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From Post-Pantheism to Trans-materialism: D. T. Suzuki and New Buddhism

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D. T. Suzuki and the Modern Transformation of Buddhism

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CHAPTER ONE

From Postpantheism to Transmaterialism

D. T. Suzuki and New Buddhism

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In a work titled *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views,* we read the following passage: "The essence of [D. T.] Suzuki's pantheism is that the world of particulars is both finite and infinite, relative and absolute, illusory and real. What one needs to do in order to see Reality in all its fullness is to free himself [*sic*] from logic, words, concepts, abstractions—in short, anything that keeps him from personally experiencing what is neither being nor nonbeing. When this occurs Nirvana is attained—one becomes one with the One."[1] To give some context: this book, published in 2003, covers seven major theses about God, nature, and reality, including "theism," "atheism," "polytheism," "deism," and something called "finite Godism"—in addition to "pantheism" and "panentheism." The last two categories are distinguished by the fact that the former posits a "world that *is* God" while the latter indicates "a world *in* God." The chapter on pantheism takes up thirty-two pages, a full ten of which are on Suzuki (other sections include Advaita Vedanta and the work of actress and self-help guru Shirley MacLaine.). The authors of this text rely heavily on Suzuki's *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1934), but also cite his *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (1934) and his much earlier work *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (1907).

But to return to the passage itself, here it is suggested that pantheism provides a balance between more extreme metaphysical, epistemological, and ontological claims (some, less forgiving, would call this is a cop-out from making *any* claims). Also, note the emphasis here on *direct personal experience,* which must be nonlinguistic, and immediate or concrete. Finally, see how the authors have included the classical Buddhist term for awakening—Nirvana (capitalized, no less)—unselfconsciously conflating a particular set of teachings and practices (Buddhism, or, in this case, Zen) with a pantheistic worldview.

I begin with this passage not to ridicule it but to show how Suzuki has come, by the twenty-first century, to stand as a symbol not only for Zen but also for Buddhism more generally, and, in this case at least, for something even broader—pantheism—a "worldview" of seemingly universal resonance. (The editors of *Worlds Apart* claim that "probably no one else has done more to influence the

West toward an Eastern form of pantheism than has Suzuki."[2]) In this chapter, I examine select passages from Suzuki's early work, *A New Interpretation of Religion* (*Shin shūkyōron,* 1896), in order to flesh out some more of the details of Suzuki's pantheism in relation to (a) classical Western formulations and typologies; (b) the work of several figures associated with the New Buddhist Fellowship, a lay Buddhist movement of late Meiji Japan in which pantheism (*hanshinron*) was frequently invoked if not always clearly elucidated;[3] and (c) an understanding of pantheism as an antimetaphysical and perhaps "phenomenological" approach to Buddhist liberation. To be perfectly frank, here I am self-consciously *using* Suzuki to dig further into the problems and possibilities of pantheism as an archetypal catchword of Japanese Buddhist modernism.

Typologies of Pantheism

The English term "pantheism" dates back at least three centuries, first appearing in 1704 in *Letters to Serena* by the controversial freethinker and early deist John Toland (1670–1722). In *An Encyclopedia of Religions,* published in 1921—around the time Suzuki was writing the essays that would lead to his inclusion in the above text as a spokesperson for the pantheistic worldview—we get a sense of some of the lingering "fears" of pantheism as a doctrine, fears that combine philosophical, religious, and moral concerns.[4] The *Encyclopedia* lists six forms of pantheism: materialistic, ontological, dynamic, psychical, ethical, and logical. Though a few of these are associated with significant philosophical names, such as Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel, the tone of the short article makes it clear that *none* of these forms can ultimately cohere with orthodox Christianity, given the latter's emphasis on the "personality" and the "will." Indeed, the preceding entry suggests that "panentheism" is the only form that can work with Christian doctrine, since panentheism maintains the central place and transcendence of God, unlike the "degenerate" forms of pantheism, which, however high their philosophical pedigree, risk embarking on the slippery slope toward secular materialism / atheism.

This fear about pantheism can be attributable, in part, to the legacy of Baruch (aka Benedict) Spinoza (1632–1677), the Western thinker most readily associated with the doctrine, whose works, such as *Ethics* and *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* were, from early on, charged with heresy and atheism. It is sometimes said that pantheism "views the world as God and God as the world." If so, it is not hard to see that, once God is all, and "nothing exists that is not God," then God is, in effect, nothing. Otherwise put, God dissolves into Nature. And indeed, Spinoza himself infamously made the formulation *Deus sive Natura:* "God is not other

than Nature." Yet, for all the overwrought anxiety about the effect of "Spinozism," one can see why not only orthodox Christians and Jews but even secular liberal thinkers saw danger in Spinoza's formulations. In the eyes of twentieth-century philosopher Charles Hartshorne, classical Western pantheism leaves no place for freedom and the will, and is ultimately committed to a fatalistic determinism.[5]

Spinoza, unlike some pantheists, rejected emanationism, the idea that things of the world are mere emanations or derivations of some more basic or causal power. In some important ways, Spinoza's pantheism is in direct opposition to the sort of "absolute" or "idealist" pantheism that one finds in, for instance, the pre-Socratic thinker Parmenides or the Indian *Upaniṣads,* where the most crucial takeaway is that the world of forms is illusory compared to the One or Being that is behind them. For Spinoza, and for his predecessors, such as Epicurus and Lucretius, it is the *particulars* themselves that take on greater significance—even sacredness—in recognition of their mutual interdependence. As "modes" or "moments" of infinite substance (i.e., God), the things or the world partake fully of the qualities of that substance.[6] This is a distinction that, I believe, is important when we consider the New Buddhist appropriation of pantheism.

In a recent work Matthew Stewart has argued that Spinoza be considered a fundamental source of ideas for radical political thought, including but not limited to many of the democratic ideals that gave birth to the American Revolution. In Stewart's view, Spinoza's pantheism brings to fruition a lengthy minority tradition in Western thought dating back to Epicurus and Lucretius, and extending through the writings of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), and Toland. Pantheism, Stewart concludes, far from being a Romantic relapse into obfuscation and mysticism, is actually the foundational cosmology of the European Enlightenment, at least in its more radical forms.[7] In contrast to the authors of *Worlds Apart,* for whom pantheism is often if not always imbued with religiosity, Stewart sees pantheism as fundamentally secularist and even antireligious at heart.[8] In this view, pantheism defines an approach to the world and others that is ineluctably *political* in its implications; more specifically, its "immanentism" acts as a universal acid, clearing the ground for the possibility of radical democracy.[9]

In any discussion of the influence of Western thought on Suzuki, some attention must be paid to Paul Carus (1852–1919), the German American writer who acted as host and philosophical mentor for the young Suzuki upon his first extended stay in the United States. Though best known for his *Gospel of Buddha* (1894)—which Judith Snodgrass calls "an archetypical Orientalist exercise using Buddhism to promote [a] post-Kantian Christian monism"[10]—Carus also published a work titled *The Religion of Science* in 1893, the year of the Parliament of

the World's Religions. Here he expressed his conviction that "science" was a necessary scourge of orthodox religious belief, and yet the final result would be not irreligious materialism but rather a higher "religion of science."[11] Though Carus claims to reject pantheism in favor of an Aristotelian monism of the "superreal,"[12] his monism is perhaps better understood as a monistic form of pantheism—or, as one critic aptly put it, "pantheism robbed of its mystical adorations."[13] The roots of Carus' monism lie in the work of Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), who sought to combine Darwinian evolution with a materialistic interpretation of Spinoza and Bruno. (Thankfully, Carus did not follow Haeckel into his social Darwinism and scientific racism.)

Suzuki's Pantheism: *Shin shūkyōron*

Let us turn now to an examination of Suzuki's interpretation of pantheism as it appears in *Shin shūkyōron,* published in 1896, just prior to Suzuki's sojourn with Carus in the United States and a few years following the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions. In this text, written as a response to questions raised by Parliament chair John Henry Barrows to Suzuki's teacher, Shaku Sōen (1860–1919), we see the young Suzuki struggling with all the many and various currents shaping not only Buddhist modernism in Japan but also Western thought in the final decades of the nineteenth century. In thinking about the "true meaning" or "essence" of religion along Zen Buddhist lines, Suzuki, like Nakanishi Ushirō (1859–1930) and Shaku Sōen before him, makes central use of the term "pantheism."

In this work, as elsewhere, Suzuki also employs the term "God," though it is clear that in using such a term he intends not the deity of orthodox Abrahamic religions but rather something closer, perhaps, to Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*. Yet, the appeal to a source or locus of transcendence even while rejecting God as Creator, Lawgiver, or Savior gives Suzuki's pantheism a flavor of *panentheism,* even shading into the quasi-Unitarianism of Nakanishi. After criticizing those who would too readily dismiss religion (and uphold a purely secular philosophy and materialistic science) due to the "nonsensical stories" and pointless rituals of typical religions, Suzuki argues that such discussions miss the point that while these superficial aspects of religion change with time and place, the "essence" of religion "has never been changed throughout history."[14] Moreover, he asserts, along with many of his New Buddhist peers, that this timeless essence of religion always includes a rational as well as an irrational (or emotional) aspect, and thus must be approached with a combination of "intellectual analysis" and "religious emotion." Ultimately, in Suzuki's formulation, the "supernatural" elements of

religion must align with our "experiences" (*keiken*)—experiences that involve the mind, the senses, and the emotions. What distinguishes "religion" from "philosophy" and "science," he argues, is that the former is "a reality," while the latter two are "explanations" of that reality. This is an interesting gambit on Suzuki's part, and one that draws us back into his reflections on pantheism. Religion in this understanding is, we might say, a firsthand illumination or *realization* of the reality of nature as a kind of living force or dynamic. Perhaps religion is nothing more or less than *phenomenology.* And yet, since "religion" in this sense is simply another name for a kind of perfected awareness of the reality of things / nature, it cannot—or at least cannot alone—be a means for dispelling ignorance. This is where philosophy and science come back into play.[15]

Mapping this onto Buddhism, "religion" becomes a synonym for awakening or enlightenment, while the teachings—the Dharma—are cognates of philosophy and science. But this is perhaps a too-traditional reading of Buddhism. Following his inclinations toward Zen, Suzuki, even in this early work, tends to collapse practice into awakening, so that it becomes possible for "religion" (later this would be "Zen") to stand on its own without "Dharma" (in the sense of ideas / teachings): "Religion exists in firsthand comprehension [of things as they are] and is where one attains realization through practicing the teachings."[16]

Suzuki goes further in *Shin shūkyōron* to assert that he has "no doubt about the presence of a great principle that is consistent throughout Heaven and Earth," one that "controls the orbital motions of the celestial bodies" and "maintains the existence of landscapes and nature." To this point, Suzuki might be referring to the physical laws of the universe, including gravity, but he goes on to add that this "principle" has also "firmly founded the moral principles of every life." Here it would seem clear that Suzuki is invoking the neo-Confucian, and more broadly East Asian Buddhist, concept of Principle (Ch. *li;* Jp. *ri*). The connection between pantheism as a cosmological assumption and ethics or morality is one that remains underdeveloped in Suzuki's work—just as, arguably, it is underdeveloped in neo-Confucian and Zen writings.

Having said that, Suzuki's critique of Western theism is rooted less in rational or scientific skepticism about the supernatural than in what we might call an aesthetic (and potentially moral) critique of such traditions: namely, that by distancing God from the world they "regard everything in the universe as a kind of solid rock or cast iron which is wastefully dull and without warmth." Here Suzuki begins to draw the outlines of his "post-pantheistic" perspective: "In the Christian sense, I am not a theist but an atheist, not an atheist but a pantheist, *not a pantheist but something that has a broader meaning than that*" (my emphasis). While atheism trumps theism (which is stuck in "primitive" delusion), and

pantheism tops atheism (due to its lack of negativism), even pantheism has a weakness: "[Pantheism] cannot explain the reason why evil prevails and disasters occur. If everything were all sacred, there would be no wicked or catastrophic elements, hence no good, evil, or fortunate elements. Both morality and immorality would disappear, and the world would see only chaotic mechanical force; supposing the working of such a force here, there would be no meaning or difference in the universe, so vast and vague."[17]

Here Suzuki seems to be adopting Hegel's pointed critique of Spinoza, famously taken up by Pierre Macherey in his *Hegel or Spinoza,* where Macherey takes Spinoza's side.[18] Hegel called out Spinoza's pantheism for its tendency toward stasis, and its consequent sterility. Suzuki's critique of classical pantheism also exudes the traditional religious critique of "materialism," whereby pantheism *removes* meaning from the world, and thus encourages nihilism.

Suzuki wants to insist that there *is* a meaning or "ideal" to life, and that the evolution of the universe and the development of humanity must have a purpose—or at least a "policy." "No, no—there are good and evil, right and wrong, half and full, healthy and unhealthy, prosperity and decline, evolution and degeneration, erecting and sweeping out, Heaven and Hell, Buddha and demons, each [side] of these pairs stand together and influences the other. Are these not our true experiences?"[19]

So the young Suzuki hedges his bets on pantheism, for reasons at once Hegelian and, perhaps, more traditionally religious: pantheism does not give adequate acknowledgment of change, evolution, and the contrast of opposites (e.g., good and evil, suffering and release), that drive most conceptions of "progress." Here he invokes a classical Buddhist phrase: "Equality without difference is a bad equality" (*sabetsu naki byōdō wa aku byōdō*).

I do not intend here to enter into a full analysis of Suzuki's "postpantheism" in relation to his later ideas regarding religion and Zen, as they appear in, for example, his writings from the 1920s and 1930s. I would, however, like to highlight some problems with Suzuki's presentation of pantheism in *Shin shūkyōron,* which may inform our reading of his later work and the work of other Buddhist modernists. First and foremost, while Suzuki wants to uphold the significance of "difference" as a way to explain—and perhaps justify—"evil" in the world, this seems based on a terribly simplified interpretation of pantheism as developed in Western thought. The basic thrust of pantheism, as it appears, in particular, in the work of classical materialists through early modernists such as Bruno and Spinoza, is that the primary causes or moving forces of the world are themselves part of the world, rather than above and beyond it. Further, recognition of such brings joy, since we no longer need look for explanations in the realm of the

mysterious or unknown. Most significant, at least for Spinoza, is that such a "view of life" focuses our perspective on the realm of the horizontal (including other beings), and the "here and now." There is a radical resistance to telos in this form of pantheism; here, especially, is where Spinoza departs from Hegel and his heirs, including, arguably, Marx.[20]

In contrast, Suzuki's "postpantheism" follows a Hegelian path, emphasizing the necessity of "opposition" through difference in order for change or progress to occur: "The tireless vital energy of the universe, indeed, lies in its relative structure. Once it loses the antithetical part of the pair, it converges in one entity and loses its raison d'être."[21] In line with the Spencerian evolutionary paradigm of the day, Suzuki fears the implications of a cosmic lack of telos.[22] But is this fear justified for a Buddhist? The following section explores this issue by turning to alternative readings of pantheism in some of the work of other New Buddhists, including Sakaino Kōyō and Takashima Beihō, in addition to the later work of Sano Manabu.

(New) Buddhist Pantheism

In a short article published in 1900, in the very first volume of *New Buddhism* (*Shin bukkyō*), the journal of the New Buddhist Fellowship (Shin Bukkyō Dōshikai), Sakaino Kōyō asks the question: What is it that lies at the foundation of Buddhism, and, more importantly, New Buddhism?[23] "We New Buddhists wish to establish Buddhism on the basis of a pantheistic worldview. A pantheistic perspective shall be the foundation of Buddhism. Upon this foundation, the Buddhism of the future can be continuously improved and purified. This is what we are calling New Buddhism."[24]

What, exactly, does Sakaino mean by a "pantheistic worldview / perspective"? In fellow New Buddhist Tanaka Jiroku's formulation, which consciously mimics a famous line from the *Heart Sutra,* pantheism implies that "everything is divine and divinity is everything" (*issai soku kami, kami soku issai*).[25] It is also, Tanaka argues, a standpoint that affirms the Buddhist critique of the "self."[26] For Sakaino, who seems more resistant to cosmological abstractions, pantheism provides a "this-worldly" and secure foundation for a holistic and inclusivist perspective when it comes to the objects or focus of belief.[27] As he puts it later in the same essay, "Standing on a pantheistic foundation, we New Buddhists are a religious organization that seeks freedom of belief."[28] In the end, we might say that pantheism for Sakaino is less an ontological or metaphysical claim than it is a methodological and ethical stance: "Our pantheism is not simply a matter of being satisfied with some lofty philosophical theory. We

believe that pantheism harmonizes nicely with ethics, as well as the latest theories of moral philosophy."[29]

Sakaino would develop this idea several years later in a piece titled "Hanshinteki shinkō no dōtokuteki hōmen" (The ethical direction of pantheistic faith) by suggesting that, while the philosophical aspects of pantheism can indeed be difficult, at its most basic and evocative level, the doctrine means nothing more or less than a willingness to take the following classic Chinese insight seriously: "The myriad things of heaven and earth are of one source" (*Tenchi ittai banbutsu dōkon*).[30]

The New Buddhist conception of pantheism suggests the capacity to find some sort of deeper resonance or significance in the "things" of the world—including but not limited to what we call "nature." Again, New Buddhist pantheism seems less an ontological claim about the nature of reality than a "pragmatic" trope or heuristic designed to emphasize the "this-worldly," universalist and possibly "trans-humanist" aspects of Buddhism as they reconceived it in the early twentieth century—without going so far as to reject the "nonmaterial" realm in its entirety. In two pieces published consecutively in the November and December 1902 editions of *Shin bukkyō,* Sakaino employs the term "transmaterialism" (*chōbusshitsushugi*) to refer to the same idea, going so far as to include it as one of the "four pillars" of New Buddhism, along with this-worldliness (*genseshugi*), a spirit of equality (*byōdō no seishin*), and a commitment to universal brotherhood (*isshidōjinshugi*).[31] "To say that Buddhism is 'trans-materialist' is to say that the primary purpose of Buddhism is to address matters of a mental or spiritual nature. This is the primary objective for us New Buddhists. And yet, although this may sound like New Buddhists have disdain for concrete materiality, it is not the case that we merely prize the spirit and disdain material things."[32]

Despite their this-worldly focus and calls for social reform, the New Buddhists often expressed hesitation about adopting a purely materialist perspective, a hesitation that finds clearest expression in a critique of their socialist peers. In a 1908 piece titled "Busshitsuteki bunmei o toki tobaku ni oyobu" (The risk of advocating for material civilization), Sakaino argues that, despite the fact that the New Buddhists and socialists belong to the same "species" (*dōsei*), New Buddhists cannot accept the "interpretation of practical human life" of their socialist friends, who, he argues, tend to "parrot the songs of French socialists and Russian nihilists."[33] The insinuation is clear: the problem of socialism in Japan—and perhaps particularly for Buddhists—is that it relies too heavily on a (Western) materialist understanding of human flourishing, and thus cannot provide a critical brush sufficiently broad to deal with the breadth of problems facing modern Japan. Of course, accusations of "crude

materialism" are frequently based on simplifications or misreadings of Marx, but Sakaino's hesitation, one shared by most of the New Buddhists, is plausibly justified on the basis of "orthodox Marxist" interpretations of socialism, which tend toward economism and reductionist materialism. As I have argued elsewhere,[34] for this reason I believe it worthwhile to revisit Sakaino's concept of "transmaterialism," which he argues must be one of the four "pillars" of New Buddhism, along with a principle of this-worldliness, a spirit of equality and a spirit of freedom.

In a short essay published in March 1910, titled "Rei ka niku ka" (Spirit or flesh?), New Buddhist Fellowship cofounder Takashima Beihō (1875–1949) presents his own take on the issue. After accepting the evolutionary thesis that human beings are creatures with two basic and fundamental instincts—that is, to preserve themselves as individuals and their species—he goes on to argue from this premise that humans are dual-natured, with an equally strong "internal" urge toward preserving their physical existence and an "external" need to protect others, particularly their offspring.[35] Thus, Beihō reasons, a strictly "materialist" thesis is incorrect, in that it neglects the human instinct for species preservation, which manifests itself in the strongest human emotion: love (*ren'ai*).[36] From this point, Beihō makes a fairly typical "leap of difference," arguing that human beings, unlike, say, "dogs and monkeys," have a spiritual as well as a fleshly aspect (*rei no hōmen to niku no hōmen to ga aru*). "Without belittling the fleshly aspect," it is the spiritual side that allows us to become "fully human," in the sense that it provides human life with "value" (*kachi*) and "significance" (*igi*).[37] While this last step is not an unusual one to make for religious critics of evolution, naturalism, or materialism, several points bear notice here. First, though he does not spell out the connection, Beihō seems leave open the possibility that the "spiritual" aspect of human being has "evolved" from the "natural" instinct toward species preservation; that is, that emotions like love and compassion are evolutionary epiphenomena that have become fundamental to human nature over the course of evolution.

Along similar lines, it is important to note that the "spiritual" aspect of human being is rendered here in purely emotional and humanistic, as opposed to transcendental and conventionally "religious," terms.[38] Indeed, Beihō blurs conventional distinctions further by referring to his goal as a "greater naturalism" (*ōi ni shizenshugi*): "Thus, with our spiritual nature, we must love the natural beauty of reality [*jitsuzai no fūkō*]. We must love the Buddha and the gods, which are other names for that reality. To put it in modern terms, facing toward the natural beauty of reality we must implement a greater naturalism. By using our knowledge and our faith, we must satisfy the hunger and thirst of our divine

nature. While human beings cannot live without bread, they also cannot live by bread alone. This harmony between spirit and flesh is the foundation on which human life can begin."[39]

Although Beihō does not employ the term here, this vision fits very well with the larger New Buddhist discourse on pantheism as an appropriate "middle way" between theism and atheism, spiritual idealism and "vulgar" materialism. It is also a plausible reading of the early Marx's attempt to forge a "practical humanism" rooted in a naturalism that overcomes the distinction between materialism and idealism—though of course Beihō, writing in 1910, would not have had access to Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*.[40] Resolutely this-worldly, naturalistic, and pragmatic in focus, the "spiritual" element of humanity appears to be a capacity for humility, wonder, compassion, and "love," ideals that are emphasized within traditional Buddhist teachings and that, for Beihō and the New Buddhists, are too easily lost within a purely materialist perspective. In addition, it is likely that Beihō and his fellow New Buddhists, being broadly educated intellectuals conversant with current trends in thought and culture, were influenced by literary naturalism, which was itself connected to progressive and occasionally radical political ideologies—particular those of an anarchist sensibility. Young progressives and revolutionaries of late Meiji and Taishō were inspired by the work of Japanese naturalists such as Shimazaki Tōson (1872–1943), Tayama Katai (1872–1930), Kunikida Doppo (1871–1908), and Arahata Kanson (1887–1981). Infusing images and motifs from Western thinkers such as Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), these authors appealed to both the power and beauty of nature as a "source" for personal and sociopolitical transformation. Suzuki Sadami has gone so far as to claim that "vitalism" (*seimeishugi*) was a fundamental concept not only for progressives but also for Taishō literary and intellectual culture more broadly conceived.[41]

It turns out that Suzuki and the New Buddhists were not alone in looking to pantheism as a potential "middle way" for a postwar, progressive—and possibly Marxist—appropriation of Buddhism. Twenty-five years following his dramatic *tenkō,* ex-communist-turned-Buddhist Sano Manabu (1892–1953) would use the same term in making a similar argument. In a chapter from his 1958 book *Bukkyō to shakaishugi* titled "Busshin ichinyo shisō no atarashii sugata" (The new shape of matter-mind unity thought), Sano argues that "human beings demand a worldview that is able to bring together and unify knowledge of nature as well as human life. However, this is not for the purposes of mere idle speculation, but rather because we want to make life more beautiful and abundant—that is, it emerges from a demand for practical action. It is from this demand that materialism—which interprets nature, and idealism—which appreciates the

spirit, are born. And yet, *busshin ichinyo* thought is not a product of compromise between materialism and idealism."[42]

As Sano explains, it is necessary to go beyond the limits of both materialism and idealism so that one sees that matter and spirit are unified. Furthermore, "this recognition of the essence of the world in things as they are is pantheistic thought." Rather than being a type of isolation or stasis, the *ichniyo* perspective allows for "generation" (*seisei*), "flow" (*ryūdō*), "mutability" (or impermanence; *mujō*), and "unceasing development" (*taezaru hatten*), concepts familiar to traditional Buddhist thought but interpreted here in a modernist and "progressive" manner.

And yet, Sano argues, despite its centrality to East Asian philosophy and religion, previous forms of *busshin ichinyo* thought contain the following weaknesses: (1) an overemphasis on meditation, disconnected from action; (2) a focus on individual, personal practice at the expense of developing a person's worldview as a member of society; (3) an interpretation of *busshin ichinyo* as a kind of tranquility, with little understanding of its unceasing dynamism (while similarly downplaying the significance of contradictions in favor of harmony); (4) a "naturalistic" fancy by which immersion in nature leads to a flight from the world; (5) and an emphasis on the laws of karma, by which the regularities and necessities of nature are neglected, leading to a lack of scientific development.[43] By squarely facing up to these issues—while reconnecting with fundamental Mahāyāna teachings such as the "mutual benefits philosophy of the bodhisattva"—*busshin ichinyo* can serve as the foundation for a unique form of East Asian Buddhist socialism.[44]

As such, Sano belatedly brings together two important tropes of the New Buddhists: *busshin ichinyo* and "pantheism," while emphasizing, as they did half a century previous, the "social" and even socialistic implications of these concepts. Indeed, these five critical points are very much in line with Ichikawa Hakugen's Marxist-inspired critique of traditional and modern Buddhism.[45] And yet, as I argue in my book *Against Harmony,* Sano's perspective is limited by an emphasis on ethnoparticularism, and the fact that his "national socialism" resolves itself in a higher unity known as the state or *kokutai*—though this aspect is less evident, for obvious reasons, in the postwar period.

One way of putting this is that, due to his outright rejection of the socialist political (if not theoretical) perspective on social change, Sano cannot provide adequate "resistance" to political power or hegemony, and is in danger of lapsing into a sterile Japanism.[46] In this sense, despite his more overtly political perspective, Sano's interpretation of *busshin ichinyo* is resonant with the early work of Suzuki and Nishida Kitarō, who similarly sought to "resolve" the problem of

subject and object by developing a Buddhist-inspired epistemology that purports to dissolve the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism.[47] Here, however, we begin to move into a quite different realm of inquiry than that favored by the New Buddhists and most of their progressive heirs, as *busshin ichinyo* becomes a mode of "merging" with the world or nature, rather than a more nuanced, nonreductive way of addressing the contradictions and problems that arise in modern, material society.

Rethinking Pantheism as Phenomenology

But let us return to pantheism as a possible "middle way" between a reductive materialism and an abstract or world-denying idealism. Here I believe Jay Garfield's invocation of *phenomenology* is of use in helping us to elucidate some of the complexities involved as we work through the implications of this line of thought. To begin, Garfield argues that the classical Madhyamika authors and their heirs in some East Asian traditions brought to bear "one of the most radical attacks on one aspect of the Myth of the Given to have ever been advanced in world philosophy." "It is not simply an argument that reality—whatever it may be—is not given to us as it is; rather, it is the claim that we can make no sense whatsoever of the very notion of reality that is presupposed by any form of that myth. The dependence, however, is not absolute, and does not yield an idealism; it is rather causal, involving an interplay between the subjective and objective aspects of the reality we enact."[48] The second sentence draws us to the crux of the matter: "reality" is a byproduct, as it were, of our interactions with the world. On one level, this leads to a "soft" materialism, rooted in commonsense pragmatism (with its own possible dangers), since the only world is the world that we inhabit—or, to use Garfield's more dynamic and constructivist term—the world we *enact*. Garfield poses the question at this stage: is this still metaphysics? His answer, correct in my view, is no, at least not in the sense in which we usually use the word. In short, "the attempt to find a determinate reality beyond the apparently ethereal *lebenswelt* may well be doomed to failure."[49]

Of course, Garfield is well aware of, and makes a point of highlighting, the similarities between this Buddhist phenomenological perspective and the Western skeptical traditions extending from the classical schools through Hume and filtering into the work of Kant and Schopenhauer, and arguably Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein (none of whom could be called "pantheists" in the strict sense).[50] And yet, there is a difference with most of these thinkers in that Buddhist philosophers, for reasons at least partly soteriological, are committed to

> emphasizing that the entities and properties with which we interact are those that have significance for us, those about which we care, that stand out from and are framed by backgrounds, or that constitute the backgrounds that give significance to that which stands out. . . . Buddhist philosophy . . . is aimed at solving a particular problem, that of the omnipresence of suffering. . . . The choice of the *lebenswelt* as the site of metaphysics is thus not a retreat from reality, but a focus on the reality that matters to us. Its metaphysics is the metaphysics that can make a difference.[51]

There are many subtleties at work here, but I suggest that this emphasis on *significance* further heightens the pragmatist aspect of this perspective, albeit a pragmatism with a distinctive, Buddhistic telos—that of liberating beings from suffering.[52]

Another important aspect of this phenomenological view, especially with respect to the New Buddhist attempt to infuse a pantheistic perspective into modern Buddhism, is the social component. As Garfield informs us, "The *lebenswelt,* especially in the Mahāyāna tradition, is a social world, a world in which conventions can be constituted. One of the central meanings of *convention* (*samvṛti, vyāvahāra*) . . . is *agreement,* or *mundane* practice. For this reason, from a Mahayana perspective, not only are our salient social practices and linguistic meanings conventionally constituted, but so too is our ontology."[53] Here we begin to hear notes of Marx, as well as his twentieth-century heirs who take seriously the possibility of the "social construction of reality."

Finally, there is a fascinating move in certain Madhyamaka thinkers (and, by extension, much of East Asian Buddhist thought) toward what Siderits calls *global antirealism*.[54] In this scenario, the residual antirealism of the early Abhidharma is pushed further, such that the contrast that upheld the Abhidharmic critique of realism is lost, allowing realism in through the back door.: "It makes sense to see Mādhyamikas, in virtue of this radical extension of anti-realism, to have recovered a robust realism regarding the ordinary, conventional world, albeit a modified *kind* of realism. . . . To be real on this understanding is hence not to *possess,* but to *lack, ultimate reality.*"[55] Here phenomenological pragmatism—and possibly pantheism understood along the lines of New Buddhist "transmaterialism"—becomes a middle way between the "nihilism" that seeks to undercut the reality of the conventional world (as does the early Abhidharma and, Garfield suggests, modern scientific reductionism), and the more ordinary, naïve reification of the world as it is.[56]

Garfield sees this move as a potentially significant contribution to contemporary Western metaphysics. "Taking Madhyamaka seriously—whether in its

Indo-Tibetan or Chinese guise—is to take seriously the possibility that metaphysics is directed not at a deeper analysis of reality but at extirpating the need for such a deeper analysis." With this extirpation, perhaps, goes the temptation toward "weak nihilism," whereby the world of appearance is depreciated in favor of something deeper or more "real," thereby allowing for a reaffirmation of "ordinary life."[57]

Through the foregoing, wide-ranging analysis of "pantheism" as it emerges in the early works of Japanese Buddhism modernism, including D. T. Suzuki, the New Buddhist Fellowship, and Sano Manabu, and in relation to Western thinkers such as Spinoza, Hegel, and Marx, we arrive at the following conclusions: "In modern Western thought, *pantheism* remains a powerful if controversial undercurrent; recent re-evaluations of the work of Spinoza point to some of its radical implications for metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics; Stewart argues for an 'immanentist' pantheism as a neglected but still fertile foundation for radical democracy." Pantheism (Jp. *hanshinron*) also has significant valence within Japanese Buddhist modernism, particularly the work of scholars and lay Buddhist activists who articulated the outlines of a New Buddhism from the 1880s through the 1940s; for these thinkers, it provided a "middle way" between materialism and idealism, as well as between theism and atheism.

In early works such as *Shin shūkyōron* (1896), D. T. Suzuki developed a particular interpretation of "postpantheism" as an ideal form of or approach to religion; Suzuki's postpantheism, which can be interpreted as a *phenomenological* approach to religion, struggles to avoid the danger of a static, and potentially nihilistic, "materialism," eventually (I argue) lapsing into Hegelian assumptions about change and "evolution."

The lay Buddhist activists associated with the New Buddhist Fellowship shared many of the above concerns, though they were more inclined than Suzuki to accept the radical "this worldliness" of pantheism as a foundation (or "essence") for (New) Buddhism; "transmaterialism" is another term employed to suggest an approach that avoids the traps of reductionism and essentialism, what Marx might call a "practical humanism."

In the postwar period, lapsed radical turned Buddhist Sano Manabu further developed these connections between pantheism, Buddhism, and Marxism, but Sano himself got caught in the same Hegelian trap of attempting to dissolve contradictions and distinctions in the name of harmony, rendering his Marxist-infused Buddhist pantheism ineffective as a basis for critical resistance against the status quo.

One way out of this Hegelian trap is to sidestep questions of ontology and metaphysics entirely, a move that we might make by following Garfield's suggestion to consider certain forms of Buddhist thought as both *phenomenological* and *pragmatic;* that is, that reality is *enacted* through engagement with others and the world, with the caveat that the primary purpose of such engagement—and thus the *significant reality*—must be the Buddhist telos of liberating beings from suffering.

Of course, this is a move that Suzuki never makes in his work, perhaps due to his emphasis on the "experience" of awakening as one that transcends "ethics" (and "religion") as normally conceived. But it is one that helps ameliorate Suzuki's concern that pantheism, in its lack of cosmic telos, must be a bridge to chaos.

Notes

This is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented to the symposium "Reflections on D. T. Suzuki: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of his Death," held at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken), Kyoto, Japan, December 5–6, 2016.
Parts of the section titled "(New) Buddhist Pantheism" have been adapted from James Mark Shields, *Against Harmony: Progressive and Radical Buddhism in Modern Japan* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 105–115, 235–243.

1. Norman Geisler and William D. Watkins, eds., *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views,* 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 93.
2. Geisler and Watkins, *Worlds Apart,* 85.
3. The best Japanese source on Buddhism and/as pantheism is Masai Keiji (1883–1979), *Bukkyō to hanshinron* (Tokyo: Dōbōsha, 1977). Masai notes the work of two of his contemporaries, scholar Ui Hakuju (1882–1963) and scholar (and Sōtō Zen priest) Kimura Taiken (1881–1930), who were also interested in elucidating this connection (6).
4. Maurice A. Canney, *An Encyclopedia of Religions* (London: Routledge, 1921), 277.
5. Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (New York: Humanity Books, 1953), chap. 4.
6. See Geisler and Watkins, *Worlds Apart,* 78–79. In distinguishing types of pantheism, *Worlds Apart* classifies Spinozan pantheism as modal, as opposed to absolute (Advaita), emanational (Plotinus), developmental (Hegel), multilevel (Radhakrishnan), or permeational (Daoism, Zen, *Star Wars*).
7. Matthew Stewart, *Nature's God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 166–167.
8. "Although America's revolutionary deists lavished many sincere expressions of adoration upon their deity, deism is in fact functionally indistinguishable from what we would now call 'pantheism'; and pantheism is really just a pretty word for atheism. While deism could often be associated with moderation in politics, it served principally to advance a system of thought that was revolutionary in its essence and effects" (Stewart, *Nature's God,* 5–6).
9. See Peter Gratton, "Spinoza and the Biopolitical Roots of Modernity," *Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 18, no. 3 (2013): 91–102.

10. Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 11.

11. Martin Verhoeven, "The Dharma through Carus's Lens," in *The Gospel of Buddha according to Old Records,* by Paul Carus (LaSalle: Open Court, 2003), 28.

12. See Verhoeven, "Dharma through Carus's Lens," 28.

13. The critic was Henry Collin Minton; see Harold Henderson, *Catalyst for Controversy: Paul Carus of Open Court* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 62.

14. SSR, 9.

15. SSR, 10.

16. SSR, 11.

17. SSR, 21.

18. "Against Hegel's view of the geometric method of *Ethics* as a formalism precluding the movement of thought, Macherey offers evidence of a method that is only apparently geometric and Cartesian and instead expresses an immanent philosophy that is not subordinated to the guarantee of an a priori truth: in Spinoza's work truth emerges through exposition rather than being fixed at the outset as a set of formal principles" (Susan Ruddick, "Introduction," in Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), ix).

19. SSR, 21.

20. See Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza,* 52–53.

21. SSR, 22.

22. SSR, 22.

23. Sakaino's article (*SB* 2, 9 [Aug. 1901], 325), titled "Katō hakase ni kotau" (Reply to Dr. Katō), is directed against the prominent Meirokusha founder and president of Tokyo Imperial University Baron Katō Hiroyuki (1836–1916).

24. *SB* 2, 9 (Aug. 1901), 325.

25. *SB* 2, 10 (Sept. 1901), 350. Tanaka goes on to cite two famous passages from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (*Dai hatsu nehan kyō*): "All beings without exception have Buddha-nature" (*Issai shujō shitsu u busshō*), and "Plants, trees and soil—all will attain buddhahood" (*Sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu*); 351.

26. *SB* 2, 10 (Sept. 1901), 355.

27. See in this regard Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 122–130; also, on pantheism and "freedom" in the work of Ando Shōeki, see Tetsuo Najita, "Andō Shōeki—The 'Forgotten Thinker' in Japanese History," in *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies,* ed. Masao Miyoshi and Harry D. Harootunian (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 74.

28. *SB* 2, 9 (Aug. 1901), 329; for more on pantheism, see *SB* 1, 5 (Nov. 1900), 140; *SB* 2, 6 (May 1901), 289–925; *SB* 2, 12 (Nov. 1901), 386–390; *SB* 4, 12 (Dec. 1903), 916–919; *SB* 8, 2 (Feb. 1907), 371–381; *SB* 8, 7 (July 1907), 454–461.

29. *SB* 8, 2 (Feb. 1907), 381; also, *SB* 2, 6 (May 1901), 289–295.

30. *SB* 8, 7 (July 1907), 454, 461.

31. *SB* 3, 12 (Dec. 1902), 675.

32. *SB* 3, 11 (Nov. 1902), 655.

33. *SB* 9, 3 (March 1908), 551.

34. See Shields, *Against Harmony,* chap. 7.

35. *SB* 11, 3 (March 1910), 262.

36. It bears noting that Beihō's argument here aligns with the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin's well-known critique of individualistic (and social Darwinistic) interpretations of evolution. See Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 2016).

37. *SB* 11, 3 (March 1910), 262.

38. In fact, Beihō's perspective here is arguably not far from the Marxian conception of "human exceptionalism," rooted in the basic insight that while human beings share with animals the basic drives for food, sex, and shelter, they have the unique ability to produce their own subsistence, which gives birth to economics, society, and "socialized" humanity (see *MECW* 3, 42–43). The difference is that Marx develops his analysis by looking at the distorting impact of ideology and specific economic factors such as private property.

39. *SB* 11, 3 9 (March 1910), 263.

40. In both the *Paris Manuscripts* (aka *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*) and *The Holy Family,* Marx asserts that communism is a form of "real" or "practical" humanism rooted in naturalism, and by virtue of the latter, serves as the unifying truth of idealism and materialism (see, e.g., *MECW,* 3, 296).

41. See Suzuki Sadami, *Nihon no "bungaku" gainen* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 1998).

42. Sano Manabu, *Sano Manabu chosakushū,* 5 vols. (Tokyo: Sano Manabu Chosakushū Kankōkai, 1958), 3:611 (hereafter *SMC*).

43. *SMC* 3:614.

44. *SMC* 3:651.

45. Ichikawa Hakugen, *Bukkyōsha no sensō sekinin* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1970), 150–154.

46. Moreover, in his insistence on the prior necessity of a "revolution in human nature" (*jinsei kakumei*), Sano misses a basic point of Marxist materialism; i.e., the recognition that fundamental change at the level of individual consciousness is difficult, if not impossible, without corresponding sociopolitical and economic change. Sano's charge, familiar to religious critics of socialism since Tolstoy, that "socialists are satisfied with superficial, institutional resolutions" (*gaimen no seidoteki kaiketsu dake ni manzoku suru* [*SMC* 3:733]) rings hollow—at least if one reads Marx carefully.

47. This connection becomes more evident when we examine the work of Tokyo Imperial University psychologist Hashida Kunihiko (1882–1945), who in the 1930s developed the concept of *kansatsu* as a Japanese equivalent to Western science's "observation."

48. Jay Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 35.

49. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 36.

50. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 37.

51. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 39.

52. Interestingly, this also happens to be the telos of the "liberal" pragmatism developed by Richard Rorty in various essays (see, e.g., Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]). One might also think here of Roget T. Ames and David L. Hall's pragmatic interpretation of the *Daodejing* as a text focused on "making life significant"; see Roget T. Ames and David L. Hall, eds., *Dao de jing: "Making This Life Significant"—A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Random House, 2003).

53. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 39.

54. See, e.g., Mark Siderits, *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13–38.

55. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 63–65. Citing the famous couplet from the *Heart Sutra,* Garfield concludes, "The emptiness of any phenomenon simply is a property of that thing, and so is dependent upon it, and so is impermanent, and so is itself empty, and so is itself merely conventionally real" (63).

56. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 63.

57. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism,* 80. Coupled with what Garfield calls the Madhyamaka "deflationary" phenomenological take on consciousness, by which "reference to internal representations, qualia, phenomenal properties and other such ghostly mediators of our experience drop away, [o]ntology becomes cleaner, perhaps more naturalistic, and certainly more public, less private" (161–162).