast array of subject matter. The poem traverses outer space and inner dimensions, hops from the funny papers to the holy scriptures, taps meta-language and mantra, hints at a government of cruelty and a garden of earthly delights. But what exactly is "misononeismystic Presbyterianism"?

Misononeismystic is a made-up word. "Mis" is a prefix that means mistaken, wrong, or simply acts to negate, as in "misprint"; "miso" is a word element referring to hate: "misononeism" means the hatred or dislike of that which is new, and "misonomer" is a misapplied name. "Mystic" has a variety of meanings, ranging from pertaining to something spiritually significant to something obscure or mysterious. I would guess that here it refers to some-

ing activity, following a seven day pattern for the creation story, marks the end of the second day. In *Gen. 1*, God creates by verbal command. Like God, in *Gen. 2*, ME, is more of a physical laborer; here, rather than being like a potter she is a farmer. The aspect of "always making corrections" (lines 33-35) posits a similarity between humankind and their creator, echoing *Gen. 1.26*, where God creates humans in His own image. This implies that the long term creation will be a work-in-progress.

THIRD DAY (lines 37-47): ME takes various animals ("peoples") from pockets in her dress. How and when the animals were created is not related. There is a Ute creation story told by Alden Naranjo, a revered Southern Ute Elder and a member of the Mouache and Caputa bands, (Utes who live on land adjacent to Tara Mandala) about a primeval time when Sinawava, the creator, sent the spirit, Coyote, with a bag of sticks, on a mission. Curious, as always, Coyote opened the bag, and humans escaped and ran in different directions. Coyote closed the bag. Later, after being asked what happened and Coyote had given his excuses, the bag was again opened, and the few remaining humans became the Southern Utes, who say they are without a migration myth, because they have always lived on this land (<https://www.southernute-nsn.gov/history/creation-story>). To the west, in Zion National Park, is a canyon (a natural amphitheater) worthy of the name, The Temple of Sinawava. Utah is

and she takes some seeds
from a pocket way in the back
that she's never used before 30

Pfff, pfff, over here
pfff, pfff over there
Mother Nature is a lot like us
she's never satisfied
always making corrections
pfff, pfff, pfff

Then she takes the water people
from a pocket near her hem
and sets them to one side
and the winged people 40
and the four-legged people
from yet other pockets

She takes the two-legged people
and sets them to one side
and says, "Pay attention
don't say anything
watch what I do, and I'll explain later"

This story goes on
Mother Nature adds
and subtracts, she points 50
the water people toward the valley

FIRST DAY (lines 1 thru 21): The planet Earth has already been created before the story begins; there is barren earth (“just dirt”) with contour lines. When compared to the creation stories in the Torah, the structure at this point resembles *Genesis 2.5*, where “no grasses of the field had yet sprouted”—however, rather than a single creator god, there is a primordial pair, named Mother Earth and Father Sky. They work in tandem, with the female deity doing the design and the male deity doing the heavy lifting by moving the sun from place to place, so Mother Earth can proceed with her work. Mother Earth is anthropomorphic. She wears clothes and uses her hands to make clouds and plant seeds. The *pff* sounds indicate her breath, similar to where God breathes life into Adam (*Gen. 2.7*). For a contemporary poet reciting this story into a microphone, there is a dramatic effect because the *pff* sound causes a *pop* sound (called “popping your Ps” by techies) to come from the speaker system. At first, ME is seated; the clouds leave; then, she stands and commands FS to move the sun closer, bringing heat to what she has planted.

SECOND DAY (lines 22-32): ME makes adjustments. After her work passes inspection, like in *Gen. 1.18* (“And God saw that this was good”), she continues working and commands FS to position the sun at a specific location. She selects some seeds (line 28) that she has “never used before,” suggesting that there have been previous cosmologies or different attempts at this creation. The conclusion of the landscap-

Before anything
 there was dirt
 a breast-shaped mountain
 a valley, a plain
 just dirt
 Mother Nature wearing
 a dress with many pockets
 looks over the land
 and bends low
 moving her hands 10
 she makes clouds

 Taking seeds from her pockets
 she throws a few here
 some there, some in the valley
 pfff, pfff, pfff
 Some on the plain, pfff, pff
 and on the mountain, pff
 she stands up and the clouds leave
 and she calls Father Sky
 “Bring the sun over here” 20
 this is on the first day
 On the second day
 she takes a look
 and makes adjustments
 she says to Father Sky
 “Take the sun back
 back further, over there!”

one who has attained insight into transcendental knowledge, a protestant mystic who has reached beyond systems of correspondence and fused with the Divine Substance. As for the connection with Presbyterianism, remember, I was a baptized Presbyterian. Once a Presbyterian, always a Presbyterian.

So, does “misononeismystic” mean anything? Probably not. It’s L=A=G=U=A=G=E poetry. Language constructed to be just language. I think I liked the sound, a kind of linguistic onomatopoeia of philosophical babble. I was in need of rest from the rigors of argument. I let sounds arise without reference and return to where they came from—into sound-emptiness-Buddha speech.

I came of age, during the Vietnam Era, in the vortex of a time when social values were in upheaval—in astrological terms, the planet Neptune, a sign representing fantasy, drugs, escapism, and spiritual quests, was in the sign of Scorpio, the first house of my natal chart—and I enthusiastically partook of mind-expanding drugs, practiced free-love, protested against war, torture and tyranny, and sought the meaning to life.

At the Berkeley Poetry Conference, in 1965, when I told Gary Snyder that I was going to Alaska to make money to start a bookstore in Berkeley, Gary told me to open my bookstore in the hinterlands, someplace that could benefit from my Berkeley experiences. Ellensburg, Washington, the geographical heart of the state, is where I set up shop.

My wife, Cheri, and I founded Four Winds Bookstore in 1978. The New Age Movement was starting to percolate. What for a while had been a small section of books in the store became a mainstay, during the 1980s. Books that were once considered esoteric now gained a popularity unheard of in the past. Occult treatises—from members of the Order of the Golden Dawn, as well of those of ancient philosophers—were dusted off and reprinted in new editions. Contemporary works on astrology, tarot, crystal healing, alchemy, numerology, and psychic channeling appeared. The divinatory arts were in ascendancy. Mysticism was now designated “metaphysics”, a term which had long been reserved for a branch of philosophy dealing with first principles, like the structure of the universe and the nature of being. The meaning was stretched to include poltergeists and Babylonian musical modes. I was not going to argue. The sale of these books paid the rent.

Chester Keller, the Chairman of the Philosophy Department at Central Washington University, became one of my best customers and a good friend. Chester made it possible for David Pond to get his master's degree in Experimental Metaphysics. It was an interdisciplinary degree with the Psychology Department, and Roger Fouts, the well-known primatologist, was on the committee. Roger had an interest in eastern philosophies and the mystical arts. I had many animated conversations with both Chester and Roger, as well as David, whose main interest was astrology and who went on to a successful career in this field.

David and his sister, Lucy, had a manuscript that utilized astrology, tarot, I Ching, numerology, and palmistry in answering your questions about life without needing prior experience in these branches of divination. It was a step-by-step book. I edited what was to become *The Metaphysical Handbook* from over 400 pages to 180 pages and readied it for print with illustrations by Jim Sorensen. In exchange for my contribution, David gave me a Texas Instruments contraption that printed out the exact degree and minute on the house cusps for the construction of astrological natal charts, and he spent considerable time showing me how to interpret these charts. I hung out a sign and made astrology and tarot readings a sideline to my business as a bookseller. Even after personal computers were being used to make charts, I continued drawing mine by hand. When asked why, I would reply, "A compass and a square alone were sufficient for God to create the World, and they'll do for me to make this chart for you."

Edward Sullivan, another Four Winds patron, overhearing me in conversation with someone touch upon the involvement of the Masons in the revolutionary politics of the 18th century, asked me if he would like a petition to join the local lodge. I considered this and decided it would be a wise move on three counts. I was curious about the "secret knowledge" rumored to be held by the Masons; also, I felt it would be beneficial to me as a businessman to be connected socially with others in my community through a fraternal organization; and finally, and most important, I knew it would please my father and heal, or go some ways towards healing, the riff in our relationship. So, I petitioned Ellensburg Lodge #39 of Free & Accepted Masons and was granted the right to enter as an "apprentice."

After my initiation as an Entered Apprentice, I took the Second



THE ANNOTATED EARTHDAY ODE

for Richard Running Deer

"Earthday" is an irregular ode, based on a creation story told by a Ute Medicine Man. The Medicine Man's name is Richard Running Deer. He was born October 16, 1939, in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the son of William Jewell and Virginia Meyer, and he died on October 20, 2012, in Mancos, Colorado. He was known worldwide for his ceremonies. This creation story was told to a group of Buddhists, sitting around an evening campfire at Tara Mandala, in 1992. These were the "pioneer days," before there were any permanent buildings at this remote retreat center. Then, each retreat season opened with a sweat lodge, a vision quest, and initiatory ceremonies into the Red Path. That night, Richard Running Deer was dressed in traditional garb, wearing buckskins ornamented with elaborate bead and quill work, a breast plate decorated with red and white trade beads, and a full eagle feather ceremonial headdress.

Later that night, after the ceremony, the story was reenacted in my dreams. Upon awakening, I transcribed the dream. I wrote without stopping, and after I read what I had written, I wrote a few lines to connect the tale to the evolving Tibetan Buddhist culture on the land.

Being the proprietor of Tara Mandala's bookstore, I was dubbed Richard Sitting in Bookstore by Richard Running Deer, after the medicine man approved my new telling of this creation story.

[A year later, upon hearing of the death of his mother and having a vision of her entering heaven, Acesius reversed his position, saying to his friend Alysia, “If women are good enough to enter heaven, they are certainly good enough to have a place in the clergy.”]

. . .

As for Easter, let the date set be a floating feast day in the spring, as a symbol of the renewal of life.

Degree of a Fellowcraft Mason, and finally the Third Degree of a Master Mason, all this occurring in 1985 and 1986. For a period of time, I attended meetings, participated in the work of the Lodge, and studied the lore. Then, I was asked to be an officer and took the Chair of the Junior Warden and, in the following year, the Chair of the Senior Warden. In 1990, I, Jampa Dorje (Richard Denner) was elected Worshipful Master of Ellensburg Lodge #39. The Lodge was full to capacity on the day of my installation, friends and family members and my brethren and their families, all wishing me success. I received a telegram from my father that congratulated me on this accomplishment and told how it was a proud moment for him to have his son be so honored. I felt jubilant that a generational gap between us had been spanned.

What with me being a Worshipful Master of a Masonic Lodge and a practicing astrologer and tarot reader, I began to have the reputation of being something of a Magus, and the Four Winds was rumored to be a den of wickedness with the Magus well on the road to perdition. Certainly, some thought so. Take Laurel. She was a young college co-ed, studying to be a grade school teacher, very beautiful, a fundamentalist Christian with a bubbly personality. I became her “project.” My name had probably come up in her youth group as someone who needed to be saved. I have a sixth sense about such things.

So, Laurel ventured to cross the threshold of this devil’s den to beard the rascal, as she liked to call me. We went for walks. We walked and walked and talked and talked. We drank cherry cokes at the Highway Grill. We went to the Liberty Theater to see *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, starring Max von Sydow. I’m a fan of biblical movies, have been since I was a child. *The Robe*, *Ben Hur* (both DeMille’s silent version and his remake), *The Chalice*, *Samson*, *The Ten Commandments*—I like the reverent tone. Even controversial films, like Scorsese’s *Last Temptation of Christ* and Mel Gibson’s *The Passion*, I give “two thumbs up.”

Laurel could tell that I loved Jesus, but that I was not going to be “reborn” in her version of the Gospels. She had run out of arguments, and I had not budged at all. I could tell that Laurel was feeling defeated; I could also tell that she was falling in love with me; and this posed a problem. I was not trying to undo her faith or convert her to my path. I made myself unavailable to her, and she soon got the News.

Living up to my reputation as a Magus, I developed a film script based on a William Butler Yeats story about a Celtic hero of folklore. This script was to become the video *Red Hanarhan*, which was aired on Ellensburg Community Television, starring Bruce McNaughty as Red, Beryl Reeves as the Most Beautiful Woman in the World, and myself as The Magus. It was cleverly staged and directed by Dan Herron using a vast array of old-time special effects and shot on locations in and around Ellensburg—The Last Chance Saloon, the ballroom above the Palace Café, and the abandoned train tunnel along Canyon Road on the way to Yakima. In the guise of the four elements, Kim Secunda played the part of Power; Carolyn Zick was Knowledge; and Jimmy Eisenberg, wearing black engineer boots and a diaphanous gown, was Pleasure. All the magic of this pagan folktale is captured.

Perhaps, there is a slight odor of sulfur around the youthful Jampa. I may have been baptized by the Devil, although I believe I am a man of love and I hope a brave man. If I have a fault, it is Pride, which is the failing of most poets. I am a Prince of Secrets and not a Prince of Darkness, I hasten to add. As a young man, I followed the ligaments of my desires. I could have curbed them; I chose not to. My desires at present are of a different order, yet I am learning to let them self-liberate. It is a difficult path but not futile.

After twenty years studying Hermetic Philosophy, I concluded the Science of God was mainly a vast system of correspondences—a word is a number is a color is a tone is a mineral is a planet is a god—and that a divinatory epistemology distorts knowledge. If all of existence is based on interdependent relationships, fine and good; let's get on with living. The Buddha claimed that if you train your mind and achieve enlightenment, everything else falls into place. I was convinced of this and decide to practice the art of meditation.

the Son, and the Holy Spirit to a more Gnostic view with the Holy Spirit being first in the order of emergence.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters [Gen. 1:1-2].

Before the creation, there was a formless void, and out of this void, God created the earth. The Spirit (although some say that the word merely means “wind”) appears at the time of the creation of the earth, but what existed before God? If the void existed before God, with God appearing out of this emptiness, God would not be eternal and would occupy the second part of the equation, with the Son taking third place. Emptiness (an abstract concept), followed by God (imaginable but human-like, since we are made in his image), and, lastly, the Son. In this scenario, God would be some form of arithmetical anomaly in space and time, an abstract first principle, producing Himself, like an accidental “vacuum” arising within the void, and the divinity of God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would be diminished to zilch. Any attempt to place a specific value scale on the divinity of the Trinity will limit omnipresence and omnipotence of their existence. Therefore, a simpler and more elegant solution [Acesius anticipates *Ockham's razor*] is to say that the Son is 100% divine and 100% human. Otherwise, we will be eternally debating this matter in hell.

Concerning women being considered for the priest hood and the date for Easter:

There is one belief that God created both man and woman in his image. If this were so, God would be hermaphroditic. And this won't do. Just look at women. They have none of the proportions of classical male beauty. Women are emotional and have no intellectual capability. They were made from Adam's rib, a part of man, and are deformed creatures. According to Aristotle (and who would doubt Aristotle?) they have fewer teeth than a man. They must remain in a subservient role in both civic and religious, service.

It is said Jesus was not divine because he died on the cross. Although He later ascended into heaven, the question remains, why couldn't Jesus, if he was God, save himself. Humans must die to be reborn. If they abide in Jesus, they will be reborn and, on the Day of Judgement, ascend into heaven (or not). Jesus shows the way humans will discover their divinity. Why doubt the omnipotence of God?

Getting into heaven is a bigger problem. I agree with Novatus. If a person has forsaken their vows, they should not be readmitted to the congregation. I know this is a severe position, the position of a purist, and I have been admonished by Emperor Constantine ("Acesius," he said, "take a ladder, and climb up to heaven alone.") and I was humbled [https://biblehub.com/library/sozomen/the_ecclesiastical_history_of_sozomenus/chapter_xxii_acesius_bishop_of_the.htm]. Still, I persist in my belief that those who have fallen from the faith during the times of persecution, or who have committed any mortal sin after baptism, should not be admitted to the church, even if they repent. In general, it sets a bad

Some will say that we can be saved at the last minute, if we confess our sins, and they source this idea to the story of the thief on the cross. Of the four Gospel writers, only Luke speaks of a thief being saved (*Luke 23: 42-43*). Mark and John don't mention any thieves. Matthew mentions two thieves but says that both taunted him (*Matt. 27:44*). Why believe Luke rather than the others? [I take this question from a speech by Vladimir in Act 1 of Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*.] We all want the chance to be saved from our sinful ways, especially in our last moments on earth. Redemption and salvation will not be easy for those of us who have lost their faith. The salvation of the thief on the cross is the exception because he was present with our Lord at the Crucifixion. Now are the End Times, and without God's intercession, there is not enough time to complete the necessary penance to be truly purified.

Argument for God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit being of one substance, like a blanket with three folds, rather than an egg with three parts:

I have argued in my book, *The Transmission of All-inclusive Mind*, the danger in resetting the order of procession as the Father,



ART AS MEDITATION MEDITATION AS ART

In this essay, I will reveal how the activity of consciousness for a viewer of art can be considered an informal practice of mindfulness meditation and, in turn, how a formal practice of mindfulness meditation can be considered to be an aesthetic experience. I will compare and contrast Eastern and Western descriptions of meditation experiences and aesthetic experiences to show how the approach of mindfulness meditation, as described by cognitive science and Tibetan Buddhist practices can enhance the enjoyment of art, and how theories of Western philosophy are useful in understanding Eastern meditational practice, as well as to enhance the creative process.

There are a complex set of interrelated components which make up the world of art. Museums and their curators, critics, art historians, philosophers (And what would art be without theories?), gallery owners, auction houses, concert halls, book stores, coffee houses, churches, parks, streets, subway platforms, wherever paintings can be hung, poetry read, music played, dances danced;—and then there are the artists, art viewers, and, of course, the

artworks. John Dewey compares art to language. He notes that each art has a language of its own. “The hearer,” he writes, “is an indispensable partner. The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it... There is the speaker, the thing said, and the one spoken to” (CP 211). A visual language is a system of communication using visual elements. Just as people can verbalize their thinking, they can also visualize it using a diagram, a map, or a painting that involves elements such as line, color, form, motion, texture, pattern, and space.

On one side of the equation we have the viewer, the transmutation of the viewer’s consciousness, and that which the artist has expressed; and, on the other side, we have the artist, the process of making the painting, and what the artist wants to express. Somewhere, in between, is the artwork. Benedetto Croce writes, “The artist produces an image or picture. The person who enjoys art turns his eyes in the direction which has been pointed out to him, peers through the hole which has been opened for him, and reproduces in himself the artist’s image” (CP 116). For Croce, what we feel, what passes through the work of art, is what is important. Art does not represent emotion; it expresses emotion. The matrix of a meditation involves the meditator, a non-active space (awareness), and the inner expression of feelings, sensations, and ideas. Those practicing meditation are attempting a close and harmonious inter-relationship with themselves in an attempt to experience and, in turn, understand their feelings and ideas. In this sense, a meditation is also an aesthetic experience.

I am a thinking being, and I can ask questions about the nature of my very existence in the universe. One might ask, as did Martin Heidegger, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Heidegger argues that Western thinking has lost sight of the significance of the meaning of Being. Human beings take their existence for granted, and do not understand what it means to Be. For Heidegger, there is a difference between beings, spelled with a lower case “b” and Being. The first deals with separate things (things that can be described) and the latter deals with how these things are understandable as things. In this sense, Being (with a capital “B”) is more of a verb than a noun. The real question, for Heidegger, is what is it to be a being?, and he feels that an artwork can give a viewer an insight into this kind of knowledge. I am not arguing for the correctness of Heidegger’s idea, only that it is one way of looking at an artwork that resembles a mindfulness medita-

Absolute that exists outside of time and space. It is said that a thing is the sum of its parts. If you remove the legs from a chair, the chair is no longer a chair, but the idea of a chair remains. It is easy to see that things are impermanent, that the only permanent characteristic things have is that they change. In the realm of the Absolute, things do not change. In the world of change, according to Plato, we get glimpses of the eternal realm of Forms [see “Allegory of the Cave” at the beginning of Book VII of the *Republic*]. Goodness is what every soul pursues [*Rep.* 506a]. Just as we need light from the natural sun to give us power to see earthly objects, the Good, which is the substantive base of our human soul, being the cause as well as the result, contains an epistemological structure (good-truth-beauty) that informs our methodological path to experience the Good. Images are reflections of objects; objects are reflections of forms; and forms unlock the metaphysical principles that allow us to reach God. In *Genesis* 1:3-4, God said, “Let there be light” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. With the light of reason we can discover our right relationship to God by seeking the good and forgoing evil.

. . .

There is a belief that God is 100% divine, that Jesus was born human and became divine upon His baptism. In *Matthew* 3:15, Jesus stated that he must be baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

Let it be so now for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.

If God and Jesus are, at this point, both 100% divine, and Jesus can redeem humans from sin, then humans are potentially of the same substance, a substance that can become divine, and humans simply don’t know this. The possible transubstantiation of man is revealed by Jesus Christ in His baptism. As it says in *John* 4:15, Jesus is the means to this end:

God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.

. . .

Jesus, by inference, is God the Father, when Jesus rebukes the Devil after being offered all the kingdoms of the world in *Luke* 4:12. Jesus answered him:

It is said, "do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Throughout the Gospels, the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit are of one substance. Jesus is with God; Jesus is God; Jesus is responsible for all things attributed to God. That the Word become flesh is revealed in *John* 1:14.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

In *John* 8:21, Jesus comes and goes from earth to heaven:

Again he said to them, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come."

In *John* 10:22, Jesus is the Messiah, speaking to the Jews:

Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. the works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe..."

All of this is summed up at the onset of *John* 1:1-3. John says:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

. . .

Phenomena that have tripartite being pose a language problem. How is one to describe a condition that operates with a three-value system of logic (both/and) utilizing a two-value system of logic (either/or)? A thing in a two-value system must either be or not be. It cannot both be and not be at the same time. This is true for objects that exist in time and space. This is not the case for an

tion. A meditator is a being, for whom the meaning of Being can be experienced in the process of meditation.

The meditator finds what Buddhists call the "monkey mind"—the chatter, the static, the tumbling of thoughts and feelings, without seeing the background, the nature of mind, the ground of consciousness. The main difficulty is in observing the mental process, let alone is in being able to think about thinking. The means to this end lie with mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation can be done sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, although beginners tend to fall asleep in the prone position. Keeping your back straight is important for form's sake and for helping you to breathe evenly. Take a breath, and notice your breath. Don't change your breathing, but focus on the sensation of the air moving in and out of your lungs. As thoughts come into your mind and distract you from observing your breathing, acknowledge those thoughts and return to focusing on your breathing. Don't judge yourself or try to ignore distractions. Merely notice that your mind has wandered, and bring your attention back to your breathing.

The trick is to develop a disinterested attitude about physical and mental discomforts and still remain interested in the process of meditation. The key is to relax, and this is accomplished by what might be called a process of constructive rest as a means to bring about an attunement of the activities of the body and the mind. In meditation, as mentioned above, there are two sides of the practice. The first, *Vipassana*, in the Buddhist tradition, means insight into the true nature of reality where impermanence, suffering, and the absence of any unified sense of self are realized to be our human condition. *Samatha*, in the Buddhist tradition, is the practice of calming the mind and allowing the formation of conceptual frameworks (ideas) to be diminished. As shown above, this is done by practicing the kind of single-pointed meditation most commonly done through the practice of mindful breathing. The combination of these two approaches to the mind, in the Western cognitive sciences, is called mindfulness meditation.

Training this monkey mind is discussed by Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch in their book, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*:

How can this mind become an instrument for knowing itself? How can the flightiness, the nonpresence of mind

be worked with?...The purpose of calming the mind in Buddhism is not to become absorbed but to render the mind able to be present with itself long enough to gain insight into its own nature and functioning...[As] the meditator again and again interrupts the flow of discursive thought and returns to be with his breath or his daily activity, there is a gradual training of the mind's restlessness. One begins to see the restlessness as such and to be patient with it...Eventually meditators report periods of a more panoramic perspective. This is called awareness (24).

Although not a typical practice while viewing art, it would be helpful to develop the samatha focus, since the average time that many viewers look at a piece of artwork is between two and three seconds. Conversely, looking at the mind in a more playful fashion, like one looks at a painting, would take some of the heavy ponderousness out of the meditational procedure.

Questions will arise concerning the artist's intent, the artist's life experience, and who or what influences the artist's art practice. One can compare the artwork to other artworks (standard categories) and how they differ from those categories, compare the artwork to other works by the same artist, compare the works to other works in the same gallery, look to see if there is a narrative or whether or not the work makes a statement or is a symbol of something else. And, then, there is the artwork's construction, how the paint is applied, its texture, the colors and shapes in the composition, whether the composition is balanced, if there is one perspective or many or none. Whether information from a broader context is used to better understand a piece of art or whether one stays within the formal constraints of the artwork itself, the viewer's personal interaction and response to the literal and expressive qualities of the artwork are engaged.

These questions about a work of art can also be asked about a meditative experience, about the meditator's own awareness, of her mental and emotional activity. What color is the mind? Does the mind have a shape? Where do the thoughts/feelings appear from? Where do they go? Is there a steady rhythm? Is there clarity or are the thoughts/feelings muddled? Is there a

All the above subjects are of great importance. However, none of the subjects is as important as our need to resolve disagreements arising over the relationship of the Son to the Father? Is the Son *begotten* by the Father from his own being and, as such, has no beginning, or was He created out of nothing and has a beginning? Against Arius, I am with the Alexandrian faction.

It is my belief that our creed should commit the church to the following precepts [What follows is a paraphrase of the Nicene Creed as it was adopted at the First Council in 325CE, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicene_Creed]: *We must state, unequivocally, that we believe in one God, the Father Almighty, who was the creator of all things, in both the visible and the invisible worlds. We believe in Jesus Christ, who was the Son of God and the only one begotten by God. We, also, believe in the Holy Spirit, and both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are of the same essence as the Father, not made afterwards by God the Father, but of one substance with the Father and with the Father from the beginning. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, came down to earth and was incarnate as a man, suffered for our sins, died on the cross, and on the third day ascended into heaven. At the end of time, Jesus Christ will judge us, both the living and the dead. I also want to emphasize that those who say: "There was a time when he was not;" and "He was not before he was made;" and "He was made out of nothing," or "He is of another substance" or "essence," or "The Son of God is created," or "changeable," or "alterable" are to be condemned.*

Overview of One Substance stance based on scriptural authority

That the Father and the Son are of One substance. In *Matthew* 11:27, Jesus said:

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

That Jesus is from the Holy Spirit can be found in *Matthew* 1:20. An angel tells Joseph:

...Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

that we may have God as our guide and the power of the Lord as our aid, to direct the course of our work in a satisfactory direction.

[Note: I compiled some of the data from entries in *Wikipedia*: Constantine, Novatian, Acesius, First Council of Nicaea, Libya, Christianity in Libya, and Early Libyan Churches. Some phrases were taken from Eusebius's *Church History* and from a Masonic document, *Protocol of the Imperial Council and Imperial Court*, online. The joke, to which I added details, is an old one.]

TOWARDS THE FORMATION OF A CREED

My fellow bishops, I pray that the Heavenly Spirit is upon us and that we may have God as our guide and the power of the Lord as our aid to direct the course of our work in a satisfactory direction.

This is the first ecumenical council of the Church. It is convened to create a uniform Christian doctrine, a creed. With the creation of a creed, we will have laid a foundation on which both local and regional synods will be able to create orthodox statements of belief. A momentous opportunity is present. The creed we produce will enable us to define the unity of beliefs for the whole of Christendom.

There is much to be resolved. Among the subjects to be debated are the following: castration among the clergy; ordination among the recently converted; women living with the clergy, women's roles in the church; ordination requirements in general; excommunication and how to appeal; the supervisory role of Alexandria, Rome, etc.; the status of Jerusalem's bishop; the readmission of the dualistic *cathari*; what to do with priests who were improperly examined before ordination; the removal of clergy who are discovered to have fallen; readmission of others that have fallen from the faith, such as those returning from the military; the communion for the dying; lapsed catechumens; what to do with transient members of the clergy and of those who receive transient clergy; the problem of usury; the conduct of deacons; the followers of Paul of Samostia; and when we should kneel or stand while praying. Also, the date for Easter must be decided. [This list is from *Fourth Century Christianity*, Wisconsin University, "Canons of the Church," <https://www.fourthcentury.com/nicaea-325-canons>.]

point of view? Who is viewing? Where is the viewer in all of this? For Buddhists, there is no isolated, permanent self that is a viewer. This has been a contentious point for many Western philosophers and psychologists. Yet, there are philosophers, as well as researchers in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and artificial intelligence who have revealed the tenuousness of this belief in an integrated self. Daniel Dennett presents a model of consciousness based on "verifiable" information in his book, *Consciousness Explained*:

There is no single, definitive "stream of consciousness," because there is no central Headquarters, no Cartesian Theater where "it all comes together" for the perusal of a Central Meaner. Instead of such a single stream (however wide), there are multiple channels in which specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemoniums, to do their various things, creating Multiple Drafts as they go (253-54).

The multiple drafts are the different ideas that arise in the mind and are held for a period of time. An idea arises; then, this idea liberates itself, and another idea arises. Ideas keep arising, until enough data are accumulated to form a more comprehensive understanding; then, the earlier ideas are abandoned. Likewise, in Dzog Chen (or Ati Yoga in the Tantric Buddhist tradition), concepts are resolved in openness, or self-liberated.

In his *Treasury of Natural Perfection*, the 14th century meditation master, Longchen Rabjam, better known as Longchenpa, writes:

Here is the essential meaning of resolution in openness:

Coming from nowhere, abiding nowhere and going nowhere,

External events, unoriginated visions in empty space, are ineffable;

Internal events, arising and released simultaneously,

Like a bird's flight-path in the sky, are inscrutable (15).

In the activity of an aesthetic experience, the viewer looks at a painting and finds that this is a space for the play of consciousness, a place to get lost, a place to spend time and learn something new. The viewer, becoming a thinking Eye, can experience the painting as communicating something in a different language than words through the aesthetic experience. With practice, the

viewer can sense another Eye sitting behind this eye, a primal Eye, sometimes referred to as the Third Eye, or gnosis (in the sense of insight into the metaphysical basis for the ground of consciousness). This is the ground of the ground, that which, no matter how it is supposed to be, isn't definable and yet is experienced as present awareness, a kind of self-reflective cognitive emptiness. Again, Longchenpa describes thoughts resolved in pure vision:

The intangible Samadhi that lacks any field of meditation,
Pristine, simple, intrinsic gnosis,
Consumes all events in consummate resolution,
And all experience spent, itself is consumed.
Since the consuming or non-consuming is resolved in absence,
Its existence as ineffable is never in question.
What is, is a vast non-referential panorama,
All experience consummate, 'no mind!'
And that is the yogin's delight! (113).

Concentration brings about a blockage of external and internal distractions, and the normal experience of time, as moving from one moment to the next, is transcended, wherein the yogin shares the same consciousness as the Buddha. Thought does not cease; indeed, if it did, you'd be dead. Awareness of the nature of mind is present, but the attachment to ideas and feelings are overcome and cease to be of primary importance and begin to recede into the background. If the mind wanders, no matter—an artist might suggest you shift your focus to the negative space. Or, take this printed page you are presently reading, and think of the white space as “contemplative awareness” and the printed words as “ideas” or “feelings” in consciousness. If all the ink that the letters are made of is pressed together at the corner of the page, it would take up a very small area of the white space of the literal page, and in terms of the main focus of the mind (bare awareness), the ink (ideas) could be considered as insignificant.

In his book, *The Psychology of Contemporary Art*, Gregory Minisale reports that “various psychological studies suggest that creative insights occur in the state when the mind is relaxing from tasks that require our full attention” (240). Normally, it is assumed

agreed among the parishioners that this was a safe bet because the bishop was well known for his difficult riddles.

In the ghetto, the people were asking, “Who is our wisest man?” After much debate, it was decided that Izzie, the tailor, was the best choice, although his wife, Deborah, whose namesake can be found in *Judges 5:7*, was a strong second choice.

On the appointed day, Izzie arrived at the gate of the castle. He showed his pass and was escorted to the grand entry hall of the building. He was amazed by the embroidery on the massive tapestries hanging from the ceiling, as he climbed a marble staircase. He was ushered into a room and seated in an ornate chair at one end of a long table. The fate of his people was to be determined by his ingenuity in answering the bishop's riddles.

The bishop, wearing his mitre and robes, entered the room with two priests. The priests stood at attention on either side of the bishop, once he was seated. After a pause, the bishop raised the forefinger of his right hand in the air. Izzie, moving his arm in a dramatic arch, pointed his finger at the table top. Then, the bishop pointed a finger directly at Izzie, and Izzie, in rapid response, pointed two fingers back at the bishop. The bishop smiled and, from a side pocket, presented an orange. In response, Izzie presented a piece of matzo.

After Izzie had departed, the priests beseeched the bishop to tell them the outcome of the debate, whether the Jew had satisfactorily answered the bishop's riddles or not. The bishop was ecstatic. “I have never met a wiser man in my life. I said, ‘God is in heaven,’ and he said, ‘but some believe he has also been on earth.’ Then, I said, ‘There is only one God,’ and he said, ‘There are those who believe he has two other manifestations.’ I said, ‘Some believe the earth is round,’ and he said, ‘Others say it is flat.’ The Jews can stay where they are.”

Meanwhile, in the ghetto, Izzie was nearly crushed by the throng wanting to know their fate. “Do we have to leave, or can we stay?” they clambered. “That bishop,” said Izzie, “what a schmuck. He said, ‘Your people must leave.’ And I said, ‘We are going to stay right here.’ He said, ‘I'm going to poke out one of your eyes,’ and I said, ‘I'll poke out both of yours.’ He took out an orange; I took out a piece of matzo; and we had lunch.”

My fellow bishops, I pray that the Heavenly Spirit is upon us and

Let me introduce myself. I am Titus Flavius Acesius, Bishop of Libya. I was born in the first year of the reign of Emperor Diocletian [284 CE] in the port city of Leptis Magna, a part of the prosperous Africa Nova province, Tripolitania. The hills in the countryside of my homeland are covered with olive trees. The city has always depended upon the fertility of its crops, and olive oil is one of our chief exports. My father, Marcus Aurelius Acesius, was a successful merchant. He was absent much of the time, and my mother, Antonia, who was very religious and very devout, raised my older brother, Claudius, my younger sister, Julia, and myself.

My brother, a robust and rather aggressive young man, was destined to take over the family business. I might have followed this path; however, because of my frail health and my interest in books, my father decided I would have more success in the clergy. He had connections, and through his beneficence I acquired a teacher and learned to read and write. I proved to have excellent academic qualifications but was totally inexperienced with the practicalities of daily living.

Later, I traveled to Alexandria and studied in both the Catechetical School and the Museion, where I gained a great deal of reverence for the teachings of the Roman presbyter Novatus, sometimes called Novatian. Although I have been influenced by his penetrating and rigorous arguments concerning the substance of the Trinity, I have managed to stay out the political turmoil in which he was embroiled.

I studied classical Greek philosophy and literature, focusing mainly on Plato and the Stoics. I am also familiar with pre-Christian Jewish esotericism and Gnosticism. I read Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. I have written two treatises: *Trove de Trinitate ac Pretioso* (*A Precious Treasury of the Trinity*) and *Derivationem Omnia Mentem* (*The Transmission of All-inclusive Mind*). These works are unknown to you, because they have only circulated among a small audience. You are all learned men. At this point, I prefer not to impress you with my erudition. I would rather tell you a salient story to set a tone for the debates to follow.

In a distant diocese, there was a ghetto of Jews outside a castle inhabited by a clever bishop, who shall go unnamed. The parish wanted these Jews to disperse, but the bishop, being a fair man, said he would give them a chance to stay, if they produced their wisest man on a certain day to answer his newest riddles. It was

that it is harmful to the learning process for the mind to wander or that errors can occur in the processing of information if attention is not paid to details. However, as Minissale points out:

In an art exhibition, in the process of examining a particular artwork, or when watching a film, there is no pressure to process incoming stimuli in a particular order, and quite often mind wandering is encouraged (ibid.).

The mind wanders, and, then, comes back into attentiveness; and when this attentiveness is extended over a period of time, a sense of losing oneself becomes a state of absorption. In a mindfulness meditation one tries to observe whatever comes into awareness, feelings and thoughts, without holding onto or pursuing them.

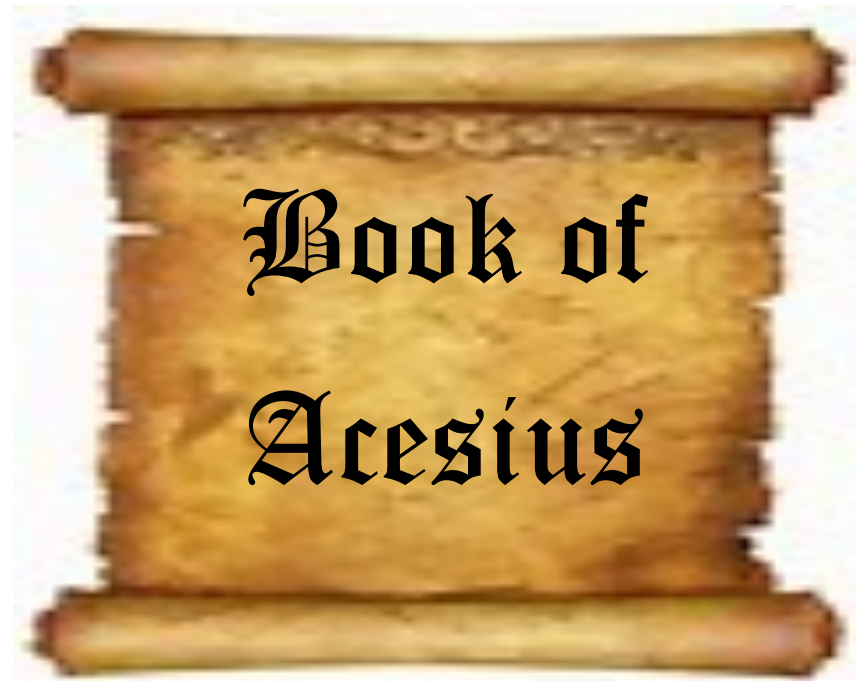
A thought experiment: I posit my extended viewing of Darwin Davis's untitled sculpture in front of the Language and Literature Building on the CWU campus (see back cover photograph). My viewing has both objective and subjective elements. This metal sculpture is made of a rising, continuous, visual line. This "line" is formed of fabricated steel with a dimension of eight inches on each side. The line rises six feet from a concrete base and curves outward three feet and returns in the opposite direction before turning in a converse direction and then curving again upward to a height of fifteen feet. The sculpture has a strong design element, reveals fine welding technique, and displays a natural patina of rust. I walk around it, and it seems to change shape, the vertical and horizontal converge into different patterns and shapes, as my movements around the sculpture seem to compose it, bringing different aspects of the sculpture into view as a form of active involvement, helping me to feel the sculpture's dimensionality, and this perceptual awareness is accompanied by intuitions of passing time, time seeming to unfold in experience and space within what I perceive in the immediate present being a retention of perceptions just past, and this retention in the present overlaps in the perception that is coming to be, not isolated from others or fixed alone in time but flowing into each other, continually becoming different, going nowhere, and I return to where I began with the sculpture not having moved from where it is. Here, past, present, and future coalesce in my meditation, as I process ideas and impressions.

The usual way of looking at art does not normally involve breathing exercises and is generally just a random looking at an object until the viewer “gets” something from it. With the use of a more developed meditational approach, a deeper aesthetic condition presents itself. This is not a cognitive state but an intuitive state of consciousness, arrived at through a creative process of looking. Here, the mind can wander and become an aid to experiencing a level of reality that is free of all endeavor, where appearances and sensations are neither good nor bad, where everything can be experienced without naming, without discursiveness, without fixation, and without any point of reference,—where meditation and art viewing coincide and the utterly ineffable experience of body and mind is unified.

Dzog Chen takes the mindfulness meditation a step further. After the nature of mind is pointed out by a master,—then, one realizes both relative and absolute are concepts of the mind and that ideas liberate themselves, if the meditator refrains from attaching and clinging to them. The essence of mind is emptiness (transience, impermanence), but still awareness manifests. The same is found to be true for the nature of reality. The essence of objects is emptiness; yet their nature is to arise spontaneously in the mind. In *The Treasury of Natural Perfection*, Longchenpa says:

When nothing whatsoever is perceived as real in essence, the duality of delusion and freedom from delusion is resolved, and thereupon we lose any preference for samsara [the relative] or nirvana [the absolute]” (116).

Kant characterizes the aesthetic experience as an act of feigning disinterestedness, and this is true for meditation, as well. But the focused aesthetic and meditative experience also produces what Baumgarten calls a *vivid experience* and Longchenpa calls a *clear, luminous experience*. It could be said that all experience is aesthetic experience, based on the perspective that all experience is perception. Like Croce, I take the position that art does not exist independently of the experience of art. Therefore, an understanding of the aesthetic experience is important in arriving at a definition of art. George Santayana, in *The Sense of Beauty*, developed the idea that an aesthetic experience is one that does not involve pleasure for a specific part of the body, but is rather “a lifting out



Salutations from the Synod of Libya to our most illustrious potentate, Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus, known as Constantine the Great. Praise be that his majesty is in good health and has called together this august body of representatives of our Holy Church from the far reaches of the empire to this convocation. Salutations, as well, to Bishop Hosius of Corduba, our Senior Council Officer, and to the right illustrious elected council officers.

Since the time of Our Savior, Jesus Christ, taught in Galilee, Our Holy Church has been confronted by obstacles, as it spread the Good News to distant lands. We true believers, as well, have undergone hardships, as we traveled from these distant lands to reach this most-favored City of Nicaea in the province of Bithynia, and we face further hardships in our mission unless we attain consensus on church doctrine in this assembly representing all of Christendom.

of ourselves” and an appreciation that involves no wish to possess what is being appreciated:

A first approach to a definition of beauty has therefore been made by the exclusion of all intellectual judgments, all judgments of matter of fact or of relation (20).

Aesthetic and moral judgments are classed together in contrast to intellectual judgments; they are both judgments of value, whereas intellectual judgments are judgments of fact. Santayana makes a distinction between aesthetic and moral values, between work and play—work will be action that is necessary and useful, while it will seem that play is frivolous. To the contrary, he argues, “For it is in the spontaneous play of his faculties that man finds himself and his happiness” (27). It is in the contemplation and appreciation of beauty that man is most himself.

The interplay between mind openness and mind focus is echoed in the concept of play by Friedrich Schiller. In *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (a collection of letters addressed to Friedrich Christian, a Danish prince, at the end of the 18th century), Schiller tries to show the development of mankind through a series of stations, from the physical to the rational, and he believes that the aesthetic experience will develop a human being’s moral behavior. In the fifteenth letter, Schiller claims that “play” is the principal expression of the human spirit and that it reconciles the divisions which civilization has produced in the human condition. Schiller divides the creative impulse into the desire for sense (the body), the desire for form (the mind) and the desire for play. He believes that the development of the play impulse reconciles the dichotomy:

Reason demands, on transcendental grounds, that there shall be a partnership between the formal and the material impulse, that is to say a play impulse, because it is only the union of reality with form, of contingency with necessity, of passivity with freedom that fulfils the conception of humanity (77).

How to raise human consciousness to this level is the challenge, but a sustained aesthetic appreciation of reality and the nature of mind through meditational stability would be a start. Meditation allows one to freely relate to both the inner and outer worlds.

I have shown that the process of a formal meditation and of an art viewing experience are much alike. It seem to me that the process of creating an artwork also has a meditational component. In terms of applying meditational techniques to the creative process, I have worked at deconstructing my identity through the use of Tantric Buddhist meditation using deep visualization and mantra in my traditional three-year retreat combined with the literary device of playing with multiple personae.

In the process of dismantling structures and looking at them from different points of view, I abandoned the idea of an author, as suggested by Roland Barthes and echoed by Michel Foucault, and I began writing my autobiography in a third-person persona, and the role of this subject, and the subject of the subject, in this pseudo-biography is another persona, masked by the author, something like an *authoranymous* (half-anonymous and half-known) being is calling me to account for myself; and this, then, challenges my assumption of being free and autonomous in the world, as well as in the writing. If I peel away the layers of the façade of the author, I find a dialogue with myself as I experience the world.

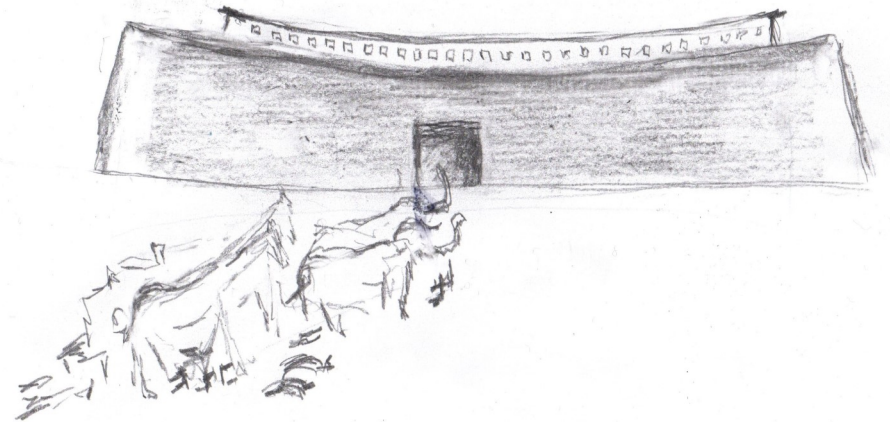
In Tantric practice, the emphasis is on the intrinsic purity of all being. The process of receiving a transfusion of information from a tutelary deity through meditation involves two stages, creation and completion. Deity practice does the purifying. The visualizations of the creation stage undermine one's sense of the solidity of the material world. In these practices, the true nature of mind is considered to be beyond intellect and description, and it is the power of devotion that allows the practitioner to accomplish the practice. Recognizing that the visualization of the creation stage is an illusion, the wonder of this creation dissolves back into the ground. The use of the deity, called a *yidam*, is to tether the mind while it is in the process of purifying mental obscurations, such as the idea of a permanent ego, or self. Each of the five buddhas in the deity mandala represent a kind of wisdom, and coming into contact with these wisdoms allows each practitioner a means to deconstruct the paradigm of a permanent self. This process of deconstruction can be thought of as a kind of play activity, that is an activity that involves active meditational practices in the process of creation.

Over a period of years, parallel to my Buddhist practices, I have played with developing a number of literary personae: Bouvard

. . .What do we do with this? How do we connect this with this understanding? For me, it was obvious that it was connected to survivor's guilt or some kind of guilt about doing something wrong.

This is plausible enough, although the film raises as many questions as it solves. Whose brilliant idea was it to get the animals to lie down? Is the curse of Canaan (*Gen. 9:23*) now extirpated? How does Methuselah, a mortal, become the healer of infertility and not an Angel of the Lord? What might happen with this altered gene pool? With the seas rising due to global warming, is God rescinding his covenant?

But, as they say, "It's only a movie." Regarding the last question, only time will tell.



theme that was posited at the beginning of the film. During an interrupted ceremony, where Noah's father, Lamech, is passing his lineage to his son, a sacred snakeskin talisman is lost. In Aronofsky's rendering, this heirloom is stolen by Tubal-cain (Ray Winstone) and is later given to Ham, who, at the end of the film, gives it back to Noah. Rightfully, it belongs to Shem, since he is the firstborn. Ham relinquishes his place in the family structure and, like Cain, becomes a wanderer. Aronofsky works in another touch of Cain and Abel allegory, when Shem (Douglas Booth) is sent by Noah to find his brother and returns without him.

Tubal-cain is mentioned in *Genesis* 4:22, as the one who "forged all implements of copper and iron." Not all Tanakh lists agree, but in *Genesis* 4:22, Tubal-cain is listed as a son of Lamech; in *Genesis* 5:25, Methuselah is said to have begot Lamech; in *Genesis* 5:29, Lamech begot Noah;—so, Tubal-cain would be Noah's older brother (or older half-brother, since the name of Noah's mother is not mentioned). Aronofsky's understanding of Tubal-cain being a worker in metals connects to the iridescent material that is being mined in the film. There seems to be shifting technology in play.

One of the most tenebrous parts of the Noah story is in the post-flood stage, after Noah has become a drunkard (*Gen.* 9:21). It is in this verse where Ham views his father's nakedness. These events have spawned an ongoing debate around there being some kind of sexual act—Ham masturbating on his father's prone body in disrespect, a rape or a castration of Noah by Ham, or that Ham "seeing his father's nakedness" (*Gen.* 9:22) is to be interpreted only as sign of disrespect in seeing Noah in an immodest pose. Aronofsky has set the stage for the latter, more literal interpretation. Noah feels he has failed God by not keeping his promise to end humanity because he failed to sacrifice Illa's twin daughters. Aronofsky does not emphasize God's command, "Be fertile and increase, and fill the earth" (*Gen* 9:1). Noah's failure to understand God's plan, combined with a full dose of post-traumatic stress, has led him into drunkenness. In the Falsani interview, Aronofsky says:

Noah just follows whatever God tells him to do. So that led us to believe that maybe they were aligned, emotionally, you know? And that paid off for us when you get to the end of the story and [Noah] gets drunk. .

Pécuchet, a historian and critic; Jubal Dolan, a skalawag; Rychard Artaud, a collage artist; Jampa Dorje, a monk and scholar; and Thuragania, a pre-Socratic woman philosopher. They each have their own body of artwork—paintings, poems, novels, critical works, and letters—and the personalities of these characters seem aligned to the weakness and strengths of the five Buddha deities. The white deity of the Buddha Family is intellectual; the red Padma Family deity is magnetic and dramatic and tragic. Blue Dhramakaya deity purifies with space. The yellow Ratna deity, is artful and nurturing. The green, All-accomplishing One is powerful and successful, and each liberates the self from attachment and clinging. After much practice, I wind up with five literary personae/tutelary deities occupying my empty consciousness continuum, and I recognize that there is only the text of my autobiography out there, as there is no here in here.

There is irony in a Buddhist writing an autobiography. There cannot help but be ego-gratification, even as one reveals the absence of a Self—a sort of succor to assuage the sense of loss of something non-existent. The Tibetans call the obstacles to one's path *maras*, and a memoir can be a weapon in the War against the Unfavorable Maras. Confession assuages the conscience and is a form of purification, a kind of homeostatic resetting of moral plasticity, to adapt a phrase from neurobiology. There are the maras of sexual pleasure in excess. There are the maras of negative views. There are the maras of seeking to be recognized, to be understood, to leave a mark (hopefully not a smudge), that from one angle is pride and from another is the bodhisattva's wish to alleviate suffering.

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light, portraying these creatures as made of light that has become deeply materialized. There are, also, tell-tale signs of their having once had wings. Regardless of their genealogy, they serve Aronofsky well as characters in a modern action film. There are no battle scenes in the biblical version of the Noah story, but the epic battle in the film foreshadows the upcoming stories in *Judges* and *Kings*. Aronofsky conflates the different interpretations of the Nephilim. During the battle to protect the ark from the wicked men who God regrets having created (*Gen. 5-8*), the Nephilim, upon being defeated, are suddenly “beamed” into the heavens. Their fallen, embodied nature appears to be redeemed by having helped Noah and his family.

In both versions of the Noah story (*Gen. 6* and *Gen. 7*), Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, have wives to take onto the ark. Aronofsky departs from this traditional depiction. Much of the dramatic development of the film revolves around finding wives for the young men. Early in the film, Noah and his wife rescue a young girl, named Illa (portrayed by Emma Watson), who is still alive after a brutal rampage of her village by the warriors of Tubal-cain. Illa has an abdominal wound; later, she finds herself to be barren. A romantic interest develops between Illa and Shem. Noah goes to a village to find wives for his other sons, but he is repulsed after seeing young women sold for food, and he returns empty handed to tell his family that they will be the last humans. My favorite new character is the one-eyed crone, played by Aronofsky's seventh grade teacher, Vera Fried, who confronts Noah in the village and gives him her fierce English teacher look, shouting, “You! You!”

Noah is in the firm belief that God wants all humanity dead, but Ham rebelliously runs away to find a wife. Meanwhile, Noah's wife, Naameh (Jennifer Connelly) connects with grandfather Methuselah (Anthony Hopkins) and explains the dilemma; later, searching for berries in the forest, Methuselah bestows his blessing on Illa, and she becomes fertile. Ham (played by Logan Lerman) befriends a young woman, but in the commotion before the flood, she is abandoned. Disheartened by his loss, Ham blames his father, and a rift develops between father and son.

Beyond extending the theme of romantic love (a modern and not a biblical notion), the conflict between Ham and Noah extends the theme of the transfer of the father's lineage to his sons, a

I think it's more interesting when you look at not just the biblical but the mythical that you get away from the arguments about history and accuracy and literalism. That's a much weaker argument, and it's a mistake. But when you're talking about a pre-diluvian world—a pre-flood world—where people are living for millennia and centuries, where there were no rainbows, where giants and angels walked on the planet, where the world was created in seven days, where people were naked and had no shame, you're talking about a universe that is very, very different from what we understand. And to portray that as realistic is impossible. You have to enter the fantastical (<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/03/the-terror-of-em-noah-em-how-darren-aronofsky-interprets-the-bible/359587/>).

I am going to focus on Aronofsky's development of characters not present in the original story and how these changes allow him to develop both an exciting visual narrative and a convincing solution to some of the enigmatic elements in the events as they unfold.

First, the involvement of the giants (*Nephilim*), called "The Watchers" in the film, in the building and defense of the ark, allows Aronofsky to introduce one of the first fantastic highlights in the story. Next, the initial infertility of Shem's wife, Illa, and Noah's later attempt to sacrifice her twin daughters, allows Aronofsky to develop a coherent psychological and consistent temporal narrative. And, lastly, the role of Tubal-cain as Noah's nemesis allows Aronofsky to pit father against son, as Tubal-cain encourages Ham to murder Noah, which creates a backstory to help explicate and resolve the ambiguity in Ham's response to his father's nakedness in the post-flood events.

In *Genesis* 6:2, "Divine beings saw how beautiful the daughters of men were and took wives from among those that pleased them." In verse 4, "It was then, and later too, that the Nephilim appeared on earth." Scholars debate whether the Nephilim were the offspring of fallen angels and human women or whether they were a separate race of giants or whether they were the lineage of Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve, or whether they were aliens from another planet. Aronofsky portrays these large "transformer-type" creatures as being made of huge chunks of rock that have a core of



INITIATIONS

A LETTER TO A YOUNG TRUTH SEEKER



INITIATIONS

Dear Abbi Merry Mountain, In your letter, you asked me: "How do I know I am on my Right Path?" The question might be rephrased, "Am I ready to be on the right path?" or "Is the right path ready for me?"

By "path" I assume you are referring to the Buddhist path in general, the Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism) path more specifically, and finally you have a bead on the Dzog Chen path ("The Great Perfection," or Ati Yoga). There is the Sutra approach, where you study the metaphysical meaning of the Buddha's teaching and practice sitting meditation. To enter the Vajra World, you must find a guru you respect and devote yourself to deity practice, which includes visualization and mantra recitation. To practice Dzog Chen, your guru must point out the nature of mind to you, and you use this awareness as the path. Each path builds on previous experience, but each is contained within the other.

To be sure you are ready to enter a path, the Tibetans speak of the four reminders, that turn the mind toward Dharma. First, the freedoms and advantages: are you aware how fortunate you are to possess a human body that has the ability to reflect and understand its real condition, as well as having been born in a time and place where you can receive teachings? Second: have you really contemplated on the nature of impermanence, how things are sub-

ject to death and decay? Third: are you truly aware of the extent of suffering? And next: are you aware of your actions, of the principle of cause and effect?

If you have given up destructive behavior, killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and so forth—and you have committed yourself to performing beneficial actions; if you recognize the many types of suffering—the suffering of change, the suffering of composite things, the unnecessary suffering of suffering suffering—and you understand that suffering can be overcome; if you are intensely aware of how everything—the outer universe, all living beings, even holy beings—are impermanent; and if you aren't just shopping for the latest fashion in gaining enlightenment, then you are ripe for this venture.

One more thing, the odds against even finding and recognizing a path are small. It requires faith, but it also requires rational deliberation, because to choose a path that has as its goal a state of being where your attachment to corporeal things is reversed and concepts are dissolved is contrary to the cultural mores you most likely have. Americans are without a network of support to transform themselves in an isolated retreat setting utilizing exotic rituals and secret practices. And doing this in Tibetan.

This takes courage and perseverance, and although there is a map, getting there (where?—to knowing who you are and what is your purpose; of taming your mind) is dependent on your own effort. It is, after all, your path and, it is unlike all others. You have “beginner’s mind”, Abbi—open, curious—good, keep it pliable and relaxed. If you have been able to navigate the outer preliminaries: aisle 1, freedoms and conditions; aisle 2, impermanence; aisle 3, suffering (in an orange box, not necessarily “natural”); and aisle 4, cause and effect—proceed to the checkout counter and take refuge.

Now, I have come to my main subject: initiation.

Again, “How do I know I am on my right path?” There might be signs, although not everyone receives signs and, if they do, can read them. Dreams, strange occurrences. For me, it was a near-death experience that made me realize, “Life is brief!” In lieu of magical or dramatic indicators, do some old-fashioned research. Patience. The Sufi says, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.”



MAKE IT NEW: A RESPONSE TO ARONOFSKY'S NOAH

Darren Aronofsky's 2014 film, *Noah*, has generated considerable controversy for deviating from the original depiction of events in the flood story, as related in the *Tanakh* (or Old Testament). How much of the film is an accurate portrayal of the episodes detailed in *Genesis* 6 through 9 and how much of it is the creation of the director and his co-writer, Ari Handel? The four chapters in *Genesis* that concern Noah take about ten minutes to read, while the run time for the film is 138 minutes. After analysis, much of the physical activity and character development in the film is the product of Aronofsky and Handel's imaginative story telling.

Why would they make changes to the original story? In an interview in *The Atlantic*, “The ‘Terror’ of Noah: How Darren Aronofsky Interprets the Bible,” Cathleen Falsani claims that it is the messages, not the history, that matters. She quotes Aronofsky:

emptiness of the nonbeing of self- nature

From here, you'll have to wing it.

Most of the lamas that teach at Tara Mandala are of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. This is referred to as the School of the Ancients, and its tradition goes back to the early spreading of the Dharma by Padmasambhava in the 8th century CE. Although the Nyingmas have many great scholars in their tradition, the main emphasis is upon tantric practice and meditation. If you are adverse to rituals, this is not the path for you.

Lama Tsultrim, the spiritual leader of Tara Mandala, puts emphasis on the feminine principle in Tibetan Buddhism. Her books, *Women of Wisdom* and *Feeding Your Demons* celebrate and explore the lives and teachings of women, past and present, in the Vajrayana. Lama Tsultrim is recognized as an emanation of Machig Lapdrön, the 12th-century originator of the Chöd, a practice which fuses Tibetan shamanism with Buddhist ideas on emptiness and compassion.

Before you take any vows (refuge or bodhisattva) and make any promises to a lama (samayas), it would be smart to read about the lineage, the teachers and their teachings. There is a wonderful world of Tibetan literature emerging in English. If you are like me and are inspired by the colorful biographies of realized teachers, a recommended read is *Masters of Meditation and Miracles* by Tulku Thondup (Shambhala, 1999).

How did I come to this path? By a circuitous route. Through many initiations. But what I've written here so far seems to me stuffy and a bit pedantic. Here are some poems to lighten the mood and which show some rebelliousness and, perhaps, weakness.

I would have fit right in with Do Khentse's gang
A sangha of reformed marauders—
Say the word, and I'll jump off a cliff!

. . . .

I fly around, put my hand and butt prints on rocks—
Come back later, nothing there
Still, I'm amazed

. . . .

Phony dharma posturing, these robes just for show—
What am I going to do when I'm put to the test?

. . . .

Complete, ineluctable, consummate
Infallible and without substance—
Watch what you're doing
Just stir the oatmeal!

. . . .

A morning of mantra muddle
Mudra mangle and fuzzy yidam
But this afternoon, I put paid to
This condition—

Vajra ground perfected
Vidyahara levels matured
Four kayas fully actualized
So, who's your lama now?

. . . .

All this sagely poetry
What a load of crap!
Still, my grocery lists are popular
For their wild, edible words

teness of

14th c. state of cognitive emptiness—

selfhood,

teeter (are poised) on the edge of presence.

emptiness

of self-

This teeter-
ing is the
enigma of
phenome-
nal exist-
ence. Per-
fect, or not.

nature,

of limit-
lessness,

Buddha nature in Dzog Chen (Great Completion) parlance

emptiness

and Deity in 18th century Enlightenment thinking,—for instance,

of disper-

Schelling's conception—God risking a return to chaos—

sion, emp-

and Longchenpa's ontological

I was baptized a Presbyterian. My secular education introduced me to skepticism and the empirical method. I became a logical positivist and wanted to study medicine. I went to Cal Berkeley. Then, I discovered English Renaissance love poetry, and medicine went by the wayside. After being introduced to the work of Arthur Rimbaud, I was initiated into the cult known as “Dérèglement de Tous les Sens” with a near fatal dose of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll.

LEARY PROCLAIMS TUNE IN TURN ON DROP OUT (1965)

I had already dropped out
And turned on to my own tune.
Radical Dzog Chen spontaneously arose
In America and Europe in the Sixties
And Berkeley was ground zero
With street poets the vanguard.

We had no discipline, but we had l’esperit.
We had no patience, but we had the grit.
Body—we believed in Free Love.
Voice—we believed in Power to the People.
Mind—we believed Make Love Not War.

We saw the body as a temple.
We opened the doors of perception,
And we abused 4:4 time
To where you couldn’t march to it.
You may scoff, but we found power
In the streets, enough to stop a war
And set the establishment on its ear.

Note: in this context, the term “radical Dzog Chen” is a term used by Keith Dowman in his book *Eye of the Storm* (Vajra Pubs., Nepal, 2006, p. xii.).

Between 1978 and 1995, I owned a bookstore and studied theosophy and mysticism. As a student of David Pond’s (co-author of *The Metaphysical Handbook*, Reflection Pond Pubs., Ellensburg, 1984), I gave astrology and tarot readings. In the late ‘80s, I joined a Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons and, in 1990, was elected Worshipful Master of my lodge. Metaphorically, I tunneled from the Temple of King Solomon to Mecca, where I became a Sufi dervish.

My first encounter with Tibetan Buddhism was in 1959, in Berkeley, as I was walking up Telegraph Avenue and saw some ritual items in a curio shop. My curiosity was aroused. The political situation in Tibet was also troubling to me. In 1963, I bought a copy of Evan-Wentz’s *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, but I found it difficult to understand. There were not many books about Buddhism in the mainstream at that time. I did find *Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen* by Alan Watts at City Lights Bookstore, in San Francisco, and this led me to D.T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism* and to Gary Snyder’s *Rip Rap and Cold Mountain Poems*, so I was well on my way. My wife, Cheri, introduced me to Lama Govinda’s *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, and I read this with interest, along with some fictional works about Tibet by an Englishman, who wrote under the pen name, T. Lapsang Rampa.

In 1989, I read *The Crystal and the Way of Light: Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen* by Namkhai Norbu, who was then Lama Tsultrim’s main teacher. My Sufi teacher, Alia, told me that Pir Vilayat, who is the head of the Sufi Order in the West, had suggested his students investigate Tibetan practices. Upon seeing a poster on my bookstore window advertising a talk on Dzog Chen by Sogyal Rinpoche, I took this as a “sign” and went to Seattle to sit at the feet of this master, and from him I received my first transmissions. Sogyal became a celebrity with the publication of his bestseller, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, and he became less accessible. I traveled to Oakland for a Dzog Chen retreat and laid the foundation for future practice.

In the early ‘90s, I traveled to Seabeck, Washington, and attended first a Chöd retreat and then a Dakini Simhamukha retreat. I took refuge with Lama Tsultrim. Kneeling on the grass outside the

emptiness of ultimate truth, emptiness

The Expediter

The Postponer

The First One

The Last One

The Absolute, The Able One, The Accountant,

The Artisan, The Architect, The Archivist,

ed things, ultimate empti- ness,

Donne's "eternal sunshine of the spotless mind,"

not a bad metaphor

for meditative absorption.

gompa, I said my vows, Tsultrim cut a lock of my hair, and she gave me the name Jampa Dorje, which translates as Indestructible Lovingkindness. It was at these retreats that she talked about her vision of a place to be called Tara Mandala, where people would be able to do long retreats. She and David Petit found land near Pagosa Springs, Colorado. In 1995, I sold Four Winds, my bookstore, to my son Theo and his wife, Melissa, and I moved to Pagosa Springs to run the Tara Mandala Bookstore. In 1998, I took responsibility for caring for my elderly parents, in Santa Rosa, California, where I resided for the next ten years, only visiting Tara Mandala for short periods each year. Adzom Paylo Rinpoche became my main guru, in 1999, and he ordained me as a monk, in 2005. In 2008, after my parents had both died, I returned to Tara Mandala to do my three-year retreat.

Each year, beginning in the summer of 1994, I made my way to Tara Mandala to work and take teachings. For the first ten years, we cooked outdoors and slept in tents. We connected with the Utes and had sweatlodge ceremonies. Tibetan lamas, as well as American Indians came and taught. It was rough, but Tibetans are a tough breed. "A Tibetan yogi can be comfortable even in hell," they say. We erected a yurt for a shrine room. The office and the bookstore were in town, at the Spring Inn plaza. The stupa, which holds the relics of Nagla Padma Duddul, a 19th century saint who attained Rainbow Body, was the first permanent structure on the land. Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche consecrated the stupa on 9/9/99. (See "Mandala Odessey" in *A View from Ekajati* (Collected Books of Richard Denner, Volume 7, at the dPress website.)

With Lama Tsultrim's tireless efforts at fundraising, the land was paid off. With David's dedicated supervision of land projects, a complex of buildings have appeared, as if by magic. It is said that David, who died in 2010, was a gift to Lama Tsultrim from Ekajati, the main protector of Dzog Chen.

Tara Mandala Retreat Center now has a three-story temple dedicated to Tara. It is glory to behold, worthy of being alluded to as "a palace of lotus light in the pure land of Akanishta." There are carvings by Bhutanese artisans, who spent a year away from their homeland, to exquisitely embellish the temple. And there are the masterworks painted by Lama Gyurme Rubgye, who I had the honor to assist before I entered retreat.

Dzog Chen is presented in groups of three categories. The initial set consists of Base, Path, and Fruit. I like to think that, historically, the era that has just ended, with the construction of the temple, is the “Base”, and the phase we are entering is the “Path”, since we are now able to serve a more diverse group of practitioners. You have impeccable timing coming now, Abbi.

Welcome to the path. May it be right for you.

emptiness

Providence, Righteousness, Simplicity

of created

things,

...joyous frustration...

emptiness

...vibrant nebulousness...

of uncreat-

The Originator, The Provider, The Self-Existing One, The Ever-Loving 69

The Noble One, The Glorious One, The Unique One, The One

emptiness
of empti-
ness,
great
emptiness,

Thrall of insight vanishes
in the vibrant nebulosness
of crepuscular haze

—knowing, not knowing—
and, again, dissolving into
the opaque dim...



A DEVIL SITS UNDER THE ASS OF THE GODDESS SOPHIA

How strange it must have sounded, this quarreling about dematerialization, voluntary aging, goat gods, and immortality to a city that was primed for the Age of Reason, a populace that was beginning to put Descartes before des horse.

—Tom Robbins, *Jitterbug Perfume*

In Buddhism, the meaning of life, the point of existence, the goal of the self is understood to be the attainment of omniscient Buddhahood. Since Buddha nature is claimed to be inherent, it only needs to be uncovered. The means to this end are found in the multitude of teachings and in practice. In Christianity, mystical experience is considered a gift from God, and methods intended to produce divine ecstasy, or union with the Godhead, are discouraged. The direct knowledge of God, when it occurs in Christian experience, is said to be something beyond the

individual and the universe, a “Wholly Other,” while in Buddhist experience, self and other are found to be empty of essence and yet to manifest as luminous clarity.

Christianity has its roots in Judaism, and Jesus is believed to be the son of the creator god, *Yahweh* (“He who brings into being whatever comes into being”). The doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ affirms that God is One God which exists as a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Buddhism has its roots in Hinduism, and Gautama is the historical person considered to be the founder of the Buddhist faith. There are many buddhas, a term that means “enlightened one.” Just as in Christianity God is One Substance in Three Persons, buddhas have three bodies, the *Tri-kaya*, that consists of the *Dharmakaya* (emptiness), the *Sambhogakaya* (luminous clarity), and *Nirmanakaya* (energy that is the quality of phenomenal existence in the course of history). In Buddhism there is no creator god because nothing is actually born or finally ceases to be. In terms of the nature of mind, there is no Self, and in terms of reality, the essence of all phenomenon is empty.

In Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism, and especially in Dzog Chen, the formation of the trinity (or groups of three) is carried out further. The Three Real Jewels: the *Buddha* (the enlightened one), the *Dharma* (his teachings), and the *Sangha* (his followers) are equated with the *Tri-kaya*, that in turn are reflected in one’s personal Guru, one’s meditational deity (*Yidam*, or *Deva*), and the *Dakini* (a term with multiple meanings but, here, representing one’s activities). The Guru (Lama) confers blessings; the *Yidam*, accomplishments (*siddhis*); and the *Dakini*, activities. These are known as the Three Roots and are manifestations of the mandala of mind (thoughts as wisdom), of the mandala of speech (sounds as mantra), and the mandala of body (forms as deity), respectively.

In *Dzog Chen* (the Great Perfection, or Completion), the “highest” of the three inner yogas of Tantra, the pattern of threes is further distilled. As transmitted by Namkai Norbu Rinpoche (see *Crystal and the Way of Light*, Chapter 8), the interrelationships of the teaching are as follows: the primordial state contains (1) the Base, made up of (a) Essence, which is empty, (b) Nature, which manifests as thoughts and objects, and (c) Energy, constituted of Mind, Voice, and Body; (2) the Path, which consists of (a) the View, or an understanding of the way things are, (b) the Means, or practices

emptiness

The One, The Exact Sentence, Powerful,

of

Difficult, Incomprehensible,

Oneness—

Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent

inner and

outer

The Prophet, Lord, The End, Wrath,

The Seducer, Veracity, The Absent One

things,

The Transcendent One, The Compassionate One, The Way, Thou, The Universe

of inner things, emptiness of outer things, things,

You can't see it,
but you can sense it

My voice coming
from within a mirror

Where the true phantom
tells the truth.

that work with Body, Voice, and Mind, and (c) Conduct, or how one integrates the View and practices into everyday life; finally, (3) the Fruit, or the realization of *rigpa*, the natural state of one's being from the beginning, what was with one when one was born and will continue at the time of death, which can be realized: Buddhahood. Since Buddhahood is the core of every individual, the Base, Path, and Fruit are inseparable.

The idea of one Substance with three Attributes in Christian doctrine was arrived at by scholars to solve theological difficulties about the nature of Unity. A schism arose in the early church with the addition, in the West, of "and the Son" to the Nicene Creed, where it says the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father... and the Son, thus creating what was called a Double Procession, since God is the Source of All Being. (See *Dictionary of Religion and Philosophy*, Geddes MacGregor, Paragon House, 1991.)

A complex matter not completely resolved, but the solution, in my humble opinion, is to rearrange the order of the Personæ in a Buddha-body sequence. Jesus is the *Nirmaka*, the manifestation of God on the earthly plane of four dimensions; in the hereafter, fused with the Great Progenitor, as an object of worship, He exists as Yidam, on the Sambhogakaya level; and together, alpha & omega, Yahweh-Jesus issue from the Spirit, or the Dharmakaya. The Spirit of God is the unfabricated "nessness" of suchness, self-cognizing Buddha nature. It is not the Holy Spirit that "broods on the face of the waters" in *Genesis* (1.2) but the Creator, who is baffled by Samsara and by His role in the unfolding of worldly events.

In Christianity, the male principle of the Godhead represents the authority figure. For Protestants, the Virgin Mary, who is the main figure representing the Divine Feminine, is reduced to a cardboard cutout in a Christmas nativity scene. In Catholicism, she does not fare much better, acting as an intercessor to her Son in prayers of petition and supplication.

In Buddhism, the Mother of the Buddhas is *Prajnaparamitta*, the Supreme Mother and Goddess of Wisdom, associated with Sophia of the Gnostics and Athena of the Greeks. However, unlike Athena, she was not born from the head of a god. She is the Primordial Wisdom Dakini, and her teaching expounds the nature of the void, that "form is emptiness and emptiness, form"—a profound ontological teaching.

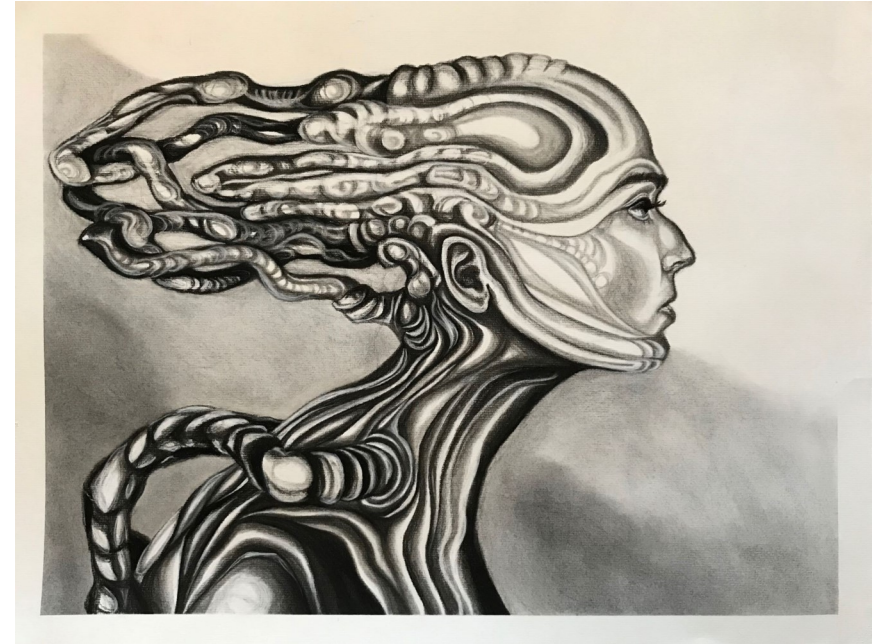
With its suppression of the feminine principle, it seems to me that the religion of Christianity is half-baked. Ideally, the tantric union of wisdom with skillful means would be in balance, the feminine with the masculine. Instead, society is skewered towards skillful means, and this has resulted in the dominance of rationalist philosophy, which, in turn, has enabled the development of the empirical sciences. Not a bad thing in and of itself, but there is the problem of moral accountability.

Again, in Buddhism, the goal is known: to overcome suffering and attain, through meditation, a state of consciousness known as enlightenment. For one in tune to a rationalist system of thinking, this goal is hypothetical, and the world must be analyzed and verified through experimentation to determine the truth.

On a personal note, coming back to the everyday world of American behavior—a world just then entering the confusion of cell phone technology—after my full immersion in Buddhist philosophy during a Tibetan traditional three-year solitary retreat in the mountains of Colorado, I decided to explore the possibility that there were simpatico ideas in the Western philosophical tradition.

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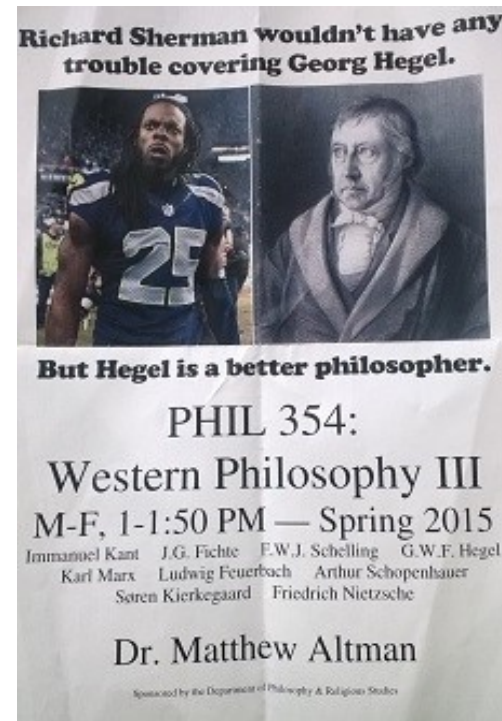
AN EMPTINESS SET

Beginning with

Emptiness

primal Eye. The Third Eye. The ground of the ground. The Base. That which, no matter how it is, isn't and yet can be experienced as present awareness.

At this point, I drop beyond the logic of common sense to a more fundamental logic in order to think with my feelings.



Reveries of a Eudaemonist

I can trace one tendril of my thought to Bertrand Russell not being permitted to teach at Cal Berkeley, in 1958, because of his free-thinking and his libertine manners. I was intrigued and asked my dad, a man in his late fifties, born in 1900, what all the fuss was about and was told that Berkeley was overrun by something called the fifth column. I wasn't sure what that meant, but I was sure that I was in need of more knowledge.

Another tendril: "Dzog Chen can't be done with concepts!" I took the lama literally. As a post-structural ontological purist, I would never contaminate the I-in-myself with the Thing-in-itself, unless, that is, I wanted to eat a burrito.

Walking along University Way in the shoes of German philosophers—trying on time and space as a pair of sensible shoes, turn-

ing into the campus, wearing hiking boots, I climb Hegelian heights. Sitting on a bench in Fichtian loafers...scuba diving with Schelling's underwater flippers...sprinting in Nietzschean racing shoes...slogging along in Schopenhauerian hip boots...

Those banners along the main drag, "What Did You Do Today?" Colored flags. A tiny piece of the Geist admonishing us to make ourselves relevant. I wonder if these inspirational banners that ask "What Did You Do Today?" with a photo of a CWU alumnae and their job title (Civil Servant, Nurse, CEO) could be a part of Hegel's concept of Geist. Spirit. Mind. A purpose to history. All these graduates of the institution, having been prepared to enter the outside world with knowledge of the arts and sciences, will leave the walled city to further the purpose of history to realize Reason. Or be exploited.

Jumping to Marx in my 12-league boots. What would Marx think of a yogi sitting in his cave? A waste. Unless he can come out of Samadhi and ease our suffering, otherwise, just selfishness. My lama said, "If you stay in your cave too long, you will become a cave bug."

Time and space. I put my left foot forward in space, followed by my right foot in time, trying not to step on a crack and break my mother's back. She's been dead for years, and I'm still doing this. Clicking my fingernails to the palms of my hands in a one-two-three-four rhythm in rhythm to my steps, like a baseball player getting ready to bat. Moving into a concentration mode. Feeling time. Time, a superstition, but still double checking my positing of my will. Willy-nilly-ness, the idea-in-itself in all its glory. The Force is with me, today. My Chi is chillin' and my Dao, adoin'.

Descartes' proof of God based on the idea of perfection not being found in the world, so the idea must come from somewhere. Ergo, God. Professor Altman finds the argument an intriguing one. Melanie, his student, wants the idea of perfection to be accessible to her without the need for an Old Guy with a white beard. The discussion moves to the term Infinity. Melanie finds the source of her concept for Infinity in the positing of its counterpart, the finite. She thinks she sees Infinity implied in mathematics, the Fibonacci sequence, but Professor Altman tells her this is another attempt to compound parts to reach a whole, in this sense Infinity is a hole that can never be filled. All the same, where does that thought come from?

In response to your What the Buddha Got Right, here is a stanza from *The Natural Freedom of the Nature of Mind*, which is part of Longchenpa's *Trilogy of Natural Freedom*:

Since everything is but an illusion,
Perfect in being what it is,
Having nothing to do with good or bad,
Acceptance or rejection,
One might as well burst out laughing.

. . .

Read *The Science Delusion* by Carl White. Yikes! I'm on track with my argument for aesthetic morality. Or, at least, I've got my hands on a live wire in philosophy. Romanticism vs Dogmatism.

. . .

The problem for the development of aesthetic morality is the same one that Schiller envisioned, the problem being the rarity of detached observers observing a work of art. The same for meditation. The meditator finds the monkey mind, the chatter, the static without being able to see the background, the nature of mind, the absolute. Can't get any leverage. First of all, unable to think about thinking, let alone observe the process. Kant could. Fichte did. Schelling went a bit inward, and Hegel a lot further outward. Schiller posits "play" as a resolution of the mind-body dualism, finding an identity between thinking and feeling, suggesting thinking with the feelings, or at least attempting to understand conscience, will, the feelings in relationship to the thoughts, their interrelations, and distinguishing between the kinds of thoughts—list making, analytical calculations, imaginative ramblings, syllogistic sophistries, sexual fantasy—and being able to sit still long enough without distraction, even if an ant bites you in the armpit.

The mind wanders, processes another draft, another scenario, another strategy. Dissonance—distraction. The Spectator sniffs it. Touches. A thinking Eye. Another eye sits behind this eye, a

ry nature, emptiness of selfhood, emptiness of things, emptiness of unattainability, emptiness of non-being, emptiness of self-nature, emptiness of the non-being of self-nature. This list could have been indefinitely extend and has itself been the subject of Immeasurable learned commentaries, which complicate matters even more and keep the intellect more and more busy with concepts of concepts and abstraction of abstraction, until the mind has proved its own utter emptiness and nonexistence.

Dr. Fletcher thanked me with a quid pro quo:

WHAT THE BUDDHA GOT RIGHT

Your worst enemy cannot harm you
As much as your own thoughts, unguarded
But once mastered,
No one can help you as much,
Not even your father or your mother.
You are the source
Of all purity and impurity.
No one purifies another.
—Dhammapada

dear michael

started to write a long thing, then thought better of it, knowing professors have so much to read, but here are three areas you might explore in relation to buddhism's concept of subjecthood

MINDSTREAM as the medium or vehicle for maintaining intention without a self, the continuum of consciousness in and beyond incarnation as a physical form

FIVE DHYANI BUDDHAS as a model for personality (in lieu of a self, given the true nature of the individual is their buddha-nature, which the buddha cautions is not a self, and as such is just another concept)

ADI BUDDHA the primordial self-originating buddha

I suggest Infinity is a point where parallel lines meet; where tautologies snicker behind their masks; where $n+1$ is 1; where new buddhas arrive, and old buddhas return to the ground of being.

I posit the term “Completion”—a reference to Dzog Chen’s Great Perfection. A view of the nature of mind and the nature of the moment. Everything perfect. I get a blank look. I take a poet’s approach and reference Blake’s “Infinity in a grain of sand, Eternity in a wildflower”, but Professor Altman claims that is just poetic license. Me thinking it is revelation...but no matter. This would lead to a discussion of intellectual intuition, and we’re discussing Descartes, so, no matter. And we are in Professor Altman’s office after class. We had heard his initial lecture on Schopenhauer, and there are still unanswered questions.

Invocations of Geist in the Midst of My Scholastic Endeavors.

Professor Altman describes the philosophy of Kant as branching in two directions: one branch to Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Marx, and one branch to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Professor Altman lets it be known that there are neo-Hegelians in Pittsburg.

After Kant, scientists began to critique their thinking, while theologians continued to reach for the Thing-in-itself, and poets critiqued themselves by plunging into unreason following their imaginative energies, William Blake waving his arms above his head as though he had been attacked by bees.

For Keats beauty is truth, not truth is beauty. Somewhere I read that that line in his “Ode to a Grecian Urn” was written especially for the eyes Samuel T. Coleridge, who Keats felt placed Truth higher than Beauty. Angels and Demons in brain wars. And these 18th century capital nouns! Reason. Spirit. Truth. Like handling concepts the size of boxcars and moving them around one’s neurological confines with the deftness of a stage magician.

. . .

I met a lady at the Tea House, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She had lately been writing on art for the LA Times. We went to art galleries and museums together and began an email correspondence after I left Santa Fe for Ellensburg, Washington.

Correspondence between Holly and myself:

Dear Jampa

Nice to hear from you. I fear I dropped the ball again and I apologize, though I'm glad to hear you finished your project. You're much faster than I! I'm about midway through my art essay, and wrestling with Schopenhauer these last few days. I look forward to reading yours. I have been thinking that in the terms that you were looking at it - from the perspective of morality - the disinterested observer does have a different, perhaps more meaningful aspect. Thinking of it maybe as a state worth striving for rather than as a present condition. A judge should try to be a disinterested observer, right? There are times when it is a useful (and potentially true) ethical position. In terms of art, I guess I've just been more interested in how hopelessly entangled it all is - the observer, the artwork, the artist. Also, studying Dewey. We'll see where it goes - I've still got a way to go in sorting it out.

I came across this passage of Schopenhauer today and it made me think of you because, while he's talking about absorption in the art object, he might as well be talking about meditation, it seems to me. I was curious what you would think of that. He too touches on the brief nature of this state of mind.

This freeing of knowledge lifts us as wholly and entirely away from all that, as do sleep and dreams; happiness and unhappiness have disappeared; we are no longer individual; the individual is forgotten; we are only pure subject of knowledge; we are only that one eye of the world which looks out from all knowing creatures, but which can become perfectly free from the service of will in man alone. Thus all difference of individuality so entirely disappears, that it is all the same whether the perceiving eye belongs to a mighty king or to a wretched beggar; for neither joy nor complaint can pass that boundary with us. So near us always lies a sphere in which we escape from all our misery; but who has the strength to continue long in it? As soon as any single relation to our will, to our person, even those objects of our pure contemplation, comes again into consciousness, the magic is at an end; we fall back into the knowledge which is governed by the principle of sufficient reason; we know no longer the Idea, but the particular thing, the link of a chain to which we also belong, and we are again abandoned to all our woe.

quires mental discipline, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, that of keeping an energetic will in whatever we do, be it work or meditation, and right mindfulness with regard to the body and the mind, and right concentration, such as applying the breath as a mode of meditation, thus one begins the training

another element in the mix: you must deal with the Trikaya of the Buddha, the three bodies of buddha, the three aspects of buddhahood: dharmakaya (the emptiness aspect of buddhahood); sambhogakaya (the spontaneously luminous aspect, only visible to realized beings), and the nirmanakaya (that which manifests out of compassion for sentient beings)

and then, Emptiness, and here too there are variations, and if we combine different kinds of emptiness with the various kinds of no-selves, the problem is complicated and confusion magnified

Eighteen kinds of emptiness:

CREATIVE MEDITATION AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONSCIOUS BY LAMA ANAGARIKA GOVINDA (Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1976) from the opening paragraphs of a chapter titled "Concept and Actuality" from which I have removed the Sanskrit (p.37):

The Middle Way of the Buddha—reiterated and reformulated in Nagarjuna's Madhyamika Philosophy and put into practice in the Tantric Sadhanas of the Vajrayana—is based precisely on the denial of anything absolute, by proclaiming the law of dependent and simultaneous origination, in which the elements of both time (causality) and synchronicity (acausality) are combined. Even the term sunyata does not mean "emptiness" in an absolute sense, because when speaking about emptiness, we cannot conceive of or attach any meaning to this word without having at the back of our mind the question "empty of what?" The word "empty," like all words of the human language, is a relational term, just like "high" or "low," "right" or left." This is clearly shown by the classification of sunyata into eighteen kinds of emptiness: emptiness of inner things, emptiness of outer things, emptiness of inner and outer things, emptiness of emptiness, great emptiness, emptiness of ultimate truth, emptiness of created things, emptiness of uncreated things, ultimate emptiness, emptiness of limitlessness, emptiness of dispersion, emptiness of prima-

culties in guiding students to awakening from their dogmatic slumbers and discover their essential nature, from a practical level, we all have a sense of self, mere selves, social selves, and spiritual selves, each with more or less reality (or none, in the metaphysical sense)

it appears that some Buddhists believe that, while there is no at-man, there is a pudgala or "person", which is neither the same as nor different from the skandhas, so your use of "person" in the sense of self holds up, as i was thinking of person more as the incarnation (the embodied mind) with or without a self

really, it is selfishness that is the problem, it is the self as a central player that is the false belief, and from this self-centeredness arise negativity—harmful desires, hatred, ill will, conceit, pride, craving, attachment—so how to get it to chill out is the focus of the teaching that will help the student discover the Buddha's nature

Self, or no self, whether or not one has compassion is what is important, being a kind person rather than a selfish one, and it is through meditation that one peels back the layers that seem to be a self that manifests in its essence as emptiness and resonates in conduct as compassion, the skillful means by which the wisdom of emptiness is put into action

the fourth noble truth, which is the 8-fold path, is not exactly a set of precepts, in the sense of the biblical ten commandments—they are a series of steps to begin meditation practice

the path begins with the first noble truth, there is suffering, which is meant in the sense of things being out of alignment, and the second noble truth, that this state of affairs, this suffering, is due to our ignorance of not realizing that our desires cause us to attach and cling to what is impermanent, and the third noble truth, that suffering can be overcome, leads to the means to accomplish this, and the means to reach wisdom is through meditation by developing mental discipline, ethical conduct, and wisdom

in order to begin to meditate, one has to create the right environment: having right understanding means understanding that wisdom and compassion are one, not dry metaphysics, but to begin to develop compassion for all sentient beings

with right understanding comes thought, which allows for ethical conduct of right speech, action and livelihood—to arrive here re-

That course sounds great! I'm envious. I think I am trying to slowly, painstakingly train myself in philosophy but it is slow going and I often wonder what it would be like in a proper university environment. I will be curious to know how it goes.

H.

Hi, Holly

A History of a Novel Idea baffles most people—"lovely placement of philosophical passages that i don't understand in the story line" or "I don't get this post-modern stuff" or "nice punch at the end" or a discussion about emptiness/bliss/aesthetic and art theory/observations, like you, hopelessly entangled in all the art - the observer, the artwork, the artist - back to myself, studying now the process Duchamp used to develop "the large glass", making collages, and reading Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*.

I can see three themes going here: (1) aesthetic contemplation/detachment, (2) void/emptiness and will, and (3) aesthetic morality. I share your concerns, and I hope this helps the two of us to make sense of all the materials we have been trying to tie together and the various excursions our minds are taking as we sort and evaluate it. Thank you for the Schopenhauer and Dewey quotes; I have been avoiding both of these thinkers. I think I need to look at the themes separately.

The directions of our pursuits are a bit different. You attempting to write philosophically/critically on art and me using what I'm calling "aesthetic contemplation" as a bridge from the West to meet "mindfulness-awareness meditation" from the East, hoping thereby to reveal a new way to understand morality, which in turn can help us make wise decisions.

The first paper I sent, "A History of a Novel Idea," attempts to track the development of the seed of the idea over a period of years, an idea that resurfaced lately in the question "Is there morality in the aesthetic order?" The word "novel" in the title has two meanings—you and I are alike in the way we are both "philosophers" and "artists," and it is interesting how we think differently in these realms, or at least I do—so, the last piece, "Echoing Keats," is more of an attempt to write a rigorous philos-

ophy piece without sacrificing my historical approach to the idea and the way it came to the page.

“Echoing Keats” begins with a confession that I misread Kant’s *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* but notes that, indirectly, it led me to read Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. I love the way Kant thinks, his a priori synthetic ramblings, the form without the content, the content without the form, but I could not find the link I was looking for to hold together the ideas I was proposing.

Schiller is a poet, and in the process of digesting Kant against the backdrop of the French Revolution, he was bold enough (poets!) to suggest “disinterested and unconditional appreciation of pure semblance” as a way to lay the foundation for a new approach to right behavior that he believed could lead to an Aesthetic State (and by this he means not just a mental state but a political state. High hopes he had. He seems to falter when he realizes that only an elite few could attain this “detachment,” and it is here, I am sure you are right, he’s another Enlightenment dummy when it comes to women. From my readings in Shiner’s *Invention of Art*, I see the cultural bias of the late 17th and early 18th century philosophers would believe that only white, property owning men could attain this level. “Race” is now considered to be a concept, and “Art” is evolves into “fine art”, and arts, such as vase painting and embroidery, are now “crafts” or “womanly arts”—not fine arts.

. . .

I find a new book, *Psychology of Contemporary Art* by Gregory Minissale, Cambridge U Press, NY, 2013. The blurb by Gerald Cupchik says, “...The author explores experimental aesthetics, neuroaesthetics, and cognitive psychology in depth, incisively pointing out problematic issues in each area related to processes underlying the creation and appreciation of contemporary art.”

Unfortunately it’s hardback and \$99, but my friend Philippe has a copy, and so I read chapter 3.9.

“Losing oneself: mind wandering.”

Minissale has a theory about art viewing. The chapter begins, “It might be possible to understand how certain artworks help us to

On Wednesday, May 13 at 5:00 PM in Black 152, Dr. Michael Fletcher gave a talk entitled:

“The Incoherence of Buddhism: A Tourist’s Guide.”

His preface read: “Buddhism makes a number of initially alarming metaphysical claims, one of which is that persons do not exist. This would seem to make the Buddhist an anti-realist about persons. But that’s not all. Buddhism is not only a body of doctrines but also a religious practice, one guided by its own distinctive normative ethic. Buddhist ethics is in large part a moral response to the existence of suffering. But can Buddhism coherently claim on the one hand to be a normative practice, one that recognizes the moral significance of suffering, while on the other claim that, whatever else may be true of our world, ours is not a world containing persons?”

I went to that presentation, and I later emailed Dr. Fletcher, who I talked to afterwards, and suggested that he had been skating on thin ice.

Email correspondence with Michael Fletcher.

hi, Michael: the following may be of use to you, thanks for listening to me...

checking on my selves, i find i can have quite a number and quite a number of no selves, as well mainly, the Self is the "I am" (like how Descartes uses the term) which is what the Hindus call "Atman" (a permanent self), but there are divergences in the meaning in some schools of Buddhism, however the emphasis is for the most part on it's unsubstantial nature, the impermanence of it as an entity

buddha nature is usually referred to as the true self, but even here it is tricky to pin the sucker down.

the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* uses the term Self in order for the Buddha to win over non-Buddhist ascetics, as Buddha says: “The Buddha-nature is in fact not the self. For the sake of [guiding] sentient beings, I describe it as the self.”

it is at this end of the spectrum that the yogi must pull back from his inward explorations to keep from becoming a cave bug

and this alludes to why i cautioned you to be careful with trying to fit the term into a single concept, as there are pedagogical diffi-

NIRVANA. The imperturbable stillness of mind after the fires of desire, aversion, and delusion have been finally extinguished.

THREE REALMS. In Buddhism, the three worlds refer to the following destinations for karmic rebirth: the desire realm, the world of form, and the formless realm. These three worlds are identified in Hinduism and appear in early Buddhist texts.

DHARMAKAYA. One of the three levels of manifestation of the Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism. Dharmakāya constitutes the unmanifested, “inconceivable” aspect of a Buddha, out of which Buddhas arise and to which they return after their dissolution.

SAMBHOGAKAYA. Translated as the “deity dimension”, “body of bliss”, or “astral body”.

NIRMANAKAYA. Buddhas are manifestations of the dharmakāya called nirmanakaya (“transformation body”), which is the historical, or relative level.

KAYA. See Three realms.

Nice, complicated dharma terms that can be interpreted six ways to Sunday. It is the term non-duality that needs to be unpacked. Longchenpa, in the previous stanza, had admonished the reader:

Without any realization of equalness in its naturally occurring state, you may obsess on the word “nonduality” and place your confidence in some state that you speculate has no frame of reference whatsoever. This is truly a mistaken notion—the dark realm in which awareness is not recognized.

It’s hard for writers in the Buddhist faith to write without the mythological context, but Longchenpa is more able than most. Within the expanse of spontaneous presence is the ground for all that arises. Empty in essence, continuous by nature, it has never existed as anything whatsoever, yet arises as anything at all. Longchenpa says,

Within the expanse of the three kayas, although samsara and nirvana arise naturally, they do not stray from basic space—such is the blissful realm that is the true nature of phenomena. (Ibid. from the section “The Adornment of Basic Space”, p.13.)

. . .

think about different subject positions and selves, and they might even help us to think differently about the concept of a self, but how far is it possible to ‘lose oneself’ in contemporary art?” He suggests “mind wandering”—although usually thought as negative in education could be useful in art understanding. He quotes studies that show that creative insights occur during resting states of the mind, and he shows that “absorption does not have to be premised on logical, linear procedures, egocentric experience or direct observation of the artwork, even though the artwork will provide the occasion for the mind to wander.” Another study shows that “mind wandering is most pronounced when there is a lack of metacognition or self-awareness and executive control.” Further on he says, “If one assumes that art can cause the mind to wander and also to be attentive, this would create different kinds of absorption: being absorbed and knowing one is being absorbed, where the latter is more likely to be as a disinterested or distance experience [my emphasis], and there are aesthetic arguments that can be mobilized in favor of one kind over the other.”

This brings me to **aesthetic contemplation and meditation** being aesthetic experiences, the work of the artist communicating “whatever” to arrive at truths of Being, the beautiful, the ugly, the harmonious, the inharmonious.

But this is not what is experienced by yoginis or yogis. Emptiness is experienced as “bliss” (which is often explained as “well-being,” so as not to confuse the term as a form of “ecstasy,” or in another reading, the essence of Being is emptiness, but its nature is to manifest, and it resonates compassion (meant in a very ontological, if not metaphysical sense). As regards emptiness, the Nyingma School holds “emptiness” to mean impermanence. Schopenhauer is, at first, abhorred by being awash in “nothingness”, then shores up his courage with compassionate will-less-ness; but a sense of being dissatisfied seems to linger in his bliss.

For Schopenhauer, the will turns in upon itself and becomes detached, and the reason to feel compassion is to transcend a meaningless universe, as will has no teleological purpose. Different from Buddhism, where the thrust of Buddhist psychology is to be a better person.

Dewey is modern. The quote, "When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which esthetic theory deals" reminds me of Heidegger's holistic approach that entails, the artwork, the artist, the art observer (and critic-philosopher), and the making of the art are all critical to the understanding of art. "The artist make the art, and the art makes the artist." But note that Dewey is concerned about how, when the continuity is broken, "a primary task is thus imposed upon one who undertakes to write upon the philosophy of the fine arts." Well and good, but this may be a problem for the "philosophic" mind with an article to write and not for the general art observer from Hoboken. Here "aesthetic appreciation" is more neutral. What is that damn "Fountain" of Duchamp's about? Is it art? Is it beautiful? What's it doing there?" And the mind wanders and comes back...the mind becomes a still mind and a mind wandering...the attention shifts...there's sustained focus for a moment...then the mind wanders. This is like what goes on during a meditation session, only there is only the focus on the breath...and moments of sunyata (emptiness).

Aesthetic morality and Schiller's concept of play.

Here's a piece on Frederick Schiller (1759-1805) by Robert Audi from the *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*:

In "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man" (1794/5), Schiller examines the relationship between natural necessity and practical freedom and addresses two problems raised by Kant: How can a creature governed by natural necessity and desire ever become aware of its own freedom and thus capable of autonomous moral action? And how can these two sides of human nature—the natural, sensuous side and the rational, super-sensuous one—be reconciled? In contradistinction both to those who subordinate principles to feelings ("savages") and to those who insist that one should strive to subordinate feelings to principles ("barbarians"), Schiller posited an intermediary realm between the sphere of nature and that of freedom, as well as a third basic human drive capable of mediating between sensuous and rational impulses. This third impulse is dubbed the "play impulse," and the intermediary sphere to which it pertains is that of art and beauty. By cultivating the play impulse (i.e., via "aesthetic education") one is not only

the Realm of Pure Thought. This realm is the Truth as it is, without husk in and for itself. One may therefore express it thus: that this content shows forth God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of Nature and of a Finite Spirit."

Dear Reader, this may seem obvious to you, or it may not.

Truth-as-it-is.

Royal goal.

OK, Crazy! But...Look at this bit from Longchen Rabjam (14th c. Tibetan yogi-monk):

[*A Treasure Trove of Scriptural Transmission: a Commentary of the Precious Treasury of the Basic Space of Phenomena*. Padma Publishing, 2001, Junction City, California, p. 171.]

Therefore, it is in the naturally occurring state without transition or change / that the most majestic perfection of goals is experienced as nonduality. / The total freedom of the three realms—the ultimate meaning of the nonduality of samsara and nirvana— / is the fortress of dharmakaya, the nature of being that arises inherently from within, / such that it is completely pure like space, yet is in fact beyond all metaphors.

Longchempa is speaking of non-duality within the awakened mind. In his commentary to the above stanza in his poem, he gives the following instructions to the meditator on how to reach the understanding of this stage of meditative absorption: "Given that the true nature of phenomena and mind itself are inseparable, on the strength of your becoming familiar with this and refining it in your own experience, a state of realization that is like space arises naturally from within; this is reefered to as "building the vajra fortress of dharmakaya"—that is, this realization is spontaneously present as great perfection beyond limitation.

Reginald Ray, a Buddhist scholar, writes of Dharmakāya as "the body of reality itself, without specific, delimited form, wherein the Buddha is identified with the spiritually charged nature of everything that is." (Reginald Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World*, Shambhala, Boston, 2001, p. 13.)

Some other definitions.

SAMSARA. Repeating cycle of birth, life, and death.

get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no dope.” Marx’s theory of alienation revealed to me that I needed more than a job; I needed the “oceanic feeling” of love.

A day or two later.

Arthur Schopenhauer wrote *On the Basis of Morality* as a response to a question posed by the Royal Danish Society of Scientific Studies in 1837 for an essay contest. The question was, "Are the source and foundation of morals to be looked for in an idea of morality lying immediately in consciousness (or conscience) and in the analysis of other fundamental moral concepts springing from that idea, or are they to be looked for in a different ground of knowledge?" Schopenhauer submitted the only entry to the contest in July 1839, but failed to win. On January 17, 1840, the society published a response to the essay, in which they refused to present him with the prize, claiming that he had misunderstood the question. (Wikipedia: On The Basis of Morality.) Ah, Maya!

Schopenhauer is grim. Pessimistic. Kierkegaard feels Schopenhauer is not pessimistic enough. Schopenhauer is happy when he wins one essay prize in Denmark and then is mad when he doesn't win another.

And the Will as what's driving things. Blind force! Still, this is a Newtonian universe Schopenhauer is describing. The universe of a sleeping man. Will rather than compassion at the heart of things. Yes, Schopenhauer acknowledges compassion as knowledge that redirects the path of will, but this is still the universe moving through time and space in sequential fashion. No sense of the spontaneousness of Brahman-Vishnu-Shiva, arising-sustaining-dissolving quantum dance of energy or the uncontrived, timeless, spontaneous here-and-newness of Samantabhadra. Schopenhauer is intriguing, convincing, but I don't believe a word he says.

. . .

In his “General Concept of Logic” (Nineteenth-Century Philosophy, edited by Patrick Gardiner, The Free Press, 1969, p. 67), Hegel says, “Logic is consequently to be understood as the System of Pure Reason, as

freed from bondage to sensuality and granted a first glimpse of one's practical freedom, but one also becomes capable of reconciling the rational and sensuous sides of one's own nature. This idea of a condition in which opposites are simultaneously cancelled and preserved, as well as the specific project of reconciling freedom and necessity, profoundly influenced subsequent thinker such as Schelling and Hegel and contributed to the development of German idealism.

Jampa

Dear Jampa

Re your emptiness of created things, emptiness of uncreated things, ultimate emptiness, emptiness of limitlessness, emptiness of dispersion, emptiness of primary nature, emptiness of selfhood, emptiness of things, emptiness of non-being, emptiness of self-nature, emptiness of the non-being of self-nature.

That is a fascinating list. In my essay on futility, which I just finished, I hold Nagarjuna up against this passage from Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer is really a pill, but he sure is a beautiful writer.

That we abhor annihilation so greatly, is simply another expression of the fact that we so strenuously will life, and are nothing but this will, and know nothing besides it. But if we turn our glance from our own needy and embarrassed condition to those who have overcome the world, in whom the will, having attained to perfect self-knowledge, found itself again in all, and then freely denied itself, and who then merely wait to see the last trace of it vanish with the body which it animates; then, instead of the restless striving and effort, instead of the constant transition from wish to fruition, and from joy to sorrow, instead of the never-satisfied and never-dying hope which constitutes the life of the man who wills, we shall see that peace which is above all reason, that perfect calm of the spirit, that deep rest, that inviolable confidence and serenity, the mere reflection of which in the countenance, as Raphael and Correggio have represented it, is an entire and certain gospel; only knowledge remains, the will has vanished. We look with deep and painful longing upon this state, beside which the misery and wretchedness of our own is brought out clearly by the contrast. Yet this is the only consideration which can afford us lasting consolation, when, on the one hand, we have

recognized incurable suffering and endless misery as essential to the manifestation of will, the world; and, on the other hand, see the world pass away with the abolition of will, and retain before us only empty nothingness. Thus, in this way, by contemplation of the life and conduct of saints, whom it is certainly rarely granted us to meet with in our own experience, but who are brought before our eyes by their written history, and, with the stamp of inner truth, by art, we must banish the dark impression of that nothingness which we discern behind all virtue and holiness as their final goal, and which we fear as children fear the dark; we must not even evade it like the Indians, through myths and meaningless words, such as reabsorption in Brahma or the Nirvana of the Buddhists. Rather do we freely acknowledge that what remains after the entire abolition of will is for all those who are still full of will certainly nothing; but, conversely, to those in whom the will has turned and has denied itself, this our world, which is so real, with all its suns and milky-ways—is nothing.

H.

Dear Holly,

I recognize the quote from Schopenhauer, now that I have taken Matt Altman's class on 19th century German philosophy. For ten weeks, one hour each day, five days each week, Professor Altman rigorously drove home the tenants of the philosophers that evolved their understanding of mind and reality from Immanuel Kant's "Copernican Revolution" in thought, his critical idealism. As a Buddhist, I had the hardest time with Schopenhauer. His ideas seem to be the most influenced by Buddhism, but he only comes to the door of understanding the concept of emptiness without passing through, and to critique Schopenhauer, I had to follow a long passageway.

Central Washington University is in Ellensburg, Washington. In the stairwell of the Language and Literature Building, I came upon Professor Altman's advertisement posted on the bulletin board.

Sounds great! Why not take the class? See if I can piece together the fragments of Eastern and Western Philosophy I know. Remember having read Kant's *Prolegomena*, but I'm unfamiliar with Fichte and Hegel. Want to learn more about Schelling. Brush up on my Marx. Borges often quotes Schopenhauer, whose quotes

are very literary, and I enjoy reading Borges. I've heard that Schopenhauer was influenced by the wisdom teachings of the East. Another link, maybe. Not sure I could say "I know my Nietzsche", but I've read some. *The Birth of Tragedy* still reverberates with me. I reread Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* and his *The Sickness Unto Death* back to back with *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals* in the three-month retreat I took after my three-years practicing the *Dzinpa Rangdröl*. Wonderful reads.

Talked with Professor Altman, and it was a go. For \$5, a senior citizen can get on the roster, and the fee comes with a library card.

Later.

Kant had a revolutionary insight about time and space being forms of consciousness, the means of how we know what we know. Fichte felt the "a priori" beat and turned it into a song and dance routine, and then Hegel expanded the tune into an opera fit for the Festival at Bayreuth.

As much as one may criticize the airy, emptiness philosophy of Buddha as the abstractions of an exotic subjectivist, Buddha does not point to the dialectical operations of Geist as the subject of his inquiries. Buddha is talking about sentient beings that are actually suffering, not abstract beings in a historical process.

I'm still thinking that Schelling is the feminine side of a Jungian equation, and Hegel is the masculine. We are abandoning our aesthetic feeling for things in lieu of mental wanderings, wisdom obscured by skillful means rather than united.

Another day.

In the '60s, I was a young Marxist. It may be I was really just a Young Hegelian, but I thought Leary's "Tune in, turn on, drop out!" slogan was the basis for a philosophy, and that my critique of society, my desire for non-violent action, ecological consciousness, alternative foods, communes, and so forth were the path to follow. Psychedelics seemed a viable method to deconstruct my Hegelian mindset. As the Furry Freak Brothers said, "Dope will