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Date Oct. 10, 96
Abstract

Moral actions characteristically emanate from moral perception; therefore, if we are to improve moral action, we should see to improving moral perception. Accordingly, this thesis prioritizes the importance of moral perception in moral performance. Yet, perception is usually interpreted as reception and, hence, lying outside one's direct control, in which case the notion of improving moral perception would be limited. However, many contemporary moral theorists who profess the primacy of moral perception are rather strongly committed to such a notion as evidenced in their pursuit of the possibility of open moral perception which is not rigidly prescribed by prior doxastic and dispositional conditions. I problematize this situation by arguing that in the way perception ordinarily operates, which is superimposition of the subject's beliefs and dispositions on what is perceived, moral perception as open perception is not possible in any serious sense. Unless this superimposition is first of all recognized--a difficult task, given our tendency to objectify what is perceived--and, secondly, given to deconstruction in both theory and experience, the proposal for open perception would not yield far-reaching results. I examine this tendency to objectification and attempt to repudiate our foundational subject-object dualistic epistemology and ontology that lie behind this tendency. Then I consider how the resulting thesis of nonduality can be experientially established. For this step, I explore the resources available in the Buddhist tradition of vipassana theory and practice which proposes laying bare the process of superimposition, and furthermore, deconstructing it experientially, thereby availing to us the possibility of nondual moral perception--that is, perception freed from the enthrallment of superimposition. I also explore
the epistemology and phenomenology behind vipassana, and I attempt to picture human intentionality in the mode of nonduality. Furthermore, I attempt to construct a general ethical theory, which I term "nondual ethic," that centralizes empathic, compassionate, and harmony-making perception. Finally, I consider the kinds of educative practices that foster nondual ways of experience, and hence nondual moral perception. With this thesis, I lay the preliminary groundwork for further investigation.
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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother who is the embodiment of generosity and care.
Prologue

In short, it is the task of philosophy to know, to love, and to heal—all in one.
It knows in as much as it loves and heals. It loves, only if it truly knows and heals.
It heals if it loves and knows.

—Raimundo Panikkar—

We live not a time span but the moments. Living as moment-to-moment flickerings of consciousness can often be a momentous event of having the presence of mind to grasp an opportunity or to avert a danger. In the blink of a moment, a sudden death shot can miss and lose the game for one player but win it for another; our spirit can shrivel and expire or soar and inspire as words of a moment are carelessly hurled or carefully offered; anger may explode into a burst of violence or transform into an energy of determination. The art of living well, to which morality should have a strong claim, depends on the concrete “texture” of consciousness that shapes how the moment is lived. What is the texture of my consciousness now as I write these words? Is it open-textured and expanding and, for instance, infused with the four brahma-viharas (“heavenly abode” or modes of consciousness)—lovingkindness, sympathetic joy, compassion, and tranquility? Or is it agitated and constricted with resentment, anxiety, and grasping? My words bear witness to the texture of my consciousness. (I now understand the time-honoured custom of poets calling upon the Muse for inspiration.)

Besides the texture of consciousness is the text to the consciousness: the configuration of what is and how something is. The texture and the text, inseparably interwoven, form our perceptions which are the events in the consciousness. Perceptions mark the momentous events in our psychic life which shape and lead to the possibility of action. For perception, having configured what and how something is, sets the stage or lays down the track.
for certain possibilities of action to follow. Sometimes it takes a dramatic event to demonstrate to us the singular significance of perception in predisposing us to a certain course of action. In such moments, we may see how a perception decisively shapes action, sometimes to a tragic end.

Granted that not all our moments are of such singular importance in sealing our fate, and also granted that much of our doings in the moment can be redressed in the future, the fact still remains that one lives the consequence of each moment’s apperception. How one lives is a measure of how one perceives. How one acts is often a direct consequence of how one perceives. This realization was burnt into my memory after a momentous event in my own life not long ago, and it was with this receptive condition of understanding that Murdoch and Nussbaum’s theories on moral perception touched home and stimulated a course of reflection and investigation. This thesis is the fruit of this exercise.

If we want people to act more morally, the foremost vital point to press should, therefore, be their perception. For it is in perception that all our beliefs, propensities, and predilections, which in themselves are abstract and latent, may take on the most tangible feel of reality, and actions, insofar as they are conscious, are powered by this urgent sense of reality. In linking perception and action, we need not postulate the mysterious entity, the Will, to account for the link. Perception naturally—that is, with a sense of natural necessity--translates into some suitable action on account of the sense of reality that perception conveys. If one were to perceive as real that there was a bear standing down the hiking trail, one would consider turning back and hiding up a tree in case the bear came chasing.

The urgent and unmistakable sense of reality can be illustrated by our common mode of speech as when we see an apple, we say, “Here is an apple”
(or something to this effect) and not "I believe I see an apple." A perception real enough to lead to an action leaves no room for conjecturing a belief. Or conversely, if anyone is so firmly convinced of a certain belief, then that belief will cease to be a mere belief and will translate into her perception. For example, one would not mean and/or say (to oneself or aloud), "I believe that you are an incompetent idiot." Rather, she will mean and/or say "You incompetent idiot!" because one sees the person to be so. The insight here also explains why much of our moral teaching consisting of imparting knowledge and instruction does not "sink in" and filter down to the minds/consciousness of the students. Or knowledge may sink into the mind but not into consciousness, if we want to distinguish, for the sake of clarity of meaning, the mind from consciousness by identifying the first as the "organ" of propositional knowing and the latter as the field of intentionality.

The classical problem in moral philosophy of the conflict between inclination and reason, which was characterized as akrasia ("weakness of will" or "incontinence") by Aristotle, may be reinterpreted here as the failure of moral knowledge to filter down to intentionality to become the appropriate perception of which inclination is part. We acknowledge that it is easy enough, comparatively speaking, to convey knowledge (in the form of descriptive and prescriptive statements) to the students. With us, this state of affairs is criterion enough to certify that students know. Yet, especially in the practical domains of learning, of which morality is a part, such propositional knowing is certainly not enough and by itself is practically useless. What really counts is how knowledge has been transmuted into intentionality—into perception and feeling and their manifestation in speech and action. This crucial process of transmutation is the hardest to penetrate, understand, and accomplish. Why this difficulty? We understand this difficulty best if we
look at it in the context of learning something new. To learn something new requires making some alteration, big or small, to the present perception. If, however, the present perception stubbornly refuses to admit the alteration, then new knowledge cannot filter into the current system of intentionality. This stubborn resistance of perception has to do with its sense of reality. Axiomatically speaking, the more one is convinced of the reality of one's perception, the more resistant one would be to the suggestion of change.

When perception conveys such an absolute—that is, substantive—sense of present reality, it appears pointless and senseless if not downright dangerous to wonder about and question one's perception. Let us call this the absolutist conception of perception. When one compares what one perceives as real with what one abstractly knows, the former is bound to claim priority and a certain right to be over and above the latter. Furthermore, we carry around an empiricist conception of perception which considers perception a passive reception. One cannot help seeing what one sees: perception just happens. This empiricist conception supports the above absolutist conception by categorically separating the perceiver and the perceived—the reality. Thus, there is an objective and indubitable sense of reality to one's perception. Hence, the impenetrable texture of perception, and thus the difficulty in infiltrating the present perception and changing it. All in all, what this shows is the difficulty of working with perception.

It is against this difficulty that I rally in my thesis. Throughout the thesis, if I appear to be unduly struggling against the difficulty of changing perception, it is—I would like to think—because I am scrupulously realistic about the difficulty while at the same time determined to break through it. The magnitude of difficulty is far greater than we are prepared to admit. It is too painful, embarrassing, or threatening to admit since such admission
would deprive us of the sense of or the belief in potent agency which we so cherish. We would like to believe that we are truly in control of ourselves and that it is only a matter of exercising firm will to change the way we think, perceive, and feel, should we find it unsatisfactory. “Let the Will side up with Reason, our unfailing guide”: such has been the usual wise counsel. Self-help, counselling, and therapy abound in our midst, and they all are premised upon the belief that we can change and improve ourselves, and it is up to the agent but to take charge of oneself. There is here a curious incongruity between our belief in the potent sense of agency and our belief in the objective sense of reality given to our perception.

I may as well be the bearer of grim news and state that ordinarily perception is impossible to change insofar as it is, as abovementioned, taken to be outside one’s control and also so bound up with a veritable sense of reality that it resists self-questioning and doubting. To accept this news is in one sense to lose hope and faith in agency. We become fatalistic and even nihilistic. We see through the vanity of moralizing that appeals to our potent sense of agency when, in fact, we are inextricably, helplessly conditioned beings who are the receiving, not initiating, end of impressions. The deterministic universe seems to operate in our psyche as well.

But not so fast, I say: we have not inquired whether we are compelled to accept the notion that perception has to be passive and outside one’s control and has to bring with it a hard and closed sense of reality, the sense that says, “This is it.” In the possibility of this enquiry I place my hope for the undeceived and unexaggerated sense of moral agency. If we want to be truly able to change and improve our perception, then we would have to change the way perception operates in us. This proposal is more than a proposal that we change the content of our perception and see something this way rather
than that. It is the proposal that the very manner in which our perception ordinarily takes place, that is, the very texture of perception, be changed. In other words, it is a proposal to change the texture of consciousness which would involve changing its text as well.

My thesis is, then, foremost an enquiry into the nature of perception. The field in which this enquiry takes place is moral life. Strategically, I first problematize perception so as to puncture the overconfidence that we can just summon our will and knowledge to change and improve our perception. A far more radical move has to be made—namely, changing the very way we do our perception. Chapter One is devoted to delineating the ordinary perception which I call closed or conditioned perception and the proposed one which I call open or nondual perception. I carry out this delineation in the context of defining and characterizing moral perception, following Murdoch and Nussbaum’s footsteps. I identify moral perception to be characteristically open or nondual perception. Thus, the effort to perceive morally becomes the effort to change our usual way with perception. Not incidentally, Murdoch and Nussbaum associate this new way of perception with love. This is so because love is open, attentive perception. (In this age of ecological distress, the task of how to love ourselves and the earth—to love ourselves as part of the earth and love the earth as part of ourselves—is an urgent business calling the utmost attention of the philosophers.)

In Chapter Two, I show that the move from closed perception to open perception involves crucially giving up on the substantive world view and, in particular, the substantive view of the self as an atomistic and enduring ego-self. This abandonment of the view of ego-self is none other than love. Of course, this giving up involves more than simply discarding one view and adopting another. Insofar as views are embodied so deeply to the point that
they condition and structure a perception, it calls not just for an investigation into the views themselves but also an investigation into the very process of perception that comes to embody the view. As emphasized, a change to perception calls for not simply the giving up of a certain view and adopting a certain other, but “undoing” the perception that embodies the view. To carry out this latter task, we have to examine our perception in operation: catch it in the act. This is the task I set for myself in Chapter Three.

In Chapter Three, I rely most heavily on the Buddhist analysis of perception in order to show both the constructed and, therefore, conditioned nature of perception and also the possibility of deconstructing and deconditioning perception so as to open it to possibilities of change. Throughout the thesis, I identify this opening as the quintessential moral task. Chapter Four attempts at a more global investigation on the shape of ethics that centralizes the view of moral perception I have proposed. Since the enquiry into moral perception has been undertaken with a bigger picture of moral life and moral agency in mind, it is necessary that our theorizing about the moral perception is placed in the total context of moral intentionality to show how doing moral perception in the proposed way fits with the rest of human intentionality. In other words, perception being an integral part of human intentionality, a change to it necessarily effects a change to the way we feel, think, and act.

The outcome of this global picturing is an emergence of an ethical view that is rather radically different from those that we are familiar with in the Western philosophical tradition. I call this ethical view that I have worked out a nondual ethic because its distinguishing feature is the epistemological-ontological claim that rejects the notion of separate, autonomous, subjective self, so central to all the ethical views in the Western tradition. Chapter Five,
the final chapter, is devoted to the practical consideration of how to cultivate and foster nondual intentionality, and these considerations are for the possibility of moral education. The means by which we may cultivate consciousness may be called technologies of experience. My thesis of nondual consciousness that rejects the postulation of the objectivist reality is consistent with and, in fact, implies this notion of technology of experience. Hence, my pedagogical considerations of technologies of nondual intentionality are the logical extension of the thesis of nonduality. In discussing some of these technologies of nondual experience, I again rely heavily on the Eastern tradition with its varied practices aimed at experience of nonduality. As I make it clear in the main text, my aim in bringing in the examples from the Eastern tradition is not so much to promote their adoption as to give examples from which we may learn to turn our ordinary learning activities into technologies of nondual experience.

The thoughts I have gathered and woven together in this thesis come from diverse sources. The reader may be struck by a curious synthesis of ideas from modern and contemporary Western and ancient Eastern traditions. That I saw them dovetailing and supporting each other in the manner in which where one tradition arrives at an insight but cannot go any further, the other steps in and take the lead, may reveal the training of my own mind steeped in the cultural and intellectual traditions of both the Far Eastern and the Western. More specifically, it may reveal how deeply rooted is the ethos of Far Eastern classical cosmology and practices in my own consciousness. My views bear their rootedness in the Lebenswelt of this author and, thus, the thesis of nondual perception and morality that I propose is not to be taken as some objective truths about the world and ourselves. I offer this self-reflection as an antidote to the small but worrisome possibility of my being
interpreted as giving an objectivist account of reality and consciousness. The ontological-epistemological view that I subscribe to—namely, insubstantialism—rejects the objectivist account. If I wish my view professed in this thesis to be taken seriously and be given the merit of consideration, it is not because I think the view presents what is "really true" but because the view may better facilitate the achievement of harmony and peace with the world and with life. In other words, it is the pragmatic consideration that I appeal to. Of course, there is additionally the epistemic consideration of how consonant this proposed view is with what we know (to our best effort) about our psyche and experience. A fictional view may promise the most happy and harmonious life, but if it lies outside the limit of our experience, it is worthless as a practical theory of morality. Thus, throughout the thesis, I try to be as phenomenological in my exposition as my understanding of nondual experience allows so as to enable the reader to assess my claims concretely.

On a different note, I wish to make a minor editorial comment regarding the notoriously bothersome gender pronouns. Though I do not wish to be insensitive to the efforts at gender equality in my writing, I find the usual compunctious practice of naming both the masculine and feminine pronouns such as he or she (he/she), him or her (him/her), his or her (his/her), and so on to be dreadfully cumbersome, threatening the flow of ideas. Thus, almost out of despair, I have decided to use the feminine and the neutral pronouns mostly with no better rationale than that I will simply base on my gender, not worrying at this point about how this practice of mine is politically incorrect.
Chapter One

Priority of moral perception in moral performance

If the doors of perception were cleansed
everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.
--William Blake--

1.1. Chapter introduction

I have often observed in myself and in others that perception sets the stage for actions which in most cases unfold straightforwardly from the terms of our perception. Rarely do we actually question the validity or acceptability of our own perception, then deliberate, and act in a way that may not be characteristically compatible with the original perception. Our perceptions have the strongest reality claim on us because they reflect our deep-seated beliefs, dispositions, and values. More often than not, our later deliberation is no more than a post hoc rationalization, a reasoned defence of the prior perception. Should a reasoned defence fail to justify our perception, we would insist bluntly that we could not have acted otherwise because we could not help perceiving as we did. Perception is, thus, always action-guiding and most often action-dictating. If we ask a child why he squashed a crawling spider, he would insist that the spider was scary, and he would justify his claim on the basis of how it looked to him: creepy and horrible. His squashing the spider rose directly from his perception of the spider's "evil look" and its consequent danger.

What I am arguing here is the primary importance of perception in our moral practice. This argument has an implication for moral education in that, if we want to generate moral actions, then more than anything else, we should work on moral perception, for actions are usually guided by or follow from perception. Morally excellent actions would in general emanate from,
as Kosman would phrase it, morally excellent perceptions. If we endorse this argument, then the next step is to ask just what kinds of perception qualify as morally excellent perception and how we would attain such a level of moral perception.

This thesis addresses these two questions. It enquires into the characterization of moral perception and also, in doing so, attempts to understand those epistemic and psychic conditions, whatever they may be, which would dispose us to moral perception. In this chapter, I start with making the case for the primary importance of moral perception in our moral theorizing and practice of moral living because it presents a move away from the still dominant trend in moral theorizing which is focused on moral action and moral reasoning. I build an Aristotelian argument for the priority of moral perception based on Iris Murdoch's and Martha Nussbaum's inspirational works.¹ Both Murdoch and Nussbaum see transforming one's perceptions to be a central moral task in one's moral life.

From reading their works, a rather clear outline of moral perception emerges. Openness, sensitivity, responsiveness, attentiveness, and empathic imagination are what characterize moral perception. Murdoch's "loving attention" and Nussbaum's "responding to what is there before [one] with full sensitivity and imaginative vigor" are their criteria or standards for moral seeing. However, as construed above, moral perception may appear to be purely a matter of affective and dispositional and, therefore, subjective phenomena, lacking criterial epistemic contents that would regulate ascription of these dispositional qualities. The above views leave us with a strong impression of their being "an empty situation morality" in which

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everything is "a matter of trade-offs." This criticism is formulated by Nussbaum herself, revealing that she is well-aware of possible objections to her view. She (1990, p. 93) speaks through an imaginary critic who makes the comment that a Nussbaumian moral agent "will be deficient in ethical continuity and commitment over time, lacking in firm principles and in a reliable general conception of the good life. So long as the agent agonizes enough over the materials of the case, she can do anything she likes."

In response to this self-criticism, Nussbaum (1990, p. 94) argues for the Aristotelian situational moral practice in which the agents have to improvise morally by bringing in "a history of general conceptions and commitments, and a host of past obligations and affiliation ... all of which contribute to and help to constitute [their] evolving conception of good living." While I find this picture of situational moral practice reasonable, since that is how we often naturally practice moral deliberation, I still find the picture lacking a more pointed understanding of exactly what we have to work with in our own beliefs and psychic capacities to bring about moral perception. What we need is a systematic way of probing the epistemological, dispositional, and valuational conditions behind moral perception in the light of which we can better understand exactly what is involved in such terms as "openness," "attention," and so on that Murdoch and Nussbaum proposed.

There must be certain ways of looking and of being that are more conducive to moral perception. If this were not the case, there would be no reason for us to distinguish moral perception from non-moral perception. Thus, what I am looking for are those underlying epistemic, dispositional, and valuational conditions that would conduce to moral perception as

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2 This is actually the charge that Hilary Putnam brought to Nussbaum's conception of morality. See Love's Knowledge, p. 93.
characterized by Murdoch and Nussbaum. To those of us who are concerned with implementating a theory for our moral education, a thorough enquiry into these conditions is not a luxury but a necessity.

1.2. Priority of moral perception

In her 1964 seminal paper titled "The Idea of Perfection," Iris Murdoch argues for a new framework of ethics in which the central concern of morality is not so much with action and decision as with perception and imagination. Our preoccupation with actions and decisions is, Murdoch tells us, the legacy of Positivism and Behaviourism. The positivistic epistemology is least interested in, and is actually quite suspicious of, the inner workings of perception, emotion, and imagination. In this view, these inner workings, if discernible and identifiable at all, are mere shadows of the mind and cannot be the focus of ethics. The focus is rather on actions and decisions regarding actions; hence, the central question in ethics is how to evaluate actions and decisions. Evaluation calls for criteria, and in moral deliberations, moral rules function as criteria. Thus, in this view, the precondition of being a moral agent is for the person to have choices of actions when facing a moral situation, and the quintessence of being a moral agent is to exercise one's will and reason to decide upon the best course of action according to the priority of moral rules relevant to the case at hand.

In critiquing this positivistic view, Murdoch is not denying that we have choices (in the ordinary sense of the word), nor that we have moral rules that we can apply to evaluate our actions. Rather, what she argues is

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4 Since the appearance of this work, many moral theorists have drawn their inspiration from Murdoch and built their moral theories upon this inspirational foundation. Blum (1994) and Kekes (1988) are two notable examples.
that deciding on actions and deliberating with rules are not as central and
crucial as they are usually considered in the total profile of our moral
experience. There is an aspect of moral experience which is prior in time and
importance to moral deliberation on actions, and this is the agent's
perception. Moral perception is what and how the agent "sees" or
apprehends the moral situations, and this seeing reflects the whole nexus of
the agent's epistemological, dispositional, and valuational orientations.
Murdoch (1970, p. 67) observes that "[b]y the time the moment of choice has
arrived, the quality of attention has probably determined the nature of the
act." It is for this reason that deliberation on choice of actions is likely to
become only a post factum exercise, a rationalization, which is considerably
limited in its import as a moral deliberation. It is limited as compared to the
reflections about perceptions, desires and the like, because these are the
primary source of our moral attitudes and actions. What the agent considers
as choices of moral action is to a large extent constrained, if not determined,
by how the agent sees or interprets the moral situation in the first place, and
this seeing or interpretation is contingent upon the agent's inner workings: of
her beliefs, desires, stance, moral/social/cultural orientations and disposition.
These inner workings are continually operating in the moral agent, and they
form the basis of moral perception and, hence, moral action.

Ethical theorizing has been focused mainly on moral actions and
decisions (Kekes, 1988). Though a sweeping generalization, it would not be
too inaccurate to argue that deontological theories, consequentialist theories,
decision theories, and contractarian theories are all largely concerned with
moral principles/rules, moral reasoning and action but have relatively
neglected the moral agent's perception, disposition, and emotion which
preorient her to a particular range of actions in a given moral situation. In the traditional approach to ethics, the moral agent is similar to a container or a place in which the important operations of moral deliberation, judgment, and action take place. What is eclipsed in this picture is the vital domain of the agent's particularity of moral consciousness which is the basic source that feeds all aspects of moral performances. In this sense, moral consciousness deserves primary consideration in ethics. Moral perception, in particular, deserves to be a focus of consideration because it is in perception that the agent meets the world. How the meeting takes place and how the agent apperceptively seizes the confronted moral situation largely determine the shape of her moral performance. Blum states (1994, p. 31): "In a given situation, moral perception comes on the scene before moral judgment; moral perception can lead to moral action outside the operation of judgment entirely; and, more generally, perception can involve moral capacities not encompassed by moral judgment."

The notion that moral perception is an appropriate focus of moral

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5 In his recent book (1994), *Moral Perception and Particularity*, Blum, in support of Murdoch's approach, makes a similar observation. See Part I. Though still limited, works in philosophical moral psychology or what Blum calls "the philosophical study of the psychic capacities involved in moral agency and responsiveness" are growing.

6 In connection with morality, such terms as 'attitude', 'belief', and 'emotion' have been frequently used but not 'consciousness'. No one talks about moral consciousness. I suspect that the reason for this absence is the assumption that, insofar as we are "normal," we all share the same kind of consciousness, and so to talk about moral consciousness seems to suggest a different type of consciousness which is peculiarly moral. First of all, I contest the claim that we all share the same kind or type of consciousness. My reason for contestation is that consciousness as that subjective "feel" of reality must be dependent upon what and how we perceive, think and feel, and since there is a great range of variation on our perception, belief, emotion and the like, there must be much variation on the subjective "feel" of reality or consciousness. For example, a highly-trained musician's consciousness must be different from a highly trained sculptor (assuming in this example that each one is not trained in the other's discipline as well). Of course, the talk of difference is always relative to the context of comparisons, and in the above example, I should think that the musician and the sculptor share a more similar form of consciousness than they would share with, say, accountants. My talk of moral consciousness, then, implies that I think of there being certain ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking which I am prepared to construe and defend as moral. However, I make no aprioristic claims about these conceptions: it is up to us to define what these are.
theory and effort has a long but comparatively obscure tradition which goes back to Aristotle. Aristotle placed great emphasis on moral perception, for he realized that it played a pivotal role in the practice of morality. Aristotle conceived human actions as the conclusions of practical syllogisms the major premises of which are perceptions and desires.\textsuperscript{7} Simply put, one wants $x$ and, therefore, one \textit{ought} to do $y$, where $y$ is seen as a means to fulfil $x$ unless there are overriding considerations or compulsions. "Ought" here implies psychological necessity.

Two distinct kinds of deliberation can have an impact on Aristotle's practical syllogism.\textsuperscript{8} One concerns the appropriateness of the action in fulfilling the demands of the given perception and desire. Let us consider a simple syllogism. Suppose I witness an incident where a person is being assaulted. This perception stimulates my indignation and, in fact, hatred for the attacker. Deeming my perception and emotion to be morally appropriate, I think of ways to express my indignation and even ways to punish the attacker. In this deliberation, I am looking for a means to fulfil the desire pursuant to my perception and accompanying emotion.

In contrast to this means-end deliberation, there is a second kind of deliberation which, as I shall argue, is of a more fundamental importance than the above. This is the deliberation on the premise of the syllogism itself. To recall, that which constitutes the premise are our perceptions, accompanying emotions, and immediate reactional intentions such as desire for certain actions. In this kind of deliberation, the focal question is not what we should do to fulfil or address the given perception, emotion, and intention. Rather, the question concerns the moral status of perception.

\textsuperscript{7} See Aristotle's \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} 1143a25 ff.

\textsuperscript{8} For an extensive discussion on Aristotle's practical syllogism, see David Wiggins' paper, "Deliberation and Practical Reason" in \textit{Essays on Aristotle's Ethics} (A. Rorty, Ed.).
the example of the assault case, suppose my initial indignation and hatred change to sorrow and compassion because my understanding of the situation undergoes a change upon perceiving the kind of wretched life that both the assaulter and the assaulted cling to together out of desperate attachment. Let us take a closer look at this kind of perceptual change.

There is a very beautiful illustration of this kind of critical reflection about our inmost perceptions and desires in Murdoch (1970). A mother-in-law's (M) initial perception of her daughter-in-law (D) is prejudiced, ungenerous, and hostile. Why she has this particular perception is a matter of her personal history: her personality, her belief system which is ensconced in the larger belief systems of her culture, her emotional needs, interests, and so on. M sees D as "pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile" (1970, p. 17). At this point, M could settle down with this fixed picture of D and continue to see D in this light. But Murdoch would have M be an "intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her." M thinks to herself, "I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again" (ibid., p. 17, italics mine). Thereafter ensues an internal struggle on the part of M in deliberately reflecting on D to understand her better and do justice to the reality of D which is complex and evolving. M's persistent, patient and just attention gradually yields, by degrees and stages, altered perceptions of D. Now D is discovered to be "not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on" (ibid., pp. 17-18). To note, these changed descriptions concern not M's abstract views but her concrete perceptions of D's gestures,
looks, words, and behaviour.

Before I go on further to discuss moral perception as moral achievement, it is necessary to prefigure a crucial question that is bound to be asked as we pursue the Murdochian vision of morality further. We would say, "It is all very well that we change our perception, but the crucial question is what kind of change qualifies as morally better?" Keeping this question in mind, we shall move on.

1.3. Perception as moral achievement

Not incidentally, the focus on perception is germane to feminine ethical theorists. They have proposed an ethical orientation which emphasizes the dispositional and affective aspect of moral development and deliberation, and also the importance of sensitive contextual interpretation of moral situations. A good illustration of perception-focused ethics given by a feminist theorist is Carol Gilligan's comparison of an eleven-year-old girl Ami's response to Heinz's dilemma with the response by Jake of the same-age (Gilligan, 1982, pp. 25-32). The contrast between the two is as follows: While Jake accepts and works with the given terms and premises of the moral dilemma, Ami searches for alternative ways of construing or understanding the moral situation. Her more or less unconscious directive seems to be to arrive at a perception or interpretation of the situation that dissolves the dilemma. In effect, she protests against the oppressive picture presented by the dilemma which forces us to choose between, or prioritize, moral principles. What she recognizes almost instinctively is that when we

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9 Briefly, Heinz's dilemma, one in a series devised by Kolhberg to measure moral development in adolescence, goes like this: A man named Heinz considers stealing a drug in order to save his wife's life after the druggist refuses to lower his price. The question asked of the interviewed is, Should Heinz steal the drug?
have to choose one valid moral principle over another, morality is compromised. For instance, when we have to choose between compassion and justice, a person with Ami's moral sensibility would feel that the situation is tragic and that it is actually our moral failing, individually and collectively, that has put us into such a situation in the first place.\textsuperscript{10} If Ami could articulate her view in philosophical terms, she might say that she sees that the conflict is not really over the principles but over disparate interpretations-cum-perceptions of the moral agents involved. As a moral agent, Ami's prerogative is to interpret and reinterpret the given picture of the moral situation and to communicate this effort to others. In comparison, Jake's orientation focuses on prioritizing the moral principles or rules involved but neglects to address the possibilities of alternate perceptions/interpretations (in the light of these principles) which would contribute to the moral well-being of everybody concerned.

The impossible situations of moral dilemmas bespeak a failing of our moral resourcefulness and receptiveness.\textsuperscript{11} The source of such a failing is to be located in the participating agents' overall conceptual and dispositional capacity as moral beings. This capacity results from a continual effort at moral perception/interpretation and imagination. Murdoch (1970, p. 43) describes this effort as "the task of attention that goes on all the time and at apparently empty and everyday moments we are 'looking', making those little peering efforts of imagination which have such important cumulative results." The cumulative results are the making of a moral person, the Aristotelian person

\textsuperscript{10} Kekes (1988) explains well how moral sensitivity functions to resist the reason's tendency to frame a moral dilemma. See the chapter on "Moral Sensitivity" in Examined Life.

\textsuperscript{11} Serious moral dilemmas are tragic in the sense that the agent is faced with choices either of which equally condemns him to a morally hazardous or compromising course of action. The effort of resourceful moral perception is such as to dissolve the dilemma by seeing alternate ways of framing the moral situations. However, such perception is often difficult to achieve since it takes a leap of logic and/or imagination—in short, a feat of creativity.
of practical wisdom. With such a person, to quote Aristotle (1985, p. 53), "the judgment about these depends on perception." Both Murdoch and Nussbaum stress that moral perception should be considered as moral achievement in itself. It is an achievement born of the vigilant effort one has made in perceiving more justly and lovingly, and it is an achievement that would make all the difference to the kinds of speech and act that ensue from our perception. The difference is carried over from the different choice we are called upon to make in perception. This is because, as Nussbaum argues, with perception, the agent has made essential moral choices, albeit without formal deliberation. Such primary choices are action-guiding and, therefore, the moral status of actions depends on the good choices to be made. For this reason, excellent moral perception is a moral achievement, a primary one at that. Just by morally perceiving the world, we are already practising morality. 

1.4. Some epistemological considerations for moral perception

It is one thing to recognize the importance of moral perception and another to endorse the implicit idea that moral perception is up to our own choosing. Even those of us who accept the former proposition may feel uneasy with the latter. Intuitively, the idea flies against our firmly entrenched understanding that perception is something that happens to us independent of our will and choice. Seeing just happens. There is neither effort nor struggle nor choice involved in seeing. If I walk down a deserted

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12 This view is somewhat in contrast to the one held, for example, by Vetlesen (1994) who thinks of moral perception and emotion more as a precondition of moral performance rather than moral performance itself. Though this is not a major issue, my view is in sympathy with Murdoch and Nussbaum. For if we hold that moral perception and emotion are just the precondition, we will be back once again to the positions of the traditional ethical views with a narrow focus on actions and moral reasoning.
street in the dark and suddenly encounter a person who comes at me with a menacing gesture, my perception of him as a mugger is not something sprung from my effort and choice, or is it? If I see a menacing face in the mugger who is actually threatening me, would I be considered to be perceiving things according to my inclination and design? Indeed, if someone suggested this to me, I would be offended and protest that I was not lying or over-reacting. In fact, the quickest way to insanity would be to begin to doubt my senses and basic perceptual ability. Conversely, the quickest way to undermine someone's sanity would be to invalidate his or her ability to receive realistic information from the environment. This must be why children protest vehemently and get very angry when we do not validate their sense of reality, as, for instance, when some children react with horror upon seeing a spider. To tell them that there is nothing frightening about the spider invalidates their sense of reality. Against our disbelief, they would protest and insist: "But it is scary. Just look at those creepy legs!" Similar scenes are limited neither to childish reactions nor to dramatic encounters. This tendency to externalize or project and objectify our perception is largely operative all the time.

The tendency to objectify comes from the deep-seated presumption that to perceive is to receive the information inherent in the external world outside oneself. Since we take what we see to be what is objective, and objectivity carries with it a sense of unalterable necessity, we proceed to act on the basis of our perception. That seems to be how the flow of action from perception often tends to occur without any disruptions. However, by and by, as we become more reflective, we may well entertain the idea that we could have perceived things differently. We reason, "If I had been in a different frame of mind, if I did not have all those experiences in which people scared
me with stories and beliefs about spiders (muggers, sinners, or what have you), if I had different parents ... then I would probably have different perceptions." This sort of reflection will begin to weaken the above naive realist or objectivist view of perception.

However, a counterfactual could show just as much reason why something is inevitable as the reason how something could be different. The reasoning, "Had I known it better or had a different situation, I would have acted differently" is no less a justification for how things had to turn out the way they did as a suggestion of a different possibility. In fact, it is an affirmation that things cannot be otherwise since their conditions and the conditions even prior to these all existed to determine or at least decisively influence the outcome. Reality speaks for its own necessity: things are not otherwise; therefore, they have to be. We intuitively appeal to this sort of reasoning whenever we protest, "Perhaps I could see it this way and that way, but I cannot help seeing it the way it appears to me here and now." Between possibility and actuality there seems to be no real bridge but only an imagined one. Over an imagined bridge, we can only imagine crossing. Despite the usual talk of exercising one's will to change the internal condition of the psyche, when we consider just how we find ourselves perceiving this way or that way, the notion of exercising one's will to change seems very delusionary. So we are back to the original notion that perception is something that happens to us. But this is not the end of the story. Whether perception is determined by the external informational input or the internally operative past conditioning via conceptual and dispositional patterns, the fact seems to be that perception is very much a determined event, and, thus, the talk of having moral choice with perception becomes a knotty problem.
1.5. Loving perception as moral perception

If the idea of moral perception as moral judgment or determination is to be taken seriously, then we have to develop a theory of perception that would allow perception which is not automatically determined by the perceiver's past conceptual, dispositional, and valuational tendencies and, hence, is open-ended. This theory needs not dispute that most perceptions actually happen automatically conditioned. Rather, it should dispute that all perceptions have to be like that. I entertain the possibility of moral perception taking place in the contingent "nowness" of each moment freed from the conditioned binding of the causative factors. Here, perception is not inevitably conditioned by experience but is, at the most, informed by it.

The practical problem that perception poses to our moral practice is that perception is, in most circumstances, conditioned. The conditioned

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13 This is a more radical proposition than what Kekes (1988), working in the Aristotelian framework, entertains. For Kekes, as for Aristotle, perception as concrete particular episodes is passive, meaning that perception does not admit a direct control over its "construction." But, according to Kekes, all is not lost, and there is still a degree of indirect control we can have over the outcome of perception, and it is that one can consciously choose to change and newly build up one's dispositional states (emotion states as well as belief states) in such a way that one would perceive and feel differently from before. As Kosman (1980) explains Aristotle's view on the matter, the way to change and build up dispositions is through actions: by consistently choosing to act differently, one lays down different dispositions. Kosman, however, intimates a further extension of this Aristotelian account, and it is this more ambitious possibility that intrigues me and promises me a more radical possibility of moral perception. If such radical possibility is possible, then we should further aim at it rather than stopping short at the more modest programme of cultivating moral dispositions or virtues. Here is how Kosman (1980, p. 114) addresses the radical possibility: "What we would like, but do not find [in Aristotle], is an extension of the theory of deliberation and practical reasoning to account for the ways in which virtuous persons might be said to have the proper feelings which they have by prohairesis. Such an account would need to provide a sense in which we might be freed to feel what would be appropriate to feel by something like deliberation and choice, by some mode of coming to understand properly the circumstances in which our feelings arise, the place of these feelings and circumstances in our experience, and the ways in which we hold these circumstances and feelings in the larger contexts of our lives. In a sense, the theories behind certain religious traditions, psychoanalysis, and disciplines that promise self-transformation and self-mastery might be thought to represent attempts at such an account." (Above, prohairesis means 'choice'.)
mind, as it were, puts on the prepainted picture of the world and ourselves. How to get around, go beyond, or break through the conditioned mind is the essential task that faces us in "practising" moral perception. For a person liberated from the conditioned mind, perception is more of a process than a passive event that has happened. If one's perception is a process, then one should not just find oneself having this or that perception. I believe that such a perceptual process is what Nussbaum (1990) is referring to when she speaks of a moral person searching to find "the right way of seeing." This time, speaking of the heroine Maggie in *The Golden Bowl*, Nussbaum (1990, p. 152) comments that "[her] vigilance, her silent attention, the intensity of her regard, are put before us as moral acts." Here what we encounter is a concrete description, albeit only sketchy, of the way to "do" moral perception. It is the process of engaging one's attention with the perceptual object in itsnowness and of having a dialogue with it, as it were, in which one tries out different ways of seeing to find the one that shows the object (situation, people, including ourselves) in the best moral light. But, is there a particular kind of perception which we should deem to be moral perception "proper"? As I shall show, Murdoch and Nussbaum's answers (as well as Vetlesen's) to this question also reveal their view of how the process of moral perception is to be undertaken.

From Murdoch's example of a mother-in-law (M) and her daughter-in-law (D) and also various examples that Nussbaum gave, using James' novels, we do get a strong impression that the process of moral perception is not an anything-goes affair but that there is a definite direction or goal towards which the process of perception aims. Nussbaum, like Murdoch, is not afraid to speak of "correct vision" and "the right way of seeing." What are these? The following quotation would give us some sense of Nussbaum's vision of
When we examine our own lives, we have so many obstacles to correct vision, so many motives to blindness and stupidity. The "vulgar" heat of jealousy and personal interest comes between us and the loving perception of each particular. A novel, just because it is not our life, places us in a moral position, that is favorable for perception and it shows us what it would be like to take up that position in life. We find here love without possessiveness, attention without bias, involvement without panic. (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 162)

The key concept here is "loving perception of each particular." A correct moral perception arrives when the perceiver does not interpose her own desires, needs, and biases that are not connected to the well-being of the other but gives a full attention to the other's concerns, interests, needs, and so on. Such is the high demand of love.

Likewise, Murdoch (1970, p. 34) speaks of seeing justly or lovingly: "I have used the word 'attention', which I borrow from Simone Weil, to express the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality. I believe this to be the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent." Again, the main concept is that the moral perceiver pays full attention to the particular, which is possible only when one's attention is not distracted by self-serving desires and interests. Love, as implied by Murdoch and Nussbaum, is the state of consciousness achieved when one's attention is fully open to the other, which is not possible when one is distracted by self-seeking and self-serving desires, interest, concerns, and the like. It appears then that a certain self-transcendence is required to perceive morally.

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14 Throughout her discourse, Murdoch speaks with energy of the need to overcome the self in order to enter the domain of the moral. For instance, she states (1970, p. 64): "To silence and expel self, to contemplate and delineate nature with a clear eye, is not easy and demands a moral discipline."
1.6. Open perception is loving attention

Murdochian moral perception seems to require our perception not to be inevitably driven by the forces and factors in one's past conditioning which have developed particular dispositional states and character but to be open to evolving interpretations of the given situation and object. An "open" perception—that is, perception that is open to catching glimpses of what the other is like or is possible to be—may require the perceiver to engage in evolving interpretations of the encountered object. Vetlesen explicates openness of perception:

Fundamentally and most generally, human receptivity means an openness to the world and all that we encounter in it. Receptivity as I conceive of it signifies a "readiness to" - to attend to, to perceive, to judge, to act toward - whereby the what, the specificity, of that at which all of this is to be directed is not yet given but is rather what the subject, in his or her active readiness, is awaiting and what will set in motion the entire sequence of human response. (Vetlesen, 1994, p. 18)

An open perception would not yield a fixed, inherent, and substantive picture of the world. It would not claim to display or represent how the world is. Yet, it is terribly difficult, if not almost impossible, not to take our perception to be a faithful picture of the world. There is a tremendously irresistible pressure from the way our mind works to take the picture or understanding of the world given in our perception to be accurately descriptive of some inherent feature of the world. If we succumb to such pressure, we will turn our perception into a closed one. What closes in the perception so that the world appears to us in its seemingly definite, inherent, and substantive properties, and attributes is our conditioned reaction to see the world in certain fixed ways. Let us recall the Aristotelian programme (of which Kekes makes extensive use) of laying down consistent dispositions so as to create a
fixed character out of which moral actions flow. For example, if we lay down loving dispositions so that we have a loving compassionate character, then our actions that would naturally flow out will be loving and compassionate. Such is the usual aspiration of virtues education. However, paradoxical it may seem, the Murdochian requirement for open perception (which characterizes loving perception) would not find satisfactory the virtues ethics approach to the cultivation of a fixed loving and compassionate character because in this case love and compassion come out of closedness, and not out of openness of perception. I want to stress this observation because it explains why my thesis research is not treading the ground of virtues ethic, as that would be natural, given that I am concerned with such virtues as love and compassion. A closed perception, which constitutes our ordinary mode of consciousness, is not a process of seeing but a terminated event of the seen in which the world has been prefigured for us by us. Speaking on a personal level, I try to see the world afresh and to do justice to the ever new-ness of what faces me, but it is as though I am not given the chance to see it afresh because my conditioned mind keeps pulling out some familiar old pictures selected from the self's by now well-established home library and delivered right to my door of perception. There is a picture for every occasion. And the picture has all the feel and markings of "objective" reality.

How do we break through the insistent home-delivery system of closed perception? How do I stop these pictures of the world from showing up at my door of perception with such efficiency as to deprive me of the chance to really look at and see the world? I believe that this chance to look at and see the world afresh, free from the projections of the established beliefs and dispositions within the self, constitutes moral perception. Moral perception is loving in the sense and to the extent that love demands one to be utterly
open to the Other. What I am saying is that the process of being open and being loving/compassionate are one and the same. Yet, how hard it is to be open to the Other by setting aside the usual reactive habit of the mind that instantly reaches out to grab the self's prefigured evaluation. This tendency is what I would characterize as self-seeking and self-serving. It is self-seeking and self-serving in that the self is more interested in running its show of coming up with its own ready-made evaluations and rationalizations than paying full attention to what it faces. The moment one is self-seeking and self-serving, one has handed oneself over to one's past conditioning, which is the dispositional condition ready to give birth to characteristic (re)actions. This is so because the self is typically an identity that is made up of the conceptual, perceptual, dispositional, and valuational tendencies of the past, and, thus, to be self-seeking and self-serving is to be enacting these tendencies—that is, the individual's dispositions and character.

Now, the opposite to self-seeking and self-serving (or self-regarding) is other-seeking and other-serving (or other-regarding) which amount to Murdoch and Nussbaum's loving and just attention to the particular. For Murdoch, the effort to perceive morally, which is to see justly and lovingly, takes the form of looking again and again. In the previous story of M and D, "M looks at D, she attends to D, she focuses her attention. Subsequently M is engaged in an internal struggle." The struggle, as I interpret in the light of my discussion, is about the self's attempt to overcome its deeply rooted habit of relying on and enacting its past conditioning. The self struggles not to fall back on ready-made views, judgments and emotional reactions that come out through perception.

The best way to resist them is not to stop their manifestation but to
bring them out into the open, accept them, and neutralize their charge. As we look at our object again and again, we let our preconditioned views, opinions and feelings float up out of the depths of our mind and then release them one by one. That is, we should not cling to them out of our attachment to and identification with them. If we persist in doing so, the mind, eventually exhausted from the laboriousness of producing a series of "right-this-time" pictures might stop its activity and quieten into a mode of receptivity. The mind is then wide open to seeing. Here, I am moving beyond Murdoch to offer an interpretation of what Murdochian look-again could be like. We look again and again, not to get the right, truthful picture, as if there are pre-set pictures of the world corresponding to how things are, but to take the inner journey of moving past the mind's conditioned conceptual, dispositional, and valuational reactions.

15 We may note that many classical forms of Eastern meditation, especially Vipassana and Zen, employ this technique. More on this will be offered in Chapter Three. For a contemporary adaptation of this approach to psychotherapy, see Mark Epstein's (1995) *Thoughts without a Thinker*. Epstein argues that judgmental views and reactive emotions are the result of disclaimed or displaced feelings of 'I' and, as such, avoidance and repression perpetuate, not resolve, them. He suggests that the way to resolve them is to confront the nature of the self and see its insubstantial nature finally. This seeing of the insubstantiality with respect to the self is what I mean above by neutralizing the charge. I only mention all this here to prefigure the direction of the discussion to come in the following chapters.

16 But this clinging will not cease altogether unless and until our belief in the substantive self who is the author of beliefs, emotions, and values nullifies. In short, it is the attainment of nondual perception in which there is no duality of the substantive subject and the substantive object that will banish the self's clinging and grasping. This is the major thesis of the Buddhist psychology which I will discuss at some length in later chapters.

17 It is important for me to point out, in order not to mislead my readers, that aside from the significant points of the convergence of ideas between Murdoch and me, such as the need to overcome the self and the technology of attention as a means to it, I make a significant departure from her in conceptualizing how we are to go about overcoming the self and opening up to the Other. The major difference centres on the issue of self-knowledge. For Murdoch, self-transcendence does not, and should not, require "a minute understanding of one's own machinery" of the self, and moreover, such understanding is usually a delusion" (Murdoch, 1970, p. 67). It is not that I am totally unsympathetic to her views here: her warnings about getting mired in various self-indulgent explorations of the self are well-taken. Nonetheless, I feel that the project of self-transcendence, in the sense of the opening to the Other, has no choice but to start with the scrutiny of the self, and as I shall attempt to show in the subsequent chapters, it need not result in self-indulgent explorations but a discovery of the dimension of being that is prior to the self-other duality.
Murdoch tells us that this task of seeing is endless, which implies that it is open-ended. If so, then there would be no particular and definite way an object has to be seen, for that would signify a particular terminating point for the perception. The epistemological implication for this view is then that there is no inherent and pregiven look of an object that we have to recover.

When we look again and again in the Murdochian perceptual practice, the objective must not be to get a right, truthful picture, as if there were a pre-set objective picture which corresponds to how things are. What are we then trying to achieve?

As we look again and again, the object of our attention would now appear in one aspect or meaning and then another, and so on. In other words, look-again presents different versions of the world which are relative to our conceptual schemes. However, if we feel that only one of these versions, if any at all, can be the true description and evaluation of the world, then we should suspect that we have left the ground of Murdochian open perception whose process is theoretically endless and, therefore, indeterminate. To ask which version is the true, or even a truer, picture is to lose sight of the epistemology of open perception that we are struggling to present. The point of this epistemology is not so much to locate a true objective version as to come up with an appropriate one that construes the best possible moral picture but with the understanding that it is a version nonetheless. I picture an accomplished moral person to be a person who is capable of entertaining a great number of fruitful or fitting versions but without considering any one of these to be the objective--that is, inherent--picture of the situation.

Now, to be fair, I have to mention that one would get a strong impression that Murdoch, as well as all other philosophers I have been
quoting, believes that there is an objective aspect of things. She speaks of seeing clearly and aspiring to the correct perception. On the face of it, what seems to be implied is that there exist definite particular objects of moral perception and definite and particular ways they should appear to us. But I think it a mistake to endorse this implication, even if such is perhaps meant by these thinkers. Justification for my comment lies in the fact that Murdoch (1970, p. 26) puts a particular emphasis on "active reassessing and redefining which is the main characteristic of live personality" and considers the task of moral perception, which involves this reassessing and redefining, to be endless. If there were an objective fact or aspect to be had, then literally the search for it could not be endless. Conversely, the search is endless precisely because there is no definite objective aspects to be nailed down. Rather, the endlessness applies more to the task of being constantly vigilant about the self's conditioned reactions springing up in our moment-to-moment perception and the tendency to objectify the percepts into static, objective, inherent facts of the world.

The interpretation that I am espousing--namely that moral perception does not aim at a pregiven objective perceptual object or aspect--is further strengthened by Nussbaum's understanding of moral deliberation. Nussbaum (1990, p. 74) tells us that "the only procedure" to follow in our perceptual deliberation is "to imagine all the relevant features as well and fully and concretely as possible, holding them up against whatever intuition and emotions and plans and imagining we have brought into the situation or can construe in it." The mention of "the only procedure" should be taken in the double sense--namely, that there are no other procedures and that there is nothing else beside this procedure. There is no specification or criteria for what the outcome has to be apart from what the procedure will actually end
up producing. In other words, there is no independently definable object of moral perception, which amounts to denying the objectivity (in the classical meaning of that word) of what is seen. "Good deliberation," Nussbaum tells us, "is like theoretical or musical improvisation, where what counts is flexibility, responsiveness, and openness to the external" (1990, p. 74). What we are given here is a procedural account, a deliberately loose one at that, and not an account of the object or outcome of perception. The best heuristics that Nussbaum gives for this art of seeing are "flexibility, responsiveness, and openness to the external" and "resourcefulness" which relies heavily on imaginativeness.

No advice, however, is harder to follow than that to be flexible, responsive and open. Just how do we know when we are flexible or not, or flexible enough and so on? Granted that there are no hard and fast rules, yet there should be some ways one can tell if one is making progress in the task of moral seeing.\(^{18}\) This demand for an evaluation guideline would still be justified even if the task is endless and open-ended--that is, with no definite pregiven result, and with only a procedural guideline to go by. Nussbaum's advice on the matter is to place first-order importance on the quality of attention that the self can muster in a concrete moral situation. Moreover, this quality of attention is bound up with, indeed equated with, the self's capacity for love and care for the concrete moral situation it faces. Here again we recognize the same psychological condition that Murdoch strives for: love. Nussbaum (1990, p.160) evokes Henry James' moral ideal which equates moral perception with love. Loving perception is to be the basis of moral practice.\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\) In moral education, this demand is particularly relevant as there cannot be education without practical assessment of progress in the individual.

\(^{19}\) This centralization of love and its various cognates is a singular feature of many
well for us to delve further into Murdochian loving perception to enrich our understanding about how to do moral perception.

1.7. The possibility of loving attention

We have already touched on the epistemic connection between moral perception and love. To recapitulate this connection: moral perception requires overcoming self-seeking and self-serving tendencies, and conversely, opening to the Other -- the object of our attention. This opening to the Other is none other than love. But how do we go about practising loving attention? The usual notion of love as passion that besieges or overcomes us or as being associated with strong liking is not helpful at all. Such a notion of love, while central to the common phenomenon of love, is reflective of the self-seeking, self-serving and self-projective habit of the mind--in short, the conditioned mind. In fact, to recall, the Murdochian practice of love begins with a struggle against the self's self-centered concerns and interests. These concerns and interests are "corrupting" influences that, for instance, can turn love into possessiveness and jealousy, attention into bias, and generosity into calculated expectation of returns (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 162). Or, to look at it another way, these corrupting influences do not even give a chance for our positive moral emotions such as love, compassion, care, and generosity to take hold of us, and as a result we become morally obtuse. It is as though our "moral sense organs" that parallel the physiological sense organs cease to function and we become deaf, blind, and insensible to the stimuli which have an ethical import. Nussbaum tells us flatly that obtuseness is a moral contemporary moral philosophers engaging in an extensive discourse on moral psychology. Blum (1994), for instance, picks compassion to be the central moral goal in place of Kantian duty and rationality. Likewise, for Vetlesen (1994), it is empathy.

20 This is the central message that Vetlesen delivers to us from his study of the Nazi genocide of the Jews.
failing. Vetlesen is most insistent that without the adequate functioning of moral emotions such as love, compassion, and empathy, we just do not have an access to the whole of moral practice. For moral practice begins with our being able to construe a situation as a moral situation, and this seeing-as presupposes our having been first affected or moved by the situation that we have encountered. For Vetlesen, as for Charles Taylor to whom he is indebted for the account of moral import perceived via human emotion, human emotions are themselyes a primary form of moral cognition, and as such they are the key to accessing the moral realm (Vetlesen, 1994, chap. 4). Failure to cultivate the dispositional aspect results not in partial moral deficiency but in absolute and total moral deficiency because the whole moral realm—hence, moral practic—is locked up and inaccessible to the morally insensible person. Vetlesen comments:

Why is the blocking of the emotional capacities so fatal to perception and judgment alike? It is so because a person with blocked emotional capacities is robbed of his or her mode of access to the domain of the human, that is to say, to the reality of other persons in general and to that reality's moral relevance in terms of others' weal and woe in particular. Incapable of feeling, of reaching out toward and relating to the experiences of others through emotion, such a person never gains access to, never arrives at, the domain of phenomena with respect to which perception is to be performed and judgment to be passed. Without emotion in the elementary sense of relating to others, as intended in my definition of the faculty of empathy, a person is an outsider to the domains of the human and the moral. A lack of empathy makes for a moral blindness, as manifested in the notseeing of the indifferent bystander. (Vetlesen, 1994, pp. 216-217)

What I have distilled from the above three authors, whom I have liberally referred to in this chapter, is that moral emotions, specifically love (for Murdoch and Nussbaum) and empathy (for Vetlesen), constitute the very ground of moral perception. Furthermore, love and empathy have one supreme obstacle which must be overcome, and this is the self's usual indisposition to escape from its exclusive self-interest and self-concern and to reach out to the other. Self-interest and self-concern interpose between
ourselves and the world, compromising and at times totally blocking our fundamental, or "primordial" as Vetlesen puts it, openness to the world. When this happens, we do not so much see what is out there and what happens to other people as project our own self-promoting, self-defending, self-rescuing and self-preserving interpretations against the backdrop of the world, which amounts to rationalization of our conditioned views and values. It is as though our "moral eyes" (or any other moral sense organs, so to speak) are not used to perceive things but to project images onto them. Using this analogy, we may then understand what is meant by Nussbaum and Murdoch's reference to clear seeing and "lucid apprehension" (Nussbaum, 1990, p.163). When the mind is cleared of obstructing personal interests and the like, it is at last able to be fully attentive to the given situation and the people concerned. Whatever is revealed to such an attentive mind would be less distorted by the perceiver's personal desires, preferences and prejudices.

I expect that many will not be in sympathy with my discourse on what appears to be distortion-free or unprejudiced perception. In this postmodern era, many of us are firmly convinced that we all are prejudiced in one way or another and that we should give up on talking about freedom from bias. Distortion-free perception and representation would sound too much like a naive realist's objectivist argument. My critics will probably raise a question about how one can ever be free of one's personal dispositional and conceptual biases. And if I affirm that one can never be free of one's dispositions and concepts in the sense that one cannot be without them altogether, how could I be arguing for the removal of personal beliefs and dispositions which would invariably "distort" our perception one way or another? This is the central question that we keep stumbling on and have been trying to resolve.
What is needed at this point is a more precise understanding of just what we do with our pre-existing beliefs and dispositions as we enter a moral situation. If we project these or enact them, then we cannot have loving perception, even if (I know this must sound forced) the beliefs and dispositions we project happen to be loving, compassionate, and so on. On the other hand, we cannot get rid of them. Here I formulated the situation as a dilemma: either we use them, which would be projection, or we lose them—an unthinkable prospect, if we wish to remain functional human beings. As the logic of dilemma goes, the only way to escape is to seek another possibility that does not land us into either of these two horns of the dilemma.

The best candidate for a third possibility is usually conceived as reflection. For Kekes (1988), for example, reflection is the self-altering process of the belief and dispositional states. For this reason, reflection is a form of self-control. Kekes (1988, p.105) states: "The possibility that self-control establishes is not the suspension of the causal process, but its alteration."

Thus, reflection can be seen as a special use of one's dispositions and beliefs where these are used to change themselves. So what happens in reflection is not quite the straightforward enactment or projection of existing dispositions and beliefs. While I follow the logic of reflection and see it as a third alternative that would rescue us from the above dilemma, what I worry is, firstly, how we can be brought to the door of reflection in the first place, given our propensity to just enact and project; and secondly, how we could make sure that reflection would not end up being more or less enactment and projection because the change brought about is just a variation on the same theme of one's dispositions and beliefs. I have much grounds for these worries because the prospects I worry about here do happen frequently with us. Getting people to reflect is very difficult. And even if we get them to do
it, the result is often basically nothing too different from the usual enaction. At this point, I might be told that we should not expect radical changes nor should we want them. Small changes, if necessary at all, at any given time are all we should hope for and need. Small changes accumulate over time to effect significant changes, and that is what we want.

Yet, when I think back to the epistemology of open perception, such that I have been trying to establish, as based on Murdoch and Nussbaum's vision and discourse, I cannot help thinking that we have to take some radical measures to ensure that reflection happens and happens in a serious way so that when people enter into a moral situation, they do not compulsively reach for their tool kit of dispositions and beliefs as they usually do. To reflect in the usual mode of practice is to re-flect, meaning mirroring back what there is. This is not good enough for the epistemology of openness. We want to stop the very compulsion to re-flect or mirror. The impulse to reach for our tool kit to see if we can say and do something about what we face has to be quelled.

It should be noted that in the above I did not say that we have to dispose of the tool kit but only the impulse to reach for it automatically and the compulsive use of it. To the degree we are attached to our tool kit and totally dependent on it, to that degree we are going to be compulsive about grabbing it to apply it, whether rigidly or not, to the situation we face. And this attachment comes from having identified ourselves with the tool kit. It functions like our badges, titles, and ID's: these help us to define who we are and sustain our self-identity. So what is required is dis-attachment, disidentification or disengagement from views, opinions and preferences (to name just a few of the psychic equipment) which make up our self-identity. When we succeed in this operation, we nevertheless would still have these
personal features, not as our essence and substance, but as our contingent tools or props. The difference between these two ways of looking can be practically tremendous. It may come down to a difference between feeling compelled to kill or die for the former and being able to freely and unreservedly discard the latter. People are most willing to hazard and even sacrifice their and others' lives where the most urgent sense of reality, truth, and self is concerned. Thus, how we view and are related to our dispositions and beliefs has a great moral significance.

To return to the original question of how Murdochian loving perception is practised, I now formulate that loving attention is this disengagement from the self's tendency to enact itself so as to allow the Other to show itself unpainted by the self's likes, dislikes and other conditional assessments. Recall the story of M and D in Murdoch. M has her conditioned assessment—in this case, a negative one—of D. But when she is not willing to let this conditioned assessment stand in the way of her acquiring a clearer perception—that is, perception which is not projection—of what D is like, M engages in a critical self-examination to assess her conditioning in order to detach herself from it and view D with her deconditioned moral eyes. Notice that what M is doing is not trying to paint D in more attractive colours. Albeit a more pleasant one, such positive painting would be just another form of disrespect to the living reality which is D. If we hold that the essence of love is respect for and honouring of the realities of the other, then the self's effort not to violate them with its usual tendency to paint the other but rather to allow the other to show itself will truly be nothing other than love. But short of this kind of love, we tend to react to the realities of others that confront us either negatively with indignation, resentment, and repulsion or positively with self-promoting, self-flattering, and self-absorbing love and
possessiveness. Murdochian loving perception has little to do with the self's conditioned reactions, positive or negative, but all to do with overcoming them.

1.8. Obstacles to moral perception as loving attention

In the last section, inasmuch as I have pointed out the possibility of Murdochian moral perception, I have also given a fair voice to the difficulty of its practice. From a practical perspective, the most urgent question is what we can do to overcome the tendency to re-enact ourselves. We know from experience that Murdochian moral perception does not always happen as a matter of course, and even with our best effort, it is in fact a comparatively rare occurrence. It is more usual for the perception to begin and terminate as a conditioned reaction to a situation. In one glance, we would have taken a pattern recognition of an object by identifying and objectifying it. In doing so, we would have carried out our apperception and figured out how things stand in the world. This way, we have taken our perception as the given and the world, that our perception has met, as the pregiven. This mode of perception, however, would not do for moral perception a la Murdoch and Nussbaum.

So how do we educate ourselves to become morally perceiving? I believe that there are roughly two modes to the art of education. One is to train the student in the required arts. This is the direct building-up process. An equally important mode is removing those conceptual and dispositional conditions that are obstacles to new learning. These two modes are not in conflict but are, in fact, complementary or symbiotic. The whole learning process is a ceaseless process of construction and deconstruction with neither dominant over the other. This general remark aside, it seems to me that the
major difficulty of moral perception lies in there being an impediment condition to it which is the self's tendency to resort and cling to conceptually, dispositionally, and valuationally conditioned reactions during perception, with the result that the percept is taken to be an inherent attribute of either the world or the mind or of both. As I see it, how to wean one from this tendency is central to moral education. In the possibility of this weaning process rests the possibility of moral perception. The critical question is how to structure our psychic and epistemic conditions in such a way that we do not fall into the usual course of perception either in the mode of objectivism (recovery of the pregiven) or of subjectivism (projection of the self's intentional categories).

What I propose to do in the next chapter is to examine critically and dispute the epistemology behind the theories of perception which see perception either as the recovery of the pregiven or the projection of the self's intentional categories. Such epistemology, which I call substantive epistemology, does not conduce perception as a practice of openness. It is only when we see the possibility that there need not be any pregiven or inherent attributes of reality nor the necessity for the self's compulsive projection of its intentional categories, including the belief in the substantive self, that we will be ready to begin the practice of moral perception. In the next chapter, I shall take a closer look at the substantive epistemology and discuss how we may overcome it.
Chapter Two

Criticisms of the substantive epistemology: 
contra objectivism and subjectivism

*Inwardly, no identity; 
Outwardly, no attachment.*

--- Hui-neng---

2.1. Chapter introduction

In the previous chapter, I claimed that between looking at perception as recovery of the pregiven (the objectivist view) and looking at it as projection of the self's categories (the subjectivist view), there is no room for moral perception as radical openness, as envisioned by Murdoch and Nussbaum. I see this full openness to the Other (the object of perception) as the essential epistemological characteristic of moral perception. But, full openness is not easily achieved under the usual condition of perception which takes what is seen to be either the objective feature of reality or the subjective feature of the perceiver's dispositional state. Either way, perception is saturated with pre-existing dispositional and doxastic conditions, and, thus, there is little room for radical openness. In this chapter, I advance the notion that both of these views on perception are but twin expressions of the underlying substantive epistemology, and challenging it may open the way to the possibility of a perception free from objectivism and subjectivism--that is, the possibility of moral perception.

My main thesis here is that both positions result from a kind of hypostatization or reification. In the case of objectivism, hypostatization occurs on the side of the external; in the case of subjectivism, it occurs on the side of the internal objects or mental entities. In either case, "something" definite, determinate, and intrinsically characterizable via concepts exists.
The epistemology of objectivism and subjectivism makes three fundamental metaphysical assumptions which are, to quote Varela et al. (1991, p. 9): "The first is that we inhabit a world with particular properties, such as length, colour, movement, sound, etc. The second is that we pick up or recover these properties by internally representing them. The third is that there is a separate subjective 'we' who does these things." Varela et al. further argue that "These three assumptions amount to a strong, often tacit and unquestioned, commitment to realism or objectivism/subjectivism about the way the world is, what we are, and how we come to know the world."

I use Putnam's term 'metaphysical realism' to designate this world view that encompasses both objectivism and subjectivism. The import of the term 'metaphysical' here is that our ontology, designated by 'realism', is inseparably bound up with the conceptual and, therefore, is meta-physical. I am critical of metaphysical realism precisely for the reason that it enthralls us in the illusion that somehow our conceptualization, when successful, should show us how the world really is. The illusion is created by our overconfidence in the power of conceptualization to mirror or even reproduce reality. This overconfidence does not recognize the conceptual just as conceptual--that is, as no more or no less than what it is. Overcoming this overconfidence has proven to be very difficult. To evoke Putnam's imagery, we are forever looking for ways in which words/concepts hook onto reality (Putnam, 1990).

I wish to argue that there is no such hooking or correspondence, not even minimally, through sense-data language. Our conceptualization is justified and validated not on the basis of its correct or even acceptable

21 There are many meaning of 'metaphysical'. In my use of the term throughout the thesis, I combine two of the meanings that have to do with ontology (what really exists) and epistemology (conceptualization of what really exists).
rendering of reality but simply on the basis of the whole long and wide tradition of epistemological practices that we have been carrying on all along through scientific and humanistic enquiries. We need not coerce the large indeterministic field of reality into tight and articulate confines of concepts. When we do, we live a life of reified reality. There are undesirable side-effects to living a reified life of conceptualization (which certainly is not restricted to intellectuals) such as being closed to the contingent, underdeterminate, and mutable flow of experience. As I have argued in the last chapter, this closedness is an obstacle to moral perception.

2.2. Liberating ourselves from Metaphysical Realism

Mainstream Western epistemology has long been in the grip of a substantive view about the world and ourselves or of what Putnam called metaphysical realism. Notwithstanding the abstruse terms, the view actually pertains to the way we ordinarily think we know about the world. It is the view that what we see is what is out there independent of us, and further, that the perceiving mind is one substance and the perceived is another.

Our perception of the world is supposed to reveal to us directly the way things are "objectively," and our mind is able to receive the information coming from external reality. Of course, humans also encountered early on enough cases of non-veridical perception and so had to defend the view of direct perception against these cases. For non-philosophers, just making the distinction between veridical and non-veridical perception suffices for the defence. Non-veridical perception becomes a minor exception to the rule

22 By substance I mean that which is atomistic, independent, intrinsic, essential and enduring. Substance is not relational, for if it were, it would not be independent and intrinsic. Descartes (1962, p. 156) was precise when he defined substance: "By substance we can conceive nothing else than a thing which exists in such a way as to stand in need of nothing beyond itself in order to [sic] its existence."
which is that our visual system accurately mirrors or represents the world. Having accounted for the aberration, we go on believing, explicitly and implicitly, that what we normally see is more or less the way things are "out there."

Philosophical enquiry, however, is not so easily satisfied with accounting for the abnormal by making it an exception to the rule. We enquire into the validity of the rule itself. When the exception is probed deeply, it may reveal a logic that shatters the understanding that stands behind the rule. This is what has happened to the objectivist view that veridical perception is a faithful representation of what is out there. Let us take a brief look at this happening. A veridical perception is one in which the perceiver accurately receives the perceptual data regarding the perceived object. This is what makes perception objectively accurate. But take the case of a non-veridical perception that, nonetheless, perfectly resembles a veridical perception. When Lady Macbeth "saw" blood that was not on her hands, it could not be that her perception was caused by non-existing blood on her hands. The usually understood causal chain linking the perceptual data to the perceiving mind is not there. Such causal chain is what supposedly accounts for veridical perception. In the absence of this causal chain, then how do we account for a non-veridical perception such as hallucination? If we say that Lady Macbeth's ailing mind is more likely the cause of her non-veridical perception, then we are acknowledging the contribution of the mind to perception, which is more than passive reception of perceptual data insofar as we accept that a hallucinating mind is still a mind. Reasoning thus, we are then compelled to ask a further question whether the human perceptual system, or more inclusively speaking, the human mind, is in general capable of "manufacturing" perceptions that resemble veridical perceptions. Or, to
put it another way, we ask whether the object-independent human mind has the "power" or capacity to create perceptual data independently of what there is. Or, more broadly put, we would ask whether the mind's contribution also figures in normal, veridical perception? If so, to what extent is the mind involved in veridical perception? The conjecture ventured here is that even so-called veridical perception is not free of the mind's contribution.²³

Historically, with respect to the category of veridical perception, a distinction was made between the perception of primary qualities such as motion, extension, shape, solidity, number of objects, and the perception of secondary qualities such as colour, smell, taste, sound, heat, and texture. The perception of primary qualities was thought to involve little contribution of the mind: the mind simply receives the perceptual data inherent in the objects. On the other hand, the perception of secondary qualities was thought to be largely due to the perceiver's mind. This distinction is now mainly associated with Locke,²⁴ but it was a view commonly held by seventeenth century scientists such as Newton, Galileo, and Descartes.

The distinction between the perception of the primary and the secondary qualities, which was the last foothold for the objectivist view of the world, however, turned out to be vulnerable. It was Berkeley who challenged this distinction, and Western epistemology has never been the same since then. Berkeley argued that the traditional basis of the distinction—namely, that in the case of the perception of primary qualities, there existed the relationship of correspondence in the sense of similitude or resemblance between mental images or ideas and objects, whereas in the case of the

²³ Psychological research on human perception is full of clinical evidence that supports this thesis. See Jerome S. Bruner's collection of classical papers (1973), Beyond the Information Given. Experiments related in these papers demonstrate just how thickly involved are our conceptual, motivational and behavioural factors in all perception.

²⁴ See Locke's An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapter VII through IX.
perception of secondary qualities, there was no such relationship—was unfounded. Berkeley states:

By matter, therefore, we are to understand an inert, senseless substance, in which extension, figure, and motion do actually subsist. But it is evident from what we have already shown, that extension, figure, and motion are only ideas existing in the mind, and that an idea can be like nothing but another idea, and that consequently neither they nor their archetypes can exist in an unperceiving substance. (Berkeley, 1965, p. 64)

Nothing resembles an image/idea except another image/idea. So much for the correspondence theory of perception. Bereft of the objective world, what we are left with are our own mental images, ideas, and sensations.

Berkeley's Subjective Idealism, captured in his famous dictum, esse est percipi, brought a crisis to the seventeenth-century European Weltanschauung, for according to his interpretation, the external world suddenly vanished from the realm of human knowledge. We may realize that the shockwaves of Berkelian subjectivism are very much alive, if not more than ever, in the postmodern thoughts of our times which are prone to discredit the objectivist view of the world and to reduce reality to texts. The same observation can be made with respect to those scientific theories that equate reality with human observation. Without any preamble, let me get to the heart of the uneasiness we feel about subjectivism which Berkeley's view exemplifies here. Subjectivism that confines reality to the human mind is a potentially dangerous view. Resulting solipsism is more than a quaint philosophical view and can easily lead us to a denial of reality to other existents, including other members of our own species. Let us now

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25 See George Berkeley's A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, in the section titled "Of the principles of human knowledge."
26 Berkeley avoids this danger by entrusting his subjectivism into the hands of God.
27 See Cashman (1992) for a succinct discussion of scientific subjectivism (or idealism, as it is more broadly referred to). In the paper, he traces the conceptual connection between idealism and anthropocentricism as well as anthropic totalitarianism.
continue to recount how Berkeley's subjectivism was repudiated.

According to Putnam's reading of Kant, Kant countered Berkeley's Subjective Idealism by rejecting the correspondence theory of truth because Berkeley's position was arrived at as a result of accepting that theory in the first place (Putnam, 1981, pp. 60-64). If we recall, the correspondence relationship between the mind and the world held two separate ontological categories—the object-independent mind and the mind-independent object—and when it was found difficult to establish the category of mind-independent objects (how else since we come to know objects only through perception), this category was dropped, leaving us with only the category of the object-independent mind. The ensuing epistemological conclusion, such as that which Berkeley had drawn, was that ultimately we would only know the content of our mind—that is, sensations, percepts, and concepts. In this view, material objects were inferred and reconstructed entities, a conclusion that greatly violated the way we experienced the world.

Kant's move was to deny that we were rationally entitled even to set up the relationship of correspondence between the mind and the mind-independent world (noumenon) to begin with, for noumenon was not open to our knowing. Mind you, Kant did not doubt that there existed mind-independent reality (the realm of substance or thing-in-itself). But what he insisted was that we not bring it into our theory of knowledge. Kant thought that while it was a postulate of reason to posit mind-independent reality, it was at the same time an illegitimate use of reason to conceptualize and talk about it as part of how we came to know what we knew. What we knew (perceived, experienced, and talked about) was strictly about things as they affected us and appeared to us in our experience. Only things-for-us—that is, things-as-they-appear-to-us—were the proper objects of our knowledge. Here I
quote a passage from Kant:

When, therefore, we say that the sense represents objects as they appear, and the understanding objects as they are, the latter statement is to be taken, not in the transcendental, but in the merely empirical meaning of the terms, namely as meaning the objects must be represented as objects of experience, that is, as appearances in thoroughgoing interconnection with one another, and not as they may be apart from their relation to possible experience (and consequently to any sense), as objects of pure understanding. Such objects of pure understanding will always remain unknown to us; we can never even know whether such a transcendental or exceptional knowledge is possible under any conditions. (Kant, 1965, p. 274)

Now, this might probably be reading too much into Kant, but, pitching my lot with Putnam, I claim that what crucially distinguishes Kant's epistemological position from Berkeley's is that Kant in effect more or less rejected the dichotomous categories of the object-independent mind and the subject-independent object out of the realm of human knowledge. These categories belong to the noumenal realm of things-in-themselves. We know neither the external objects as they are in themselves nor the internal objects, such as sensations, as they are in themselves. Putnam (1981, pp. 62-63) summarizes Kant's point that "the objects of inner sense are not transcendentally real (noumenal) that they are transcendentally ideal (things-for-us), and that they are no more and no less directly knowable than so-called 'external' objects." This, then, is where Kant departed radically from Berkeley who held that we could at least get hold of the noumenal properties of internal objects. For Berkeley, these internal objects existed as things-in-themselves or substances. But Kant would argue that any object of experience, qua an object of experience, was already a cognitively/conceptually interpreted object. In other words, they were not substances. Thus, with Kant, a decisive turn was taken in the formulation of Western epistemology, and I would characterize it as a turn towards phenomenological epistemology as
opposed to substantive epistemology of metaphysical realism.

As indicated, objectivism takes the substantive view of external objects while subjectivism takes the substantive view of internal objects (the content of the mind). Subjectivism, no less than objectivism, belongs to metaphysical realism. Thus, rejection of metaphysical realism entails rejection of both objectivism and subjectivism. However, what we here must make note of especially is the equally decisive rejection of subjectivism because in having repudiated objectivism—a common ideology and practice in our intellectual arena these days—we are liable to walk straight into the arm of subjectivism, unless we realize that they both are of the same mold—namely, the substantive view of the world. In other words, we have to see that if we reject the objectivist view, we are also logically committed to reject the subjectivist view because they are two sides of the same coin which is the substantive view of the world—that is, metaphysical realism. The substantive view postulates how "things," mental or physical, are inherently or in themselves. Kant's objection was that we could not know and say how things, including our sensations, were in themselves (Putnam, 1981). Even the names and description of mental phenomena do not designate things that are substances. When perceiving red, we are no more in touch with the substance 'redness' than we are when perceiving a stone. They all lack inherent substance-ness because they all are contingent on our conceptualization.28

However, with this acknowledgment that conceptualization has infected just about all our senses of reality—the realization that should

28 We may ask whether this talk of conceptual dependency is not what Berkelian subjectivism is all about. It would be either if concepts are considered to hook onto mental substances (say, sensations) or if concepts themselves are taken to be such substances. But if concepts are denied of such "privileges" and are left to be simply concepts and nothing more, then subjectivism will not be perpetuated.
release us from objectivism and subjectivism—we face the danger once
more of falling into yet another form of substantivism, more insidious
than ever, whose source is conceptualization itself. What I mean is that
after banishing the substantive sense of reality from both objectivism and
subjectivism, we sneak the substantive sense of reality into the conceptual
itself: we make the conceptual inherently real. I wonder if this is not
also the danger of the postmodern view, or any other contemporary view
focused exclusively on linguistic-conceptualization, that acknowledges no
other reality than what is conceptualized: text is reality as we often hear
these days. Here, the acknowledgment amounts to the denial of
experience outside conceptualization: there is no experience to speak of
outside what we can conceptualize and articulate. There seems to be an
understanding that so long as we stay within this articulated conceptual
realm, we are safe from the substantive metaphysics since we are
postulating neither the physical substance nor the mental substance. But
are we not treating the concepts themselves as substance? What, after all,
is a substance but a constituent entity of reality that has inherent
properties and is, therefore, definite, atomistic, discrete, separate,
independent, and enduring in time? Concepts would fit this definition of
substance. Or, if not actually postulating the conceptual substance, we are
at least substantivizing reality through the medium of the categories of
concepts. We, thus, substantivize the external entities as well as the
internal entities. Conceptualization shows our mind's propensity to
substantivize reality—that is, to view the world and ourselves as definite,
determinate, and intrinsically characterizable.

In my resistance to the substantivism via the conceptual, I am

29 We recognize this view as Platonism: only Ideas are (truly) real.
inspired, although in a roundabout way, by Kant's notion of noumena. To recall, Kant has defined the proper purview for epistemology to be what can be conceptualized and articulated, which is the realm of phenomena. However, he does not wish to restrict ontology strictly to phenomena. Outside phenomena, there is the noumenal world. For Kant, this noumenal world is forever out of our experiential— that is, phenomenal reach— because, as he believed, the experiential coincides with, or is limited to, the conceptual. The noumenal as lying outside our conceptual or experiential is the realm of how things are in themselves, but we have no access to this realm. However, we ask, "If we had no experiential access, why bother postulating the noumenal at all? What is the point?" We are inclined to conclude that Kant's notion of a noumenal world is "an unnecessary metaphysical element in Kant's thought" (Putnam, 1981, p. 61). But I think otherwise.

Shadowy as it is, the notion of noumena serves to prevent us from identifying reality exclusively with what can be conceptualized and articulated by humans. Such identification would result in subjectivism. Subjectivism is both epistemologically and ethically a hazardous view. It is only prudent to include in our view of reality that there must be far more to reality than what is and can be thought of. So I affirm the Kantian noumena, but I take a radical departure from his notion by claiming that the noumenal is not outside the reach of experience. To put it more directly and simply, I claim there is unconceptualized experience. This domain of unconceptualized experience is like Kantian noumena insofar as it is outside the domain of conceptualized experience, but at the same time, it is unlike Kantian noumena because it is still within the possibility of experience. Now, the crucial question is: Can there be non-conceptual
experience? To this question, not only do I answer affirmatively, but I also argue that the possibility of nonconceptual experience is not so improbable as it would appear at first. Let us see how this may be the case.

2.3. Releasing ourselves into the open-texture of experience: beyond metaphysical realism into thatness

The problem with Kantian noumenon is that, even if we are willing to forget about its unmistakable undertone of substantive metaphysics, it does not fit the bill of the traditional epistemological quest since epistemology has all to do with articulate conceptualization such as comparison, categorization, and description. With early Wittgenstein, we might as well say that language is the limit of one's reality: the shadowy noumenon lies outside this brightly lit arena of reality. But I argue that something is amiss with this view. It does not show the right understanding of experience. Although there are brightly lit areas or layers of conceptualized experience, the layers and areas that are dim, unclear, indeterminate, and simply amorphous are more extensive. In fact, if we take a closer look at our experience, thus looking beneath the thin topical layer of articulation, the sharp boundaries and categories of conceptualization give away to inarticulateness. The more we focus our attention on the feel of experience, the more ineffable the feel of experience becomes. What is going on here?

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30 From *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (1961): "5.6 The limits of my language means the limits of my world."

31 Foucault (1988) has argued, very persuasively in my opinion, that disclosure of the self through verbalization and articulation, such as it was practised by the Stoics and the early and later Christians, constituted a dominant technology of the self in the Western tradition. His view coheres with my observation that our Western tradition attaches almost a singular importance to conceptualization, cognition, rationality, and the like. Consider Plato's Ideas; Pascal's observation that humans are thinking reeds; or, even, the notion that in the beginning was the Word. We also hear the culminating declaration in Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*. In contrast, in the Eastern tradition, the perfect example being Taoism, there is a strong recognition and even a celebration of the ineffable—the realm outside articulate
My analysis of the matter is as follows: What we notice when we nonconceptually focus on experience is that it does not come already in sharp, clear, definite, and particular conceptual forms and that these forms have to be superimposed on top of indeterminate experience. Indeed, this is the process of conceptualization and articulation. We learn to "figurate" reality with concepts. By the time we become competent language users, our reality has become so saturated with conceptualizations that we equate reality with conceptualized entities, be they descriptions of sensations, percepts, or concepts. At some point of saturation, we cannot even see the possibility of unconceptualized experience. But recovering this possibility is not as hopelessly difficult as it may appear. Let us try a Jamesian phenomenological reflection on sensations. First, we pay a very close attention to our sensations, not giving in to the temptation merely to name them and move on with further conceptual processing. What we will notice is that sensations lack an immutable and intrinsic self-identity and are in perpetual flux, so much so that they defy any definite description, comparison, and categorization.

This is not to discredit the usual practice of giving seemingly definite identifications nor is it a recommendation that we refrain from the practice. But here I am running ahead of myself with these remarks.

32 To "figurate" is Owen Barfield's term (1965). This thesis about imposition of the abstract on experience to enable us to experience in particular ways which are conceptually describable is espoused by Polanyi (1962) and Hayek (1969). Loy (1988), in his extensive study of the nondual, nonconceptual experience in the Eastern traditions of Buddhism, Taoism, and Vedanta, argues that the "thought-constructed" nature of experience, in particular, perception as espoused in the contemporary Western view, in fact, indirectly supports the possibility of nonconceptual experience.

33 As we shall see in the next chapter, this phenomenological or experiential reflection on sensations is an important discipline in the practice of mindfulness which aims specifically at experientially realizing insubstantialism. It is for this reason pertaining to my interest in the practice of mindfulness that I find James' treatment of sensation particularly relevant.
Language learning that begins in our infancy is a training in putting definite shapes on what is otherwise more or less indefinite, indeterminate, and mutable. Sensations and percepts that we commonly describe are already the product of substantialization—that is, the process of linguistic-conceptualization. Sense-data, or to use the current term, perceptual states, are definite, conceptualized entities which we have isolated, stabilized, identified, and compared. But we should be careful not to confuse these conceptualized or substantivized sense-data with the phenomenological sensations themselves. William James calls this kind of phenomenological experience "pure experience." This is how he explains pure experience:

'Pure experience' is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. Only newborn babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*, tho ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and of manyness, but in respects that don't appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught. Pure experience in this state is but another name for feeling or sensation. But the flux of it no sooner comes than it tends to fill itself with emphases, and these salient parts become identified and fixed and abstracted; so that experience now flows as if shot through with adjectives and nouns and prepositions and conjunctions. Its purity is only a relative term, meaning the proportional amount of unverbalized sensation which it still embodies. (James, 1976, p. 26)

To me, this marvellous analysis of sensation reveals an important understanding about experience of which we keep losing sight. It is that our conceptualized experience (how things appear to us) is substantivization of that which is prior to and underlying our conceptualization. James' term "that" indicates the sheer beingness of experience which is prior to and underlying any particularizing linguistic conceptual forms imposed on

34 Just how much we can recover this insubstantialness is open to debate: the skeptic would consider the possibility unpromising and at best only conceptually plausible, while a practitioner of mindfulness-awareness (meditation) may confirm it as a veritable experience. I place myself somewhere closer to the latter's position. We will look into this more fully in the next chapter.
"thatness" of experience. Thatness or "suchness" underlies the particularized whatness.\textsuperscript{35} Thatness being yet free of conceptual categorizing and discriminating, experience of thatness (or I should say, experience as thatness) embodies unitiveness or nonduality. Thatness comes to us as one whole and not divided up into those numerous conceptual categories we carry around, including the category of self and non-self.

When conceptualization dominates, which is our normal lot, we lose sight of thatness which is not yet substantivized or hypostatized into concepts. Thatness is the state of indeterminacy with respect to our experience prior to conceptualization. As our aspiration to a greater degree of conceptualization and articulation--our epistemological quest--seems to be succeeding by all the appearance of how much our experience is mediated through concepts, we fall into the danger of equating reality with these determinate conceptual categories.\textsuperscript{36} I do not think that this danger afflicts only the intellectuals. All language users fall prey to it, and perhaps those who are less fluent with concept-making may even be in a greater danger. This is so because those who can entertain many versions of interpreted reality may be spared the

\textsuperscript{35} Suchness (tathata) is a Buddhist term which signifies the totality of reality and which goes beyond conceptualization. It is a notion that is epistemologically very challenging, and I shall deal with it to an extent in the next two chapters. For now, I brought this term into the discussion on James' notion of thatness (as opposed to whatness) because I suspect that they are related. It is also interesting to note that James restricts the experience of thatness to babies and people in semi-coma due to "sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows" whereas in the Buddhist tradition, the technology of meditation has been developed to enable people to have such experience outside the hazardous and uncontrollable conditions like illness, drugs, or even blows.

\textsuperscript{36} My reader will ask why this equating is a danger. The danger I have in mind here is one to our moral project of becoming empathic perceivers after the ideals of Murdochian perception. Empathy calls for the ability to entertain or even experience different possibilities of being, but substantivizing reality in terms of definite particular conceptual categories locks us into a conviction that the way we understand is the way reality is, or at least we come closest to it in guessing it. Such conviction not only may disable us from practising empathy fluently but also may take away the very motivation to want to be empathic. This does not mean that people (when not being empathic) would not be curious about how others experience differently. But curiosity here might be grounded in the judgment that these others who experience differently do not have the "true" or "right" or "acceptable" picture/understanding of the reality.
objectivists' tendency to look for the real picture or understanding. However, we are mostly objectivists with respect to many areas of everyday life, and especially with regards to the familiar "things" we talk about in our everyday world. These present the most concrete aspects of reality so that it is very hard to see their conceptual made-up-ness. The concept of "I" is one notable example which concerns me the most in this thesis. In particular, I am concerned that the substantive conception of the self is so normalized with us as to be taken to be an invariant feature of human nature. As I see it, domination of the concept of the substantive self is counterproductive to our becoming deeply moral beings.

When we are utterly dominated by conceptualization, as we usually are, we fail to discern the insubstantial or insubstantive and indeterminate in our experience. I indicated this insubstantive sense of reality, as compared to the definite whatness of reality given to our conceptualization, by the term thatness. But thatness is not to be discerned and experienced only when we cease to be conceptualizing beings altogether. I am not suggesting an alternate reality inaccessible to us. Rather, I am arguing that if we carefully reflect on experience, instead of rushing to the ready-made concepts that help us figurate and articulate experience, we may discern the indeterminate and insubstantial nature of lived reality beneath the conceptualized experience. What makes this attempt difficult is not so much the esoteric nature of this insubstantial reality but the insistent presence of determinate and articulate conceptualization. As we try to feel our way into thatness, an incessant flow of proposals as to how to view reality breaks in upon us. We never arrive at our destination of thatness because we are perpetually waylaid by articulately conceptualized perceptions. Unless we keep in our mind firmly that the conceptual is just conceptual when we accept any of the how-to-view-reality
proposals, we are likely to identify the conceptual with the real or what there is, and then we are well on the way to reification. In this view, we may even arrive at the postmodern outcry of life as the text.

I am struck again and again by just how hard it is to escape metaphysical realism or what I call substantialism. Its quest for how things really are enthralls us, takes us to all different avenues of metaphysical realism and would not release us into the open sea of experience, into thatness. The quest of metaphysical realism burns us with "cravings for absolutes," to use Putnam's phrase, or to use Nagel's, "voracity of the objective appetite." Nagel (1991, p. 212) reminded us that "the philosophy of mind is full of refusals to admit that there may be no objective fact that is what really obtains when something looks red to someone." James would agree as that is exactly the point he was making.

2.4. Liberating ourselves from the notion of substantive self

The "voracity of the objective appetite" that Nagel spoke of pertains not only to the external world but also to oneself. Just as the objectifying, substantialistic impulse is to define the world in determinate terms so as to make it a mind-independent space-time entity, the same impulse defines the self to be an object-independent mental entity or substance which is absolute and irreducible (at least while it lasts on this earth). Now, when we use terms like 'mental entity', 'substance', 'object-independent', and 'absolute' to describe the self, we may again at first deny that these pertain to our everyday notion of self. This initial impression aside, I claim that these philosophical descriptions are nonetheless a clearer articulation of the way we habitually feel and believe ourselves to be. The self is considered a separate fact/entity from the experiences it has (one has and undergoes experiences but is not the
experience itself); the self is atomistic (there is only unambiguously one "me" which is separate from all other selves) and is absolute (it is a simple and unchanging mental entity). What I am claiming is that the prevailing ordinary conception of the self, such as that most of us carry around "in our heads," presents a substantialistic metaphysical entity. Furthermore, I claim that there is nothing inherently right about the conception, but on the contrary, we can cogently argue that the conception is guilty of harbouring a logical muddle, and this muddle has enormous consequence for the way of our being-in-this-world, hence, morality.

Let us apply a Rylian analysis of the category-mistake\(^{37}\) to our ordinary notion of self and see if it is not the case that the self is an objectified metaphysical entity. But I need not go over this analysis at length here since Ryle's category-mistake is too well-known. It will suffice to point out for my purpose that the self is coextensive with psycho-physical experiences which the self is customarily said to have or undergo, just as a government is coextensive with all its physical and functional constituents. There is no separate entity, 'government', over and above its constituents.\(^{38}\) Likewise, there is no self over and above the experiences it has or undergoes (Macy, 1991).

Yet, the impeccable logic in this argument aside, the argument flies

\(^{37}\) See Concept of Mind, pp. 20-25. Ryle (1973, p. 23) is clear on the point that he does not disclaim the existence of minds as mental processes. Similarly, I only mean to disclaim the self as a separate, further fact/existent from the experiences it has, and not the experiences themselves. If the self is understood only as a convenient label, a shorthand, for experiences, then it would not be a metaphysical entity. But this is not how we conventionally understand the self.

\(^{38}\) Some will argue that something like a government is an emergent entity which, though coextensive with its constituents, is still not the same as them. Simply put, the parts do not add up to the whole, they will claim. I concede that if parts are considered as isolated parts outside the context of wholistic integration, then indeed parts do not add up to the whole. But, parts as seen within the original integration, organically constituting the whole, have to be equal to the whole.
against the most basic and seemingly self-evident understanding we have—namely, that there is the self that stands over and above its own experiences, and that the self either owns the experiences or undergoes them. We only need to glance at the syntax of our language to see this exhibited: the subject-predicate sentence structure exhibits the self’s ownership and doership with respect to its experience. But, what is utterly perplexing about this way of conceptualizing experience is that we have to separate the self from its content of experience and set the former lording over the latter; thus, a separate entity is created. What a fantastic creation this substantive self is! The order of creation here is just about the same as becoming a biological parent to oneself. I think that we sense, however vaguely, this impossible logic when we sometimes wonder how on earth there is such a thing as oneself. I suggest that the beginnings of illumination on this question are precisely to see the logical and material impossibility or groundlessness of the substantive self: the self created ex nihilo. Such a self is a figment of the imagination or, to put it more prosaically, a product of conceptualization, though so tenacious is it that it has a complete hold on us. Again consider Descartes’ cogito ergo sum. So great was the hold of the conceptualized self that Descartes identified his existence/reality with conceptualization.

That the reification of self has taken an intractably firm root in us is well-evidenced by a plethora of apologia for personal identity against the kind of argument that I put forth to dispel reification of the self. Usually the defence for self-identity takes the form of citing physical and psychological

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39 Is English peculiar in exhibiting a subject-predicate sentence construction? Although English might exhibit this more articulately than other languages, it certainly is not an exception. 40 For sure, this is an unorthodox interpretation of Cartesian cogito, but the interpretation recently struck me and gave me a bit of aha experience. To me, the cogito argument does not prove Descartes’ indubitable existence but demonstrates his equating of ontology with epistemology, that is, the actual with the conceptual -- a perfect example of my thesis that we are prone to identify the real with the conceptual.
continuities as evidence. Against this, I argue that the situation is more the other way around—namely, that the experience of psychophysical continuities depend on our having the concept of self-identity. In other words, the concept of self-identity is an organizing principle which enables us to experience ourselves as substantive, separate selves. That is, the notion of the self is presupposed by physical and psychological continuity. What this means is that we cannot account for self-identity in terms of physical and psychological continuity, for the very identification or determination of "the same" person over time presupposes a certain determinate notion of what counts as the self. This is in the main objection that Parfit (1984) raised to the Cartesian deduction of personal identity from the experience of the self.

2.5. Imagining the life of no-self in the open sea of experience

Supposing that we recognize and admit the metaphysical, substantive nature of the notion of self, how will it change the way we experience the world and ourselves? We should expect the change to be profound, but what difference will it make, not just to the argument we construct on personal identity and the like, but to our living experience, and especially to our moral perception of the Other? Perhaps this is the hardest part of philosophizing, many philosophers having become unaccustomed to imagining what they argue and claim to know.41

Parfit, in his effort at imagining what it is like to live a life of a dissolved self, likened it to being liberated from a glass tunnel. I find this analogy to a glass tunnel carrying me some distance in conceptualizing and

41 A line from Shelley's (1951, p. 516) A Defence of Poetry comes to my mind: "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life; our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest." These lines were written in 1821; yet, I find them perfectly befitting our present life of learning and intellectualization.
articulating my understanding about the life liberated from substantive selfhood, and so I shall rely on it and build on it. The following is how Parfit expressed it.

...I find it liberating and consoling. When I believed that my existence was such a further fact, I seemed imprisoned in myself. My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. I now live in the open air. There is still a difference between my life and the lives of other people. But the difference is less. Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others. (Parfit, 1984, p. 281)

The analogy of the glass tunnel captures very well the meaning of what it is to experience the world under the aspect of self. We see the world through a wall of glass; that is, we think/feel as though we can never be in direct contact with the world/reality. The glass, although transparent, still stands between the self and the world, the subject and the object. The subject looks out through a pane of glass, which is the self, at the world that is forever the other. The psychic distance we feel from the world is all the more tantalizing because of the perfect transparency through which the world appears to us. This is the most damning psychological effect of alienation, and I would claim that this is largely the work of the reified concept of the self embedded deeply in us. Our experience embodies this concept.

When we come to the understanding that the self is a metaphysical concept that divides experience into the subject and the object whereby we identify ourselves with the subject, then (I hope) this realization would begin to release us from the glass tunnel effect of alienation into unitive, nondual experience. But nondual experience does not necessarily entail disappearance of the distinction among the particular existents nor some kind of psychic melding among them. When I get out of the glass tunnel of substantive

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42 I sense that this is the ultimate fear that prevents so many thinkers, who through various
selfhood, I do not find myself able to read other people’s thoughts or to feel their emotions and sensations. Nor do I mistake or confuse myself for another person or vice versa. Resorting to the glass tunnel analogy again, when the glass tunnel is removed, there is no difference to what I can see now. What I can see now without the wall of glass would be the same as what I saw before through the glass.43 What, then, is the difference and, if there is a difference, does it constitute a major change such that it affects the way we perceive and relate to the world—the Other? In other words, does it have a bearing on morality? My answer is an emphatic Yes, and this thesis is about spelling out that answer.

The difference is more in the mood and mode of perception than in what is perceived. The glass tunnel signifies the dichotomized consciousness that is aware of the permanent discontinuity between the subject and the object. When I see a mountain in the mode of subject-object dichotomy, I am aware of the absolute separateness and otherness between me and the mountain. The mountain is forever an other to me. However, if I could overcome (even if minimally) this dichotomized consciousness, then I would not feel separate (without being indistinct from it) from the mountain. This is the so-called unitive experience, and it has been expressed in a variety of ways, including subject-object non-distinction.44 Yet, this person writing

paths arrive at the door of contemplation on the possibility of doing away with subject-object duality, from pushing that door open to enter.

43 There is a famous Zen saying by Seigen that during his intense practice of meditation before his enlightenment, mountains were no longer mountains, but after his enlightenment, they were still mountains. I suppose a volume could be written to explore more fully the experience here, but the main point I get is that experience of thatness need not be different from the ordinary perception of the world in terms of its whatness, with the exception of the profound difference that the ordinary awareness of duality between self and not-self is not there.

44 Carter (1992, p. 181) characterizes the "pure experience" of William James which I referred to as thatness as "without all distinction ... empty of any and all distinctions." I have my reservations about this characterization. Nonduality of consciousness need not entail indistinguishability or nondistinction.
these words here is distinct from the mountain yonder. I think that a good grasp of this rather ambiguous notion of distinction-in-nonseparateness is the key to imagining felicitously the life liberated from substantive selfhood.45

I am keenly aware of the difficulties of understanding, in a non-trivial sense, what it is for us to be distinct but not separate existents. To me, the ordinary and superficial sense is the kind of prevalent understanding that our welfare is interconnected through reciprocating favours, assistance, and social and moral obligations. Here, I do not mean to deprecate goodwill and mutual help: life is certainly better with these intentions and deeds than without them. Yet, I cannot help seeing shallowness of these social-moral virtues that are pale in my vision compared to what they could be, had they been grounded in the consciousness of nonduality. Compared to this greater possibility, the measured and entreated reciprocation of goodwill and good deeds as practised in the framework of "enlightened self-interest" seems limited and, moreover, vulnerable to their breakdowns in straining circumstances of which life abounds and the ensuing scene of everyone looking out for "number one." This greater possibility is a moral life lived in the space of nonduality where Murdochian open perception and loving attention naturally flourish.

However before I go on to explore more fully this space of nonduality—the topic of the next two chapters—the problem of how to get to this space still occupies us. As I see it, overcoming the conceptual obstacles that discourage our progress is a key issue. Thus, back to the original puzzle, we ask, "Just

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45 In this regard, I am in agreement with Plumwood (1991) who also argues for the distinction between distinctiveness and separateness. Yet her unsympathetic criticisms of those views that try to express (the difficult job of) what it is to overcome the substantive self and experience reality accordingly seem to indicate that her understanding is more of an intellectual one without an inkling of the experience of nonduality. Her view is more of a conceptual arrangement than an expression of transformed experience.
how should we understand distinction-in-no-separateness?" Neither complete indistinguishable merge nor atomistic separateness, what I am trying to conceptualize is a profound unitiveness that transcends, but does not discredit, the various conventional and physical boundaries of distinctness and that is experienced as a radically different mode of reality/experience. I would use the term 'ontological turn' to signify this radical change to the mode and feel of experience-and-reality. So what I am after is a certain ontological turn, namely, to nonduality, to our experiencing of the world and ourselves. But it is difficult to conceptualize nonduality while we are occupying in the main the mode of subject-object dualized consciousness. The very possibility has to be made plausible even to orient ourselves towards seriously entertaining the possibility. Such effort is what I am making now. The following is what I find to be a promising analogical model of understanding about nonduality which, I suspect, is actually more than an analogy.

"Distinctive-but-not-separate" is not too hard to understand in the case of body perception. There is a sense of distinctiveness about the various body parts I have but, nonetheless, they do not feel separate from me. My hands are distinctive from my torso, and yet they are not alien to each other. I am aware, without having to check consciously, that all the distinct body parts belong to this body. This sense of unitive body awareness with respect to their spatial and organic connectedness is called proprioception, and it is normally automatic and unconscious. For example, at any moment, one has

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46 Underlying my talk of ontological turn is a view that I embrace that ontology is foremost about how reality is experienced and thus it is closely allied with phenomenological psychology. A further assumption embedded in my view is that consciousness is not a monolithic capacity of which there is just one state but is a spectral capacity consisting of multiple states. Nonduality is one of such states. For discussions on the connection between states of consciousness and ontological accounts, see Walsh (1992).
the sense of where one's hands are without having to look for them. The loss of proprioception, however, results in the most dramatic state of disembodiedness as described by Sacks (1987) in his fantastic clinical cases. In one case history, the patient, afflicted with a loss of proprioception, was so utterly repulsed by the alienness of his leg that he repeatedly tries to detach it forcibly from his body. He was overcome by revulsion that a foreign leg was attached to him and was enraged that he could not get rid of it. Granted that this is an extreme reaction, the point I want to make is that when we lose proprioception, the affected body part feels foreign to us. It has become an Other to our sense of our body.

I now wonder if the sense of self-identity which demarcates the self from the not-self (the Other) is not somewhat similar, hence, parallel to bodily proprioception above. If my parallel is justified at all, then we may have gained some insight into the nature of unitive awareness with respect to the objects of our experience. As one way of characterizing proprioception is by the absence of otherness with respect to one's body parts, the unitive awareness may be characterized as absence (admitting of degrees) of otherness, foreignness or alienness with respect to the objects that are presented to experience. For example, if I had an appropriate unitive awareness, these books, tea pot, cup, and so on that are part of the content of my consciousness at this moment would not feel like an Other to me. There would be no

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47 Perhaps postulation of parallelness is extraneous here: I feel that the kind of "psychic proprioception" with respect to the Other is actually coextensive with bodily proprioception. To me the psychic proprioception (i.e., nonduality) is a bodily, sensate experience. In fact, I would assert that if it were not a bodily, sensate experience, then it cannot be nondual since nonduality is inevitably wholistic and integrates the psychic and the somatic. I shall be exploring this idea further in Chapter Five.

48 Empathy, according to Vetlesen (1994), is a prerequisite to moral perception. To me, empathy cannot arise where there is a strong sense of otherness. (I gather that this is not the case for Vetlesen, and I find that conceptually amiss. For him, empathy is primarily a cognitive function and can stand alone without the emotional identification.) The perception of otherness is concomitant with the process and the mood of objectification. Hence the subject-
clear and stark sense of discontinuity between myself and these objects. After all, these objects lie within my own field of consciousness, and so why should there be this sharp demarcation between what is myself and what is not? Is it inevitable that my unitive awareness ends at the limit of my skin? I do not think so. We know from the greatly varying degrees of otherness we perceive with respect to the world and people that the boundary of the self need not be fixed at one's epidermis. Consider someone who sacrifices his or her life to save another's. Surely this person does not have the same sense of otherness as the one who does not feel compelled to take such an action in the same situation. We can well imagine the person having a sense of inseparableness with respect to the other person whom he or she is saving.

The thesis I am pressing is that when we have embodied the substantive notion of the self, we are aware of the world (that is, anything that extends beyond my skin) as a whole lot of otherness, and conversely, when we have overcome this substantive notion and sense of the self, one may even experience the world and the self to be continuous. That is, categorical object duality mode of consciousness is intimately bound up with the perception of the Other as an object. I will discuss further empathy and objectification in Chapter Four.

49 William Barrett (1962) in his interpretation of Heidegger's Dasein speaks of a young child's first understanding of his name. For him, his name is referential not just to his physical person but to the "region of Being" with which he is vitally involved. To quote Barrett (1962, pp. 218-219): "... he has heard his name as naming a field or region of Being with which he is concerned, and to which he responds, whether the call is to come to food, to mother, or whatever. And the child is right. His name is not the name of an existence that takes place within the envelope of his skin; that is merely the awfully abstract social convention that has imposed itself not only on his parents but on the history of philosophy. The basic meaning the child's name has for him does not disappear as he grows older; it only becomes covered over by the more abstract social convention. He secretly hears his own name called whenever he hears any region of Being named with which he is vitally involved."

50 Motivations are far-ranging and complex. The case I am illustrating could have a whole range of motivations, utter self-regarding or ego-affirming ones on the one end to self-negation or ego-destruction on the other. I do not see the motivation of nonduality (if we may indeed call it a motivation) as falling at either ends or even in between. Self-negation of the kind that is associated with seeing oneself as worthless and corrupt is certainly not of nonduality. Nonduality is transcendence of the self-other duality, and thus to fall either into self-affirmation or self-negation is still to be committed to duality. So the case I am considering here is one in which the "motivation" is out of nonduality.
otherness disappears.

The kind of metaphysics we have, coupled with the kind of language that mediates this metaphysics, greatly influence the shape of our experience, hence, our very consciousness. Based on this assumption, which I consider reasonable, changing our metaphysics and the conceptual devices to mediate this change is a necessary and efficacious move. How do we conceptualize the world with ourselves in it and our experience in such a way that we do not fall into metaphysical realism but find our way towards experience of nondual, nonsubstantive reality? Mind you, it takes more than conceptualizing nonduality to experience nonduality just as it takes more than picturing an apple to taste an apple. Recalling my previous thesis, nonduality is experienced precisely when the mode of conceptualized experience is dropped. Nonetheless, first things first, we have to conceptualize, or imagine, our way towards nonduality. But we do have difficulty conceptualizing/imagining this mode and, thus, what I am suggesting here for paving the way to imagining the nondual or nonconceptual experience is that we research a system of conceptualization that would challenge the substantive metaphysics and give an inkling of the experience of nonduality or nonconceptuality. I affirm that concepts constrain and guide the possibility of experience, and thus it is definitely a necessary task to be acquainted with finely captured conceptualizations of nonduality so as to be better disposed to such an experience. With this objective in mind, for the remainder of the chapter, I will explore some Taoist thoughts for their rich and insightful conceptualizations about the nonsubstantive or non-essentialistic way of looking at the world and ourselves. I bring in this Chinese philosophical tradition here to add a comparative perspective to the trend of Western epistemology which has
been increasingly restless with metaphysical realism. As well, our effort to conceptualize and articulate the notions of insubstantiality of reality and the self, which has been proving to be a difficulty, may benefit from acquiring a Taoistic conceptual vocabulary developed to capture and express such notions. I am hoping that the Taoist vocabulary will take us a step further towards a concrete imagining of what it is for the selves to perceive reality nondualistically, hence nonsubstantively, and to interact with each other and the world in this mode.

2.6. The Taoist notion of reality as transformation

Ames (1989) and Hall (1989), in their analyses of the Taoist cosmology, characterize the Taoist cosmology as the aesthetic order and contrast it to the logical order. Here, I shall focus the discussion on the aesthetic order. Their major thesis is that the perception of the aesthetic order calls for an abandonment of the dualistic mode of perception. In this mode, one "thing" (self, object, value, event) is defined in opposition to another. A radical separation characterizes the dichotomous terms in that what one thing is is not derived from its opposite. 'Good' is 'good' and cannot be derived from 'bad', and vice versa. Ames (1989, p. 120) explains: "The separateness implicit in dualistic explanations of relationships conduces to an essentialistic interpretation of the world, a world of 'things' characterized by discreteness, finality, closedness, determinateness, independence, a world in which one thing is related to the 'other' extrinsically." We recognize this characterization to be pertaining to metaphysical realism.

The aesthetic order, however, conceptualizes the relationship that obtains between two or more "things" not in dualism but in polarity. That is, each particular requires the other as a necessary condition for its self-identity.
In this sense, the relata can be said to entail each other.51 "Each particular is a consequence of every other, such that there is no contradiction in saying that each particular is both self-determinate and determined by every other particular" (Ames, 1989, p. 120). Ames continues: "[A] polar explanation of relationships gives rise to a holographic interpretation of the world, a world of 'foci' characterized by interconnectedness, interdependence, openness, mutuality, indeterminateness, complementarity, correlativity, coextensiveness, a world in which continuous foci are intrinsically related to each other."

In the polar explanation, the self and the not-self are not two separate entities or substances but constitute one and the same "field" which is tao (Hall, 1989). However, within this same field, there are particular foci which are "specific perturbations and transforming configurations in ch‘i" (ibid.). The self is one of such foci which is self-referential. Now, in this picture, the particular cannot be atomistically defined, separated from the all-encompassing field. Moreover, because a focus is not an independent entity but a contingent locus of perturbation, it is ephemeral and, hence, mutable. I find Morowitz's often quoted illustrative example perfect for the point I am making here.

Consider a vortex in a stream of flowing water. The vortex is a structure made of an ever-changing group of water molecules. It does not exist as an entity in the classical Western sense; it exists only because of the flow of water through the stream. If the flow ceases, the vortex disappears. In the same sense, the structures out of which biological entities are made are transient, unstable entities with constantly changing molecule, dependent on a constant flow of energy from food in order to maintain form and structure. This description stands as a scientific statement of the Buddhist notion of the unreality of the individual. (Morowitz, 1989, p. 48)

51 This notion is graphically illustrated by the classical yin-yang symbol in which the yin region contains a dot of yang and vice versa to symbolize their mutual entailment and mutability.
The self that we usually understand in substantive terms can be redescribed—a Rortian project—as an ephemeral vortex, a local perturbation, in the flowing stream of the universal field of Being—*tao* in Taoism or *dharmadhata* in Buddhism. This conceptualization of the self gives us a way to account for the self's distinctiveness and uniqueness without solidifying it into a discrete, substantive entity that stands apart from its environment. That each locus of perturbation can refer to itself as a self does not prove that the self is a separate entity. The self can be an articulation, summation, and consummation of its environment and vice versa. Says Ames (1989, p. 131): "His hands express the clay, and the clay expresses his hands." Hence, the self has no inherent property or essence. The individual existent whose identity we seek turns out to be ultimately empty—hence, nonsubstantial—since, when we zoom onto it for identification, it only leads our searching eyes outside itself, to all directions, to the diffused currents that support and carry it.\(^{52}\) This absence or emptiness of ultimate substantiveness is what is meant by the Buddhist terminology, *sunnata* (emptiness).

The self's ability or capacity to articulate creatively its environment is signified by the Chinese word, *te*, which bears a resemblance to the Aristotelian notion of virtue.\(^{53}\) Here I quote Ames' explication of the etymology of *te*:

The character *te* is comprised of three elements: *ch'i h* "to move ahead"; a second element which most etymologists take as a representation for the human eye; and *hsin*,

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\(^{52}\) Panikkar (1992) offers a similar imagery which I find most fitting. He speaks of the individual vortex or focus as a centre that has no circumference. He states (1992, p. 239): "We can only be a center when we have no dimension of our own and are open to an ever greater circumference. The center stifles the moment it draws a circumference upon itself." This notion of being a centre without self-definition that puts the substantive boundary around oneself satisfactorily captures both the phenomenon of self-effective agency and the nonsubstantiality of the self.

\(^{53}\) Aristotle defined virtue, *arete*, as an enabling power which makes the possessor perform its functions well. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapter 5.
the "heart-and-mind." The eye and heart-and-mind elements suggest that the unfolding process of te is disposed in a particular direction. Te then is the transforming content and disposition of an existent: an autogenerative, self-construed "arising." (Ames, 1989, p. 125)

The above notion of autogeneration or autopoesis can be misunderstood as the self-making of the atomistic, substantive selves, which would result in egomania. This is not at all the meaning of Taoistic autopoesis. In the context of polar relation, as opposed to the dualistic relation, autopoesis denotes aligning and coinciding of the self with its environing field such that the self is the creative interpretation of the field while the field is the creative embodiment of the self. Without this coincidence or alignment, autopoesis is not a harmonious event that gathers together all the particulars in the field. Instead, as said, autopoesis could turn into a willful imposition of the ego-self on the Other. The Taoist autopoesis is really a process of integrating and harmonizing the self with the Other so that they come to form a continuity of being. Since the particular's self-making involves interpretation of the field, and the field contains other particulars, to be effective in its self-making, the self should seek to integrate or harmonize with other particulars. Ames explains:

... [H]armonization with other environing particulars is a necessary precondition for the fullest self-disclosure of any given particulars. It is thus a calculus of the appropriate direction of the particulars that constitute the unifying harmony and regularity observable in the world. The potency of the arising event as innovative interpreter is dependent upon the range and quality of its self-construal. There is an openness of the particular such that it can through harmonization and patterns of deference diffuse to become coextensive with other particulars, and absorb an increasingly broader field of "arising" within the sphere of its own particularity. This then is the "getting" or "appropriating" aspect of te. (Ames, 1989, p. 126)

The above explication of te should clearly show the inappropriateness of interpreting autopoesis of the particulars as the usual egoic endeavour. The standard meaning of "to appropriate" bears this egoic view, which is
unfortunate because the notion of appropriateness, on the other hand, well expresses the particulars' deferential regards for or honouring of each other. In the Taoistic understanding, to appropriate is to act appropriately; that is, in harmony with other environing particulars.\textsuperscript{54} But harmony is not conformity, and what is required is not submission to other particulars or selves. Where there is submission, there is also imposition, and thus harmony or mutual coming together of the particulars does not abide here. Instead, there will be a domination of one particular over other particulars, rendering the latter to be the resource to the former.

Coming together of the particulars so that they can maximize mutual self-disclosure, articulation, or autopoesis is the etymology of the Chinese word for nature, tzu-jan, which literally means self-evidencing. Tzu-jan connotes absence of the self's egoic pretension to be an atomistic substantive self set apart from other particulars, hence from the whole field of tao. Actions emanating from such egoic pretension are considered contrived, unnatural, and ultimately self-defeating. On the other hand, actions and events that emerge spontaneously, as the result of the harmonious coming together of environing particulars, do not bear imposition and controlling egoic willfulness. Harmony is this emergence and not of any particular's doing. The term wu-wei, usually rendered as 'non-action', expresses this notion of emergence with respect to those conducts that bring about

\textsuperscript{54} I would like to point out that "appropriately" and "proprioceptively" share the same Latin root meaning of "one's own."
harmony. The literal interpretation of wu-wei as doing nothing and making no effort is another misunderstanding because when thus interpreted, puzzlement sets in as to the seemingly contradicting counsel, evident in the Taoist and zen practices, that we make ceaseless effort in self-cultivation. However, there is no contradiction here. We have to make a ceaseless effort to overcome the atomistic, substantive notion of the self; but as for the harmonious, emergent outcome which is the result of the particulars being coextensive and synchronistic with each other, the outcome is not something over which the particulars have a control.

However, this self-cultivation in the Taoist context, in which a person makes an effort to overcome the usual substantive selfhood, is an enormously difficult endeavour, especially given our usual deeply-entrenched beliefs in and practices of substantive selfhood. Certainly, conceptualizing nonduality, insubstantiality, no-self, and the like, which has been largely the endeavour of this chapter, is helpful in that it orients us to the possibility of nonsubstantive experience. The next step following this conceptualization is an empirical attempt at such experience. Unless we can actually perceive, feel, and act in the mode of insubstantiality, our theoretical preparations through arguments and analogies, such as I have done in this chapter, would not be fulfilled. We are brought to the door, prepared to see the inside, but the actual opening of the door has not yet been effected. The following chapter is concerned with an experiment of opening the door. The approach taken is experiential investigation: we take our experience and closely investigate it in order to empirically confirm the theoretical possibilities hitherto presented.
Chapter Three

Deconstruction of ego-self: an experiential approach

To study Buddhism is to study the self.
To study the self is to forget the self.
To forget the self is to be one with others.
--Dogen--
One does not err by perceiving, one errs by clinging;
But knowing clinging itself as mind, it frees itself.
--Padmasambhava--

3.1. Chapter Introduction

To realize that much of our knowledge is just theoretical and not embodied in the way we perceive, feel, and act in the concrete context of relating to the world is sobering indeed. However, the shortfall does not lie with theoretical knowledge *per se* but with its failure to be tested out and embodied in experience so as to transform our being-in-the-world. This failure is particularly unacceptable when it concerns theories that could have direct bearings upon the way we experience and conduct ourselves. If theories are not applied to our experience for both validation and embodiment, they are as good as naught.

In the preceding chapter, I endeavoured to explore and advance the epistemological thesis that negates the two-sided notion of subject-independent object and object-independent subject or ego-self and in doing so, bring out its import to morality. Simply put, if the substantive boundary between the self and the Other blurs and even disappears altogether, the notion and the practice of morality as regulator of this boundary would become superfluous. However, this epistemological thesis, at least in the context of Western philosophy, usually lacks experiential exploration, validation and, hence, embodiment. This is so because, as Varela et al. (1993) had noted, Western philosophy has been predominantly concerned with
rational enquiry and understanding rather than with transforming our daily experience. This is particularly the case in the modern development of Western philosophy as an academic discipline. However, Western philosophy started out in ancient Greek and Roman times with a practical purpose which was the desire to transform our understanding, perception, sentiment, and conduct, or in short, the whole personality, so as to enable men and women to lead a flourishing life. *Eudaimonia* was the ideal that philosophy ultimately served. Men and women, troubled by life's complexities and vicissitude, sought philosophical therapies such as those offered by the stoics, the epicureans, and the skeptics.55

In this chapter, I shall explore one philosophical-experiential tradition outside Western philosophy which has been concerned centrally with examining and embodying the thesis of non-substantiality of subject and object, and this is Buddhism.56 In presenting the Buddhist philosophy and practice for examination, I wish to clarify my position which is that I am not

55 For an extensive discussion of philosophy as therapy in Hellenistic times, see Nussbaum's *Therapy of Desires*. As for the modern version of philosophy-as-therapy, we may point to the contemporary practice of conceptual clarification. Such therapy could lead us out of linguistically-conceptual confusions, puzzlement, and obsessions, especially of the metaphysical sort. Wittgenstein (1958, p. 103) asks: "What is your aim of philosophy?" His answer is "To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." Though his remark is directed at philosophers and their penchant to mire themselves in metaphysics, to the extent humans in general are disposed to conceptualize about reality, his remark can be extended to apply to this general human tendency to conceptualize and "metaphysicalize."

56 It appears that other spiritual traditions, such as Christianity, Sufism, and certainly Hinduism (which was the matrix for Buddhism) also aim at the birth of new perception and understanding, hence new ways of being, through transforming the egoic consciousness. I chose to examine the Buddhist practice rather than these others for a number of reasons. The foremost reason is that I am familiar with Buddhist philosophy and meditation but not familiar enough with the others. The second reason is that the core Buddhist teaching and practices, originating with Sakyamuni (the Buddha), are fundamentally nontheistic and hence can be investigated apart from any religious doctrines (which are irrelevant to this research) that might have grown around them. I suspect that this cannot be said of other spiritual traditions, but I cannot be too certain. The third reason is that the Buddhist psychology has carefully worked out analyses of human intentionality (perception, desire, feelings, etc.), which lends itself well to a theoretical scrutiny.
concerned with Buddhism as a religion that is often practised within the usual theistic metaphysics of salvation of the substantive self or soul. Such metaphysics is, in fact, in contradiction with the central teaching of Sakyamuni which is the rejection of the substantiality of the self. His teaching was a massive and radical criticism of the strongly substantialist and essentialist metaphysics, as well as the rigid sociopolitical and moral structures founded upon it, that dominated India in his times as it still does everywhere in ours.

The focus of this chapter is more on the exploration of the methods and the results of the Buddhist examination of experience. The method takes the form of mindful awareness practice, popularly known as meditation. Mindful awareness meditation aims at careful and open-minded observation and investigation of experience as it occurs in everyday living. The only tool required, albeit very hard to acquire, is attention. For this reason, this meditation is called satipatthana or "establishment of mindfulness." But since the purpose of mindful awareness is also to gain experiential insight into the nature of experience—namely, non-substantiality of the self—it is called vipassana (insight) meditation. Vipassana meditation aims at meticulous microanalysis of ordinary experience in order to see how experience appears close-up. The result is a disclosure of its layeredness or compositeness, its conditionality and, most importantly, the absence of the substantive self. This disclosure could eventually dispel the "illusion" (maya) of the separate, autonomous, and enduring I-ness, thus freeing us from the obsessive and desperate attachment to the ego-self, which is the root

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57 The reader may notice the recurrence of this important term from our previous discussions on Murdoch's loving attention.

58 This form of meditation was initiated by Sakyamuni and was revolutionary because it was the first of its kind in Indian history. See Kalupahana (1987, p. 73).
cause of human suffering, according to the Buddhist analysis.

3.2. Microanalysis of experience in search of the ego-self

Ordinarily, the sense of ego-self we have is so strong and self-evident that it is practically immune to challenge. Even when it is challenged and said to be deflated, such as when we are humiliated, the sense of ego-self is intact: if we did not have the sense of ego-self, we could not feel humiliated. But difficulty is not impossibility, and under suitable conditions what seems like an unchallengeable given of our experiential reality may reveal its constructed and, therefore, contingent nature. The suitable condition that Buddhist meditation creates is refinement of attention to such a degree that one can catch sight of moment-by-moment, continuous arising and passing of various psychophysical (namarupa) components such as: 1) the awareness or recognition of object as the content of consciousness; 2) perceptions or discernments built thereupon; 3) feelings and sensations concurrently arising with these; 4) conditioned dispositions that influence all of the psychophysical components such as cravings, aversion, confidence, and anxiety; and 5) continuous sense of consciousness. Briefly, these are what

59 Called rupa, or material form, it refers to "the body and the physical environment." However, the notion of the physical body here is not to be understood as matter in the usual understanding which separates matter from the perceiving mind. Varela et al. states (1993, p. 64): "..our encounter with the physical is already situated and embodied. Matter is described experientially."

60 Called sanna or perception, it is the function of recognizing something as something. Perception is not separate from other mental functions or activities. For instance, there cannot be sanna without there being awareness of rupa. Says Kalupahana (1987, p. 18): "Each one of our perceptions constitutes a mixed bag of memories, concepts, and dispositions as well as the material elements or the functions referred to as rupa."

61 Called vedana, feeling or sensation is inevitable in experience, and hence is part of any cognition. However, feelings are distinguishable from attachment (to the pleasurable) or aversion (to the unpleasurable). Attachment and aversion arise not from the feelings themselves but from the egoic sense of "I," and this distinction is central to Buddhist ethics. More on this later.

62 Kalupahana (1987, p. 19) quotes Sakyamuni's definition of disposition (sankhara): "that which processes material form, feeling, perception, disposition [itself] and consciousness into
are known as the five aggregates or *pancakkhandha* in Sakyamuni's teaching. These aggregates are heuristic, conceptual tools with which the meditator could examine her experience more closely in search of the ego-self. The importance of these tools is that they enable us to observe more clearly otherwise blurry and vanishing experience.

There is much hair-splitting dispute among the Abhidhamma schools over the precise manner in which the aggregates were temporally-causally related (Varela et al., 1993; Kalupahana, 1986), but it is not necessary to go into their debates to establish the main point that is relevant to us. The point of the aggregate analysis is to provide a systematic and exhaustive search scheme for the self. It is akin to mapping out closely a terrain where a fabulous creature allegedly lurked so that the explorers could do an exhaustive search; and should they return empty-handed, they could conclude with confidence that the creature was not there. Hume (1968) also undertook a similar exercise, though not as rigorously as in vipassana practice, and came up with the conclusion that all he found was "a bundle of perceptions."

Behind the functions of any of these aggregates, is there a substantive self who becomes aware, perceives, feels, likes, and is aware of being aware? According to the logic of common sense, the subject is behind the activities of

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63 But this continuous sense of consciousness (*vinnana*) is not due to its being a substantive entity. Rather, as Sakyamuni explains, it is due to the continuous flow of experience, especially thanks to the guiding force of dispositional tendencies.

64 This Pali term literally means "heap." It is said that Sakyamuni first taught these categories of psychophysical components using piles of grain to stand for each aggregate.

65 Abhidhamma texts are considered canonical because, though they are not Sakyamuni's own words in the early Discourses, they nonetheless are purely the systematizations of these without modifications.
these aggregates: they happen within the subject. "I see..., I feel..., I want..., I am aware, and I am aware that I am the one doing all these." But, apart from the grammar of expressing the experience, upon a closer examination, we would see that the self is not to be found in any of these aggregates for the simple reason that all these categories refer to experiential phenomena of transient and constantly changing experience whereas the ego-self we are looking for is continuous and immutable or self-identical; therefore, it cannot be found in any of these aggregates.

If the self is not to be found in any of the aggregates, then how about in their unity? After all, aggregates make up experience which is in unity, and the self may in fact be the unifying agent, the subject in whom these arise or who constructs these into coherent events, and this is exactly what the grammar of the expression, "I feel..., I intend..., etc." shows. The self would be the holder or author of these aggregates. Notice that such is the logic that Kant followed in his argument for the transcendental ego.66

3.3. Codependent arising of the psychophysical aggregates accounts for the apparent sense of the ego-self

Sakyamuni rejected such logic, for it implies that the self lies outside the aggregates, hence experience, and this implication is unacceptable. Even the theory of the emergent self--self as an emergent property of the aggregates--will not do for the same reason that the self that we are searching for is not a postulated, abstract, transcendental self, but must be given to us in our experience. If we cannot find it in experience despite an exhaustive search, then we must conclude that such a self is unfounded.

66 See Kant's argument in Critique of Pure Reason, (1929: p. 136): "No fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances...there must be a condition which precedes all experience, and which makes experience itself possible."
However, no agent, whether emergent or not, outside the aggregates is required to account for the unity or coherence of experience. Sakyamuni's aggregate analysis provides the account for the unity and continuity of experience without the self. Or, to turn it around, the account can be seen as an explanation for the apparent sense of the ego-self. How is this so? The aggregates already arise interconnected with one another, and so no agent is needed to connect and process them. In the terminology of Buddhism, these aggregates arise codependently (patițcasamuppada) according to the workings of causality (kamma in Pali or karma in Sanskrit). It is this codependent arising which gives a sense of coherence and continuity to the flow of experience which Sakyamuni pictured as a stream of becoming.

For an example, let us examine the most important aggregate from the viewpoint of ethics: disposition. Disposition permeates the whole of experience and is, therefore, inseparable from all other functions. Kalupahana (1987: 18-19) states that "[a]lmost everything including physical phenomena, come under the strong influence of this most potent cause of evolution of the human personality as well as its surroundings." Specific dispositions in individuals predispose them to the particular outcome patterns of perception, feeling, and actions. It is, in fact, these particular patterns of dispositions which identify individuals as who they are. In turn, individuals identify themselves with the established patterns of dispositions to the point that they end up with a solid sense of the substantive self. Tendencies become substances. (Just how this happens will be discussed later.)

This solidification or reification of tendencies or probabilities, or to put it another way, confusing probability with inherent property, is what creates the substantialist view. The outcome of this view is that the self, contrary to
its self-understanding of acting autonomously, is enacting its past history of causal conditioning. It enacts its "script," actualizing the tendency, thereby reinforcing its conditioning and further strengthening the sense of autonomous, self-same I-ness.

The Buddhist teaching is clear on this point of equating the sense of I-ness with conditioned intentionality in which dispositions play a crucial role. The word 'karma' (or kamma in Pali, literally meaning 'action' or 'behaviour'), now commonly found in contemporary English vocabulary but usually incorrectly understood, designates psychological causality created through conditioned intentionality. In its original meaning, as it is still used in the Buddhist discourse, karma does not mean predetermination or fate: rather, it means psychological causality or causal intentionality operative in the conditioned mind. Causal intentionality, or simply-called causality, is portrayed as a Wheel of Life, consisting of twelve links, depicting "the circular structure of habitual patterns, the binding chain, each link of which conditions and is conditioned by each of the others" (Varela et al 1993). Hence, the term 'codependent arising' (paticcasamuppada).

The first link in the wheel that sets the person moving in her karmic becoming is ignorance (avidya), meaning not knowing about the absence of ego-self (or more broadly, non-substantiality with respect to both the subject and the object). The belief in the ego-self, like the thread that runs through the beads in a necklace, binds together causally all the other links in the Wheel in this order: volitional action, consciousness, psychophysical or mental-sensory complex, six senses, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, decay and death.67 Remove the belief in the ego-self and all

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67 For a visual representation of this wheel and a more detailed discussion, see Varela et al (1993), Chapter 4, especially, p. 112.
the other links come undone. Removing the belief, however, is not simple and easy at all, for it has been worked into our volition, consciousness, psychophysical functioning, sensory perceptions, and feelings.68

According to Sakyamuni's analysis, what is crucially involved in working the belief in the ego-self into the fabric of experience/consciousness is our very facility of conceptualization. This facility decisively contributes to the making of the substantialist view with respect to the self. What is notable about Sakyamuni's analysis of conceptualization is that this facility, called mano or mind, is understood as belonging to sense perception along with the usual five senses and their objects. That is, mind is one of the sense organs and concepts are one of the sensory objects. This analysis of the mind as another sense organ and its functioning, another sense perception, has a very significant epistemological import. In the Buddhist analysis, mind does not occupy an independent category outside ephemeral sense perception, thereby becoming the enduring, self-same "entity." In other words, mind is not reified, which reduces the chance of our attributing the status of substance to it. Recall the substance notion of the mind which we have been stuck with for so long (and there is no end of it in sight). The dualism between the mental substance (mind) and the physical substance (matter) refuses to go away even under the assault of contemporary physicalism.

The continuous processing of the six senses and their objects feed into

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68 It is noteworthy that object relations theory in psychology claims that the usual sense of self that we take for a given is a developmental achievement of childhood. Two things are achieved: self-identity, meaning the notion of ego-self, and object constancy. Engler (1986, p. 22) notes that the subjective sense of self as experienced to be unitary, cohesive or integrated, continuous, and separate is "literally constructed out of our experience with the object world." Crucial to this construction is the individual child's separation-individuation process contingent upon early bonding and self-differentiation. Since this process takes place in the complex and dynamic matrices of cultural beliefs and practices of the family and the larger society, it is reasonable to conjecture that the construction of the ego-self is contingent upon these beliefs and practices. Indeed, there are crosscultural studies that support the claim. See, for example, Roland (1988) and Pratt (1991).
the stream of consciousness, giving a particular "form" and "feel" to the individual's consciousness and these condition the consciousness. Thus, human consciousness is viewed as a compound of six different consciousnesses pertaining to the six senses, the sixth being the mind (Kalupahana 1987). Mano, however, has special relationships with other sense organs and their objects in that it converts their percepts into concepts. This conversion from the impermanent, immediate, insubstantialistic percepts to durable, change-resisting, solid concepts characterizes the process of solidification or reification. And this conversion is aided by memory which, at least in the case of humans, seems closely associated with conceptualization. In the process of conversion, the sense of empirical self, one like the Taoist sense of self, that is ephemeral, fluid, not dichotomous, and is given in the immediate experiences solidifies into the

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69 For further explanation, see Kalupahana (1987, pp. 29-32).
70 I find it intriguing that the Buddhist understanding that memory is involved in creating a unified and continuous sense of self (the substantive self) accords with the contemporary account of apparent motion, such as Kolers' (1972). In commenting on the findings of the experiments by Kolers, Goodman (1978, p. 79) points out that our visual system (and I should think, all other sensory systems) is driven "towards uniformity and continuity, constrained by its anatomy and physiology, and influenced by what it has seen and done before, but improvising along the way." This improvisation in the service of creating uniformity and continuity seems to rely heavily on the memory of the past perception-interpretation. That is, memory supplements the in-coming information that alone is insufficient to produce uniformity and continuity. Goodman, departing from Kolers' interpretation, speculates that in this kind of reconstruction based on insufficient information, the reconstruction may be a retrospective event. That is, our visual system first gathers information in real-time, in which the preceding information is remembered, and only when the last information is gathered, then it retrospectively constructs the best possible pattern of motion in accordance with its various constraints. But, unlike this backward order of perceptual construction, our experience is in the usual forward temporal sequence.
71 Ordinarily, it is rather difficult to recall or imagine what this sense of empirical self is like because we are usually deeply entrenched in the sense of the substantive self with all its accumulated identities as to who we are and how we are. Outside the experience of meditation, it is rather difficult to capture the sense of phenomenological self, but perhaps what comes close to it is something like the experience of waking up from a dreamless nap and suddenly looking out at the world and momentarily not knowing who we are. Also there are those moments when we are so astonished and gripped by what we see that we are in the state of forgetfulness about ourselves and find ourselves just being there in and with the world (such as when we behold a splendid sunset), and such moments seem to allow us to be just our
substantive self that stands behind these experiences, having and processing them. It is a curious process in which one (the mind-sense) among others (all other senses) becomes one over others, owning them and ruling over them. What is lost in this process, besides what is gained, which is tremendous and supports our form of civilization, is the sense of fluidity, impermanence, and insubstantiality which characterizes sensory perception. I shall argue in the next chapter that the loss is devastating as far as our psychic well-being is concerned and that this has an enormous consequence on how we relate to the world and each other, the consequence that would be reflected in our ethical theorizing.

3.4. Undoing the reification of the self through mindfulness practice

The notion of or belief in the ego-self is then the product (but not the precondition, as Kant thought) of conceptual reification due to the genius of mental functioning. Since it is the conceptualization that has created the substantive self out of the nonsubstantive percepts, the attempt to dispel the substantive self has the best chance if it sees through and breaks through conceptualization and at the same time focuses on the awareness itself. This two-sided attempt characterizes in a nutshell the basic process of mindfulness practice or meditation. If this methodological objective sounds deceptively

phenomenological selves.

72 Mistake me not: conceptualization is the backbone of our (all of the cultures, inclusively), civilized, technological life, and we cannot do without it. I am not advocating doing away with conceptualization. We could use more sophisticated, fluent ability to conceptualize, training of which largely constitutes education. What I am saying, though, is that there could be some undesirable side effects to conceptualization, in particular, equivocation which easily leads to the formation of the belief in the substantive ego-self. This side effect has become so overwhelming that it is taken to be one of the main substances of reality. An antidote to this side effect is not doing away with conceptualization altogether or even reducing it in sophistication, but is skilfully undoing the notion and experience of the ego-self. This is where the "laboratory" setting of mindfulness practice (meditation) is useful. Through the practice, we come to recognize the process and effect of conceptualization and, thereby, gain freedom from it. More about this freedom later.
simple, it is practically very difficult. Beginning students of meditation usually have considerable struggle staying focused on the immediate, moment-to-moment experience, for they are forever carried off into thoughts, especially thoughts about what the self thinks and feels. The usual conditioned pattern of substituting the percepts by concepts (Kalupahana, 1987) is relentless and hard to break away from. Unless one can interrupt and disrupt this pattern, one has little chance of escaping the grip of the substantive view of the world and ourselves.73

Why is it so difficult to stay focused on the moment to moment experience but so easy to be carried off and absorbed into thoughts? I suggest that an explanation lies in the nature of conceptualization, the most accomplished example of which is story-making. Stories are a marvellous device that anchor and conduct our attention and can enthrall us completely. We do not have to exercise our attention to stay focused on the story. Once our attention is committed to a story, we are enfolded into the structured plot of the story and moved along. We simply have to be absorbed into the rhythms and patterns structuring the story in order to be carried along. The key notion that characterizes the story is this structure. What it does is to capture and guide our attention and, hence, our experience, thereby creating the sense of structured, substantial entity: this is the mind. Egan makes this comment on the role of stories in creating the mind (1988, p. 96): "The

73 Buddhist meditation training begins with concentration. Being able to focus one's attention so as to gain freedom from the incessantly interrupting and wandering thought process is requisite to the next step in the training which is to direct the attention to the micro-observation of the thought process itself and the conceptual products of this process. The concentration practices disrupt the normal flow and mode of the thought process, thereby freeing the meditator from the fixed images of the self as a substantive thinker and doer. Dualism of self and other and substantiveness of the self begin to break down through concentration practices. Mark Epstein (1995) offers an insightful explanation that the concentration practices lead us out of the static spatial metaphor of the self to the more fluid temporal metaphor. As we shall see, awareness of fluid temporality is at the heart of experiencing the flux.
invention of the story was a crucial stage in the discovery of the mind. What was invented was a narrative form that worked at increasing the memorizability of its contents." Egan goes on to explain how stories fix meanings, especially affective meanings, in us. Since affective meanings are intimately involved in the formation of dispositions, and dispositions are involved in I-making, we may conclude that stories have a great deal to do with I-making, as I shall explain shortly. Mind as a structure is not all like the Lockean *tabula rasa* but bears dispositional "groovings" of the five aggregates, thus orienting us to apperceive in particular ways. Stories and other linguistic-conceptual devices, including argumentations, engineer these groovings which condition all our experience.

The thesis that story-making is involved in I-making accords with MacIntyre's view (1984, p. 216) of the self as a narrative character. As a narrative character, one enacts the part of the story one finds oneself in, and any degree of freedom one may have in one's enaction is heavily constrained by the script and the role assignment. MacIntyre notes that the key question in this view is not about the self's authorship, for, strictly speaking, the self is not the author who stands outside the narrative but is an actor inside the story, albeit with some degree of freedom to change one's lines and roles.

Now, from the Buddhist viewpoint of radical deconstruction of the self, this theory of the narrative self is incomplete because it implies a denial of the possibility of jumping out of the story. If one can recognize something to be a story and that one is acting a role in the story, then it is logically possible, even if difficult, to walk out of the story and the acting. It is only when one does not realize that one is in a story that one takes one's script for real and goes on acting. The very fact that one holds the narrative view of human selves and human life should logically commit one to the position
that there exists an existential space outside the narrative into which one can exit. What prevents us from exiting from the story? The conditionality of the self? How could it be that we are condemned to live in the story, even knowing that it is a story? The import of this question is that there is a faulty logic to the narrative view that implicitly insists on the impossibility of jumping out of the narrative structure of the self.

The view of no-self explored so far would argue that knowing that the ego-self and its intentionality are narratives would logically and inevitably transport the knower away from the narrative context. We may say that knowing creates ontological discontinuity. It is as though one wakes up to a different order of reality, discontinuous with the narrative reality of the ego-self.

However as it is sometimes very difficult to exit from a dream, the hold that the narrative structure of the ego-self has on us is tremendous, and it is terribly hard to wake up from it. Just where does its power come from? As we saw, its power is the power of the narrative structure. A story is complete with a plot and characters. It is a coherent structure in which the characters and events unfold according to some causal schemas. The narrative universe is structured around organizing principles (the belief in the ego-self being the prominent one) that condition our perceptions of and interpretive responses to the world. In other words, we learn conceptually to perceive-interpret the world. Such is also the argument that Polanyi (1962) and Hayak (1969) put forth about our learning to put together the "reality" and the superimpositions of the abstract upon our sense-perception to construe apperception. The abstract—that is, the conceptual—provides the organizing/interpreting principles around which we organize and interpret
reality in definite, particular terms.\textsuperscript{74}

The notion of substantive ego-self standing behind the process and the act of perceiving, thinking, judging, willing, and acting as the author, owner, and agent is one of the supreme organizing principle/concept we have. Our form of civilization practically runs on this principle. Certain benefits aside, however, living our lives as ego-selves brings a lot of suffering into the world. The Tibetan teacher Tsultrim Gyamtso explains human suffering:

We all act as if we had lasting, separate, and independent selves that it is our constant pre-occupation to protect and foster. It is an unthinking habit that most of us would normally be most unlikely to question or explain. However, all our suffering is associated with this pre-occupation. All loss and gain, pleasure and pain arise because we identify so closely with this vague feeling of selfness that we have. We are so emotionally involved with and attached to this 'self' that we take it for granted. (Gyamtso, 1986, p. 20)

It is the fundamental insight of Buddhism that life lived as an ego-self is subtly or grossly shaded with suffering. Suffering is inherent in the nature of ego-self since it is grasping or avoiding, in pursuit of or in aversion to, the object of its experiences. Grasping or avoiding is suffering in the sense of being agitated and not being at ease with the moment's "beingness."\textsuperscript{75} This pattern of grasping or avoiding responses stems from the ego-self's self-definition as a separate, lasting, and independent self. It follows logically from this view that dispelling the belief in the ego-self dissolves suffering. But the way to dispel this belief ultimately is not with another belief, not...

\textsuperscript{74} There seems to be some essential difference between these theorists and the Buddhist theorists and practitioners of vipassana, and the difference is that the former would not consider it possible to "undo" the superimposition in the sense of seeing through its constructedness and possibly doing something to alter it, while the latter affirms this possibility.

\textsuperscript{75} Some may argue that this agitation is a necessary part of the life of activity. Without this agitation, one will not be motivated to do anything because one is too content to just be. There is no doubt that such agitation is often the driving force behind our activities. But to endorse it is like endorsing "necessary evils," or like arguing that there cannot be material progress without human greed. Or, more to home, it is like arguing that without appropriate punishment, students will not learn.
even the belief in the no-ego-self, but through experiencing the state of awareness unbound by the cognitive and dispositional manifestations of the ego-self. Once established, this state of awareness will give us a new reference point from which to view the phenomena of ego-self. Only from this viewpoint can we say with the Tibetan master Tsultrim Gyamtso that the ego-self believes and behaves as if the egoic mode of perception and action is the only one available to humans.

The state of non-egoic awareness is not achieved independently from the egoic mode. To acquire the former, it is not as though we have to go somewhere else outside the egoic mode. It is emphasized again and again in Buddhist literature that the non-egoic mode of awareness and experience is achieved through transforming the egoic mode. There is no other way. We take the raw material of our ordinary conceptualizing, dualistic, substantializing mind that gives rise to ten thousand discriminations and preferences and then transmute it by releasing the mind from conceptualization. Now, the objective here is not so much to destroy conceptual discriminations and preferences as to unanchor them from the ground awareness so that we can discern and experience this ground awareness. Such, then, is the objective of meditation. To emphasize, meditation is not the suppression or even the annihilation of thinking/conceptualizing but disclosing the fundamental field of awareness which underlies but cannot be identified with the conceptualizing mind. Soygal Rinpoche (1993, p. 74) explains of meditation: "The secret is not to 'think' about thoughts, but to allow them to flow through the mind, while keeping your mind free of afterthoughts." When thoughts are allowed to

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76 This is symbolized by the lotus whose pure blossoms represent the enlightened mind of nonegoic awareness emerging out of the muddy pond water of egoic consciousness.
arise and pass away freely, which is made possible when we do not cling to them and identify with them, then we can catch glimpses of the spacious awareness between and around the thoughts. In other words, catching the glimpse of and opening into the gap between arising thoughts afford us the best way to establish ourselves in the practice of meditation. Again to quote Soygal Rinpoche (1993, p. 75): "So the work of meditation is to allow thoughts to slow down, to make that gap become more and more apparent."  

3.4.1 Attentional Training

The gaps we are seeking between thoughts are hard to secure. In the beginning of our meditation practice, gaps are often nowhere to be found. Thoughts come in such an unbroken succession that they seem solidly fused together. In the Theravada meditation texts, this state of fused thoughts is referred as "compactness." This sense of compactness, in which there are no gaps between thoughts and which characterizes our ordinary mode of perception, may contribute to our perceiving the world and ourselves as solid objects occupying three-dimensional space. To recall the notion I related earlier, the process of meditation affects our cognition and shifts it from the spatial mode of understanding to the temporal mode. The spatial mode promotes conceptual structure-embedding in experience, whereas the temporal mode promotes appreciating moment-to-moment transitory experience. As we shall see, when we can observe minutely the moment-to-moment formation and dissolution of perception and emotion, can we discover the perception prior to the imposition of conceptual categories. The

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77 Soygal Rinpoche's insight here comes from his own teacher, Jamyang Khyentze, who one time gave this advice to a student: "When the past thought has ceased, and the future thought has not yet risen, isn't there a gap?" Jamyang went on to tell him that meditation consisted of prolonging the gap.

78 See Engler's (1986) discussion on the stages of insight meditation, in specific, pp.41-43.
effects that the shift brings about is "dispelling the illusion of compactness" through observing the temporal succession of arising and passing thoughts (Engler, 1986, p. 41). But because thoughts ordinarily crowd our awareness so densely and wildly, we cannot discern their punctuatedness and the gaps between them. As it were, they form one big mass. Attentional training is first and foremost a training in calming down the noisy mind so that each thought or emotion-thought and the gap between them become discernable to the meditator. The training increases attentional acuity as well so that the meditator can watch more clearly the arising and the passing away of thoughts.

However, attentional training demands rigour and dedication to which we are unaccustomed. The momentary arising and passing of sense experience lacks structure and, hence, lacks enthralling power. Thus to stay focused on it, one has to have a persistent and well-tuned attention. It is hard to attend to the impermanent, for it requires giving attention moment by moment. Hence, satipatthana, meaning "establishment in mindfulness" is important. One has to be mindful of each passing moment. Meditation is this training in mindfulness or attention. Without such training, it is difficult to notice the absence of the substantive self, codependent arising of mental aggregates, and the enactment of conditionality (karma). We cannot notice them because we are unable to sustain our attention for an extended period of time and observe the flow of experience and all its minute eddies; nor is our attention detached enough to watch the constant coming into being and passing out of being of the mental content. Instead, our attention is constantly absorbed into the content itself. We get pulled into the story--the well-rehearsed script constructed by the ego-self. Anyone who undertakes a meditation session for the first time usually notices how incredibly easy it is
for the attention to be scattered and absorbed into both thoughts and feelings. Before one realizes it, one is carried away once again for the hundredth and thousandth time, deep into the unending train of one's thoughts and thoughts about feelings/sensations. It is only with much perseverance and effort, comparable to learning to play a musical instrument or mastering any other rigorous art, that one gradually trains one's attention.

The most essential part of attentional training is liberating awareness from the content of thoughts, including thoughts about our feelings and sensations so that one can "watch" without being absorbed into and identifying with the particular content of the on-going mental pageantry. This is, indeed, a difficult art since what usually happens is that we select, analyze, interpret, elaborate, and generally react to the thoughts and feelings that arise. For example, one may blush and squirm at the thought of past embarrassing incidents. Still embarrassed by these events, one then goes into some face-saving explanations and/or justifications. Or, one may fall into self-condemnation and despair. As another example, a thought concerning an incident that made one angry may arise. At the thought, one may re-experience the anger, and as result, may start thinking about the ways to get even with the supposed offender. As yet one more example, a pleasurable thought arise, and one keeps savouring and elaborating it to further enjoy oneself.

All these examples show how we interminably participate in the content of our thoughts. It is not easy for us to let thoughts arise and pass

79 The question would arise and stay at the beginning stage of meditation as to who watches the stream of thoughts. To acknowledge that there is the watcher is to once again affirm the substantive self. But this question only arises from the dualistic subject-object mode and dissolves when this mode disappears as the mindfulness practice advances. One comes to experience the (self)awareness without identifying it as a separate self. It is an awareness in which the categorical distinction between the observer and the observed and the knower and the known dissolves, leaving only the unitive, nondual awareness.

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away as soon as they arise because we cling to them. We are attached to them because our self-identity is bound up with them. This is the work of tanha, translated as desire. Tanha subtly or not so subtly is overlaid on all our sense perception and thought perception. This is why we cling to them. Through careful attentional training in meditation, we learn to discern and separate tanha from thoughts and perception. Separated from the relentlessly driving tanha, thoughts, perceptions, and emotions float up and pass away like clouds in the sky. Sogyal Rinpoche (1993, p. 67) advises: “Whatever you see, whatever you hear, leave it as it is, without grasping. Leave the hearing in the hearing, leave the seeing in the seeing, without letting your attachment enter into the perception.” Thus, in the training, the most important thing one learns is to make one’s attention “bare,” non-selective, and non-reactive (Engler, 1986). One does not repress, control, criticize, or react to anything that rises in the mind but simply allows everything to arise and pass away.

The objective of mindfulness (sati) practice is to get past the surface level of cognition which is dominated by the conversational or script-following mind and penetrate into the more elemental level of experience—that is, to the senses themselves, which exhibits the dynamic process of five aggregates of which we spoke earlier. “Back to the senses”, we might say. The elemental process or level of experience-making is not easily “visible” to us unless we break through the superimposed outermost layer, the conceptual

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80 As we shall examine more closely later, delinking of tanha from thoughts, sensations, and percepts, which are usually fused together, is the “fulcrum point” in meditation training.

81 The training of attention or mindfulness is the opposite of conditioning in which we learn to react consistently to selected stimuli. The point of mindfulness is to see the conditioned pattern of mental aggregates arising, thereby gaining freedom from the conditioned pattern. How is this freedom gained? Conditioning results from the necessity of causal link. That is, there is a sense of compelling necessity from one node in the causality to the next. But, if one were to see through this, that is, to see that the so-called necessity is of a conditioned nature, then the compelling sense of necessity disappears, at which point one is free from the conditionality.
layer of the mind. However, separated does not mean destroyed or negated: it simply means undoing the fusion so as to see the compositeness. For this reason, mindfulness practice may best be characterized as a deconstructive or refracting process. It deconstructs experience into the composite states so as to reveal both the layer in which the substantialist I-ness resides and its absence in the elemental layer of sense-making. The understanding to be gained from this experiential deconstruction is that beliefs in substances, whether of the objective or the subjective (ego-self), are unfounded since if anything is a substance, then it has to exist at any level of experience. That the sense of the substantive self disappears at the elemental level of experience indicates that the notion of the substantive self is unfounded. Thus, the sense of substantiality with respect to the self and the non-self is only apparent. Hence, the idea that substantiality is illusory and that reality is empty of substantiality. Such, in a nutshell, is the Buddhist thesis of sunnata or emptiness.

The above expositions are prone to a misunderstanding that the negation of substantiality is absolute nothingness, hence nihilism. This was not Sakyamuni's understanding. In denying the substantive self, he certainly did not deny the existence of the psychophysical (namarupa) personality (Kalupahana, 1986). Kalupahana (1986, p. 40) sums up Sakyamuni's position, which is often called the "middle path" of "avoiding both extremes of nihilism (uccheda) and eternalism (sassata)": "Absolute self-negation as well as absolute self-assertion are not only morally repugnant, but also epistemologically unwarranted."

Another likely error again marks the substantialist tendency. This time, the talk of disclosing the elemental level of experience to show the absence of the substantialist self is construed as discovering the "ultimate"
reality or nature. This, too, betrays the substantialist viewpoint. For, whatever is ultimate has to be the foundation upon which everything else is built while it itself is self-given and independent. Sakyamuni's "radical empiricism" rejects even the ultimacy of what is experientially revealed as the substrata of experience, such as the five aggregates. The theory of the five aggregates, the sense experience involving the six sense organs, and the causal conditionality (the wheel of life or kamma)—all these conceptual frameworks or categories that Sakyamuni worked out are heuristic devices with which to examine experience and to discover nonsubstantiality. The very fact that one conceptual device reveals reality to be one way and another one to be some other way only serves to invalidate the whole substantialist epistemology. The end of substantialist epistemology is the beginning of radical empiricism which is not just another metaphysics but an end of metaphysics and the beginning of the practice of mindfulness, of a way of being characterized by appeasement (samatha) of the substantialistic dispositions and views. In other words, Sakyamuni's attack on substantialism was not with another metaphysics, not even if that was of nonsubstantialism, which would have been self-defeating, but it was with a

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82 Kalupahana (1987) draws the parallel between Sakyamuni's empiricism and William James', showing both to be of this kind of radical empiricism.

83 This understanding that teachings, consisting of various conceptual devices, are contingent tools, albeit efficacious or skilful, distinguishes a nondogmatic system of thought from a dogmatic one. The latter creates a category of absolute truths (and their opposite, subjective values). This understanding about nondogmatic system is most dramatically illustrated by the famous Zen saying which advises the aspirant to kill the Buddha if she meets one on the road. Meeting the Buddha on the road signifies relating to the teaching as an objectified body of absolute truths, i.e., dogma.

84 Brown's (1986) comparative study of three meditation traditions (Tibetan Mahamudra, the Hindu Yogasutras, and the Theravada Vipassana) points out the determining role of theoretical perspectivism in shaping different enlightenment experiences, despite their congruence at the formal level of the stage-progression involved in the psychological transformation.
proposal to remove the dispositions towards substantialism.\footnote{Angel succinctly explains the difference between a metaphysical position that criticizes metaphysics and what I call a "therapeutic" position that tries to dissolve the will to metaphysics. Now, the therapy could and usually does involve theorizing; nonetheless, the distinction is crucial to preventing misunderstanding. Angel (1994, p. 150) states: "Certainly there are many Buddhist systems...in which the release from the ego is suggested to be a release from ignorance and delusion. However, there are two ways to take such suggestions. One is to hold that the metaphysical perspectives of ego-released stances are preferable, more accurate, or in some sense truer than that of the ego-stance. The second is to hold that the release from delusion is only a release from the delusion of thinking that the ego-stance is fixed as the only possible stance." I believe that the latter interpretation accords better with Sakyamuni's own teaching and is the one that I adopt here.} Removal of tanha was the key. But since the source of tanha is the belief in the substantive self, deconstruction of this belief is the ultimate challenge that meditators face. In the following section, we will go over stage by stage the progress in attentional training.

3.5. The process of phenomenologically deconstructing the "illusion" of substantive "I"

Ordinarily, substantialistic dispositions and views dominate our mental processes as is easily seen in the way we react to things, taking things as if they are the way they are inherently. As long as we experience reactively, there is little hope of overcoming substantialism. Hence, we need to train ourselves in mindfulness. When one is capable of steady and non-reactive attention, the first thing to occur is breaking through the "illusion of compactness" (Engler, 1986). What is meant by compactness is the sense of immediate givenness with respect to both the world and the self. This immediate givenness defies analysis and presents itself as how things are inherently or objectively. The perception simply pops onto the "screen" of awareness, thereby creating an impression of objective reality, separate from the perceiver.

But if one could observe the process by which we arrive at our
perceptions—that is, the way it comes to be, through the activities of the five aggregates—the magic of the substantialistic givenness or objectivity would evaporate. As an analogy, if I could see this rock in front of me subatomically and see billions of buzzing electrons in what seems like an infinite space, my substantialistic perception and understanding of this rock could not remain intact. This is not fanciful talk since sophisticated instruments do allow us to see beyond the ordinary level of perception. Or, as a more concrete example, suppose I harbour a racist perception of a certain ethnic group. To me, members of this group have certain attributes because I think that is how they "objectively" appear. But suppose I become very mindful of the way I interpret the world and can see how my conditioned dispositional reactions, such as aversions, fear, envy, and insecurity, have shaped my perception. If I were able to witness, while I am perceiving, the way my dispositional aggregates "colour" and "shape" my perception, I would then clearly realize, not just theoretically but experientially, that the seemingly subject-independent objectiveness of how things appear is unfounded. Consider again Murdoch's example of the mother-in-law practising look-again in order to transform her perception of the daughter-in-law. This looking again and perceptual change thereby may be taken literally. How things appear can really change before our very eyes.

Both the claim in the canonical Buddhist texts and meditation and contemporary cognitive studies show that with attentional training it is possible to discern experientially, with increasing acuity, the temporal and conditioned nature of information processing and pattern recognition

86 Inasmuch as Kosman (1980) intimates this possibility, our usual view is that this is an impossible expectation. We think that perception is always an end result whose process is forever lost to our awareness. However, the vipassana practice purports to realize this possibility.
involved in perception. The process here is akin to slowing down the speed of movie projection so that one can discern the individual frame-by-frame discontinuous images and see how each frame is integrated into the next one. In the case of attentional training, it is not so much the slowing down of the mental events/percepts as increasing the attentional acuity so that the mental events/percepts are observed at a more microscopic level. This is how Brown explains insight meditation:

Insight meditation is a high-speed analysis of the stream which unfolds over time as a 'succession' of discontinuous or continuous movements... Many thousands of such movements may occur in even short intervals of meditation. The meditator conducts 'analysis of each and every movement'... occurring so rapidly as to go unnoticed in ordinary perception. (Brown, 1986, pp. 246-247)

There have been neurophysiological experiments which demonstrated the time lag between the initial basal perceptual awareness, which is ordinarily not conscious, and the later more cognitive, conscious recognition or conceptualization. Varela et al. (1993) report that "the initial stages of perceptual organization ... precede the more cognitively related electrical correlates by some 100-200 milliseconds." Also, Goswami (1993) cites Libet and Fernstein’s experiment (Libet, 1979) with a finding that there is a time lag of 1/10th to 3/10ths of a second between a behavioural response to a touch stimulus and a verbal response, which is interpreted as indicating the

87 Brown (1986) cites experimental studies of high-speed information processing using a tachistoscope. Brown states (1986, pp. 250-251): "The T-scope has been used to study what humans are capable of becoming aware of at the level prior to conscious attention... Practice also improves information-processing. The yogi doing the insight meditation is doing what T-scope researchers have called a high-speed search task. The categories of insight—nonentityness, dependent origination, sameness in change—are kinds of memory sets. The yogi searches each and every moment of the flow of light to see if there is any match in the original category. With full awareness, the yogi searches events which pass very rapidly, unavailable to ordinary attention. He continues this high-speed search to learn about the structure and operations of perception and to remove the biases to ordinary perception."

88 What this means is that there is unconscious perception: we perceive without being aware of perceiving. Apparently there were some experiments on monkeys and humans that demonstrated unconscious perception. I have not tracked these down yet.

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composite or built-up nature of perception from the initial sensory recognition to the conceptualization upon it.  

Varela et al. (1993) note that it is remarkable that both theories and observations in modern neurophysiology and cognitive science validate the findings about the practitioners who engaged in mindfulness/awareness training centuries ago. Recall Sakyamuni’s theory that the sensory faculty of mind that processes stimuli conceptually is superimposed on all other sensory perceptions. We are normally unaware of this process of superimposition, because it happens too fast for our lax attention, but according to the indications of the classical texts and contemporary experiments, we can catch sight of the process—if we can be attentive enough to observe minutely the flow of experience. Varela et al. comment:

By paying attention over and over again to the details of our embodied situation, awareness of what happens becomes more and more spontaneous. What at the beginning are simply mere flickers of a thought or an emotion become sharper and more apparent in the details of their arising. Through further development, the attention paid to mental movements is sufficiently subtle and quick that mindfulness actually has to be dropped as a distinct attitude. At this point, mindfulness is either spontaneously present or it is not. Then as this inseparability between awareness and mental movement stabilizes further, observations of the fine progression of the aggregates (whether sequential or simultaneous) from moment to moment become possible. (Varela et al., 1993, p. 79)

According to the classical Theravada meditation texts, there are a number of stages to meditation practices, each aimed at achieving a certain perceptual-cognitive transformation and accompanying insights or realizations. A full exposition of these stages and tasks is beyond the scope of this thesis but a summary presentation of the key points would do well both

89 Of course, these experiments I cite do not substantiate the theories here in any conclusive way, but they lend plausibility to them and invite further research.
90 I find Brown’s exposition (1986) to be helpful in that it is able to decipher the recondite language of the classical texts, such as Mahamudra and Yogasutra, in the comparative light of Western cognitive psychological accounts of perception.
to review and to supplement the foregoing exposition on meditation. I focus on the experience of arriving at the experience of disappearing ego-self progressively.

The supreme task of insight meditation is the search for the ego-self—the self that is separate, substantive, and enduring and that is the author or subject of experience. However, the practitioner has little hope of undertaking this task successfully without having progressed in attentional training to the point of being able to "unpack" experience into its constituent components such as the traditionally conceived five aggregates. Also as mentioned, essential to being able to discern aggregates is non-identification with and non-reaction to experiences, whatever they happen to be. It is not the particular content of experience that matters in meditation but the ability to hold attention steady enough to watch without participating in the experience, the moment-by-moment arising and passing of experience in a stream.  

What we are after in meditation is understanding of the nature of the compositional process by which experience comes to be and unfolds.

When experience, which as usual comes swathed in solidified conceptual "images" of things and selves, is dissolved, as it were, into perceptual moments, revealing the dynamics of the five aggregates, and when these moments are experienced in their stream of continuous becoming, the sense of independent I-ness disappears. What remains are just simultaneous and inseparable moment-to-moment knowing (nama) and form (rupa).

There is no additional knower who authors or holds the relationship between nama and rupa.

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91 Kalupahana comments (1986, p. 74): "Mindfulness (sati) is to be established by a process of 're-flection' or 're-cognition' (anu-passana) or looking back, that is, not concentrating upon the immediate moment or point-instant without any attention to what has occurred, but rather looking at the 'historical present' in order to understand the nature of life."
It is said that at the more or perhaps the most advanced stage of mindfulness/awareness, this sense of non-substantiality would permeate all of experience. Engler explains:

When the total moment-to-moment "coming to be and passing away" (udayabbaya) is experienced, there is a profound understanding of the radical impermanence (anicca) of all events. Not only do I no longer perceive any durable "objects," but even the processes of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and sensing themselves come to be and pass away without remainder. In this experience of perpetual and discontinuous change, such notions as a solid body, a durable perceptual object, an internal representation, or even a fixed point of observation no longer appears tenable. I come to understand the lack of any intrinsic durability anywhere; I become aware of the selflessness (anatta) of mind, body, external objects and internal representations. Not only does everything change all the time; there are no "things" which change. (Engler, 1986, p. 43)

What is described here can be rightfully interpreted as process-ontology as opposed to substance-ontology. Process ontology shows reality as a boundless field of possibility into which events emerge and dissipate according to their determining conditions. The enlightened person--one who has taken off his/her substantialist glasses--can experience reality primarily as a field of possibility and sees how in this spacious field the causality of karmic conditioning is played out.

3.6. The possibilities of freedom from which springs moral perception

As we saw earlier, the sense of "I" is all tied up with causal conditioning. Causal conditioning gives us the sense of who we are and what we are like as well as what the world is like. When seen from within causal conditioning, the causality appears as though we are autonomously conducting ourselves. If I want my usual cup of tea in the morning, and I make the tea, we construe this as the agent's volitional action. Agency and volition imply autonomy and freedom of the self. But this is not how it appears to a Buddhist. My craving for tea and the making of the tea to satisfy
the craving is not an expression of freedom but just the opposite. These are conditioned cravings and graspings, and I have been driven by them. Such is the illusion of the autonomous substantive self.

In fact, the possibility of freedom begins with recognizing the conditioned nature of the psychophysical aggregates. We gain further freedom when we can disrupt the accumulated pattern of conditionality. Some forms of conditionality are easier to disrupt than others and some are rather impossible to disrupt. To the latter belong more enduring physical traits. Those conditionings that we can target effectively through transformation of perception, disposition, and values are the ones that present themselves in the context of cravings and graspings, both positive and negative, by the ego-self.

Now, the management of cravings, addictions, and obsessions is a prominent part of popular psychology as well as serious psychotherapy. Thus, the Buddhist concern with these is certainly not unique, but what is unique is the analysis of how they arise and how to "cure" them. Popular psychology tries to bolster the self's willpower and confidence to resist them. The most grievous problem in this approach is that it sets up a conflict between one's pleasures/desires and volition within the self. In the process, one is likely to become a victim of internal warfare, torn, unhappy, and dispirited about a lack of self-control. It is the picture of the akratic person discussed at length by Aristotle (1985). In the Buddhist analysis, the root problem is the substantive ego-self. This self-identity has come to be, precisely, through the causal conditionality in which the psychophysical aggregates are fused together to form the self. To undo causal conditioning,

92 Conditionality extends to the physical factors. That I have black hair rather than blond is genetically conditioned and bears the "accumulated and collected history" of my ancestors: it expresses phylogeny.
we need to remove the belief in the ego-self and come to see the workings of conditionality closely.\(^{93}\)

Cravings, either negatively as aversion or positively as desire, arise on the heel of perceptions and feelings. For example, the moment I see my favourite chocolate bar, I want it badly. Insofar as it is a conditioned reaction, the perception has automatically led to the craving and grasping. As mentioned repeatedly, all these conditioned reactions occur so rapidly that we come to know them after the fact—after they have already arisen. Hence, what is required is discerning these conditioned aggregates and delinking them. Thus, the perception of chocolate, the pleasurable feelings about it, the craving for it, and the acting to have it are all to be delinked. When this happens, the automaticity of moving from one link to the next is broken. What this means is that, to speak metaphorically, one link does not fuel the next. Craving and grasping would lose their impetus when delinked from perception and feeling. Varela et al. state:

Nothing could be done about the past; one cannot go back and remove past ignorance and volitional actions. And since one is alive and has a psychophysical organism, the six sense fields and their contact with objects are inevitable. Inevitable also are the

\(^{93}\) Of course, the past cannot be undone, and the conditionality accrued in the past may continue to (but not lasting forever) operate into the present. But having seen through the conditionality behind the present arisings, I need not again react to them with anger, resentment, and the like, in which case I would not be reinforcing the past conditioning.

\(^{94}\) It may come as a surprise to some readers that I consider the Buddhist outlook to be radically eudaimonic because, according to the popular (and superficial) understanding, Buddhism is a utterly pessimistic religion whose fundamental teaching is premised upon the observation that life is marked by impermanence, selflessness, and suffering. By the way, Buddhism is not a religion in the conventional sense of the word 'religion' because Buddhism does not promise and teach salvation of the individual souls in this life or in the afterlife. Freedom from suffering is the objective of Buddhism, and with this objective, Buddhism compares well with the liberation tradition of Western philosophy from Plato to Wittgenstein. Plato wanted to free delusive humans from the cave of shadow play, and Wittgenstein wanted to show human "flies" (specifically, philosophers for Wittgenstein) how to escape from the fly-bottle of imprisoning perception/conceptualization that makes us aspect-blind. Likewise, Sakyamuni wanted to show us how to escape from suffering. The radical eudaimonia in Buddhism rests with the view (to be validated by the practice) that this escape is possible because the obstructing conditions in the consciousness are not the necessity of the "human nature."
feeling states to which the senses give rise and the craving that results. But must craving lead to grasping? It is at this point, some traditions say, that the Buddha formulated the technique of mindfulness. By precise, disciplined mindfulness to every moment, one can interrupt the chain of automatic conditioning—one can not automatically go from craving to grasping and all the rest. (Varela, et al., 1993, p. 115)

Delinking is difficult because our attentional acuity is usually not precise enough to discern the links, especially while their activation is occurring. Furthermore, (and this is crucial) as long as the usual firm belief in the ego-self remains, the progression from perception and feelings to cravings and graspings, and the further strengthening of dispositions take place relentlessly. The crucial transition from perception and feeling, which arrive in us due to past conditioning, to craving and grasping for the objects of the perception and feeling happens precisely because of the belief in the ego-self. If the ego-self's hold is not there, then the attachment to the pleasurable or the aversion to the unpleasurable, or indifference to what does not interest us would not happen.

It is instructive to note that meditators who began to delink the aggregates reported their discovery, amazing to them, that they could perceive and feel but without the usual concomitant attachment or aversions. Can one feel anger without getting angry? However uncommonsensical this may sound, mindfulness practice enables this sort of detachment. The detachment rests on delinking or making the distinctions between emotions that occur and our conditioned reactions to them. Goldstein explains the distinction:

From the meditative perspective, various mind states, including emotions, arise and pass away empty of any substantial nature. They come into being when certain conditions come together and disappear when the conditions change. None of them belong to anyone; they are not happening to anyone ... Can you feel the difference between the experience of 'I am angry' and the experience of 'This is anger'? Through that little distinction flows a whole world of freedom. (Goldstein, 1993, p. 71)

As we shall see in the next chapter, this freedom from conditionality set up by
the belief in and enactment of the ego-self is the well-spring of compassion, and this is where I shall look for the possibility of moral perception.
Chapter Four

Ethics of nonduality

We sit together, the mountain and me,  
until only the mountain remains.  
--Li Po--

Midnight. No waves,  
no wind, the empty boat  
is flooded with moonlight.  
--Dogen--

In the cherry blossom's shade  
there's no such thing  
as a stranger.  
--Issa--

4.1. Introduction

This thesis started with an enquiry into the epistemic conditions for Murdochian-Nussbaumian moral perception and evolved towards a rather radical approach to ethics—namely, ethics based on the negation of the notion of separate, substantive selves, which contrasts with the prevailing Western ethical views predicated upon a self-other duality. I am keenly aware that this suggested nondual approach to ethics may appear exotic, if not dubious, since we are denying what seems like the indubitable psychological fact in life that we are separate selves. For this reason, even if we are attracted to the thesis of anatta or egolessness for whatever epistemological and psychological reasons, we may have a hard time envisioning realistically how a practical morality can be devised out of it. The present chapter is a further step towards envisioning an ethics of nonduality. I shall attempt to give a more concrete, comprehensive account of an ethics of nonduality by discussing what it is for us to be nondually perceiving, acting, and thinking.

At the same time, in order to consolidate my proposed ethical view, I shall engage in a justification of why I think nonduality has something vital
to offer to morality. This justification involves a discussion of the aims of morality (what morality is for and why we need morality) and, further, a vision of humanity (what we are like and what we can be like). From the outset, I adopt as the aim of morality that we should be moral so that we can live in harmony with ourselves and the world. However, central to living in harmony is our achievement of a deep sense of well-being or, to borrow Aristotle's term, *eudaimonia*. Thus, by the logic of implication, our moral practice becomes the quest for human flourishing or *eudaimonia*.

As I echo an Aristotelian view of morality, I can hear the sober voice of a "realist" (for lack of a better term) who, seeing just how ugly, banal, painful, and atrocious life can be in the world and has been throughout history, is very skeptical about a deep and enduring sense of well-being connected with human life. The realist would argue that any sense of well-being we may have is spurious anyway and, thus, is not something on which we should found our morality. People and their lives are likely to be marked by ceaseless unrest, hungering, discontent, and minor and major tragedies of one form or another, death being the final tragedy that ends all other tragedies. Given this presumably realistic picture of human life, the realist's conception of morality would likely show not so much a path to *eudaimonia* (well-being or human flourishing) as a strategy on how to minimize human ills and problems through a sensible management of rampant human selfishness (predicated upon the substantive I-ness) and imprudence.

We may perhaps think that these two views might still come to the same thing because the optimal management of human ills and problems should lead us to *eudaimonia*. But they do not, especially if the eudaimonist holds something like the Buddhist insight into, or experience of, the radical well-being which lies beyond the target of even the best practical management
of human ills and problems. Our sober realist and beyond-suffering Buddhist may be like two persons who both look at a half-filled glass and come to two opposing conclusions: one says (with disappointment and wanting) that the glass is half empty and the other says (with delight and satisfaction) that it is half full. In some "real" sense, these two persons are not seeing the same "thing." These are two different consciousnesses and, therefore, there are two different (that is, incommensurable, though not mutually unintelligible) versions of the world. And, to take Goodman's perspective, it is versions that matter to us ontologically. Here, we may read versions as visions. Thus, part of my justification for nondual ethics would have to involve making out a case for the kind of radically eudaimonic vision of humanity that I share with the Buddhists.94

I argue that visions or versions are a matter of consciousness, but arguments do not suffice to incline us towards the proposed vision/version. To appreciate a vision, one has to be able to imagine the feel and the tone of the form of life the vision projects. It is the texture and nuance of Dasein that one has to get hold of. We may accomplish this best through empathic imagining of what some experiences are like: we come to have an intimate (that is, as if from the inside of an experience) understanding.95 Thus in

94 It may come as a surprise to some readers that I consider the Buddhist outlook to be radically eudaimonic because, according to the popular (and superficial) understanding, Buddhism is a utterly pessimistic religion whose fundamental teaching is premised upon the observation that life is marked by impermanence, selflessness, and suffering. By the way, Buddhism is not a religion in the conventional sense of the word 'religion' because Buddhism does not promise and teach salvation of the individual souls in this life or in the afterlife. Freedom from suffering is the objective of Buddhism, and with this objective, Buddhism compares well with the liberation tradition of Western philosophy from Plato to Wittgenstein. Plato wanted to free delusive humans from the cave of shadow play, and Wittgenstein wanted to show human "flies" (specifically, philosophers for Wittgenstein) how to escape from the fly-bottle of imprisoning perception/conceptualization that makes us aspect-blind. Likewise, Sakyamuni wanted to show us how to escape from suffering. The radical eudaimonia in Buddhism rests with the view (to be validated by the practice) that this escape is possible because the obstructing conditions in the consciousness are not the necessity of the "human nature."
95 I heartily endorse Rorty's vision that human solidarity (here, read it as 'eudaimonia') is to
proffering a vision of eudaimonic ethics, I must sketch out what it is like to perceive, think, and act nondually.

4.2. Morality and Eudaimonia

Like many people, I grew up thinking that being moral had all to do with doing the right things and refraining from doing the wrong things. Though something of a caricature of the deontological view of morality, this captures that view's main angle on morality. What is missing—or, more accurately what is obscured—in this conception of morality is the primary concern for the agent's personal well-being. In this deontological conception, how a moral agent feels about life and oneself is not the central concern of morality. In other words, it is not the primary aim of morality to secure personal well-being. In the deontological view of morality, it seems to be perfectly compatible for one to be both personally suffering and admirably moral.

It was something of an awakening when I encountered the Aristotelian
view of morality which identified human flourishing, happiness, or well-being (*eudaimonia*) to be the supreme aim of morality. In the concept of *eudaimonia*, I saw beyond the egoic pleasures or happiness to a notion that placed personal well-being in the context of harmony with life and the world. In other words, personal well-being is not just about the individual per se but about the individual in harmonious relationships with the world. Understood this way, *eudaimonia* is a moral aim and its pursuit, a moral imperative.97

However, the notion of human flourishing is by all accounts open-ended, and there seems to be little consensus on what constitutes or contributes to *eudaimonia*. Witness the endless debates over incommensurable values, interests, views, and so on that are so characteristic of our liberal democracy, especially in this postmodern era where fragmentation is celebrated but unity and consensus are suspect. While I am all for a peaceful coexistence of incommensurable values, I would point out that in our civic lives debates are born of, as well as perpetuate, conflicts that threaten and compromise the possibility of eudaimonic lives. Instead of a life of communion, we find a life of alienation from one another and even from our own selves. Irritation, frustration, and hostility add up to moments of confrontation and explosion. Or, at best, we erect a sullen wall among ourselves. How ironical this is that the universally practised pursuit of *eudaimonia* should lead us to the opposite of *eudaimonia*. Is the ideal of human flourishing really an illusory ideal?

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97 See Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, especially Book I. To note, *eudaimonia* is the highest moral good because it is the complete end (*teleios*), and hence self-sufficient. It is the end towards which all other ends are directed. I interpret the notion of end here to be psychological: the *teleios* is one that we desire for its own sake. That is, we do not desire *eudaimonia* for some other purpose but desire it as the final end in itself. (Aristotle has observed that pleasure cannot be *eudaimonia* because it is not the complete end.)
Indeed, *eudaimonia* would be illusory if the human capacity for achieving mutual self-other harmony-making is not there or is not called into play. In the conception of the utilitarian scientific calculus founded upon the premise of the individuals' pursuit of self-interest, the capacity for such harmony-making has been theorized away into illusion. What is real for the utilitarians is the phenomenon of self-interest and their faith in the scientific calculus of maximizing everyone's or the sum total of self-interests. However, given the endless play of desires and means to their satisfaction, which notably characterizes the lived experience of human life, complexity involved in the calculation of utility is overwhelming. What this means is that the achievement of satisfaction which is to put the hungering, pursuing, and grasping mind driven by self-interest to peace and ease is ever elusive. Here we begin to taste disillusionment with our faith in the utilitarian calculus and may perhaps reconsider the possibility of *eudaimonia* as the capacity for harmony-making that goes beyond the conception of self-interest.

In fact, we may see that this capacity for *eudaimonia* opens up only when we abandon the doctrine of self-interest. This is where we can enlist the Buddhist analysis of desire and suffering pertaining to the phenomenon of self-interest. According to this analysis, pursuit of self-interest inevitably lands us in a condition opposite to *eudaimonia*—namely, suffering—precisely because self-interest is a phenomenon of self-other, subject-object dualism,

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98 I will not go into an exposition of the complex theories of utilitarianism, but it should be noted that utilitarianism is a form of eudaimonic ethics just as the Buddhist ethics. For they both place *eudaimonia* (however it may be conceived) as the central aim and criterion of morality. Yet the two differ significantly from each other in that for Buddhism, unlike utilitarianism, the criterion of *eudaimonia* is not pleasure or happiness that is definable in terms of the egoic self operating in the dualized mode of consciousness, for such pleasure and happiness are ultimately seen to be ungenuine in that they lead to suffering. Genuine happiness that may be defined as freedom from suffering is possible only when the self overcomes the dualized mode of consciousness.
and where this dualism exists, there is bound to be suffering. For suffering is nothing other than grasping for what is not there for one, which is the phenomenon of desire. In other words, suffering is inevitable to desiring and, therefore, to the dualistic consciousness. Hence, any radical realization of eudaimonia must involve deconstruction of the dualistic consciousness and its resultant desire phenomenon. Yet, this logic aside, we are averse to the very notion of desirelessness as promised by deconstruction of the dualistic consciousness because desirelessness seems like a psychic death. *Eudaimonia* and psychic death do not seem to coincide, at least in our ordinary understanding.

However, cessation of desire does not mean becoming numb—unreceptive, unresponsive, and having no appetite for anything or to do anything. Cessation of desire means not having a dualised consciousness which grasps after objects. The estranged consciousness stands apart from the world: the self and the not-self are discontinuous with each other. A psychic fault is the source of our existential distress--our feeling not quite "at home" with the world and with ourselves. Hence, the self does not feel totally "at home,"--that is, at being one with the moment's beingness.99 If one could

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99 It would be argued that we should not feel at home in those conditions that threaten and debase our lives. Should one be feeling "being-one-with-it" when one is starving to death or is being physically abused? We may feel that any moral theory that recommends this must be an immoral theory. But misunderstanding abounds here. The theory of (Buddhist) *eudaimonia* does not recommend that we be "happy" with depraving or physically reducing conditions. The recommendation does not consist of reinterpreting or ignoring the reality of the pain of starving or the pain of cruelty so that one does not feel the pain. "Being-one-with-it" and "being-utterly-present-to-it" are the recommendation that we accept whatever condition as what it is and do not work up an aversion or attachment to it. It is a misunderstanding--a delusion--that only aversion or attachment (which characterizes the phenomenon of desire) motivates us to actions. Being able to differentiate between acting from aversion and attachment and acting in harmony with or in consideration for the particular condition we are in may show us the possibility of actions not motivated by desires but by a sense of harmony, that is, by the sense of honouring the good of the person (including oneself), situation, and the environment. Of course, this opens up another question of how we may know the good of the person, situation, etc., which is a very big question, but I must address it elsewhere.
accept the given moment completely, which is to go beyond the evaluations of right or wrong, good or bad, so that the fullness of the moment's being fills one, then one would not be driven to grasp after this or that object, whether mental or physical. To be in the grip of hungering and grasping is suffering. In a nutshell, this is the Buddhist analysis of suffering.\textsuperscript{100} 

We often think that the reason we do not feel totally at home and at ease with ourselves and the world, feeling the fullness or perfection of the moment and the very fact of our existence, is due to particular unsatisfying conditions of life and living. Subsequently, we reason that as soon as we improve or change our unsatisfactory conditions, our well-being will improve. Indeed, we can do much to improve our lot, making life less toilsome and burdensome. Yet, the fact that even the most efficient management of life with plenty of luck does not wipe out but only temporarily palliate the sense of alienation and thirst, which indicates that the compromising circumstance of life is not the cause of our misery but only the aggravator. Something much more fundamental is at work in our psyche, and a radical approach to the problem of suffering--that is, lack of \textit{eudaimonia}--must address this state of psyche. As I have been arguing, it is the dualistic consciousness that posits the separate self over and against the world--the Other--which is the root cause of the suffering state of psyche. To appreciate this point better and not to be so hasty in externalizing the problems of life, making our fortunes and misfortunes account for our joys and suffering, it is most instructive to focus not so much on the external conditions of life as on the assorted flavours of existential malaise--fear,

\textsuperscript{100} This is how Sakyamuni formulated the Noble Truth of Suffering: "Association with the unloved is suffering, separation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering." In other words, suffering is unavoidable so long as there is the duality of subject (self) and object (not-self). This dualistic psychic structure is the origin of suffering.
insecurity, anxiety, dissatisfaction, boredom, inner emptiness--that perpetually plague us regardless of the circumstantial conditions into which we move.\footnote{Heidegger (1962) and others in the tradition of existentialism and phenomenology recognized the importance of these "moods" (Stimmung) as an object of philosophical enquiry. Michel Haar (1993, p. 159), in his analysis of Heidegger's notion of attunement in its relationship to thinking, states: "Our moods reveal the co-presence of all things in a way more comprehensive than any comprehension, more immediate than any perception. Moods are a way of access to preconceptual totality." Applying this analysis, I argue that those existentially negative moods, such as anxiety, fear, and resentment rather than the positive moods such as love, joy, and kindness show our dualized consciousness most accurately, and thus they occasion us to work on and transform the dualistic consciousness. In other words, it is when we are gripped by misery rather than (dualistically experienced) joy that we are motivated to question and work on our dualized consciousness.}

This is not a peculiarly (post)modern phenomenon: such an analysis of suffering drove Shakyiamuni into his quest for the end of suffering twenty-five centuries ago.\footnote{The Buddha was totally clear about the objective of his teaching: "I teach one thing and only one: that is, suffering and the end of suffering."} Even if some of us are lucky not to be beset with a major mental and/or physical crisis at some point in our lives, we know only too well the shadows of anxiety, fear, insecurity, resentment, indifference, and the like that follow our psyche everywhere.

For the Buddhist analysis to make its case, it is important that it resists the opinion that the existential malaise is caused by the external circumstance and, thus, the latter's improvement is all that is required to lead a good life. Therefore, the Buddhist analysis is resolutely focused on seeing and analyzing even the minutest perturbations of the mind-and-heart in order to recognize their suffering presence in the dualized consciousness. The analysis insists on not explaining away or covering up or dismissing suffering. Suffering has to be recognized in its entire depth and expanse. We have to become sensitized to suffering in order to understand it accurately.\footnote{The end of suffering is not achieved by closing oneself to it, which is aversion, but opening oneself fully to it and embracing it. This is compassion. Accordingly, people with aversion to suffering cannot be compassionate. Yet, we often mistake this aversion as compassion where the person, not being able to embrace suffering in oneself or in others, recoils and retreats from it, which appears as tender-hearted and, therefore, compassionate whereas this fearful aversion is a reaction to the sense of threat to one's sense of self. I make this remark because some of our}
brevity in this thesis, I shall not undertake any in-depth reflection and analysis of these psychic conditions (fear, anxiety, and so on), and I shall proceed on the assumption that we have already done this groundwork.

According to the Buddhist analysis, the root cause of our existential disease--hence, the phenomenon of desire--is the dualised consciousness in which the self perceives and feels itself to be separate from the world and even from its own existence and experience. It may be instructive to note that the word 'existence' comes from the Latin *ex sistere*, meaning 'to stand outside'. We ask, astonished, how one's existence could be this experience of standing outside. And yet, this seems to be precisely the state of our ordinary egoic consciousness. Recalling our discussion in Chapter Two, the I-consciousness sets itself up as the owner and author of its experience, thereby creating two discrete modalities (the subject and the object) which are soon reified into two substances. Furthermore, since the I-consciousness identifies itself with the subject and not with the object, the object is dissociated from the subject and becomes an other. As soon as this duality between the self and the other is set up, then we are prey to the experiences of fear, insecurity, anxiety, alienation, resentment, regret, expectation, frustration, and so on.\(^{104}\)

more complex analyses of compassion, such as the accounts given by Blum (1994) and Vetlesen (1994), do not show this insight. In fact, what they show to me is, not surprisingly, a fear of losing that sense of separate self which must occur when we are deeply empathic (which is required for compassion). Dualistic consciousness that insists on the separate sense of self, therefore, obstructs compassion. Blum and Vetlesen want to explore compassion within the confines of the dualistic consciousness, which, to me, does not bring out the full play of the phenomenon of compassion, as it is known to the Buddhist or the Taoist tradition (or perhaps to other traditions, too).

\(^{104}\) It has been pointed out to me more than once that I seem to be overlooking the fact that the positive state of being which must qualify as constituents of *eudaimonia*, such as joy, happiness, love, and so on also arise in the dualistic structure of consciousness. So, if I am trying to do away with the dualistic structure, then wouldn't I be also bereft of the positive eudaimonic constituents? My response is that the eudaimonic qualities (joy, love, generosity, and so on.) that arise from the dualistic mind are not as positive as we expect or we would like to think. If we are honest and courageous with ourselves, I think that we would have to admit that dualistically arising positive forces are invariably tainted with suffering. Insecurity, anxiety, grasping, and the like are the integral part of the dualistically experienced joy, love, and
As long as there is the separate self standing apart from its circumstance, condition, or object—that which makes up the content of one's experience, the self is an alienated psyche which suffers from its own sense of alienation. It suffers both in pleasure and pain, in grasping after and clinging to the object of desire and repelling and avoiding the unwanted object. In either way, perturbation follows us like shadows. Such perturbation permeates our being so deeply that we may not know how experience can be otherwise. It is normal to us to be constantly driven by agitation of one form (aversion) or another (attachment) or one shade or another. But there are those rare moments when the self momentarily forgets about its perpetual agitations of the psyche (due to subject-object duality) and enters into an experience of the nondual: it merges into the objects of its attention and dwells in the beingness of the moment. In such moments, the psyche is freed from all manners of agitation or disquietude and is released into a suchness of the moment.

I return here once again to the significance of the mood or what I call the "texture of being." I believe that it is this texture that primarily shapes our epistemological and moral discourses and practices.\textsuperscript{105} That is, this talk of the mind's release from agitation has a far greater consequence than just the comfort we seek at the end of the day after we have been through a happiness. If this view is accepted, then the next question asked may be, Would nondual experience include the nondual versions of joy, love, and so on? The answer is most definitely in the affirmative with an added remark that these nondual versions, unlike the dualistic versions, do not give rise to negative qualities.

\textsuperscript{105} Putnam has argued in many places (for instance in \textit{Realism with Many Faces}) that what counts as objects are relative to our versions of ontology. On the same note, Heidegger (1962) has argued that the major determining factor for the versions of ontology is mood (Stimmung). Dreyfus (1991, p. 172) in his commentary on Heidegger says that moods "must be understood as specifications of a dimension of existence, i.e., of affectedness as a way of being-in-the-world." Further, Dreyfus explains that "moods determine not just what we do but how things show up for us." At another place (ibid., p. 174): "... moods provide the background for intentionality, i.e., for the specific ways things and possibilities show up as mattering."
stressful day of living out our alienated civic and private lives. If such be the supplementary comfort and solace we seek, we can easily turn to any variety of popular therapies and quick-fixes. But through philosophy we may seek a more fundamental and, therefore, total reorientation. Metaphysics, epistemology, and ontology could be our tools for transforming consciousness. Nondualism as an epistemological and ontological thesis is a tool for changing our dualistic consciousness to nondual consciousness. Needless to say, just having a tool around does not accomplish the needed work. We have to use our philosophy to fashion the turn from an anxious and manipulative Dasein to a suchness/thatness Dasein. We will then cease to objectify the world, and we will cease to be the subject doing the objectification.

To sum up, if we were to take the view of morality that places its central aim on the attainment of well-being, and further, if we took the Buddhist view of radical well-being as stemming from nondualized consciousness, then we could expect to arrive at a vision of morality whose program consists of breaking through the ordinary dualistic, that is, egoic consciousness and attaining nondual consciousness.

4.3. The idealist versus the realist concerning human "nature"

How compelling is the above vision of morality? The answer depends on how receptive one is to the proposed view, and this receptivity has much to do with certain relevant assumptions we bring with us when we inspect an unfamiliar view. In the case of our proposed nondual ethics, the relevant

106 Does philosophy seek to change the form/mode of consciousness? Does our epistemological enquiry seek to shape, not just our theories of knowledge, but more importantly, the way we experience—perceive, feel, and think? The answers to these questions are emphatically a "yes," especially from the perspective of Eastern philosophies. See Walsh (1992) for a discussion on the contrast between the Eastern philosophical tradition and the Western one.
assumption would be the view on human "nature"—what humans' psychic/psychological structures are like. To those who are set with the view that human nature is such that we can never cease to be driven by desires because we cannot overcome the dualistic mode of consciousness (say, it is "hard-wired" into our consciousness), the proposal for the ethics based on nondual consciousness would appear to be simply delusory. (Since I have been calling this group realists, I shall continue with this label.) The realists will argue that we cannot erect our morality on a fanciful, fictional notion. Morality has a realistic job of looking after the people and their problems as the result of the dualistic mode. According to the realists, morality is not about transforming our consciousness (for one thing, that is not likely to be possible) but about devising and implementing practical ways to cope with and manage the existential problems and distress facing us as dualistic consciousnesses.

For the realist, the source of moralness is likely in the moral norms themselves. Hence, the practice of morality would consist largely of applying the moral norms to all aspects of human intentionality from desires to actions.\textsuperscript{107} According to the realist interpretation, morality is not a matter of consciousness but of the right application of adequate (rationally defensible, and so on) moral norms. It is a delusion to think that we can ever be free of suffering and distress, for humans are so constituted as to be driven by egoic desires which propel us into perpetual grasping and short-lived fulfillment or frustration. Given this, the most we can do in our moral programming is to regulate, modify, and channel our egoic drives so as not to generate unwholesome forms and excessive aggression, exploitation, and

\textsuperscript{107} What I in effect have described here is the deontological tradition, such as the Kantian one, which sought to regulate human desires and actions by rational moral laws, principles, and rules.
manipulation. The aim of morality is to prevent our society from naturally degenerating into a Hobbesian world inhabited by men and women leading nasty, brutish, and short (or, nowadays, long) lives. The Hobbesian world illustrates an unintervened, natural state of humanity. Any degree of peace, harmony, and social grace we may enjoy is thanks much to the restraining and cultivating hands of morality and law, but certainly not to anything like the idealist’s illusion of an intrinsic "Buddha nature"—that is, nondual consciousness—which is claimed to have been temporarily obscured.

Not surprisingly, the realist conception of morality prevails over the idealist picture for the following reasons. The idealist picture has a slim chance of convincing people because it seems to contradict flatly the empirical evidence about how people really are and at the same time presents an ideal which seems impossible to reach. The idealist cannot dispute the empirical fact that the human condition of existential distress prevails. Both the idealists and the realists stand on that much common ground. But the idealists would dispute the realists' denial of the possibility of radical human freedom (from suffering) and consequent well-being. They would maintain that the distressed human condition is not inherent to human nature. In fact, they will argue that the state of distress-freeness is the underlying ground experience, and distress is more of a surface condition experienced when the ground experience of freedom is obscured by obstructing conditions owing to the mode of dualistic consciousness.108 A change to this dualistic mode of consciousness—hence the removal of obstructing conditions such as desire,

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108 Even if we grant that distress-freeness is possible, we may wonder why this is the ground experience rather than the surface one. Something is the ground if it is what is revealed and remains after certain things are removed. In other words, the distinction between the ground and the figure is contingent upon the process of deconstruction. The bare attention workers (of vipassana meditation) who undertake the deconstruction of dualistic consciousness come to know the distinction between the ground of consciousness and the contingent constructs.
attachment, fear, greed, anger, and aggression—would result in a disclosure of the underlying distress-free mind which has always been there to begin with. The distress-free mind is ontologically prior to the psychologically-constructed distressed mind of the dualistic consciousness. Morality may be conceived as an archaeological project of disclosing this ontologically prior state of mind or consciousness.

The idealists, like anyone who relates an unfamiliar notion to those who have no experiential inklings of it, run the risk of appearing to utter an unintelligible dogma. But this cannot be helped. If pressed to justify and validate their assertion, they can do little other than to give helpful indications and urge others to look into their own experiences to see if they can relate to it with their best effort at empathetic imagination. Better still, they would be asked to try out the necessary experiment—in this case, of de-conditioning or de-automatizing the habitual, reactional patterns of perception, feeling, thinking, and acting. In short, the skeptics are asked to validate the given thesis themselves, relying on their own effort at self-transformation. On matters of experience, the only way to validate a claim is by having the proposed experience. However, not being able to have the proposed experience after only a minor attempt should not count as invalidating the claim.109

As previously mentioned, for the nondual idealists, the programme of morality consists of theories and practices geared towards the transformation of consciousness from the dualistic, egoic consciousness to the nondual consciousness. But, especially given that the aim of the idealist

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109 Once again, a question arises: How do we distinguish the minor effort from the major effort? Obviously, there are no absolute, objective criteria. We would only have heuristic working criteria given in the tradition of practice, and even so, they would be contextually set with considerations for the concerning individual's history, aspiration, and capability.
morality is ultimately to (re)discover nondual consciousness as the very
ground of our being, the idealist programme of morality is a form of
midwifery, drawing out what is already there but hidden, as opposed to a
form of injunctive prescription that imposes external constraints and
prohibitions. Thus, moral education conceived in the understanding of the
nondualists has to work with the seed of nondual consciousness which must
already be present in each of us even when we operate in the dualistic
consciousness. This seed is available to us in our everyday experience and
proves to be the most invaluable resource both for winning our serious
consideration and, further enabling us to tap into the larger ground of
nondual consciousness.

Glimpses of nondual consciousness, though relatively rare, are
available to us, especially in those moments in which we attain singular calm
and poise without the usual agitations of thoughts and emotions that
intensify our sense of self as being separate from the world. But, as to be
expected, the limitation of these glimpses is that they are just brief glimpses,
and it takes a disciplined investigation and cultivation to follow them deep to
their source which is the underlying nondual consciousness. Just as
glimpses, they certainly do not appear as the ground consciousness. More
likely, they appear as a rare, contingent surface mode. Also, these glimpses
usually occur in the context of pleasant self-absorption as when one is lost in
reverie, reading, painting, and such activities, where the mind achieves a

\[110\quad\text{Consider this perfect example that Benoit (1955, p. 51) gives: "One day, comfortably}
\text{installed, I am in the process of reading a book which takes up my attention without in any}
\text{way reminding me of the preoccupations of this period of my life; I do not identify myself with}
\text{any of the heroes of my book and I follow their adventures as a completely detached spectator.}
\text{With regard to my personal life, I am enjoying an absolute truce, my fears and my hopes have}
\text{been expelled from my mind... at this moment the calm in me is so pure that it amounts to a}
\text{veritable suspense... Suddenly a sense perception... breaks this suspense... in this moment I feel}
\text{no longer any separation between the world and myself although they remain distinct."}
\]
singular focus of concentration by virtue of which the usual agitations subside—agitations that make the self feel to be separate from what is experienced. When such concentration occurs, experience becomes transparent, meaning that the ontological barrier between the self that experiences and the object that is experienced dissolves, leaving only the subject-object unity. This is nondual consciousness. However, for us to become firmly established in nonduality, our nondual experience must transcend the context of the pleasant and grow stable and deep to embrace all contexts, including unpleasant and neutral alike. To be established in nonduality is to be utterly present to whatever is in the given moment, not short-circuiting our perception of reality by the egoself's ever-ready-to-arise aversion and attraction. Such reactions agitate and, to be specific, dualizes the field of consciousness. Any emotions born of the self's aversion and attachment hinder nondual experience. Hence, an important discipline in gaining nonduality is refraining from emotions arising from the self's aversion and attachment and, at the same time, cultivating such emotions as sympathetic joy, compassion, lovingkindness, and equanimity that are qualities of consciousness arising from openness to whatever is experienced.\(^{111}\)

The importance of glimpses of the nondual, unitive experiences to be found in everyday experience cannot be emphasized enough since they may be the only concrete link that we have to the not-yet fully realized nondual consciousness. This fragile link is our passport to nearing and entering nonduality—that is, freedom from the distressed state of existence due to the

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\(^{111}\) Here my claim is not that there are two kinds of emotions—the nondual and the dual. Rather, what makes a certain emotion, be it anger or joy, a nondual emotion is that it arises not out of the self's attachment or aversion but out of the nondual openness to being. When I can say, "This is an anger experience" rather than "I am angry," my anger-experience is not a dualistic anger-experience since aversion is not there.
subject-object dichotomy. The idealists must make the best of the link in their effort to persuade the realists. The realists, if disposed to trying to understand the nondual idealist, should, in their turn, stretch their imagination to extend whatever glimpsed experiences they have had to entertain the general feel of nonduality. In the following section, I propose to take the reader into this extended understanding of nonduality.

4.4. Nondual perception

It has become axiomatic in our contemporary epistemology that perception is permeated through and through with conceptualization. To perceive is to perceive through conceptual superimposition. It is also axiomatic in the Western epistemological understanding that this superimposition is not something that can be undone. Western philosophical tradition has yet to recognize the possibility of the awareness that is not restricted to or identified with and detachable from conceptualization. In this tradition, it is typically denied that one can be aware apart from concept-laden thought processes. Let me revisit the argument on nonduality and conceptualization. According to the Buddhist tradition of attentional training, it is possible to discover awareness freed from conceptualization. And (this is the crucial point) since subject-object duality is mediated through conceptualization, freedom from conceptualization would consequently release us from the grip of duality. Again, I point out that freedom does not mean getting rid of conceptualization: it means being able to detach the consciousness from conceptualization.

For nondualists, being able to separate percepts from concepts is an extremely important point upon which hangs the possibility of transcending the ego-self and, thereby, overcoming existential distress and attaining radical well-being. As we saw in Chapter Three, nondual consciousness is perhaps most expediently realized through a distinctive non-discursive effort such as mindfulness/awareness practice which disrupts the usual automatic functioning of the conceptualizing mind. This freedom from thought construction is known in the Buddhist epistemology as nirvikalpa, meaning "without thought-construction." Since nirvikalpa perception is free from thought-constructs, what is perceived does not refer to anything, mean anything, or even interpreted as anything. A thing thus perceived is drained of the usual signification, and it stands unsullied by conceptual interpretation. Since it lacks referents or meanings, it is not something

113 See Loy (1988), Chapter 2.
114 Meaning or signification presupposes a definite object, be it a mental object or a physical object. But, objects are identified through the activity of our thought-constructs. Thus, in the absence of thought-constructs, objects and their signification vanish. Loy (1988) succinctly summarizes this thesis in his explication of the Buddhist term, prapanca: "the differentiation of the nondual world of nirvikalpa experience into the discrete objects-of-the-phenomenal world, which occurs due to savikalpa thought-construction." It is significant that Heidegger also has analyzed this "draining" of signification and adds a different insight to it. Heidegger identifies anxiety as the mood which exhibits draining of signification. See Dreyfus (1991, pp. 176-183). The usual signification fails, and we cannot relate to the world. This is alienation: we stare at the world with a blank expression. Is nirvikalpa perception, after all, this kind of alienated perception? If so, how does the alienated perception lead to nondual consciousness? A nondualist's response would be like this: anxiety is played out against the background expectation that there be meanings which are constructed via conceptual mediation. Thus, when this expectation still operates, we experience the draining of signification as a loss, hence, anxiety. But if this expectation is not there to begin with, and our dependency on the conceptual is gone so that our Dasein is free from this dependency, then we do not experience the absence of conceptual signification as a loss. Hence no alienation. Furthermore, with this freedom from conceptual dependency, our ontology has come to its own terms instead of being dependent on epistemology. That is, ontology is not substantiated and justified by epistemology, as it was declared by Descartes' Cogito ergo sum. Ergo sum can stand by itself, all self-sufficient, without cogito.

115 Percepts innocent of conceptualization are not to be understood as anything like the
that can be understood discursively. Hence the insistence by the nondualists that experience of nirvikalpa perception is beyond discursive understanding because it is nonconceptual.\footnote{For a detailed examination of nirvikalpa perception, see Loy (1988, chap. 2).}

If the above descriptions of nirvikalpa perception sound unintelligible, it is for a good reason: we ordinarily do not perceive things that way. Whatever we perceive are usually given names and imbued with all kinds of meanings regarding their functionality and instrumentality defined in their relationship to us. The moment I see a cup, I recognize it as a cup. I know when to use it, how to use it, how it would behave, what it is made of, and so on. The sight of the cup triggers a whole chain of thoughts, and the result is that I am too occupied to be attentive to the presence of the cup solely. The "being-there-ness" of the cup has faded in the endless distractions that my thoughts create. The presence has been muted and is replaced by conceptual labels and descriptors. In this way, things that come into our lives simply become transformed into objects that bear our thoughts and desires. This is savikalpa (with thought-construction) perception. Savikalpa perception leaves us in no doubt that we are subjects who perceive objects since to see objects as objects is to be also aware of ourselves as subjects. Subjectness is just the other side of objectness on the same coin.

In advocating nonduality, I must not give the impression that we should give up (if that is possible) savikalpa perception and embrace only nirvikalpa perception. Nonduality is not to be identified with nirvikalpa perception. Rather, my point is that we cannot have nonduality—that is, we cannot experience the world as nondual consciousness—if we are dominated

\footnote{For a detailed examination of nirvikalpa perception, see Loy (1988, chap. 2).}
by *savikalpa* perception. When *savikalpa* perception dominates to the extent that we lose sight of *nirvikalpa* perception entirely, we are trapped in egoic, dualistic consciousness. Operating exclusively in the mode of *savikalpa*, we become dualised consciousnesses, seeing ourselves as the subject, categorically and substantively separate from the object. As argued previously and repeatedly, the ontogenesis of existential distress is to be found in the dualised consciousness which gives rise to a strong sense of substantive ego. If our analysis is correct, then the most radical (meaning, pulling by the root) and, therefore, most effective way of bringing about moral consciousness is not to re-contentize *savikalpa* perception so as to give it a moral content but to recover *nirvikalpa* perception. No matter how much moral content (with moral norms and principles) we may inject into *savikalpa*, once one becomes imprisoned in a dualistic mode of consciousness, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, not to feel alienated from the world and enact this alienation through objectification of all that comes to us, including people. This difficulty bespeaks itself in the practice of traditional morality: being moral is a struggle, an uphill battle, because one has to go against the invariable thrust of dualistic ego-consciousness. Alienation becomes the psychic field in which we struggle to establish kinship with the world (things and creatures). But if we can change this psychic field so that we have kinship with the world, the switch that comes with the recovery of *nirvikalpa* perception, the struggle to be moral by going against one's selfish desires ceases.

So far in our explication of *nirvikalpa* and *savikalpa* perceptions, we ended up talking more about *savikalpa* perception since that is easier to comprehend, being germane to our ordinary perception, but we are still left wondering as to what *nirvikalpa* perception is all about. To those of us who are firmly convinced that all perceptions are inextricably conceptual,
nirvikalpa perception seems to amount to seeing nothing, which is nonsense. But nirvikalpa perception does not mean not seeing anything. It is not as though one would see blankness or the physical substrata of things such as swarms of moving particles. When I see a cup in the mode of nirvikalpa, I would not fail to see its usual physical features. Yet, what is conspicuously absent in nirvikalpa perception would be the usual restless rapid movements of thought that name, classify, ascribe, prescribe, represent, calculate, relate, explain, hypothesize, conclude, justify, and so on. The mind comes to a still point and rests in the sheer presence of things. A shift of focus in perception has occurred here: the perception of whatness has receded to the background, and into the foreground comes the perception of thatness. When this happens, our mind is freed from the usual tendency to substantivize or reify reality, including the tendency to set up the substantive boundaries between the self and the nonself.

In contrasting nirvikalpa perception against savikalpa perception, I do not imply that one is a truer or better (for whatever reasons) mode of perception than the other. Neither do I imply that the nondual consciousness is to be identified exclusively with nirvikalpa perception. True to the logic of nonduality, a consciousness is not nondual if it posits an exclusionary duality between nirvikalpa and savikalpa perceptions. Rather, for nondual consciousness, perception encompasses a whole spectrum,

117 Once seeing is freed from the usual stable mold of conceptualized pattern recognition, the possibility of what can be or is seen opens up wide. Loy (1988, pp. 82-86) cites an experiment conducted by Deikman in which subjects were asked to view an object (a blue vase, in this case) in a state of relaxed concentration as in a meditative state. The striking finding was the instability or variability of percepts across subjects and times. The blue vase, which ordinarily would appear in a fixed stable pattern of percepts, now appeared unstable in size, shape, physical boundary demarcation, colour, motion, and subject-object distinction. Why this unstable perception? Or, to pose the question the other way around, why is the ordinary perception so stable? The explanation I would venture is that conceptualization normalizes our perception so that the world appears stable, enduring, and predictable. In other words, conceptualization effects a consensual world of perception.
ranging from nirvikalpa perception to highly interpretive savikalpa perception mediated through language. Thus, my position is that we need to widen our understanding of perception so that, instead of narrowly identifying perception only with savikalpa perception as in the prevailing mode of understanding, we recognize perception to include both savikalpa and nirvikalpa. Contemporary epistemology has been leaning almost entirely towards the interpretive mode of seeing, to the denial of nirvikalpa perception. It is this denial of nirvikalpa perception and not the affirmation of savikalpa perception that is the problem. When we lose sight of nirvikalpa perception, we also lose sight of nondual consciousness, because nonduality is this irreducible wholeness.

To emphasize, nondual seeing is not just nirvikalpa perception. If so, we should forget about our ambition for nondual consciousness while we live our normal lives of common humanity, carrying on with naming, arguing, explaining, and the like. But in nondual consciousness, one continues to engage in savikalpa perception, yet it does not figure exclusively but as a part of the larger landscape (or skyscape, to continue with our metaphor) of perception that shows the deep background of nirvikalpa perception. In other words, as long as the savikalpa floats against the nirvikalpa, one is enjoying nondual consciousness. When definite and organized savikalpa is experienced against the formless background of nirvikalpa so that we understand savikalpa to be a contingent thought-construct, not surprisingly, savikalpa itself then becomes fluid and metamorphic. There is no one true way in which things should appear and, therefore, no one true way through which we should perceive. What this means is giving ourselves the permission to open up the possibilities of seeing and saying what we see. For instance, seeing is not restricted to the
usual physical identification of what things are. Instead, seeing becomes a continuum experience, a complex of experience rather than a specific seeing, such as physical seeing. I shall now illustrate these points with the case of Thich Nhat Hanh's seeing.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1991) says that when he looks deeply at a piece of paper, he "sees" clouds, rain, sunshine, the trees, the logger, and so on. The list of implicated existents without which the paper could not be can go on indefinitely until it has included the totality of reality. Is Thich Nhat Hanh hallucinating when he "sees" clouds and sunshine in the paper, or is he only speaking metaphorically? The answer seems to be neither. To justify this answer, I will apply the insight we have gained from the foregoing discussion on nondual seeing. I argued that nondual seeing encompasses the whole spectrum of seeing, from nirvikalpa perception to savikalpa perception. Even savikalpa perception is part of nondual seeing insofar as one does not exclusively identify seeing with it. Our usual identification of seeing with a normalized savikalpa perception is responsible for the view that would deny the validity of Thich Nhat Hanh's seeing clouds, rain, and so on in a piece of paper. To explain his seeing in the way that does not violate the usual language usage of the word 'see,' we would have to conjecture that he is either hallucinating or using the word 'see' just metaphorically. But once we accept the theory of nondual seeing, in which seeing is not to be exclusively identified with the conceptualized pattern recognition of physical objects, then we could permeate seeing with a wider awareness of the interconnectedness of the world.

Here, the wider awareness is not in the abstract sense (as when we would write down what paper reminds us of) but in the experiential sense as when Thich Nhat Hanh has the "thick" and immediate feelings of clouds.
without actually seeing them. When the feelings/thoughts of clouds and rain are so immediate, intimate, thick, and palpable as to be integrated into the whole complex of experience that we call seeing so that one cannot say where the physical seeing of paper ends and the experience of clouds and rain begins, then one can said to be realizing nondual perception. In nondual perception, savikalpa perception opens up rather than limits the scope or possibility of seeing so that the interconnectedness of being, and hence our sense of kinship with the world, is nurtured. When savikalpa perception becomes reified so that it purports to deliver to us the "true," objective pictures of the world, then it becomes a great obstacle rather than a mediator to our nondual experience. This is why I insist that if savikalpa perception has not gained the freedom of floating (via the realization of nirvikalpa perception), then it will not conduce nondual experience. On the contrary, in the absence of nirvikalpa experiences, savikalpa perception will perpetuate subject-object dualism.

Still, our worries linger. We worry about misleading the listeners if we start talking about seeing clouds in a piece of paper. Wouldn't our listeners be wondering (not just idly but with an anxiety over the lack of conceptual clarity) whether the speaker is "really seeing" clouds in a piece of paper or just imagining? Indeed, I would say that this kind of worry has been so important to us that we have ended up with defining seeing proper (as opposed to the metaphorical usage of the term) narrowly as seeing of the physical properties of objects. But worries are always relative to what we value and what we can live with. We would have worries over the ambiguity of seeing if our values are positivistic (which they have been) and feel that we cannot tolerate the richness (referred as 'confusion') of undisciplined experience which regularly mixes up (that is, seen from the viewpoint of conceptual clarity)
psychophysical events of different categories like seeing and imagining. Positivism is foremost a commitment to clarity and distinction whose consequence unfortunately has not been so much a clear disclosing of the richness of experience as the disciplining of experience down to a narrow spectrum of possibility. In short, our experience has become limited. To wit, how often do people "see" (whatever mode of seeing this may be) clouds and rain in a piece of paper? We allow poets to talk like that, explaining to ourselves that is poetic license, but if our non-poet friends say these things, we would secretly worry about their mental health and look for further signs of a mental breakdown.

But we need not worry that Thich Nhat Hanh is going to take out his umbrella and put it over his head when he sees clouds and rain in his paper. There would not be such confusion in his mind. But even when thus assured, we might still be very tempted to philosophize and say that he is not really seeing clouds and sunshine in the paper but thinking or imagining them. I do not know what Thich Nhat Hanh would say about our attempt at clarity and so I cannot speak for him. But I know how I would respond to this point. If I say that I am seeing clouds when looking at this piece of paper, my "seeing" is not physical in the ordinary sense. But nor am I just abstractly mentating or free-associating when I say that I see clouds in the paper. Something much more experiential that involves my whole being—or, to use Thich Nhat Hanh's word, interbeing—is happening even if I am not visually seeing the clouds in front of me, to the point that I am profoundly engaged with the whole being of paper at the moment of seeing. I believe that it is this kind of profound engagement with the field of being, which transcends the restricted, conventional perceptions, that moral perception calls for. In other words, we need to place ourselves in the field of being where we can
experience deeply, and not just conceptualize, the innumerable facets of being that support each and every thing and event.

What I attempted to show with this illustration is that when *savikalpa* is placed in the field of *nirvikalpa*, it is given free play. *Savikalpa* can multiply and flourish because it is unburdened with the task of having to represent the objective world. Under that burden, a sharp distinction had to be made between what we can truly and really see (empirical seeing) and what we can imagine (metaphorical seeing). Only empirical seeing was admitted into the hallowed hall of reality while imagination, though cherished, is left in the ontological wasteland, deprived of more tangible possibilities of being. But understanding *savikalpa* in the larger context of nonduality breaks down all these divisions, created along the line of subject-object duality, among seeing, imagining, thinking, and sensate experiences, allowing experience to be all these at once as in Thich Nhat Hanh's example of seeing. I argue that moral perception with its requirement to be a deeply embodied and engaged experience has to be this kind of "thick" experience. However, it has been my contention that the usual process of conceptualization tends to impede this project of accessing the field of being. In the next subsection, I shall take a yet closer look at this problem. The thesis I propose is that language, especially in its propositional capacity of naming and describing the world, has the tendency to hide rather than disclose the field of Dasein.

4.4.1 Deconceptualization and the nonduality of perception

I mentioned in one of the footnotes that conceptualization works as a means of disciplining our experiences, the result of which are normalized experiences. Notice how we react to Thich Nhat Hanh's seeing clouds in paper: we would say, "He must be imagining." What is implied here is a
sharp and categorical distinction between the objective *what is* and the subjective mental phenomenon that bears no correspondence to what is. Veridical seeing falls into the former category while imagination falls into the latter. As such, the two categories must remain distinct and separate if one were to be mentally sound. When the distinction blurs and the two categories become continuous with each other, the result is usually thought to be madness. If putting an umbrella over one’s head while looking at a piece of paper because one thinks one is physically seeing clouds and rain when they are not there is a sign of madness, then I think that seeing only the piece of paper without the experience of "interbeing" that is manifested in the paper is equally a sign or form of madness. I am here defining madness, but with no intention of making it a clinical definition, as the incapacity to appreciate deeply and nurture the interconnectedness of all the co-dependently arising factors that make up our space-time field.

When we become entrenched in the usual subject-object dualism, we disallow ourselves to experience, with a thick and intimate sense of presence, the interconnectedness of paper, clouds, rain, and the like. In order to recapture this experience, we have to renounce dualism. It is just very hard to talk about "seeing" clouds in a piece of paper in a language that has a certain dualistic ontological commitment. We see this commitment in action in the way words are used to distinguish sharply physical seeing from imagining or conceptualizing.

Still, difficulty is not impossibility, and we can make a move to reinterpret the sharp categorical boundary between the objective and the subjective. We can see the boundary not as a sign of disconnection or discontinuousness but as a sign of connection and continuity. I think of Escher’s lithographs in which the boundary that marks off one region from
another is precisely the site of subtle transfusion where one being is pregnant with the possibilities of another. It is the site of co-dependent arising. The statement, "I see a cup," which is usually dualistically understood as positing the subject and the object can be understood as indicating nondual co-arising of the subject and the object. But this is a difficult art, given the dominance of the representational and referential use of language. The word "paper" refers to paper and not to cloud or rain. And "cloud" does not refer to paper or rain, and so on. This referential or representational mode of language is not conducive to the transformative perception of nonduality. On the contrary, it is conducive to fast and accurate pattern recognition or identification of objects and events, fostering judgmental attitude. We learn to cut up the world/reality into discrete, substantive objects, events, and qualities. Recall Murdoch's example of the mother-in-law and her initial judgmental attitude and practice. Moral perception as seeing interbeing and opening of the possibility of mutual transformation between the one who sees and the one who is seen so that both parties can see each other into better possibilities of being is not well nurtured by the representational mode of language.

On the other hand, moral perception would find fecund soil in the metaphorical view of language, for language as metaphor claims no substantive correspondence to the objectivist reality and becomes that fluid and transformative receptacle or vehicle that carries us from one moment of being and seeing into the next. It discourages demarcation and reification, seeing all things and events in the stream of becoming or metamorphosis. Thus, paper is seen in the larger context of becoming, metamorphosing from clouds and rain into, say, a writing pad. Seeing paper is not representation--picturing what is "out there." Rather, if we embrace the ontic view of co-dependent arising, then there is no objective given to be seen prior to the act
of seeing itself. Seeing is a creative configuration that emerges from the moment's perceptivity. Seeing is the inward figuring or tracing of the moment's beingness. Seeing is presencing.\textsuperscript{118} In such figuring, the duality of subjective and objective breaks down since there is no separate object to be perceived and no separate subject to perceive. Instead, there stands only the moment of seeing which is a singular creative act, the self-presencing of Dasein.

I have argued that a way to encourage nondual perception is unanchoring perception from propositional conceptualization, but this does not mean that we would no longer conceptualize. Rather, what happens is that conceptualization, which previously seemed like the very ground of our being is now free-floating, like a cloud, which free movements we can enjoy and benefit without our being attached to them. Attachment is a symptom of reification. Goldstein (1995, p. 4) states that a dramatic difference exists between "being lost in a thought" and "being aware of a thought." In the next section, I will examine what our thinking is like when we establish ourselves in nondual consciousness. As asserted here, we do not cease to conceptualize when we become nondual, but the way we conceptualize changes along with our very understanding of it.

4.5. Nondual thinking

\textsuperscript{118} A theory of perception that I am forming here owes both to Ames' exposition of the Confucian notion of knowing (1991) and Appelbaum's notion of percipience (1995). Of the latter, I will be discussing more extensively in the next chapter. Ames (1991, p. 231) explains that in the Confucian conception of knowing, "What is 'known' exists as a function of being able to know--it does not exist prior to it. There is a natural 'awakening to and manifesting (chueh) of a reality to which one has immediate access as something within (wu or chueh) as opposed to the conceptual notion of 'grasping something from without'." Further (ibid.): "... knowing in a Confucian world involves a tracing out without obstruction of the correlated details and the extended pattern of relationships which obtain among them."
Just as nonduality does not imply the absence of perception or action, it also does not imply the absence of thoughts. Thinking is dualised when it occurs under the condition of the I-consciousness. That is, thinking becomes dualised when the I-consciousness dominates. The I-consciousness invariably thinks that it is doing the thinking and that it is carrying out the thoughts. It considers itself the traffic controller, proprietor, or author of the thoughts. In this understanding, the self wills and directs the flow of thoughts, stringing together one thought after another. The self is the one who links the thoughts. Hence, thinking occurs in a series, in linear progression of one thought following another.

However, as we come to realize very vividly, say, in meditation, thoughts can arise unwilled and undirected by the self. Thoughts arise and pass away without the self's conscious and directed effort. As one's concentration deepens and one's attentional acuity increases, what one notices is that thoughts are not linked up in a chain, one to the next, but that there are gaps in-between, revealing that thoughts spring up one-by-one from the ground consciousness where there are no thoughts. A thought springs up and then vanishes. There is a gap where no thoughts arise: as it is often described, there is only the luminous stillness of awareness. Then another thought bubbles up and disappears again. The underlying awareness is like the calm surface of a body of water and the thoughts are like bubbles that pop up and disappear.

Ordinarilly, when thoughts appear all linked with no gaps in-between, it is hard to experience the nondual consciousness that underlies thoughts. With thoughts thickly clouding our consciousness and the sense of self identified with the thoughts, nondual consciousness is obscured and blocked. But when thoughts are experienced as discrete bubbles that come and go with
gaps in-between, then we (our attention) are released into the wider stream of consciousness which includes nirvikalpa experience. As explained in Chapter Three, thoughts usually cannot be experienced in this manner because they come too thickly and fast. We have become so besieged with thoughts and so identified with them that we are largely cut off from nondual consciousness. We have identified the essential part of our being with our thoughts. Descartes' statement (1962, p. 33) is the case in point: "(Thought) alone is inseparable from me. I am— I exist: this is certain; but how often? As often as I think; for perhaps it would even happen, if I should wholly cease to think, that I should at the same time altogether cease to be."

No wonder, then, we constantly occupy ourselves with thoughts, for, according to Descartes, we would pass out into nothingness the moment we stop thinking. But the nondualist would challenge this view and argue that, if anything, nirvikalpa experience is a full-blown experience of being and deeply eudaimonic at that. Furthermore, the nondualist would argue that thoughts can come and go without the I-consciousness anyway. This is best seen in a vipassana session: thoughts rise up from nowhere and pass away into nowhere, and between thoughts are the gaps where no I-consciousness resides. From experiencing thoughts in this way, one makes observations like: "Thoughts think themselves." With this view of unauthored thoughts, we have gone off to the extreme opposite from Descartes' cogito, and the whole Cartesian project of founding certain knowledge on the indubitable fact of cogito would simply vanish if we embrace the nondual view of thoughts. What we are left with, however, is not nihilility, a negation

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119 Such thoughts are said to be "unsupported." Loy (1988, p. 143) explains: "A thought is 'unsupported' when it is not experienced as arising in dependence upon anything else. It is not experienced as 'caused' by another thought (which is a 'mind-object') and of course it is not 'produced' by a thinker, since the Bodhisattva realizes that 'thinkers' (like ego-selves generally) do not exist."
of existence, but, on the contrary, an affirmation of being which nullifies the need for conceptual support in the first place. The need for conceptual support has risen from the fundamental anxiety that comes with losing sight of nonduality.

The notion of nondual thinking does not deny the phenomenological existence of thoughts arising by themselves. What the notion denies is just that there is a thinker behind the thoughts. It is only when I-consciousness is superimposed on otherwise unsupported thoughts that thoughts become dualised. Dualised thoughts bear the staining of the I-consciousness. In other words, all thoughts, insofar as they occur against the background of nondual consciousness, are nondual thoughts—thoughts belonging to no subject. Nondual thoughts are without an author who thinks up these thoughts at will.120

The essence of nondual thinking is having the view of the underlying ground of awareness from which particularizing thoughts arise. In contrast, dualistic thinking is preoccupied only with particularizing thoughts without the view of the background or the surrounding nondual awareness. Nondual awareness is preconceptual in that it is prior to the particularized and definite whatness, including the subject-object, self-other distinction.121

120 Someone may pose this question to me: Who has authored this thesis? If not a subject named Heesoon Bai, where do these particular thoughts come from? Well, let me first answer by way of an analogy. Is the sky an author, a maker, of clouds? Are we not content to think of clouds as taking place in the space of the sky and the sky is the arena in which particular configurations of cloud rise up and disappear? What ontological or epistemological necessity is there for us to think that the sky is the maker of clouds? Thinking likewise, I can say that "my" thoughts are not so much authored by "me" as have taken a particular shape in the "space" of this person who is no more an author than an environment, rich (hopefully) with history and experience, whose boundedness is only an arbitrary convention and which diffuses into other environments.

121 Years ago when I was first introduced to meditation, I became greatly puzzled when told by the teacher conducting the meditation retreat at that time that we had to distinguish between consciousness and awareness. I could not see the difference at that time, but now, in retrospect, I know that the difference he alluded to has to do with nonintentionality and, hence, nonduality. Although we commonly use "consciousness" and "awareness" interchangeably, we could define a technical usage of these terms as my teacher had done in the context of
As mentioned before, the metaphor of a clear blue sky in Buddhist literature is often used to capture the sense of this nondual awareness. Particularizing thoughts arise from or against this nondual awareness as clouds float in the sky. Dualistic thinking sees only the clouds of thoughts whereas nondual thinking sees both the sky of awareness and the clouds of thoughts. Thus, in nondual thinking, there is the understanding that particular thoughts that arise are impermanent, insubstantial, and contingent. Simply put, thoughts are squarely understood as thoughts and nothing more. Thus, the thin but fated line of hypostatization that converts thoughts into re-presentations of reality is not crossed. Not crossing this line makes one a nondualist. As clouds do not define the sky, thoughts do not define the reality of awareness.

To think nondualistically is never to lose sight of nirvikalpa experience while letting the thoughts come and go freely. This way, one is not attached to one's thoughts and does not identify with them, especially the familiar ones that are marked by reactive and habitual responses. The automatic causal chain that links one thought to the next or to a habitual action is broken by the practice of disidentification or disengagement. When this happens, we are released into a space of wider awareness and resonance. This is the space of attunement where, with our mindful "listening," we can piece together variations on the theme of human condition. But what we piece together is not taken to be a "true" description of reality.122

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122 meditation, and have 'consciousness' to denote the consciousness of subject-object duality and then have 'awareness' to denote nondualized consciousness. Since awareness is not dualized and has no sense of the object, it is not intentional—that is, without the object. In this thesis, I have not followed this semantic exercise of differentiating 'awareness' and 'consciousness', but I believe that I have made my point through my explications. Oh, come on," says my skeptical reader, "surely, some statements are true descriptions of reality and some are not. If snow is white, then the statement, "Snow is white" is a true description of how the world is. To deny that this is how descriptions work, or even to deny that there are descriptions at all, as it seems to be implied by the nondualist, is literally nonsense." I readily admit that the nondual view and practice are nonsensical to the dualist. It cannot be otherwise. If otherwise, there is no cause for nonduality. What we have is two
If we wish to embrace nonduality (say, because it is a better way of furthering eudaimonia), then we have to give up the objectivist understanding and practice of description, for it perpetrates duality and obscures our nondual consciousness. Nondual consciousness has little chance to show itself under the compulsion of reality descriptions. Descriptions are the most powerful prescriptions. Against the persuasion of how reality really is, we can only submit. But if we consider thoughts nondualistically, that is, as being unsupported, free-floating, and roaming, then we can afford not to be so attached to them. We do not take them to be re-presentations of reality. What do we take them to be then? Just as thoughts!

Thoughts come and go, gather and disperse according to the dynamics of our Dasein experience. This being so, the way to take care of thoughts is to let them rise freely, neither suppressing nor clinging to them. However, this is incredibly hard for the egoic consciousness, for it has identified itself with thoughts (because thoughts reveal reality) to the point of being their author. We will (or rather, we think we will) thoughts into existence, direct, and project them. But this possession and control over thoughts only imprison

competing ontologies, and the nondualist is displaying an ontology which, though not quite totally unintelligible to the dualist, is nonetheless sufficiently different as to be odd. Yet, as I assess it, the nondualist ontology/epistemology has a major attraction in that it is a larger, more inclusive account that can accommodate the dualist account, while the reverse is not the case.

More accurately, this power of the descriptive lies precisely in the understanding that it is a descriptive and not a prescriptive. In other words, the prescriptive power of the descriptive lies in the tacit prescriptiveness. Once the tacit prescriptiveness is openly disclosed, the power dissolves, and we are invited to an "ethical" discussion of how we ought to see the world. Putnam (1990, p. 115) has put the point imaginatively like this: "If I dared to be a metaphysician, I think I would create a system in which there were nothing but obligations. What would be metaphysically ultimate, in the picture I would create, would be what we ought to do (ought to say, ought to think). In my fantasy of myself as a metaphysical super-hero, all 'facts' would dissolve into 'values.' That there is a chair in this room would be analyzed (metaphysically, not conceptually--there is no 'language analysis' in this fantasy) into a set of obligations: the obligations to think that there is a chair in this room if epistemic conditions are (were) 'good' enough, for example."

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us in them, blocking our access to nondual consciousness. I suggest that allowing thoughts to be free-floating, delinked from the wheel of intentionality, has a great moral importance because when we are identified with our thoughts, such that we are chock-full of our own thoughts, it is hard for us to resonate with the world—with our fellow humans and other creatures. In the following subsection, I shall explore this idea further.

4.5.1. Nondual thinking and empathy

By identifying ourselves with thoughts, we become imprisoned in them. The situation is ironic in that we appear to be the guard while, in fact, we are the prisoners. Breaking out of this prison so that the thought-cum-self returns to the nondual source and can resonate with the moment-to-moment found-reality or emergent reality instead of perpetuating the story line of the self-cum-thought process is how I construe what the moral project of nonduality to be. We want thoughts to become the authentic expressions of Dasein instead of being the script for the autistic egoic self. As mist rises up from the lake, thoughts should rise up from our nondual experience. This ability of thoughts to be in tune with or be attuned to our evolving, ever-arriving Dasein—this is empathy.

The core meaning of empathy is resonance, meaning vibrating sympathetically in response to another "body." In empathic thinking, then, thoughts are sympathetic vibrations which rise up in response to the world.\(^{124}\) In thus construing empathic thinking, I would like to bring our

\(^{124}\) Some would argue that empathy is not sympathy and that it suffices to know how another is feeling and thinking to qualify as empathic, while sympathy calls for not only knowing but also sharing the feelings and viewpoints. This is the view that, for instance, Vetlesen (1994) and Blum (1994) hold. In my thesis, I did not make the above distinction between empathy and sympathy but used both terms to include the sharing component. My reason for not making this distinction is that I have no use in my own moral theorizing for the Vetlesen-kind of empathy which is only cognitive. Since nonduality is what I aim for, I am not at all troubled by being
attention to two important points: the negation of willful imposition which indicates a substantive self and the affirmation of the "field of resonance" of which all individual particulars participating in the resonance are integral parts. As we shall see, these two points converge on the same notion: selflessness or \textit{anatta}.

If thinking is not generated and controlled by a self (although it appears to be so when seen from the egoic perspective), then it is a happening that occurs on its own in accordance with various conditions and factors, including the state of attentional receptivity in the individual as well as the very belief that there is or is not a thinker who stands over his or her thought processes. When conditions change, the kind of thoughts that come out change, too. In a condition of deep empathy, the kinds of thoughts that emerge are bound to be different from a condition of closed-mindedness and heartlessness. When one faces a situation as a separate ego-self, the kind of thoughts that can be had about the situation are bound to be different from when one merges into it empathically.

In the context of interpersonal interactions, if thinking is not empathic, it is liable to be projective, meaning that the self is too eager and ready to construe people and situations in terms of the self's conditioned and reactive categories of understanding and feelings. The usual judgmental attitude which forever pronounces what is what exemplifies this projective thinking. The judgmental attitude and practice are founded upon the objectivist understanding of reality and are unmindful of the fluid potentiality of reality/experience.

Just how far can we be open-minded and open-hearted? Positive

\footnotesize{able to closely, albeit temporarily, share feelings and views which make one identify with another. This latter prospect is very objectionable to both Vetlesen and Blum.}
claims aside, how can we practise open-mindedness/open-heartedness with rigour? Isn't it the case that whatever situation we face, we enter into it with an already existing set of beliefs and dispositions? Aren't our responses already loaded and, hence, prejudiced? Most theorists working in the tradition of virtues ethics would unreservedly affirm this view and comment that this is why we want people to have the right kind of moral views and dispositions out of which they can act consistently.\textsuperscript{125} I shall not discount the obvious merits of virtues ethics: I would rather have people act out of morally virtuous dispositions than out of immoral or amoral dispositions. Yet, the requirement of empathy or compassion as an expression of nondual consciousness is something more or even other than feeling and acting out of fixed dispositions and views. In fact, we could say that the nondual practice of empathy and compassion depends on the opposite mechanism from virtues ethics—namely, active disengagement from one's existing views and dispositions even when these are morally salutary. One has to resist the overwhelming tendency within oneself to enact one's preexisting views and dispositions.

Now to be fair, virtue theorists do talk about the need to change one's dispositions and beliefs in order to improve them. There cannot be learning the new without unlearning the old. Yet, in their theories, because the focus is learning, the unlearning process is subsumed under the learning programme, and the result is that not enough is made of the potential of unlearning, the deconditioning process. In the opinions of those who subscribe to virtues ethics, humans are not that free to decondition

\textsuperscript{125} The tradition of virtues ethics goes back to Aristotle's ethics. Aristotle put a heavy emphasis on disposition (hexis) as the source of moral (or immoral) conduct, and thus moral education must be primarily devoted to molding morally virtuous dispositions. Character is a settled complex of dispositions.
themselves and, therefore, cannot be free of their dispositions and beliefs. As an empirical statement descriptive of the contingent fact about humanity, I suppose this is true. But we should not take it as a statement that tells something about the immutable human nature. To do so would turn a blind eye to a possibility of a more radical freedom that equally characterizes human "nature."

Let us return to the above original question: Just how far can we go with this practice of deconditioning or disengagement from the established views and dispositions? As Kekes (1988) remarks, we cannot just get rid of dispositions (feelings and beliefs). The most we can do is to modify what we have. But before we come to any modification, we must enter the psychic space where this deconditioning takes place and where we are disengaged from the usual thrust of projection of our beliefs and dispositions. My thesis has been that this space is best entered when one is in the state of nondual consciousness, having ceased to view and feel oneself as separate from the Other. In these chapters, I have been occupied with the question of how we can attain this cessation, and this has led me to examine different aspects of human intentionality. My primary concern in this quest has not been with any specific modification to one's beliefs and dispositions that may follow after disengagement, believing as I do that there is no set modification to aspire to, but with disengagement itself. What actual modifications are made to one's beliefs and dispositions is to be left to an emergence contingent upon the practice of nondual perception, thinking, and acting.

As an analogy, suppose that I am a handiperson called to fix something in a house. I would bring my usual toolbox, for sure. When I arrive on the scene, I however would not start pulling out my tools, eager to use my favourite ones. I should not be construing the problem in terms of my tools.
Rather, I should first be examining the situation carefully and, after figuring out what the problem is, I should think about what tools to use. I might find that I do not have the right kind of tools and I might be obliged to borrow one or make one up. This analogy makes perfect sense to us, and yet when it comes to facing (moral) situations calling for our attention, we react right away with our own beliefs and dispositions and, sadly, our reaction is sometimes indifference or furtive evasion. The reason for these reactions is that we are identified with our beliefs and dispositions which constitute our sense of ego-self, and in the usual mode of our being, we function as ego-selves. My handiperson is able to have her careful examination of the problem because she is not identified with her tools. Likewise, if we are not identified with our preferred dispositions and beliefs which give us a self-identity and see them as tools per se, then we could be more fully present to/in the situation. This is empathy.

The difference between projective thinking and empathic thinking may be illustrated by the difference between hearing and listening. People hear whatever they selectively tune into and construe, but when they listen mindfully, they do not select, reactively interpret, and judge. In listening, we try to be as fully present to the moment as we are able, requiring us to suspend our self-consciousness (that is, consciousness of the self). Interposing the self's habits and agenda would only disrupt listening. Listening is not taking place if we find ourselves resisting or grasping. Such a reactive response would indicate that we are hearing through the ego-self's selected conceptual, dispositional, and valuational filters. If nondual thinking is to occur, we must not stop at this point of resistance and grasping, called "the sticking point," for it is right here that objectification and projection would take place. We have to go beyond the sticking point to where we feel no
inner resistance, denial, or attachment. Then we would enter the space of empathic resonance.

Every time we encounter resistance or grasping, we need to become more mindful and attentive, letting go of the self's attachment to certain ideas and dispositions, and opening up more to the field of resonance. Again we ask, just how far can one be open and empathic? I suppose this is really an open-ended process which is intimately known only to the person undergoing it. Extending the logic of anatta, it seems that one would have reached a very high degree of empathy when one encounters no resistance and grasping from the self and is fully present to what one perceives and hears. Without the interfering waves of the self's resistance and grasping, the mind would be free to resonate with the moment's beingness. Granted that such a pitch of empathy is unusual, examples are not lacking. I think of Thich Nhat Hanh's poem (1991, pp. 123-124) "Please call me by my true names" as an example of deep empathy.

I know that behind this persistent question that I have been asking myself lurks a common fear about empathizing with those who we may feel are unworthy of deserving our empathy. Should we be empathic with brutal criminals? Wouldn't that be encouraging immorality and criminality? We do misunderstand empathy. Empathy/compassion is not approval. It does not come from a soft and weak state of mind. Salzberg (1995) explains that compassion "arises out of seeing the true nature of suffering in the world." It takes a tremendous strength of mind-heart to be open--to acknowledge and be with--suffering. This is why it takes nondual consciousness rather than egoic consciousness.

Do not say that I'll depart tomorrow because even today I still arrive.

Look deeply: I arrive in every second to be a bud on a spring branch, to be a tiny bird, with wings still fragile, learning to sing in my new nest, to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower, to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and cry, in order to fear and to hope. The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that are alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river.
example of seeing clouds in a piece of paper, Thich Nhat Hanh is not merely abstractly and conceptually imagining that he is a bird, a frog, a boat girl, a pirate, and so on. Empathy involves the depth of one's being to the degree that one feels what it is like to be a frog being eaten by a snake or what it is like to be a female refugee raped by a sea pirate or the pirate himself. But the expression 'I feel like a frog' does not convey the depth of his empathy. Hence the expression 'I am a frog'. Here, 'to be' expresses more than an object identity. It is an expression of Dasein, naming the kinship formed by an empathic bond.

That thinking can transcend the conventional substantive boundary of

and I am the bird which, when spring comes, arrives in time to eat the mayfly.
I am the frog swimming happily in the clear pond,
and I am also the grass-snake who, approaching in silence,
feeds itself on the frog.
I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks,
and I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.
I am the twelve-year-old-girl, refugee on a small boat who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate,
and I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.
I am a member of the politoburo, with plenty of power in my hands,
and I am the man who has to pay his "debt of blood" to my people,
dying slowly in a forced labour camp.

My joy is like spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom in all walks of life.
My pain is like a river of tears, so full it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart can be left open,
the door of compassion.
the selves is evident in the very phenomenon of empathy. If the model of substantive self is what really holds all the way so that each self would be atomistic and discrete, then we would have difficulty in accounting for the phenomenon of empathy. If selves are substantive, the difficulty lies in showing why one self should sympathetically affect and be affected by another at all. On the other hand, if selves are not substantive and, hence, are integral parts of the common field of resonance, it is not at all difficult to explain both the phenomenon of empathy and the phenomenon of its absence. Empathy is absent when we behave like substantive selves, constantly thrusting out our egoic desires and habits of thought, thereby rendering ourselves unable to be receptive and empathic.

I think that the last point can be validated by our common observations—namely, that we find ourselves more empathic when we are less preoccupied with and less projective of our own selves. We are able to suffer and rejoice more readily with others when we do not interpose our own self-seeking interests and concerns. Compassion and sympathetic joy simply do not operate in a psychic environment where the self puts up a boundary between selves, because then resonance cannot take place. Not long ago, I heard a gripping story related to me by a friend. She spoke of a woman she met whose blunt response to the collapse of an apartment building in Seoul killing hundreds of residents was "I am so glad that the value of my house was not badly affected by the incident." Recalling Vetlesen's central thesis that the key to moral performance is affectedness, we can indeed see that without the resonance of sympathy, whether in joy or in sorrow, we cannot start to relate to others morally from the depth of our heart-mind. It is my thesis that nondual consciousness is the natural home of empathy.
In discussing nonduality and its manifestation as empathy, our difficulty is not that we have no intuitive understanding of this phenomenon since it occurs commonly enough. Rather, the difficulty is that it does not sustain itself so as to establish us firmly in nonduality. Usually, our empathy sparks up like little tongues of fire and then quickly dissipates, and we return to the dualistic mode of pitting and balancing the self against the nonself. In other words, if we count on just the natural show of empathy, then empathy is not reliable enough as our moral guide or foundation. The realists whom I have identified at the beginning of this chapter as those who assess the situation of human empathy realistically—that is, as it occurs—are vindicated in thinking that we cannot found morality on this frail and whimsical ground.

Yet, if we go to a tradition like Buddhism, which has been chosen for exploration in this thesis, a very deep and sustained (to the point of being the ground consciousness) level of empathy is considered possible by all since nonduality, the home of empathy, is, in fact, the ground of our being which is temporarily obscured by egoic consciousness. If nonduality is indeed the ground of our being, and duality is only a surface layer of our consciousness fabricated with the help of the conceptualizing mind, then we would expect a deep-seated influence of nonduality to be coming through to the surface still. As argued before, Buddhists could point to the very phenomenon of empathy as the manifestation of this irrepressible nonduality. They and others would also interpret our basic desire to be happy, loved, secure, belonging, and at peace with the world as the inherent longing for the underlying nonduality that has been temporarily obscured, for it is dwelling in nonduality—that is, overcoming the subject-object duality—which would protect us from various forms or symptoms of alienation and fragmentation.
In the following section, I will examine how the nondual perception and thinking discussed so far would translate into nondual actions. Though I have been focusing more on perception and thinking than on action in my ethical view because of the former’s priority in moral intentionality (Chapter One), it is really in the discussion of nondual moral action that we may encounter the strongest inner resistance to the notion of nonduality, for, in a very fundamental sense, nondual moral action effaces our sacrosanct notion of autonomous moral agency. What is morality without agency? What kind of ethical view is it that denies autonomous moral agency?

4.6. Nondual action

Action conceived in the dualistic mode is intentional. Intentionality has to do with there being objects to which our perception, action, thinking, and conation are directed. When we think, we think of an object; when we see, we see an object, and when we act, there is an object to which our action is directed. This is the ordinary, dualistic mode of experience dichotomized into subject and object. But to act nondually is to have no sense of separation between the subject who acts and the object of action or the action itself. That is, in nondual action, there is no sense of a separate agent who acts and no sense of a separate action, or the object of action, which is achieved by the doer. Lacking this sense of separateness, a nondualist is wholly “one with” his or her actions: the subject-object duality vanishes, rendering nondual actions non-intentional.

Although this way of formulating nondual action may sound decisively strange, it is not difficult to understand if we recall some of our

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128 This is the classic definition of intentionality. Searle (1983, p. 1) formulates it this way: “Intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world.”
own common experiences. For instance, the moment the pianist self-consciously remembers what he is doing or even why he is doing it (say, to win the competition, to please someone, and so on), his playing will suffer, and he is likely to falter and even fail in his performance.\textsuperscript{129} It is fortunate that we often forget to be self-conscious about what we do when we are very absorbed in our doing, and we are carried along by the flow of the activity.\textsuperscript{130} Abandoning the notion of self-conscious doing and committing oneself to the evolving flow of an event and literally becoming part of the event: this is the way of non-intentional, nondual doing. To achieve this, however, requires the difficult art of nonduality, that of effacing the tightly defined boundary of selfhood. This is difficult for most of us who have been almost permanently inducted into self-conscious ways of the subject willing, directing, controlling, and performing things.

Despite the occasional realization that one can be so absorbed in one's doing as to forget the cumbersome sense of the subject-object duality, since our ordinary self-understanding is almost entirely dualistic, it is very difficult to escape the duality. Our standard notion of agency is firmly established in terms of the separate subject willing and performing a separate action. So, just in what sense can I say that I am one with my action or the object of my action? What sense can we make of the talk of the self and the action not being separate?

\textsuperscript{129} A colleague of mine related a story of his own debut as a concert pianist in which he got stage fright and his mind went blank. As seconds ticked away in front of his expectant audience, what he finally did out of desperation was to place his hands on the piano, hoping that his hands would know what to play. His hands did. As this story illustrates, in a performance, it does not help to be self-conscious, that is, conscious of oneself and one's doing; if one is simply absorbed in the doing and is mindful of each moment, the performance is likely to go well.

\textsuperscript{130} Heshusius (1994) argues, along with Berman (1981) and others (Havelock, 1963; Evernden, 1985), that this forgetting of the self and being wholly absorbed in the moment's doing and being, which she characterizes as the participatory consciousness, has been increasingly vanishing, especially in modern times under the bright glare of scientific rationalism with its absolute object-subject duality.
The usual separateness or separableness of the autonomous self and its actions (and their objects) is assumed by the phenomenon of willing. Willing as some psychic "faculty" is what is supposed to interpose between the separate self and actions and their objects, and connect them so that the self performs an action. For instance, when I raise my arm voluntarily, the self has willed this action. The belief that we will our actions is strongly supported by the sense of choice we have. Whether we will something or not is our choice. If we affirm the phenomenon of willing and choosing, then it would seem that we have to grant the separableness thesis of the autonomous subject from its actions. What does the nondualist, who insists on the inseparableness thesis, have to say about willing and choosing?

Again, consider the example of my raising an arm. The dualists hold a causal theory which imputes a subject who entertains an intention, and somehow or another, this intention is causally linked to the ensuing action. But it is precisely this causal link between a thought and an action which eludes our explanation. How does a thought cause an action? This problem has been pondered by philosophers, but it still remains unexplained. Nondualists, seeing no explanation, venture to question the validity of the causal link claimed to exist between the agent and its actions. Nietzsche (1967, p. 295), for instance, clearly saw that we have "absolutely no experience of a cause." The whole notion of causality is an explanatory device necessitated by the separation of the subject and the object in the first place. If the subject and its actions are not separate at all, what need is there to impute causal intentionality? The nondualist position is precisely this denial that the subject and the object (including the subject's actions) are separate and the affirmation that the two are identical. This affirmation is to be verified phenomenologically when one dwells in nondual consciousness. When the
subject and its actions are one, then there is no need to invoke willing and choosing. Actions happen without willing and choosing, without autonomous agents as well.

Yet, it is true that as long as we operate dualistically, we face choice-making daily. I could be picnicking with my children rather than working on my thesis, and this choice-making compels me to do some rational calculation, if I am a prudentialist. Our daily life seems to be filled with these small and big choice-making occasions. But a nondualist, insofar as she is embedded in and, therefore, is identified with the context of immediate situation, is not beset by choice-making, for she would do what is perceived to be most appropriate to her. Of course, she could think of choices abstractly, but such is thinking of choices which is not the same as having to make a choice. Thinking of choices is an exercise of the mind that a nondualist may engage in for whatever reasons, but as a nondualist she would recognize it clearly as a thought and deal with it only as a thought. In the end, when it comes to action, a nondualist does not face a choice among different choices, which is a dilemma, but is entirely guided by a sense of the most appropriate thing to do at the moment, which may include doing nothing.

Kekes (1988), who would not claim himself a nondualist, is nonetheless cognizant of the exaggerated importance of choice-making in the usual discourse or practice of moral life. For him, if one faces a dilemma, this is an indication that one is lacking a deeper understanding of the situation one is in as well as one's own commitments. Echoing Murdoch's observation, Kekes argues that if one were to achieve deep understanding, then what one ought to do should become clear to one. But the question then would be, "How do we achieve this kind of deep understanding?" Murdoch hinted at the answer when she talked about attending properly. Taking up
this, I have radicalized it so far as to suggest nondual consciousness as the condition for the depth of attention. With nondual consciousness, the depth of attention reaches the extent of extinguishing the usual substantive boundary between the subject and the object.

Psychologically, the most concrete way to gauge the disappearance of the subject-object boundary, therefore the dualistic consciousness, is to note the absence of desires because there cannot be desires where there is no subject to desire an object and no object to be desired by the subject. Like the two poles of electricity, the subject and the object are the two poles of the dualistic consciousness between which the consciousness oscillates, generating desires. If there were no subject and no object, then there cannot be desire, not even altruistic desires. There is no grasping, seeking, or intending, for there are no objects of action and perception that the subject grasps after. Such experiences are characterized by a profound stillness and fullness since agitations of the ego-mind that restlessly turns to objects has come to a standstill and has dissolved into the fullness of being. To act in this fullness of being is to express it, in whatever manner, and the resulting manifested actions owe no authorship of a subject nor the mechanism of volition.

To dualists, the disappearance of desire seems the most alarming prospect: a comatose life. In the domain of morality, they wonder how we can be motivated to be moral if we have no desire to be moral and good. The nondualists are pictured to be an indifferent lot. But I think that the common notion that one cannot be moral or do morally right (appropriate or fitting) things if one is not propelled by the desire to be moral is a myth. The Taoists would be the first to tell us that morally appropriate or fitting actions may occur without the self-conscious desire to be moral. If I see a person in
distress and I offer help, not with any expectation to be praised or reciprocated, nor out of moral compunction, there still should be no denying that the action is a moral action insofar as it was performed out of my compassionate heart and was appropriate for benefiting the person. Such action as this lacks what may be properly identified as moral desire--desire to be good, moral, helpful, or even compassionate, and so on.

Now, some may still argue that the very fact that a certain characteristic action is undertaken shows that the agent must have had a certain desire or intention, notwithstanding its moral qualification. So, in the above example, I must have had a certain desire that would characteristically lead me to the action of helping the distressed; otherwise, I would not have helped the person. At this point, I think it would be helpful to clarify what desire is. The point of this clarification is to show that one need not have any desire (as I understand what desire is) in order to act, morally or otherwise. For this clarification, I shall rely on the distinction that is drawn in Buddhism between tanha and vedana.131

Tanha means desire, and as such, it is a phenomenon contingent upon the formation of ego-self, that is, the self who considers itself to be a separate substantive subject (looking out into the objective world). On the other hand, vedana simply means feelings (positive, negative, or neutral) that arise inevitably from sense perception. The distinction here is crucial to understanding correctly the Buddhist thesis of nonsubstantiality (anatta). The thesis of anatta does not negate nor recommend the permanent extinction of the phenomena of human feelings or emotions. Insofar as sense perception persists, which is the usual lot of all humans including the enlightened, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings constantly arise. To emphasize, the

enlightened—that is, those who have overcome the egoic consciousness and perceives and acts from the space of insubstantiality—is not immune to feelings of the pleasant, unpleasant, and the neutral. A warm cup of tea on a chilly morning would be as pleasant to an enlightened one as to me. Humid heat that causes prickly heat would be just as unpleasant to the enlightened one as to me. But the difference between us is that she would neither be attached to the tea nor have an aversion to the prickly heat. The pleasant does not lead to the arising of a desire or attachment. Nor would the unpleasant lead to arising of hatred. Feelings come and go just as feelings. It is only when the ego-self seizes on these feelings that they become desires.

Again, that there is this distinction and that there could be *vedana* without *tanha* are best observed in one's sitting practice in which one may experience feelings as pure feelings without the ego's involvement.

Kalupahana explains that the ability to make the distinction between *tanha* and *vedana* depends on the realization of nonsubstantiality (*anatta*):

However, when one realizes their nonsubstantiality and dependent nature, by "melting" the solidified conceptualizations, one's thought (*citta*) is said to become less rigid (*mudu*) and flexible or malleable (*kammanna*). Having achieved such flexibility, one can proceed to have an understanding of the experiential process, and whenever a pleasant sensation occurs, one would have the necessary understanding as well as conviction to prevent the emergence of lust or hatred, attachment or aversion. It is this form of restraint (*samvara*) on occasions of sense experience that is emphasized in the Buddhist texts. It is not a platonic attempt to develop a non-sensuous intuition or experience; rather an elimination of the harmful effect of sensation. (Kalupahana, 1987, p. 47)

Cultivation of unattached enjoyment and desireless actions are at the heart of the Buddhist and the Taoist moral life. If this sounds too plain or simple, because we may expect something more grand, heroic, and substantial in the way of moral guidance and effort, we should remind ourselves that what is simple is often the most difficult and that, indeed, learning to live a
life of full perception and sensation without attachment or aversion is perhaps the hardest challenge we can face. But it is a challenge that could alter significantly the way we relate to the world. I think that the enormity of change is on the order of a major revolution. It is a revolution that could render us harmless—that is, incapable of enacting our distressed and frustrated ego-selves, not superficially by way of moral compunction but by the root of our consciousness. Neither externally-imposed moral prescriptions nor their internalization into conscience would render us thoroughly harmless. Only by rendering the mind free of duality-formed desires can we achieve a genuine measure of harmlessness (*ahimsa*) and, therefore, peace. Until the very root of our distress and suffering, which is desire born of the view of substantiality, is severed, we will go on enacting the grasping mind through objectification of the world and, then, grasping after and manipulating the world thus objectified.

Even if my readers can see that nonduality would put an end to the existential distress enactable in all sorts of harming ways against the world and that nonduality is a morally good thing, when it comes to entertaining it realistically as a viable option, they would still hesitate to act. The notion goes just a little too much against our cherished commonsense. What becomes of agency, informed and rational choice, and calculation of utility that are the main ingredients of rational morality? How can one act without these? If we were to practise nonduality, how would our actions be different from happenings in the natural world, such as wind blowing and stones rolling?

The Taoists would be characteristically nonchalant in their answer that we should model our actions after these natural happenings. It is the constant thrusting of our grasping, imposing, and manipulative will into
each moment of being which mars the potential harmony present to the moment. What we need to learn is to go into the moment, try to see its potential harmony and, in the process of seeing, become so attuned to or integrated into the field of being surrounding the moment as to become an expression of the pattern of harmony itself. The most critical part of this process is seeing the potential harmony. I shall be examining more closely this important topic of seeing the potential harmony in the final chapter. For now, however, I shall dwell a little longer on the notion of nondual agency (which may sound like an oxymoron) and choiceless, desireless actions, which would pose a stumbling block for many.\footnote{It just is very hard to get over our cherished notion of agency: our whole being would cry out against it, for it is a radical negation--a death--to the ego-self and its sense of being the subject who wills, desires, and chooses.}

What is wrong with having choices? As a matter of fact, do we not have choices? Certainly, we do have choices, and therein lies our problem. Choices are largely the projections of our desires, and as such, they show our peculiar mode of living and being: instead of seeing an appropriate and fitting thing to do in each moment, we intentionally impose our antecedent desires on the moment, thereby obscuring the moment's unique presentation. In this mode of imposition, we become too eager to see only those patterns that would satisfy our desires, which would result in overlooking patterns capable of nourishing all the elements involved in the situation.\footnote{Of course I betray my own struggle here. Writing this thesis has been a witness to this struggle and a certain degree of understanding I managed to gain from this struggle. This is not so much an apology as an explanation of why I seem to keep returning to certain discussions, such as this notion of desire and choice throughout the thesis.}

Each moment, each situation is a uniquely confluent and...
emergent configuration, drawing together a myriad of factors. The nondualist who practises seeing and merging into the context (or the texture of being, as I call it) tries to become an internal factor/force that gathers together the myriad of environing particulars rather than an external factor/force that imposes a pattern, namely, the self's independently conceived desire, external to the situation.  

Choices as projected will and desires are abstract in that they are divorced from the internal configurations of the given situation whose perception is available only to the person who has merged into it and senses it from within. Being able to list the many choices one can have is no display of an intimate understanding unique to a situation. On the contrary, it is a display of incomplete awareness because the more one is aware of the correlated details that characterize a situation, the fewer choices one should discern. In this process of more and more refined, perspicacious seeing, one comes to a point where one discerns the most fitting or appropriate thing to do. This one fitting "choice" is not some antecedently existing representation of objective reality. There is no antecedent pattern or picture prior to seeing.

A nondualist enters into a situation with perceptivity but without desire, and she does not process the situation in terms of choices or options but attunes herself increasingly to the situation to the point she sees the "right thing" to do. This is the art of discernment and judgment on which Aristotle based his practical morality. This cultivation of perceptivity and

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134 See Ames' (1989) discussion on these two contrasting approaches which he calls "logical order" (where there is a preestablished order to which the particulars conform) and "aesthetic order" (where an order emerges as the particulars collaborate).

135 To quote Aristotle once again, this time as translated by Nussbaum (1990, p. 69): "The discernment rests with perception" (Nichomachean Ethics 1109b23). This is Nussbaum's explication (1990, p. 69): "The subtleties of a complex ethical situation must be seized in a confrontation with the situation itself, by a faculty that is suited to address it as a complex
attunement is most central to moral education to which I shall return in the next chapter.
Chapter Five

Moral education as cultivation of nondual proprioception

Yun Yen asked Tao Wu, “What does the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion use so many hands and eyes for?”
Wu said, “It’s like someone reaching back grasping for a pillow in the middle of the night.”
Yen said, “I understand.” Wu said, “How do you understand it?”
Yen said, “All over the body are hands and eyes.”
—The Blue Cliff Record—

5.1. Chapter introduction

Chapter Four was devoted to sketching out what an ethics of nonduality is like in terms of the way a nondual moral person would perceive, think, and act. This final chapter is about what we can do to foster nondual moral agency, and my proposal is a moral education that is not confined to a separate subject matter with particular sets of skill and knowledge but is diffused into all aspects of learning. The work of transforming nondual moral agency cannot be restricted to a single subject matter because nonduality, as I have been conceiving it, is the ground consciousness that infuses everything that we are and we do. Nonetheless, there are skilful means or technologies that we can employ across all that we do to bring about the nondual consciousness. Previously, I have looked at one prominent ultimate traditional technology of nonduality—namely the mindfulness/awareness practices, popularly known as sitting meditation.

However, formal sitting meditation is a rather specialized and difficult tool to use, making its use restrictive and, hence, unfeasible for wide application for the purpose of moral education of the young.¹³⁶ This is

¹³⁶ In particular, a warning against recommending formal meditation indiscriminately to everybody has been given by Engler (1986) who occupies a unique position of being on the one
especially the case for the reason that meditation practices, such as vipassana that I examined in Chapter Three, can run the risk of being highly mental, focusing on the deconstruction of substantialism. Again, it is important to remind ourselves that what the mindfulness practice ultimately aims at is not just a deconstruction of the belief in the ego-self, which of course is a major step in the process, but is an embodied, organic awareness of no-self. To emphasize, nonduality is not just a metaphysical proposition but a lived experience. So, coming back to our quest for technologies of nonduality, I ask whether there any other practices, or whether we can think up any that are

hand a clinical psychologist working with schizophrenic and borderline patients suffering from ego-deficit and on the other hand a meditation teacher helping his students to realize there is no-self. His observation based on his own clinical work is that people with impaired ego-structure who consequently suffer from a lack of "inner cohesiveness, unity, and continuity" should not be introduced to vipassana meditation, for it will only decimate an already underdeveloped sense of ego-self. In other words, the tools of ego-deconstruction are to be applied only to those who have already developed "a strong, mature, well-differentiated psyche and a well-integrated self-structure with a sense of cohesiveness, continuity, and identity" (Wilber, Engler & Brown, 1986, p. 12). Engler’s position here, born out of his professional clinical work, is well taken. Yet, I see that his warning implies a certain picture of psychological development which is neither accurate nor desirable. An impression one gets is that vipassana and meditation in general should be introduced to people only when their ego-development is complete, which makes the transition from the developmental phase of building up the ego-structure to its deconstruction phase to be abrupt and punctuated: one leaves one stage completely and enters the next. This is not the way developmental changes take place. Here, there is also the question of how dogmatic and singular we are going to be about assessing the completion of ego-structure building. Most of us are perennially plagued by varying degrees of self-esteem or self-confidence deficit, to name just one problem in the domain of self-concept. Would this be indicative of ego-structure deficit, and further, indicative of unsuitability for meditation? My own view is that we should not think of the shift from ego-self to non-egoself to be so abruptly punctuated but gradual and also simultaneous: one can be building ego-structure while simultaneously doing things (which needn’t be—maybe shouldn’t be—rigorous meditation) in the way of ego-deconstruction. When we do this, one’s ego-structure may be more malleable and pliable, and thus easier to deconstruct than if there were no influence of simultaneous deconstruction. It seems to me that if we were to practise Engler’s two-stage development, we will fail to enter and pursue the second stage because by the time the first stage came to full fruition, it would be almost beyond the influence of the second stage programme. It is like building an indestructibly strong house so that when we need to take it down, there is little we can do to take it apart. Thus, the model of development I favour is construction of a soft-shelled, impermanent ego-structure which is functionally “normal”, enabling us to live an individuated social life but still has room for further gradual growth into nondual consciousness which we would find to be ultimately a more satisfying form of being. Moreover, it is erroneous to think that one who attains nondual consciousness leaves behind once and for all the ego-structure. One continues to function as an ego-self and yet one is not identified with it while one is simultaneously dwelling in a nondual psychic space.
more broadly serviceable in terms of fostering the embodied organic awareness of nonduality at the sensate level. What I am looking for is a variety of tools that are not as specialized and formidable as formal meditation and yet that could efficiently elicit the experience of embodied nondual awareness. The point of seeking a variety of tools is not to discard meditation tools but to have at our disposal many other just as useful tools. Since we are looking for something other than sitting meditation practice but still something that aims at attaining the same treasure, it is well to start with examining the sitting meditation practice in order to discover the essence of what we should be looking for.

5.2. Mindfulness practice and embodiedness

Meditation has often been erroneously equated with achieving a disembodied state of being or even a state of total oblivion. While it is true that some yogic method of meditation could achieve this, in the total context of the pursuit of nonduality, such achievement is not an end in itself. If it were the end in itself, then the subject of mindfulness practice would have no relevance to my project of conceiving a theory of ethics and moral education. As I see it, mindfulness practice has relevance to morality precisely because it expands and heightens, rather than obliterates our awareness of deep, being-to-being connectedness to the world. Instead of disembodiedness, what is aimed at is fuller embodiedness to the point of our becoming one-bodied with the world, and nondual consciousness has all to do with this embodiedness.

Nondual consciousness, in my conception, is not some kind of a mystical, out-of-this-world and out-of-the-mind state. On the contrary, it is the awareness of oneself being inseparably connected to the world—human and non-human—at the body-to-body sensate level. A Chinese proverb
expresses it most concisely: The Heaven, the Earth, and I are one flesh. It is only when one has achieved nonduality at this bodily rooted sense that the quest of nonduality is complete. No amount of strongly convictional intellectual understanding of nonduality by itself would suffice. Thus, in carrying out moral education in the paradigm of nondual ethics, we have to aim at feeling and sensing the world as connected to our own bodies.\textsuperscript{137}

Attaining this objective is easier said than done. The whole mode of substantive metaphysics which objectifies the Other, including one’s body, and subjectifies the self draws an impenetrable line of separation between what is one’s body and what is not. According to this view, one’s body ends and the Other begins literally at the boundary of one’s epidermis. Proprioception ends at the epidermis. Outside one’s skin lies the vast expanse of the Other, often hostile, sometimes profitable and beneficial, but mostly indifferent. The value of the Other is usually measured in terms of how much service, use, or profit it would render to the self. Such is the extent of the interaction that the self and the Other engage in.

So entrenched is the above view that even the sense of caring that purports to overcome instrumentalism plays into its hand. When we care about and for something, it is often for its instrumental value to the self, even if it is only the pleasure that the self receives.\textsuperscript{138} I suggest that as long as

\textsuperscript{137} It is a regrettable omission that in this thesis I have not included Dewey’s theory of the self as body. Both he and James have much insight into the bodily basis of our consciousness and self. Whilshire (1990), subscribing to James and Dewey’s insight, argues that we need to educate the “organic excitement” (James’ phrase) of the body in such a way as to generate a new consciousness capable of meeting the awesome magnitude of ecological challenges facing us. He states (ibid., p. 216): “I agree with James that the basis of the self is an organic excitement. We can only try to free and discipline this excitement, educate it, so that the scope of our identifications and sympathies is broadened and deepened.”

\textsuperscript{138} Psychological hedonism is a widely held belief. Often it is defended on the logical ground that by the very fact that one does something shows that one is interested in it for whatever reasons, even if it is just to gratify one’s senses and psychological egoic needs. The trouble with this argument is that it fails to account for the distinction that exists phenomenologically between self-regarding conducts and other-regarding conducts. By reducing all human conducts
the incarnate sense of categorical separateness between one's body and what lies outside one's body is absolute, any attempt to overcome subject-object duality, even with the most rigorous philosophical argumentation, is futile.

Yet, attaining, even if momentarily, embodied awareness of nonduality _can be_ astonishingly simple as far as what-to-do goes. It is as simple as breathing and, indeed, it is in the breath work that I find the most stunning instance of embodied awareness of nonduality attested by the fact that mindful breathing is the foundational work in all forms of meditation practices. In vipassana practice, focusing on one’s breathing is one of the standard methods of attentional training; but here, what is being achieved in the training is more than mere focusing of the attention or concentration but the experience of material exchange between the body of the meditator and the body of the world. In other words, mindful breathing elicits in us an experience of nondual embodiedness. When I mindfully attend to my breathing with each inhalation and exhalation, my body and the world are engaged in a direct, part-to-part physical exchange. Dwelling in this experience of exchange helps me overcome the notion and sense of substantive separation between my being and the larger being that surrounds me. I come to experience the continuity or coextensiveness between the locus of this being (my self) and the larger environment or reality.

to self-regarding behaviour, it completely immaterializes the ordinarily experienced distinction between doing something for one's own sake and doing something for another's sake over and above or even regardless of one's own interest and gain. That such other-regarding behaviour exists must be acknowledged and honoured. It will not do to explain it away. Of course, the proponent of psychological hedonism might argue in response that deep down the other-regarding behaviour is _really_ nothing other than self-regarding behaviour. Well, maybe deep-down at the biological level of explanation, one can show both behaviour to be stemming from the same survival strategy or whatever, but this kind or level of explanation cannot invalidate the phenomenal distinction felt at the level of experience between self-regarding and other-regarding behaviour. Nor do these self-regarding and other-regarding behaviour take place in nondual experience in which the substantive distinction between the self and the Other breaks down.
Of course, I can come to know about this exchange as a piece of discursive information in the study of biology. For example, I know that humans and plants exchange oxygen and carbon dioxide. But this discursive knowing does not necessarily result in embodied knowing wherein one knows intimately this inseparable continuity of being as the happenings of the body. We breathe all the time but usually not achieving the embodied knowing of one's organic continuity with the world. This happens because breathing goes on automatically without our conscious attention while our mind is preoccupied with thoughts usually occurring in the mode of self-object duality.

Thoughts disemboby me to the extent that my attention is displaced from bodily experiences to the thoughts themselves, and more, to the extent that I do not call into play my moment-by-moment embodied awareness of the body-in-the-world but let myself be totally carried away with the thought process, abandoning body awareness to experiencing it on "automatic pilot." It is only as a physical body that I can directly relate to the physical body of the world. In the case of breathing, being mindfully aware of the on-going stream of exchange in the form of gases between this body and the larger body of the earth allows me to feel at the sensate level the inseparable unity—that is, continuity with the world. What normally seems like the absolute separation between this self and the world gives way to the unitive mode of being which cannot locate the self in this body only, for this body is not substantively bounded off from the larger world. At this point, the strong spell of ego-self—the substantive, therefore, autonomous self—starts to break.

5.3. Practice of "stop" and attainment of proprioception

Although, as mentioned above, breathing, because of its direct, simple
physical exchange, is particularly effective in allowing us to experience nonduality, all our bodily-sensory experiences under the condition of mindfulness could enable us to embody nonduality. It is this condition of mindfulness that is so indescribably difficult to achieve. What is required to practise mindfulness is to bring to a stop the wheel of thought-constructs that is repeatedly, ceaselessly, and relentlessly turning. Appelbaum (1995) uses the gripping term, "stop," to designate both the act of stopping and the experiential space where the stop has been made. His analysis, which is rooted in the phenomenological tradition, is uncannily analogous to the Buddhist analysis of mindfulness/awareness, and its presentation here augments the thesis of the embodiment of nonduality I am espousing. More importantly, his analysis goes straight to the notion of embodiedness rather than focusing mainly on epistemological deconstruction of duality. This analysis is pivotal to my proposition of nonduality as embodiedness.

The stop is the gap between two thoughts where the first one has ended and the second has not yet begun. This space is most special, indeed magical, full of potent possibility of embodied awareness. It is the space of liberation where we can be momentarily free of the "functional rational automatism." This is how Appelbaum (1995, p. 17) explains it.

The text of the daily round is intellectually reinterpreted in order to avoid disclosure of the stop. The function of the rational automatism is precisely here. The attention is repeatedly, ceaselessly, and unknowingly given over to an onrushing stream of associative thought. Habits, dreams, assurances, secret fears, cherished beliefs, and hopeless infatuations--together with their objects--are therein perpetually revalidated. At no time is notice taken of a gap between two thoughts. The smooth rational function annihilates the pause by which real and unreal come under question. An endless automatic movement of thought obscures the stop. (Appelbaum, 1995, p. 17)

Even our sensory operations are complicitous in rational automatism. This seems to be especially the case with the sense of sight. Of all the senses,
sight is least given to noticing the stops because it presents a continuous series of sweeping, totalistic, and sustaining pictures of the world through seemingly effortless and passive reception of "sense data" from the world.\textsuperscript{139}

But what sight does not show is the discontinuous process of active, moment-by-moment recreation with stops in between of the pictures of the world. Appelbaum (p. 18) states: "[Sight] neither hesitates nor falters nor stutters nor stumbles regardless of a resistance it meets in its object. Once the eye opens, sight, the noble sense, is the very perfection of perpetual motion."

Appelbaum would have us contrast the sighted person's representation of reality which is sweeping, far-reaching, and totalistic to the blind's effortful reconstruction of reality taking place within the body's sensuous experience of visceral feel, touching, smelling, and hearing. The blind's effort at "seeing" proceeds in the rhythmic movement of start-and-stop which "bespeaks a meeting of resistance with effort." Unlike the sighted who makes a sweeping survey of the surrounding unchecked by any stops in seeing, the blind is constantly thrown into the stops where he is left suspended in the act of representation. In those stops, there are neither pictures nor stories but only intense awareness rooted in the body. The picture of the objectified world has disappeared and the blind's attention is returned to the body. As we shall see shortly, this returning of attention to the sensate body is the key to developing nondual consciousness—the project of our moral education. The whole body "listens" with utter attentiveness. The blind must work hard to earn each and every perception. They are "proletarians of awareness."\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{139} Everden (1993) asserts that what we think of as reality is identified with what vision presents. Other sensory data are indicative of the aspects of reality, but vision presents reality. Everden (p. 84) goes on to argue that objectivity, "our cherished achievement, may not be a discovery or a consequence of logical thought so much as the outcome of our reliance on one mode of access to the world."

\textsuperscript{140} In the tradition of vipassana practice, meditators are called "bare attention workers."
Intense sensate awareness is diametrically opposed to reactive
thoughts, feelings, and actions in the sense that if the latter are at the centre
stage of consciousness, then the former cannot occur. This is so because when
we are engaged in conceptualized processes or activities, our attention is
habitually discharged through these outlets. What has to be done then is to
return one's attention to this awareness. Here is Appelbaum once again (p.
21): "The return is to an organic, archaic level of experience. It is a return
from a constructional, conceptual mind that predominates in the daily round.
The return involves dwelling in the body as awareness while face-to-face
with entrenched impulse to take flight."

The flight here is flight to clear and perfect knowing as in visual
perception. We are uncomfortable with the darkness of imageless stops, and
we long to escape into clear visions and stories. We long to be shown and
told how the world stands. As long as we can be given these visions and
stories, we need not make any effort to re-create the world, attending
moment-by-moment to our sensory experience. "Seer need not attend to
present sensory experience at all. Sight, in fact, is coloured by a curious
indifference" (Appelbaum, 1995, p. 22). The order of consciousness,
manifested by inattentive and indifferent sight, is that which has created the
Cartesian mechanical universe that operates automatically according to "laws
of indifference, that is, cause and effect" (ibid., p. 22). It is a universe that
negates effortfulness on the part of the perceiver, for no effort of awareness by
the perceiver is required for this mechanical universe to run smoothly
forever and guided only by its inherent law of causality.

Awareness, if acknowledged at all, is an epiphenomenon that would
play no significant role in the operation of human lives and everything else
in this universe. It is the Platonic universe of eternal and enduring
substances disclosed to our thoughts but not to our embodied experience. The universe revealed in the embodied experience, such as in the blind’s effortful “seeing,” is temporal (not eternal), discontinuous (not continuous as the operation of cause and effect) and co-creative (not pre-given). It is not a world of substances where the separate self perceives (is this not voyeurism in a way?) and acts upon separate objects (which is manipulation), but is a world of flux created by resonating, sympathetic, and confluencing participants.

Perception in this sympathetic (as opposed to mechanical) universe is not conceived as a mechanical transmission and reception of data over the gulf between the self and the object. On the contrary, the very condition of perception is sympathetic confluence between the selves or subjects. For this reason, the seer in seeing feels sympathy with what is seen. Thus, sympathy is the condition of perception.\textsuperscript{141}

The practice of mindfulness or awareness proceeds by eschewing the ingrained habit of objectification via conceptualisation. Appelbaum offers an acute analysis of the turn of awareness when objectification comes to a stop. I shall quote it in some length because of its importance to my concept of embodiedness:

The stop stops a continuous automatic leave-taking of percipient energy. Such energy is automatically and without effort drawn into a conceptual frame that moment-by-moment constructs the world. It empowers the frame, thereby losing its own identity, power, and sense of origin. Energy mistakes the form given it by the frame itself, for perception itself. It thereby finds itself separate from the world. Separate, it conceives its task as a detached onlooker to an activity of which it is not a part. It grows forgetful of how it bears witness to its own co-creation. The stop stops percipient energy from animating the conceptual frame. Energy that no longer magnetizes ideas and concepts remains in its organic habitat. Such energy, by virtue of the stop, no longer escapes the fleshy folds of the body. Instead, it energizes a network of relations, constituting the organism, thereby resensitizing the milieu and awakening a responsiveness uniquely nonmental. “Body” ceases to be an idea within the frame of

\textsuperscript{141} It may be pointed out that this statement cannot be empirical since obviously we do not often feel sympathy with that which we see. Here, my choice of perception is not just any perception but nondual perception—the objective of nondual morality.
ideas, implying other ideas such as “extension” and “motion.” It becomes instead a container of an unknown identity through which move currents of sensation, themselves percipient and mindful of a reality to which the organism belongs. One’s body becomes available to an attentiveness of an entirely different order. (Appelbaum, 1995, pp. 77-78)

What is this different order that emerges? Relating it to the thesis of nonduality that I am espousing, I would say that the order is that of nondual consciousness. Through the nondual consciousness, we come to relate to the world with a different order of sensitivity and perceptivity—namely something like proprioception. In proprioception, the categorical separateness between the subject and the object changes into a Mobius strip-like continuity between the two. In proprioception, perception does not simply terminate in the perception of an object (as in "That is a cup"); rather, it initiates us into the process of becoming appropriately related or embedded (thereby becoming proprioceptive—that is, appropriately receptive) to the surround. We become sensitively attuned to that which surrounds us, and we become organically connected. In proprioception, one does not stand outside the perceived and know it as this or that by its definite quality and quanta, but one becomes an organic part of the order of being that enfolds now both oneself and the thing one perceives. What is important for proprioception is not so much that one comes away with clear, distinct, and “true” ideas about the objects—the Cartesian ideal of objective knowing—but that one has entered a communal field of being. This is how Appelbaum (1995, p. 83) once again succinctly explains: “As channels open, a sensitive network starts to resonate to influences distant and near, local and global, subtle and audacious. Perception lies wholly with maintaining the resonant

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142 Of course, in the standard usage of the term, ‘proprioception,’ simply means knowing one’s own bodily position without having to reference or confirm it externally but just by the internal feel. In my text, I stretch the use of the term to the from-within perception of the world by virtue of being related to it. In this knowing, the known is not an object.
The word ‘influence’ does not suggest clear and distinct ideas about objects that our perception is to deliver to us but messages that are open to endless (re)interpretations and conduce us to ways of perceiving that are illuminating, connecting, evolving, and harmonizing. (To recall, this is the kind of perception required for moralising a la Murdoch and Nussbaum.) To a proprioceptive organism, as to the blind, the world does not present an objectivist vista of determinate and independently existing quanta and qualia which are laid out for mechanical transmission and reception. Rather, the world, remaining opaque and fluid, responds to our effort—rightly called, moral effort—of participating, connecting and creative configuring. Our effort to relate and become intimate with and inseparable from the world yields us not “true” “objective” pictures, but appropriate knowledge that can nourish and sustain our particular Dasein in a particular temporal space. This appropriate knowledge gathers and enfolds us into the world in that we become appropriately attuned to the world and, thus, become communing beings. Our moral task is, then, to become morally proprioceptive, and to this end we practise stops.

Subsequent to the need to practise stop continually in order to be proprioceptive in moral education, we have to look for those activities which would best facilitate stops. In the following section, I examine three examples taken from the Eastern traditions. Using examples from the Eastern tradition does not imply that there are no other arts in the Western tradition which can do the same job. Nor do I suggest that we cannot design some new practices to this end. My reason for selecting examples from the Eastern tradition is two-fold. Firstly, these examples are the practical arts that have been developed specifically to facilitate the growth of nondual consciousness.
Secondly, these being experiential examples, it is advantageous for me to explore that with which I am personally familiar. In a way, all activities we engage in can be arts that are open to the possibility of being turned into arts that facilitate Proprioception. We just have to grasp the general principle and spirit underlying the technology of moral Proprioception as that in Japanese tea ceremony, in Chinese brush-ink painting, or in Tai Ch'i in order to seek or implement a similar technology in our own tradition.

5.4. The Practice of Stop in the Eastern Tradition of Art

The first two practices that I propose to explore are in the domain of aesthetics. It could be asked, "What do morality and moral education have to do with aesthetics?" In fact, the immediate reply would be "Nothing." The thesis of incommensurability of values, which we owe to Aristotle, is as well respected now as then. The moral cannot be reduced to or be identified with the beautiful. The beautiful and the moral share the common characteristic of being a value judgment, but whether they share something more substantive so that art and morality are closely related, even indispensable, is a question that has roused much debate in the history of Western thought. By and large, the two domains are not thought to be closely related. The usual wisdom would hold that aesthetic pursuit could not contribute, in any direct and necessary way, to the project of becoming moral. However, in the Eastern aesthetic tradition, as we shall see in our

143 See Nussbaum, Chapter 2 in Love's Knowledge for her defence of the Aristotelian thesis of incommensurability against the Platonic thesis of commensurability.
144 Again, this topic is of enormous complexity, and I shall leave it safely untouched here except to put in the remark that the possibility of construing a moral life in the project of aesthetic life has never been more attractive now in this postmodern era of destruction of the humanistic conception of the self and the unified objective knowledge, including moral knowledge. Foucault and Rorty represent forefront voices in this project. See Shusterman (1990).
examples, aesthetic experiences and moral experiences share the same quest for nonduality as well as the practice of mindful awareness. It is for this reason, then, that aesthetic practices can contribute directly to the project of becoming moral.

5.4.1. Tea Ceremony

Anyone who observes the Japanese tea ceremony for the first time will be struck by how complexly ritualized the simple act of preparing and drinking tea can be. Surely, we do not have to go to that extent of preparation to enjoy tea with our fellow humans. Why is a ritual necessary at all? A ritual is a set of prescribed procedures and movements which is often practised on a regular basis. Rituals aim at the transformation of consciousness. Each prescribed motion in the tea ritual is meant to effect changes in the way we perceive and feel. Traditionally, there are four concepts which the tea ritual attempts to embody: reverence (kei), harmony (wa), purity (sei), and tranquility (jaku). In the following, I shall quote at some length Hammitzsch’s elucidation of these four cardinal concepts in the tea ceremony. Let us take the first two concepts.

The concept ‘reverence’, kei, comprises deference, respect for other people and at the same time self-control in so far as the ego is concerned: it also includes reverence for all living things. ‘Harmony’, wa, is one’s harmonious relationship to all things. This harmony reveals itself in one’s personal behaviour, in one’s relationship with one’s whole environment and in one’s self-adjustment to it... the combined effect of both concepts is to engender that deep feeling that links man to all other living things and allows him to participate at a really deep level in their own being. One’s heart, once it has surrendered itself to these concepts in the Zen sense, no longer has any room for any

145 It has been argued by many moral philosophers, especially ones working in the Aristotelian approach (Kosman, 1980; Burnyeat, 1980; Oakley, 1993), that moral actions inculcate moral dispositions. According to Aristotle, for instance, we learn to be just by doing just things. My thesis that rituals help transform consciousness is a similar argument, but I am being more specific about the kind of action that would be effective in the consciousness and disposition transformation. Rituals are actions that are singled out and invested with a high degree of attentiveness.
particular object or circumstance, but devotes itself solely to what is in front of it—in the sense of mushin—and thus becomes totally 'gentle and tender', nagoyaka. (Hammitzsch, 1979, p. 69)

It is necessary to elaborate on Hammitzsch’s brief explanation of kei, for what is alluded to by self-control of the ego contains a significant insight into the difference between our usual understanding of respect and the above notion of kei. With us, the notion of respect is that of a value judgment in the sense that we accord respect to someone or something when we deem it to have satisfied a certain criterion or standard. But, for kei as resultant from self-control of the ego does not function as a value judgment. What is suggested is that if we were to remove the presence of the ego-self, then reverence would naturally be the resulting state of consciousness. As such, reverence is the state of nondual consciousness. When the self merges into nonduality, it does not see others as higher or lower, let alone, separate. Rather, the self relates to other selves in the spirit of communion, which is reverence. Reverence is not so much what one does (as in worship) as what one ends up with as a state of mind, and this results from diminishing the dualistic ego-consciousness.146

Yet, this diminution is not a matter of will and decision nor simply of discursive understanding and, hence, the role of rituals. Rituals become the technology of the action147 whereby, by virtue of undertaking the set of

146 Reverence as kai is not paying high regards to others as the usual notion of respect implies. In kai, we are prepared to meet others in the field of nonduality, to see them not as atomistically separate individuals but as, to use a metaphor, particular vortices in the same body of water. But, at the same time, we have to realize that no matter how much nondual attitude and perception we may have of others, this does not make others nondualists. What this means is that the nondualist must entertain a bifocal vision of regarding others nondually— as vortices in the same body of water and at the same time accepting others as dualistically operating individuals who see themselves as separate individuals. It is for this reason that the nondualist does not cease to show compassion to a dualist just because the compassion the nondualist shows towards the dualist is not reciprocated or even acknowledged.

147 It is revealing to reflect upon the meaning of the Greek word, technologia: systematic treatment. When Foucault (1988, p. 18) talks about technologies of the self, he means such
prescribed actions, one undergoes changes in perception, emotion, and so on. For instance, the door to the tea room is low so that one has to get down to one's knees and walk on one's knees to go through the door. The motion of genuflection is to engender a feeling of humility which reduces or effaces the ego-self.¹⁴⁸ Humility or reduction of ego-self is not just a disembodied mental-state. Technologies of the self that aim at certain orders or states of consciousness invariably involve intervention on the body and its motions and dispositions. To continue with the example of the tea ceremony, each and every movement in handling the tea utensils and in placing and carrying one's body aims at a heightened awareness of the body-in-relatedness or harmony with respect to the whole spatio-temporal environment, including the guests.

Reverence is the precondition to the experience of harmony. The ego-self that defines itself as separate from the other cannot be in harmony with others (things and people) for the reason that harmony, as understood in teaism, is the manifestation of harmony in each moment and situation and is a uniquely emergent quality that is created only through the evolution of each constituent member redefining or reshaping itself in relation to the rest of the environment. As such, harmony is not a matter of the utilitarian calculus in which each separate self's self-interest is extracted independently.

¹⁴⁸ A little clarification on humility. Humility as understood here is not diffidence. Lowering oneself with respect to others is not humility but diffidence. Humility in the context of nondual consciousness is absence of the sense of separate ego self—the sense that gives rise to all forms of comparative evaluations that only sets one fundamentally apart from another. Thus, genuflection here should not be interpreted as a gesture of lowering oneself with respect to others, although, of course, it could be practised as such, and it is usually done so.
and, then, put into a utility function in order to obtain a solution that maximizes each one’s original self-interest. Rather, harmony requires that each person becomes an integral participant in a common process. The emphasis here is on "integral". Participation as a self-interested person will bring forth, at best, consensus but not harmony.

To realize harmony, we have first to realize the co-dependent arising of the self and the nonself. Autonomous agency renders itself to a contractarian society but harmony as understood in Taoism and Confucianism is not a matter of contract and agreement. Through its ritual, the tea ceremony opens up a space of communion for all who participate in it. It is the space of empathy and sympathy created by an emptiness of the mind-heart. Empty of the egoic notion of separate self and all its attendant perception and desires, the mind-heart is established in the tranquility that comes from experiencing nonduality.

This emptiness is aesthetically experienced as purity (sei) and tranquility (jaku). The heart-mind is pure, meaning that it is free of emotions caused by the turbulence of egoic desires. Greed, craving for recognition, resentment, shame and guilt, insecurity, and anxiety loosen their grip, lose their potency, perhaps even disappear as the phenomenon of ego-self subsides, leaving one tranquil or equanimous. Commenting on the concept of tranquility (jaku), Hammittszsch states (1993, pp. 70-71): “For there the concept stands in close association with satori, enlightenment. Worldly desires are extinguished, to be replaced by self-absorption into the ‘nothingness’. Thus our concept also embraces that of ‘emptiness’, ku, which is simultaneously that of silence.”

149 For a Taoist understanding of harmony as an aesthetic order, see Ames (1989). For a Confucian understanding, see Hall and Ames (1987).
Now, having seen how the tea ritual aims at certain expressions of embodied awareness, I shall now make a general comment about the importance of rituals to the cultivation of embodied awareness. As emphasized elsewhere, just the fact that one acts does not engender nondual, embodied awareness. This is because, as explained before, acting in the usual manner takes away much or even all of our attention with little or none left to return to the sensate experiencing of the body. In other words, actions discharge our attention. Rituals are actions, too, but unlike ordinary actions that discharge attention, rituals gather the attention into the actions themselves, making the attention available to the participants so that they can experience their own participation in the action. Often in acting, we do not sensately experience what we are doing. That is, there is little self-reflexivity to experience because our attention has been dissipated over the objects of our action. But rituals require us to redirect our attention and, if we comply to this requirement, we may be rewarded with embodied awareness. However, rituals become empty motions if we do not invest the requisite attentional work.

Rituals need not be, and should not be, of an impractical nature. If rituals are going to help cultivate moral capacity and since moral education is for everyday living, rituals should be embedded in mundane life. Our moral life is primarily about all those little everyday details of how to live with one another (humans and nonhumans). Thus, I would consider rituals that have to do with the simple everyday details of cleaning, eating, tending to people, animals and things, caring for and adorning the environment, and nourishing ourselves to be most worthy seedbeds for moral education. I believe that our present-day school system could pursue some similar rituals. I have often wondered if cynicism, uncaringness, apathy, obtuseness,
unmindfullness and the like that we observe not infrequently might not be somehow related to lack of rituals that have to do with the basic care of ourselves. I have also wondered if introducing even a simple ritual like mindfully tidying the classroom together might not somehow have a significant effect on our students’ perception and dispositions.

The point about introducing rituals into the daily life in schools and elsewhere, however, is not to turn life into a series of rituals. As I pointed out previously, rituals can easily turn into empty, mindless gestures and procedures which would not add anything to the cultivation of nondual consciousness. We must look at rituals as potent technologies of consciousness, and as such, we should employ them with clear understanding and goals. A technology that does not yield the desired result either due to misuse or mindless use is better left out of our lives for reasons of conservation of time and attentional effort. With this warning about empty rituals dispensed, I shall now turn to the art of Chinese brush-ink painting as another fine technology of nondual consciousness.

5.4.2. Chinese brush-ink Painting

Chinese painting and calligraphy have been profoundly influenced by Taoism so much so that Chinese painting and calligraphy have been considered an embodiment or manifestation of the Taoistic principles of emptiness and vital breath (ch’i). Emptiness is the ground, nondual...
consciousness while *ch'i* is the dynamic, creative force that manifests this nondual consciousness into a multiplicity of spatio-temporal phenomena. The creative movement oscillating between emptiness and the manifestation of particularities is what is captured by the brush-stroke. Cheng (1994, p. 67) in quoting Shih-t'ao, a renowned painter and author in 17th-century China, states that each brushstroke unifies the mind of man and the universe. This is so because brushstrokes are moved by breath, and this breath is part of the vital breath that circulates throughout the universe. When an artist picks up a brush and focuses inwardly on her rhythmic breathing, she participates in the cosmic flow of *ch'i* and directs this flow into her brushstrokes. However, as it is understood in both the theoretical and experiential frameworks concerning brush-ink painting, there cannot be a flow of *ch'i* without the emptiness—that is, the nondual consciousness—in which the flow takes place. It is from this psychic place of nondual consciousness that the painter executes her brushstrokes. Cheng (p. 70) explains, in commenting on Shih-t'ao's notion of *hsu-wan* (empty wrist), that the painter does not begin

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151 Consider these lines from Chang Yen-yuan and Shen Tsung-ch'en, respectively, quoted by Cheng (1994, p. 69): “The only painting that is real is that in which the brush is guided by the spirit and is concentrated on the one.”; “The play of the brush must be dominated by the breath. When the breath exists, the vital energy exists. That is when the brush truly gives birth to the divine.”
painting until his hand fully gathers the energy of vital breath, and at the point of culmination, the hand “suddenly yields to emptiness.”

The creative dynamic play of ch'i is let loose in the field of nondual consciousness. The execution of brushstrokes is spontaneous and continuously flowing from contact on paper to follow through in space and contact on paper again, and this flow may be expressed as non-doing (wu-wei). In other words, the brushstrokes are the expressions not of egoic consciousness but of self-evidencing nondual consciousness. In such moments, the artist does not experience, “I am trying to draw bamboo” but something like “Bamboo is happening.” In other words, there is no subject-object duality but only the unity. The creator and the created are one. Here I quote Shen Tsung-ch'en.

The painting only attains excellence when the breaths emanating from the brush-ink so harmonise with those of the universe that they are one with them...Therefore, it is important that the idea of all things be already completed in the heart of the artist, so that the execution of the picture which spontaneously actualises dilutedness-concentratedness, lightness-darkness, tenderness-power, and potentiality-manifestation can be animated by the vital current that indwells in the universe. (Cheng, 1994, p. 68)

Reflecting on the above elucidation of the brushstroke in Chinese painting, we may sense that there is quite a difference between the Eastern understanding of aesthetics and the Western one. And the difference is, indeed, great. To put it in a most startling way, as Yanagi (1989) did in the following, the notion of aesthetic as being primarily concerned with beauty is more of the Western tradition than the Eastern tradition, the main influences of which were Taoism and Buddhism. In the latter tradition, the beautiful is never a separate value but is identical with the spiritual and the moral. This

152 I have explained this concept of wu-wei in Chapter Four.
153 This quote is from Cheng (1994, p. 68).
is so because the condition of aesthetic appreciation is exactly the same as the condition of being moral. Here I quote Yanagi (1989, p. 152):

The sense of beauty is born when the opposite between subject and object has been dissolved, when the subject called “I” and the object called “it” have both vanished into the realm of non-dual Entirety, when there is no longer anybody to transfer or anything to be transferred. Neither the “I” that faces “it” nor the “it” that faces the “I” can attain reality. A true awareness of beauty is to be found where beauty watches beauty, not where “I” watch “it”. The “I-it” relationship cannot reveal beauty in its entirety, but only a small part of it. (Yanagi, 1989, p. 152)

In reading the comments of Yanagi, I attach a significance to the last line where he indicates that the dualistic mode of consciousness can still reveal beauty but only partially. To me, his observation indicates that even dualistically experienced beauty links us, however tenuously, to nondual consciousness. Without this link, there is no hope of our ever making the leap from dual to nondual consciousness. That we do make such leaps is an indication that even duality contains a germ of nonduality. This is a hopeful prospect since my proposal of utilising aesthetic experience as a path to nondual consciousness must not assume a fully awakened nonduality but must start with the ordinary dualistic state of consciousness.

At the moment one is struck by a magnificent sunset, one may be enjoying nonduality, albeit briefly. The usual preoccupation with the self, which makes nondual experience impossible, momentarily vanishes under the impact of the sunset tableau. The impact breaks up the hard-shelled ego-self, and one becomes eminently vulnerable to the penetration of the surround. I am reminded of the lines by the famed Haiku poet, Basho:

Even the wild boar
is pierced through and through
by the storm on the heath.¹⁵⁴

The wild boar would represent our egoic consciousness whose thick skin admits no easy penetration. The wildness of the boar or dualistic ego consciousness refers to this impenetrability. In this context, another image, this time from an opposite viewpoint, comes to me from Henry James' novel, *The Golden Bowl*. In the story, Maggie and her father Adam are able to see each other into better possibilities of themselves (this is the supreme moral task) because they are responsive to each other's effort of (moral) perception, but they would not be so responsive were they "thick-skinned" like the wild boars. At the most, human "wild boars" may come together to negotiate their self-interests, the objective being to maximize self-gain, but they cannot see each other into better possibilities through mutual "fusion of horizon," to use the celebrated phrase of Gadamer. The fusion refers not so much to the individual personalities as to the intrapsychic space in which separate individuals can *together-be*, or *inter-be*, to use Thich Nhat Hanh's term. Between Maggie and Adam is interposed not the thick skin of wild boars but "an exquisite tissue."

In nondual consciousness, we do not lose our functional separateness of individuality, for the "exquisite tissue" of unique individuality is there. Yet, the moment of aesthetic appreciation in which "beauty beholds beauty" rather than "I see beauty" happens when one realizes the insubstantiality of the "exquisite tissue." (In fact, I may say that insubstantiality makes the tissue exquisite.) At this moment, the hitherto altogether obstructive presence of "I" that stands between experience and the object of experience and between the experiencer and the experienced suddenly dissolves. This experience can be a profoundly disorienting for one who is used to experiencing things as Otherness. The usual locational sense of the self being in here and the object being out there becomes confused. One may feel like being nowhere and

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everywhere simultaneously. Or, to use the language of paradox so favoured by the Taoists, by being nowhere, one is everywhere.

One feels to be nowhere when the usual sense of self that stands over and against Otherness dissolves into and permeates the Other so that there is neither the self nor the Other but only the together-arising or codependent arising. To me, this sense of the substantive self (whether of oneself or of other selves) dying into otherness is startlingly captured by another Haiku of Basho:

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What a stillness!
Deep into the rock sinks
the cicada's shrill.155
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The stillness is the experience of the dissolution of the ego self. When the ego-self dies, there is only the most profound stillness. Not only oneself, but also all other selves, including the cicada, diffuse into the Other, here instantiated by the rock.156

To return to the discussion of Chinese brush-ink painting, how does decentering and diffusing of the self happen in the process of painting? The spontaneous nature of brush stroke execution frees the painter from the representational mode of operation. Whatever emerges moment-by-moment in the way of the picture is not something that the self copies either from the inner vision or the outer scenery. Hence, brush-ink painting is not representational activity even when the outcome looks like a copy of something. Representation is the mode of operation in which dualism functions. An artist, operating in the dualistic mode, would understand the process of creation as one in which the self draws or paints the object. But in

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155 Hammitzsch, 1993, p. 87
156 I do not claim that the interpretation I give here is what Basho intended when he wrote this Haiku.
the process of brush-ink painting, because the process is spontaneous without a sense of copying or representing something, there is only the sense of ever fresh unfolding or happening under one’s brush.

These moments of spontaneous creation can be profoundly transformative because one may experience co-emergence or codependent arising of the self and the nonself (the painting). As one looks at what emerges under one’s sweeping brushstrokes, one may experience the disorienting sense of agency in which one cannot tell what is the self and what is not. The self is nowhere and everywhere, and so is Otherness. We are in the boundless sea of codependent arising.

I now would like to tie the remarks I made about gaining nonduality in the spontaneous activity of creation with the ones I have made about the Japanese tea ceremony which is usually practised meticulously over a long period of time. If nonduality is gained from the spontaneity of a brush-ink painting, then one would not expect nonduality from the tea ceremony in which there is nothing spontaneous in that the movements are practised repeatedly every time and thousands of times. Contrary to this intuition, I would need to clarify that brush-ink painting does involve repeated practice, too, but what makes the action spontaneous is not how many times one has practised the brushstrokes but the amount of attentional work one has engaged in the activity each time. Here again, I draw upon Appelbaum’s explanation of gathering attention.

Consider the ritual of the tea ceremony in which each precise movement that the self executes has been practised thousands of time. When the self executes the same movement for the \( n \)th time, the nonduality of experience could be more, not less, pronounced on account of the repeated practice. I said here ‘could be’ because it could also be otherwise, depending
on the factor of how attention is applied. Below is my account of why repeated practice could be conducive to nondual experience.

When we do something unfamiliar, what often happens is that our attention is so totally drawn to the unfamiliar action we are performing that there is no attention left over to be directed to the sensate experience as it unfolds. The result is no or vague awareness of one's sensate experience. The first time one does something, one may remember what is produced or performed, but one may not remember how one did it. I am not claiming that this is always the case. If one is not anxious about what has to be produced or performed, one may be able to spare some attention to direct to feeling the unfolding experience.

On the other hand, familiarity does not automatically instil attentiveness. The opposite could just as easily be the case. At any rate, my main point is that when familiarity is combined with attentiveness, it is conducive to creating a condition in which the experiencer can be intensely aware of its experience as it unfolds. This intensification of experience as it unfolds moment-by-moment turns our experience into that of creative happenings in which the self and the Other (in whatever forms) merge into a Mobius-strip-like unity which, in the vocabulary of Buddhism, is co-dependent arising.157

If we are focused singularly on what is created, then we cannot attend the moment-by-moment process of creation. We may see what emerges and confirm that it is something we did or did not expect, but we would not witness the process in the making by participating in the process itself. Such

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157 I would like to remind my readers that this subject-object unity, which is at once the repudiation of subject-object duality, is at the heart of the enaction theory of perception (and cognition in general) as explicated by Varela et al. (1993), of which we had a chance to look at in Chapter Two.
witness-by-participation results only when the naturally out-going attention is, in part, brought back to the process of attending itself, and I am claiming that this turning around of attention to face itself is, in fact, achieved more easily when the object of our attention is familiar through repeated practice. Instead of the old adage “Familiarity breeds contempt,” I would say that familiarity may breed transparency of the self so that the self can see through and beyond itself into the Other. Certain moments of creation, if carefully attended with full attention, are such moments of transparency where the self witnesses itself co-arising with the Other. This is none other than the experience of nonduality. In a nondual experience, there is such a thorough con-fusion of the self and the other that the most one can do by way of expressing it may be this convoluted or tautological way of putting it that the self witnesses itself emerging and merging with the other or that the self-other witnesses the self-other. I interpret that Yanagi’s statement previously quoted that true aesthetic experience (that is, true in the Buddhist framework of interpretation) is when beauty watches beauty coincides with the statement of the self-other witnessing the self-other. Yanagi (1989, p. 153) explains with no hesitation that the Buddhist explanation of beauty is the discarding of one’s self, meaning that beauty is experienced when the substantive self dissolves.

Obviously, the kind of beauty that is experienced when one is established in nonduality is neither the prettiness nor the standardised and formalised beauty of objects. Ultimately nondual beauty does not depend on the shape, size, proportion, texture, and other properties of objects. Nondual beauty is not a property either of the viewer (the subject) nor the viewed (the object), nonduality being precisely the dissolution of the self-other’s substantive separateness. In fact, beauty is not a property at all, if property is
understood as belonging to objects. More properly, nondual beauty is a phenomenon that arises out of nondual experience.

My point of exploring Chinese brush-ink painting and the Japanese tea ceremony is, again, not so much for the promotion of these very arts into our learning settings as for the understanding of the technology of attention involved in these arts so as to apply it to our own practices, existing or to be established. Indeed, if we have a clear sense of this technology of attention, we need not go far in searching for ideas and activities. All the plain moments of seeing, hearing, touching, feeling, thinking, breathing, smelling, tasting, and so on are vast opportunities for nondual experiences. In the parlance of Zen, these are the just seeing, just hearing, just touching, just thinking, and so on.

5.5. *T’ai Ch’i*

*T’ai Ch’i*, although not formally belonging to the discipline of artistic endeavours, could be a useful technology of nondual experience at the most basic sensate level of the body’s beingness through space-time. I emphasize the basis of nondual experience at the sensate level, which is the theme of this chapter, because this basic sense of nonduality will enable us to experience all our moments nondually. The task of how to be nondual begins with how to be bodily nondual in space-time.\(^{158}\) I shall give no formal description of what it is, save that it is a series of movements, akin to a dance, executed slowly but fluidly with concentrating attention and mindfulness centring on the vital breath (*ch’i*). What I am going to focus on, however, is

\(^{158}\) It is for this reason that physical education holds an enormous potential as a technology of nondual embodied consciousness. Yet, as far as I can see, such potential is not being explored and utilized. We think of physical education serving primarily the needs of body culture and socialization.
neither the work with ch'i nor movements themselves but on my experience of how my experience of space changed through T'ai Ch'i.\textsuperscript{159}

Ordinarily, space is not much experienced except as the negative state of objects not being there to obstruct us. Where there is a lack of attentive experience, there is little sense of relatedness on our part. Space receives little attention and, hence, we have little relatedness to it. Yet, as I did the movements of T'ai Ch'i, the space in which I was executing them came to be experienced much more than as a negative state of things not being there. The space felt very much alive, full of feel, and my movements were really the interaction with this pregnant medium. In other words, in doing my movements moment by moment, I did not just feel my own body's movements but also the space to which my body was relating. Each movement was an engagement with the space I was moving in, and there was the sense of co-emergence by my body and the space. It was the sense that my flexing body expressed the space and space expressed my flexing body. As limbs gathered, swooped, caressed, rolled, stretched and pushed forth the enveloping space, the usual inanimateness and inertness of space disappeared and was replaced by vibrant aliveness.

The Other "against" which our being plays out its intentionality is often either silent and as-if-nonexistent (as space) or is categorically separate, and, therefore, foreign to the self (as the other minds). Nondual embodied awareness emerges only when these modes vanish and one feels the nondual, organic, and embodied relatedness. As one walks, sits, speaks, and goes about performing all kinds of activities, if this nondual embodied

\textsuperscript{159} The account of T'ai Ch'i I give below relies mostly on my own experience of learning T'ai Ch'i two years ago. I include my personal account because a certain realization I had in my T'ai Ch'i practice is not conveyed in the literature on T'ai Ch'i and because I consider it to be illustrative of nondual embodied awareness that we have been focusing on in this chapter.
relatedness could permeate every mode of one’s being and action, then it will render each moment into a state of communion with the world.

I believe that achieving this sense of relatedness or communion is much more efficacious in putting ourselves on a path to a better planetary and civic life than any fear and despair about the disarrayed ecological and moral states that we actually do face today. As I tread my steps mindfully through the forest, it is not so much due to worries about disturbing the state of ecology as, for one example, the thrilling feel of the pebbles and lumps of dirt under my feet that impels me to be caring towards the environment. In fact, there is no two-step progression from the embodied, loving awareness to the caring attitude and conduct. The latter is not a logical or psychological conclusion to be drawn from the first. To be thus sensately, mindfully, and nondually related to the “Other”--the kind of relatedness that banishes the otherness of the Other--is to be inevitably and irresistibly caring. As I see it, the central objective of the project of morality is the discovery of this nondual, embodied awareness of relatedness.

5.6 Impediments and Supports to the Cultivation of Nonduality

So far, I have endeavoured to show the kinds of practices that can be introduced to foster nonduality. One of the points I made in the previous subsection is to the effect that every moment holds the promise of nondual experience. However, in contrast to this optimistic estimate, what we can actually expect is much struggle to overcome the usual way our attention goes out to the objects and dissipates, leaving us with nothing for the job of embodiment--that is, attentively tracing the organic, percipient energy in the body as it participates in perception, emotion, and so on. The deeply entrenched habit of objectifying and the sheer volume of distractions and
constraints all conspire to give us little opportunity to do attentional work.

Progress is made in either one or two ways: by introducing the desirable elements and/or by removing the undesirable elements. The discussion of those arts that could train our attention belongs to the first way. But we can also approach the cultivation of nonduality from the angle of removing impediments. I believe our usual schooling practices and environment contain many such impediments. In this section, I will explore a few of them.

First and foremost, our schooling is oriented primarily towards accumulating information and mastering subject matter. Here, the focus is on what the students should and have learned: Have they learnt the multiplication table? Have they learnt such-and-such facts? Have they learnt such-and-such skills? With goals and approaches that focus on the subject-matter per se, what tends to be neglected is the self-reflective awareness of the learning that is taking place at the sensate level. For instance, if the students are learning to draw with the usual focus on the subject-matter, the instruction and the learning would be almost entirely on what to draw and how to draw, and the goal and the evaluation of learning in the art class would be about producing certain kinds of pictures.

Contrast this to a lesson on something akin to the Chinese brush-ink painting in which the students have to pay attention to the moment-to-moment states of their embodied consciousness while drawing.\textsuperscript{160} Drawing is the medium through which the intensification of consciousness takes place. In drawing (or painting or any other artistic endeavour), one is not merely producing a picture. More than anything, one is learning to “see” differently,

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\textsuperscript{160} Of course, even brush-ink painting and calligraphy can be taught, and is usually taught, in the manner that disregards embodied awareness, which is a pity. On the other hand, regular pen-and-ink drawing, or any other forms of artwork for that matter, can be taught in the manner of embodied awareness. Frederick Franck’s drawing lesson is a case in point. See his \textit{Zen Seeing and Zen drawing: Meditation in Action}.
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to “see” with a sense of nondual participation. Each stroke one makes is a manifestation of embodied awareness that awakens as one makes an effortful contact with the object while the whole body attentively “listens.” The activity of drawing forces one to abandon the usual sweeping survey gaze and adopt concentrated “listening-seeing” which is comparable to the blind’s “seeing”: one repeatedly makes little “stops” as one listens to the feel of one’s breath, the relaxed grasp of the brush, the readiness in the wrist, and in fact the whole body relaxed, the flow of ch’i throughout one’s whole frame, and so on. Through this intensification of awareness is born a way of relating to the world which negates the subject-object dualism and affirms the co-dependent arising of all.

Attention work is viable not only in art class. The embodied awareness approach may be tried out in all subject domains. Consider science or "math" class. What room is there in these classes for exploration of embodied awareness? I believe that there is ample room for it and that this exploration would not replace the traditional curriculum objectives for these subjects but in a way might even enhance them. The typical curriculum objectives for sciences and mathematics consist of mastering various facts and computational skills, but what tends to be left unaddressed is why one should find these subjects psychically motivating at all. By psychic motivation, I do not mean the utilitarian reasons for wanting to do things. It is not that I think little of utilitarian reasons: they have their usefulness. Yet, to equate the whole of psychic motivation with the utilitarian reasons is both empirically inaccurate, and further, does little justice to other reasons. What I have in mind are intrinsic reasons that place the reasons for doing things in the activity or the subject-matter itself. Intrinsic reasons are aesthetic in the sense that the very sensate experiences constituting the exploration of the
subject-matter are what motivates the learner to engage in the learning. If my observation is correct, I would claim that there is not enough honouring and nurturing of the aesthetic reasons for doing mathematics and science. Here I clarify that my use of the term ‘aesthetic’ is wider than the usual meaning of beauty and elegance and implies embodied awareness that bodily/sensately connects one with one’s object and the lived context in which the object figures. The culmination of this connectedness is nonduality.

I do not doubt that science and mathematics can be taught and learned in the general framework of aesthetic exploration without the fear of sacrificing the depth, breadth, and rigour of these disciplines.\textsuperscript{161} Still, the practical challenges in actual implementation would be considerable, given our deeply entrenched prejudice that mathematics and science are cut and dry subjects dealing with facts, axioms, formulae, laws, principles and the like. For instance, the poetic impulse to see exquisite patterns and to experience the interconnectedness of the phenomenal world, oneself included, which the glimpses of these patterns afford us has not been honoured and cultivated enough. Nor does it seem to me that the sensuous impulse to experience the physicalness of the scientific “objects” that the students are dealing with has been made enough of.

Similar points as above can be made about the teaching/learning of usual social studies. Here, too, the central curriculum objective seems to be to learn certain things about the world--its history, geography, cultures, governments, and so on. I have no doubt that there are many important, useful and interesting things to learn, but the imperative question we have to ask is how knowing these things would vitally add to the learner’s concrete

\textsuperscript{161} Fractal geometry, for instance, would be an excellent topic to introduce to math and science class.
sense of self becoming more connected to the world and life. Neither the intellectual curiosity that likes to know important or intriguing facts nor the utilitarian reasons, such as getting good grades or equipping oneself with knowledge for a future good, may contribute to the students' feeling of rooted and realized in the world and life. The best justification for social studies (or any other subjects) as I see it is that it would help students feel themselves growing deeper roots into the world and their lives in it. Again, in this thesis, I will not take on the task of devising a curriculum for social studies, it being an extensive project entirely outside the scope of this thesis. My main concern is that in teaching any subject, we should not overlook what I consider the most central point of education which is to honour and cultivate the students' psychic well-being, not in the abstract sense of the future or general goods, but in the urgency of living the moment as fulfilled beings.

Let us recall again my vision of moral education which is to put ourselves on the path to eudaimonia and thus to enable us to become so harmonious within and without that we can become one-bodied with the world. In this state of moral proprioception, indifference and intentional harm would not take root. I believe that we can find ways to teach any subject to facilitate the students' path to eudaimonia and to help them appreciate the order of complexity that a lived life presents so that they, too, can become

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162 I shall make a quick suggestion, though not original, that the narrative approach to learning social studies subjects proves to be fruitful. Literature is invaluable for training us to use our imagination to penetrate into the lives of people, listening to their thoughts, emotions, vicariously sharing their desires, concerns, pleasures and sufferings. We acquire an extensive conceptual vocabulary which we can take to our real life interpretation. However, we must not consider this training in imagination to be sufficient in the practice of nondual embodied awareness in actual situations. There is nothing like an actual experience, which brings me to reflect that our social studies curriculum should ideally include a lot of opportunities for the students to participate seriously in community life. Students should regularly and frequently go out to the communities to work and share the community life. It would also be ideal for older students to be given extensive opportunities to go, work, and live in other countries. Narrowly circumscribed academic and social lives marked by abstract pursuit of knowledge and sedate entertainment often characterize the life of our students.
more complexly and finely responsive in their effort to be more fully rooted or embodied in the world. The danger of knowledge alienating the knower from the known, because one learns about the world without infusing one's whole being into what is being learned is possibly the greatest one that our educational practices face. This danger is none other than the failure to cultivate and nurture moral beings who can perceive and act out of compassion, lovingkindness, attentiveness, and reverence in whatever domains of life and with respect to whatever object of concern.

In closing, I shall make a few comments about what I observe to be a hazardous learning environment which is not conducive to nurturing the kind of attention work that my vision of moral education requires. I feel that with the way we bombard our students with information and directions, we draw out and enthrall their attention, leaving little room for them to be inwardly attentive and to practise "stops." Teachers fear to lose their students' attention and so they not only send out a continuous stream of information and directions but also add extra attention-grabbing antics to keep the students enthralled. Teaching has become something of a "show business." Not surprisingly, the consumers of this show business--namely, the students, become suited to their role which is that of the consumer of information and directions. As long as an attractive supply of stimulus comes their way, they are content, but the moment this supply is perceived to be disrupted, their attention wanders off, and they become bored and listless. They are then quick to demand directions as to what-to-do and what-to-look-for. They need an explicit menu and service to hold and guide their

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163 These days, youngsters are fond of using the slang expression "it sucks." Crudity of the experience aside, I find the expression to be congruent with the point I am making here about our mode of teaching, namely that of drawing out, shall we say, "sucking out," the students' attention and leaving them vapid.
attention. This seems to be why these days we place such emphasis on the need for teachers to be armed with detailed learning objectives.164

In my analysis, the students' attentional capacity will not grow if they are not freed from their attentional enthralment. They need the freedom to take their attentional capacity into their own hand and feel their ways about in the space of perception. They need to become the virtuoso players of their own instrument--their attention--and be alert, penetrating, and finely responsive. Then they will be ready to encounter the world in its full complexity and unsimplified richness. Without such capacity, they will always be clamouring for explicit and minute directions as to what to look for, what to perceive, what to think and even what to feel. It is an illusion to think that if we can only make the learning objectives and instructions very explicit and detailed, we will be able to penetrate the students' cognitive field and organize it appropriately so that it will crank out suitable solutions and conducts. The most and the best we as teachers can do is to set up appropriate challenges for students, and they, in rising to these challenges, begin to develop their capacity for attention and perception.

It should not be the teachers' work to secure and sustain the students' attention. But this has been the usual practice, and the result, as I mentioned, is that our teaching has become something of a show business. Attention-developing and attention-giving should be the specific work that students are

164 To me, the mark of a competent teacher is one who is first of all devoted to the practice of his or her art, be it mathematics or painting, and secondly fully discloses his or her practice to the students so that they too can set up their practice alongside the teacher. This of course is the apprenticeship model which cannot be replaced by other models of learning/teaching such as learning from instruction manuals, books, and computerized programmes. There is a Chinese term that captures precisely what is involved in the apprenticeship model: shen-jieuh, literally meaning 'body-teach', connotes that the teacher's way and life are her medium of teaching. The teacher herself is the living example or illustration of her own teaching.
expected to do: it is what entitles them to be students. In facilitating their work, the last thing we should be doing is drawing out and enthralling their attention. On the contrary, we should assist in *returning their attention to themselves*. This is why I feel that the highly stimulating learning environment that constantly grabs the students' attention is counterproductive in developing their attentional capacity. We need to slow down and calm down the process and tone down the learning environment. Slowing down means letting the students have frequent spaces of silence in which they can practise "stops." From the viewpoint of cultivating attentiveness and embodied perception, silence is essential. Silence as the gap of time between the last external stimulus and the next one is vitally needed for one to clear one's mind, as it were, to empty oneself of thoughts and emotions currently preoccupying oneself and to let new impressions permeate one's psyche and to evoke waves of far-ranging thoughts and feelings.

Without these in-between pauses, we cannot practise open-minded and open-ended listening, nor deep dynamic processing of what we perceive. Our perception and feelings thereof become a quick fare, like fast food, predictable and conditioned. Such perception does not allow us gropingly to send out tendrils of thoughts and feelings that are to find their ways into the moment's being, fusing us with the world as it is lived. If is only when we are given the permission and the space-time to feel our way into the lived world of the moment that we can become Proprioceptive beings in harmony with the world.

Each school subject is a microworld that invites students to come to live in it and become part of it. This way of relating to the school subjects is very different from the usual way in which the students are encouraged to
master and get something out of the subjects. The whole notion of extracting something out of what one is doing should strike a proprioceptive person as highly absurd. The world is to be lived, not mined or conquered or even toured, and to live something is to become part of it. I have suggested that becoming part of something requires that we be allowed to sense, with attentive and empathic thoughts and feelings, our ways into the open texture of the world/reality.
This thesis and its writing has been a vehicle conveying me on the path towards a better understanding and an experiential validation of nondual intentionality and, thus, it has been for me a technology of nondual “self.” Having reached this point on the path, I see in perspective that I have come a long way from the initial quest for moral perception and to the gaining of a deeper insight into as well as an experiential dose of nonduality. Yet, the path stretches ever onward, and I feel this thesis is only a drop in an ocean. Nonetheless, it is a living drop of water to me athirst for deeper connectedness to Life and the World.

Why do I thirst for this deeper connectedness? Is not the measure of comfort, pleasure, security, and practical achievement that I have been enjoying enough for me? What more should life provide me or anyone fortunate enough to lead a life of relative ease and security? I have wondered if my thirst for a deeper connectedness to the “Tree of Life” and to the “Being of beings” might not be an indulgent demand, a luxury rather than a priority, in the face of the great proportion of humanity denied even of the basic needs. If my thirst for deeper connectedness is the kind of quest that could only be undertaken after all our basic needs have been fulfilled, then it should have little import to us who concern ourselves with basic moral education.

In my view, the quest for a deeper connectedness or nonduality is most basic. To say that something is basic means that it forms the basis upon which other things rest, or similarly, it means that the intended item is an essential
ingredient in all things. Either way, a basic item is indispensable in that if left out, the result would be wanting. Deeper connectedness to the Being of beings is indispensable because it adds life to the fulfilment of all other basic needs. It can be likened to salt that brings out the flavour of all foods, or to light that makes everything visible in shape and colour. Without a deeper connectedness to the Being of beings, all our endeavours, basic and otherwise, would lack the dimension of fulfilment which comes, in my experience, when they are connected to the larger whole which is Life itself. If we engage in disconnected endeavours, in time we ourselves would become disconnected, alienated, and fragmented: in short, life-less. With increased disconnectedness and reduced vitality, we, in turn, would reduce the world in which we live by not caring. How much we care for something is both an expression and a measure of how connected we are to it. If we want people to care about something, the thing to do is not to simply ask them to be caring but to help them establish an intrinsic, nondual connectedness to it. Through intrinsic, nondual connectedness, the person comes to see herself arising codependently with what she is connected to, which in the end amounts to the denial of a substantive self and the affirmation of nonduality.

To illustrate my point, let us take the business of eating as an instance.Disconnected from the food we eat, we consume food only to satisfy the hunger pangs, the taste bud, or certain cultural values. In such a manner of food consumption, we are disconnected from Life which gives form to the animals and plants of whose bodies and stored vitality we come to partake. Eating, then, becomes a ritual of disconnection or of oblivion to the Tree of Life rather than a ritual of remembrance—that is, re-member-ing as opposed to dismembering ourselves back into the Body of Life and Earth. Through a heedless practice of eating, we become dismembered from the Body of Life.
We can extend this example through the whole list of basic needs and show how by not remembering and practising deeper connectedness to the Being of beings, we turn the activity of satisfying each of the basic needs into an act of disconnecting and dis-membering ourselves from the Tree of Life. The whole business of taking care of our basic needs has been perceived as a necessary act of expropriating the earth "resources." (We have extended the concept of resources even to humans as in "human resources.") But I detect no necessity to this particular perception. What I detect rather is an amnesia of our fundamental connectedness to Earth, Life, and Being. It is an oblivion of our codependent arising. What we need, then, is to re-member our fundamental connectedness, our codependent arising, and see all our life activities from eating to writing a thesis as acts of communion with and affirmation of the Being of beings. Each action we perform, no matter how insignificant and mundane, is a consummate partaking in Life, an expression of Life. The usual logic of, say, we eat in order to live leaves Life out of the picture. It should have been that we eat because we are alive. Each of our actions is a profound gesture of remembering ourselves back to the Tree of Life, to the Being of beings.

My proposal for a realization of a measure of deep connectedness may appear to exceed what we have asked for in the way of moral education. As those working in the ethic of care would maintain, in moral education, most of us would just want more caring people who practise honesty, integrity, justice, thoughtfulness, considerateness, conscientiousness, and compassion. We want people who care about what they do and care for people around them. My proposal that we achieve a vision and an embodiment of fundamental connectedness to the Being of beings may seem like using a bulldozer when the job is turning the sod in a small garden plot. Surely, we
would be asked, is the attainment of deep connectedness or nonduality that necessary to become morally caring and just people? My answer is an unequivocal, "Yes, indeed it is".

We may all easily agree that we do need to be more caring, just, deliberative, and so on, but the question is how can we become so. The Aristotelian answer that we become so by acting caringly, justly, thoughtfully, and so on is ultimately unsatisfactory because caring conduct is a logical, inevitable expression and a measure of connectedness which in point of fact has to be realized first if we want caring conduct. To target caring conduct and not connectedness as the crux is like treating symptoms without diagnosing their underlying causes. In this thesis, I have located the "cause" of disconnectedness, manifested in lack of caring and of other moral dispositions, in our dualistic consciousness that posits the substantive self that looks out at the Other—the categorically foreign object. Furthermore, I have located the very phenomenology of disconnectedness in the mode of perception in which the world is grasped as the object and we are the subject who stands disconnected to the object. Unless we can change this mode of perception, all our theoretical conviction that we should recover fundamental connectedness would come to nothing. Unless each perception becomes an act of connecting, of consummating, and of remembering connectedness, the kind of caring that follows thereof will not come about.

In this light, my thesis started out with an investigation of moral perception rather than of moral action and proceeded to look at the conditions of perception rather than dwelling on the investigation of moral perception and moral emotion since I saw that perception as arising from epistemological/metaphysical matrixes. How we understand our own cognition, perception, and the self has a powerful impact on the shaping of
how we actually perceive, feel, think, and act. If we think that those who seem to live by naive realism have no metaphysical matrix out of which they perceive, feel, and act, we are mistaken. Naive realism is no less a metaphysical view than physicalism or subjective idealism except that it may only be a little more naive than the others. What I endeavoured to show in my thesis is that the kind of moral perception and emotion we want, such as being caring, just, compassionate, tolerant, and the like are best achieved when we abandon metaphysical realism or substantialism that divides up the world into substances, and in specific, the substantive view of the ego-self that stands over and against the Other—the object. But to abandon metaphysical realism, we have to be able to experience the world nonsubstantively or nonsubstantially. That is, we have to be able to experience nonduality, and my thesis made a sustained effort to give both an epistemological and an experiential account of nonduality. From the experiential viewpoint of nonduality, the self and the world are experienced to be codependently arising, and this is the basis of the perception of deep connectedness.

The implication of nonduality or deep connectedness for morality is enormous. In this thesis, I have only begun the reflection and investigation. My main focus was on picturing how a nondual person would perceive, think, and act, but this picture of nondual intentionality is only in a rough outline. I have given indications of how issues like choice-making, agency, and respect would be viewed from the perspective of nonduality. The finer details of how a nondual person would live in transaction with the dualistically functioning world, however, have been largely omitted. Still, another major effort is warranted to deal systematically with the host of issues that arise when comparing the nondual ethic with the dualistic ethic. Some such issues are: What becomes of the concept of autonomy and
autonomous agency?; Do we have anything like responsibility and accountability in a nondual ethic?; How does the nondual ethic find a balance between justice and tolerance?; How are justice, right, and tolerance understood from the perspective of a nondual ethic?; How would cultivation of nonduality affect moral motivation?; Is it advisable at all to help youngsters to deconstruct their ego-self?; Wouldn't the practice of nonduality create diffident and unfocused persons low in self-esteem?; Would the practice of empathy create a person fragmented and without integrity? Won’t the practice of compassion encourage immorality in others through lack of opposition?

The following are a few remarks to stimulate further reflection. All of the notions fundamental to the epistemology and psychology of dualistic moral philosophy would not quite hold in the nondualist framework. There will not be autonomy of the substantive kind, and in its place, there would be continuity of being. Moreover, the kind of fundamental right and respect that autonomous agents command in the dualist framework will be equivalently (but not identically) bestowed through mutual deference and participation. Nor will there be the usual understanding of responsibility that focuses on the ascription of praise and blame for the consequence of an action. Praise and blame assume autonomous agency, and an ethical framework that centralizes codependent arising has little use for praise and blame. Rather, efforts at attunement, responsiveness, deference, and their resultant harmony become the key ethical considerations. Likewise, tolerance will be understood more as harmonization through deference. In contrast to the picture of a diffident, fragmented, and helpless agent, our nondual agent would be sensitively deferential, intensely mindfully aware, and profoundly participatory.
In closing, I would like to make two remarks about the practice of a nondual ethic in our times. I am aware that anyone advancing a moral theory entertains a degree of conviction that if her ethical view is put into practice seriously, the society will be so much better for it. I am not immune to such a conviction, although to entertain such a conviction would be characteristically un-nondual. A nondualist accepts what is and imposes no change, though this does not mean that no change is going to come about: change is inevitable. The art of nonduality is to bring about changes in the direction of eudaimonia and harmony without imposing moral directives for change. To have a blueprint for change and to mandate the change are not to practise nonduality. As I have explained at some length in Chapter Five, the nondual art of harmony-making requires the agent to become part of the concrete context and indirectly bring about changes by becoming more appropriately attuned to it. No willful imposition of the desire, no matter how noble, is involved here. Thus, in offering a vision of a nondual ethic, I caution the reader not to think of the project of implementing nondual ethic as prescribing morality to people. Nondual ethic that requires to be prescribed is not nondual ethic.

This point brings me around to look into the suitability of nondual ethic in our contemporary intellectual and cultural climate. As Loy (1988, p. 296) remarks, our times show an increasing absence of “transcendental glue,” such as God’s moral law, to bind together autonomous individuals. Without this glue, our “society is dissolving into a collection of autonomous individuals each ‘looking out for number one’.” That a society needs a measure of cohesion while allowing individual freedom is obvious. What is not so obvious is how to achieve this in the absence of some form of transcendental glue. As I see it, realization of nonduality may perform this
dual-edged role. (Of course, some may argue that we ought to revitalize some form of transcendental glue.) Nonduality is not a transcendental view. Transcendence always creates duality by posing one thing over and against another. Nonduality is precisely the antipode to this programme. By rejecting transcendence, nonduality brings in a radically multilateral, mutually codependent relatedness among the participating particulars. There is no higher authority to dictate to the particulars to fit into some preassigned order, be it God’s, Heaven’s, or Reason’s mandate. In this absence of preassigned order lies the radical freedom for individuals. Yet, at the same time, an order emerges from the multilateral participation that the particulars undertake. To participate in the Being of beings, to become re-membered to the Tree of Life, and to enter the Stream of Being give rise to a cohesiveness that is far deeper and stronger than the cohesiveness resulting from conforming to the transcendental source. Where does this depth and strength of cohesiveness come from?

The force is certainly not external to the moral agents. This possibility is ruled out of the very logic of nonduality. So, what gathers us towards nonduality—-that is, deep connectedness and codependent arising? What is not external/extrinsic has to be internal/intrinsic. Intrinsic to nonduality is nonduality itself. Thus, it is deep connectedness itself that draws together the particulars embedded in this field/web/stream of Connectedness/Being. To feel alienated from Connectedness is to suffer, and it is this suffering that sets us on the quest for nonduality.
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